

Selling the spectacle of destruction - The films of Rintaro, and Japanese animation's transnational transformation from 'cult' to 'commercial'

London Screen Studies Group Conference, Birkbeck, University of London. 8 June 2019

Introduction

As one of the most acclaimed figures working in Japanese animation, Rintaro (aka. Shigeyuki Hayashi) has come to be known - particularly amongst Western anime fandom - as one of the most stylistically distinct directors working in the medium; fronting a body of cinematic work that stretches from the late 70s through to the 00s.¹ From his early days as a disciple of 'the God of Manga' Osamu Tezuka at studio Mushi Productions to his co-founding of Studio Madhouse - now one of the most popular and prolific anime studios in the industry - his work is often characterised as being cinematically epic, profiling life and death struggles against darkly fantastical backdrops.

As three of his most recognisable works, *Doomed Megalopolis* (1991), *X/1999* (1996) and *Metropolis* (2001) chart a distinct through-line across the course of a decade, capturing a crucial era in which the West was opening its doors to Japanese animation following the landmark screening of *Akira* (1988) at the London ICA in 1991.² Simultaneously, the boom in the home video market - seeing both the maturation of the VHS format as well as the beginnings of the DVD as its successor - played a vital role, facilitating the development of an exciting new 'cult' environment where a niche medium like anime could bypass the cinema and be marketed directly to fans.

It is within the context of this era and this specific 'fan-boy' mentality that Rintaro's position as a director is key - his works both pandering to the preconceived 'tits and tentacle' notoriety³ anime had (and arguably still has) as a medium, as well as adapting and evolving with the times to push toward new levels of critical recognition and mass-market reception.

With animation's inherent advantage of being able to depict levels of destruction and violence not possible in live-action cinema, these three films stand uniquely placed in

¹ Rintaro [encyclopedia entry], *Anime News Network*, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/encyclopedia/people.php?id=2617> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

² Hoad, Phil (2013) *Akira: the future-Tokyo story that brought anime west*, *The Guardian* (10 July), <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/jul/10/akira-anime-japanese-cartoon-manga> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

³ Denison, Rayna (2015) *Anime: A Critical Introduction*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, p 66

an era before CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) had become truly ubiquitous, capturing a snapshot of a decade in which anime's allure as pure spectacle stood as a core selling point to Western audiences. It is here that the notion between cinematic spectacle and marketable medium meets - and which this essay will attempt to analyse; charting the course of these three films as both aesthetic and transnational objects, created in Japan, yet consumed in the West.

Japanese environments vs. Western environments

For a cinematic landscape to be destroyed, first it has to exist. For each of these three films, their setting remains crucial to the wider themes they are trying to convey - but also impacts on the kind of relationship the audience has with the film itself.

Doomed Megalopolis was released in 1991 as a four-part direct-to-video release, serving as an adaptation of Hiroshi Aramata's best-selling 10-part *Teito Monogatari* novel series released over the course of 1985-1987 (a live action adaptation released in 1988 had become the third highest grossing Japanese movie of that year).

The film depicts early 20th century Tokyo, where historical events such as the great Kanto Earthquake are the backdrop to a supernatural battle taking place between the powers of good and evil as they work to influence veins of spiritual energy that make up Tokyo itself. The plot is deeply involved with the Japanese esoteric cosmological concepts of the onmyoji, with evil mystic Yasunori Kato attempting various machinations over the course of the early 1900s in an attempt to destroy Tokyo and appease his ancestors, who battled against the Imperial Court in ancient times.

X/1999 deals with largely similar themes⁴ - released in 1996 and based on a long-running manga series by female collective CLAMP, the film once again sees an apocalyptic battle between good and evil play out over the control of 'spiritual barriers' in the heart of Tokyo in an effort to determine the fate of humanity. On one side, the 'good' characters wish to see the status quo of Tokyo maintained, whilst the 'evil' side wishes to see Tokyo (and by extension, the Earth) purged of the plague of humanity and returned to a state of natural, ecological order. It falls to central hero Kamui to choose which side he will pledge allegiance to, in a narrative that increasingly displays moral shades of grey to both sides of the conflict.

⁴ Reider, Noriko T (2010) *Japanese Demon Lore: Oni from Ancient Times to the Present*. Logan: Utah State University Press

Lastly, in *Metropolis* - released in 2001 - we see the action transposed to the titular fictional futuristic city of Metropolis; where the tension is rising between the underclass of robot citizens relegated to the city's lower reaches, and humans; who blame the robots for taking many of their jobs. Duke Red - the city's proclaimed leader has overseen the creation of two significant constructions. One, a massive tower - the Ziggurat - that houses a powerful super weapon, and secondly, a robot girl - Tima - modelled after his dead daughter. As the plot proceeds, we see both of these constructions emerge as potential threats to the safety of the city, amidst weighty themes of the dangers of science and what it means to really be human.

Loosely based on Osamu Tezuka's 1949 manga (which in turn was indirectly inspired by Fritz Lang's 1927 film of the same name), the film is said to have taken five years and \$15 million to create⁵ - marking it out as a clear 'prestige' piece; and while it only grossed \$4 million on its initial US release, the film is frequently critically praised for its detailed visuals.

Looking across the three films, we see a clear distinction. With both *Doomed Megalopolis* and *X/1999* - although highly fantastical - still based in real world settings, whilst *Metropolis* is placed within an imagined future; removed from the connotations of state and history that are inherently present in the former two movies.

Both *Doomed Megalopolis* and *X/1999* are suffused with a melancholy fin-de-siecle feel - further cementing their position within a real-world (and crucially, Japanese) landscape by positioning themselves at transitory moments in history. *Doomed Megalopolis* features the death of the Meiji emperor, reinforcing the constant march of time as the city increasingly moves to modernise - this element would have had special resonance for Japanese audiences of the time, as on the film's initial 1991 release, the death of the Showa Emperor in 1989 would still have been fresh in their minds. Meanwhile, *X/1999* deals with similar 'end of an era' overtones, both explicit in the imminent new Millennium referenced in the '1999' of its title, but also in the generational change present in 90s Japan at the time - perhaps best summed up in the blurb of *Tokyo Babylon* - CLAMP's manga which serves as a prequel to the events of *X/1999*:

“The last days of Japan's bubble economy, and money and elegance run through the streets like rivers of neon. So do the currents of darkness beneath

⁵ Sharp, Jasper (2014) 10 great anime films, *BFI* (13 May)
<http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/lists/10-great-anime-films> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

them - obsession, greed, and exploitation, nourishing evil spirits that only the arts of the onmyoji - Japan's legendary occultists - can combat."⁶

In these two films, we see a Japan at the beginnings of the 20th century, and at the end of the 20th century - in both instances undergoing vast change; real world, historical narratives intermingling with fantastical, fictional narratives. And in so doing, breathing into life a cinematic world that becomes inherently darker, grittier and more believable to a Japanese audience precisely because it is the world they exist in themselves.

In *X/1999*, we see the specifically Japanese environment of the film outlined in language that attaches plot-significant meaning to real-world Tokyo locales. Against a backdrop of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building standing amidst a ruined, flooded Tokyo, one of the film's villains - Kanoe - explains:

"The city has grown stagnant and foul. The slime will gradually cover everything unless a thorough cleansing can lead to a revival... The power shields that protect Tokyo have become central to the stability of the whole world - many shields make up the city's umbrella. The skyscrapers of Shinjuku are the blinding beacon of the night. The tracks of the Yamanote rail line are the Buddha's hand enclosing the Imperial Palace in its grasp. The Sunshine 60 Building is a focus of security on Tokyo's shifting ground. And then there's the Tokyo Tower. If all these shields are destroyed, Tokyo will fall. These obscenities that man has created - the corruption, the pollution - all these will be annihilated. Nature will reclaim its dominion. The Earth will breath again."

Coming roughly halfway through the film, this speech is crucial as it draws together some of the most recognisable landmarks of Tokyo - both old and new. Just as in typical Western disaster movies we see iconic landmarks such as the White House, Eiffel Tower or Big Ben destroyed⁷, here we see the physical destruction of Tokyo couched in the cinematic language of pin-point destruction of key buildings.

To the primary Japanese audience of the film's original release, there is an inherent presence and meaning in these locales that lives beyond the film's own narrative. This is typified in Susan Sontag's *The Imagination of Destruction* where she outlines: "Science fiction films invite a dispassionate, aesthetic view of destruction and

⁶ CLAMP (2013) *Tokyo Babylon - Book One*. Milwaukee: Dark Horse

⁷ Holmes, Chris (2013) Monumental Destruction — Top 10 Landmarks Movies Love to Destroy, *Pop Dose* (14 August)

<http://popdose.com/monumental-destruction-top-10-landmarks-movies-love-to-destroy/> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

violence—a technological view. Things, objects, machinery play a major role in these films. A greater range of ethical values is embodied in the décor of these films than in the people. Things, rather than the helpless humans, are the locus of values because we experience them, rather than people, as the sources of power.”⁸

To a Western audience however, unless the viewer is already deeply versed on the urban environment of Tokyo, they are unlikely to come into the film with the same sense of meaning imbued into these specific buildings. As such, it is important to consider the more worldly outlook Rintaro would take with *Metropolis* - de-centering the film from a Japanese locale and placing it within an anonymised, transnational future-setting. In a note of dark irony, however, *Metropolis* and its future-city would stand as an all-too relevant reminder of the very real horror of large scale urban destruction - the film’s original 2001 US release postponed until several months later, following the terrorist attacks of September 11th.⁹

It is important to note that *Metropolis* actually deals with many of the same themes as both *Doomed Megalopolis* and *X/1999* - namely, that of the irrepressible march of progress, as well as notions of man’s place in an increasingly urbanised, mechanised landscape. However, whereas the former two films present these within the specific context of Tokyo, *Metropolis* is - both through its own visuals and setting, as well as by virtue of its connotations to the Fritz Lang *Metropolis* - placed within a far wider oeuvre of mechanisation within science fiction as a whole.¹⁰

Metropolis stands as a cinematic construction that consistently works to present itself as un-Japanese. The architecture of the city is distinctly Western, and so is the music - employing a Japanese jazz band to create a soundtrack that is firmly inspired by classic Dixieland jazz of the 1920s. In this, we are presented a fascinating intermingling of internationalities - a Japanese composer creating Western music, attached to a Japanese medium (anime) fashioned after another Western product of the 1920s - Lang’s original *Metropolis* (1927).

In a neat piece of meta-cinema, Rintaro’s *Metropolis* also flags up its awareness of its own transnationality in a reference back to James Bond movie *You Only Live Twice* (1967), which is set predominantly in Japan. In that film, Bond orders a drink of sake as follows:

⁸ Sontag, Susan (2007) “The Imagination of Disaster”. In Redmond, Sean (ed.), *Liquid Metal. The Science Fiction Film Reader*, New York: Wallflower Press, p43

⁹ Clements, Jonathan and Helen McCarthy (2015) *The Anime Encyclopedia, 3rd Revised Edition: A Century of Japanese Animation*, Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press

¹⁰ Lee, Makela (2008) From *Metropolis* to *Metropolis*: The Changing Role of the Robot in Japanese and Western Cinema, in MacWilliams, Mark (ed.), *Japanese Visual Culture*, pp. 105–110.

Tiger Tanaka: “Do you like Japanese sake, Mr. Bond? Or would you prefer a vodka martini?”

James Bond: “No, no. I like sake. Especially when it’s served at the correct temperature, 98.4 degrees Fahrenheit, like this is.”

Tiger Tanaka: “For a European, you are exceptionally cultivated.”¹¹

In the corresponding scene in *Metropolis*, detective Shunsaku Ban walks into a bar and asks for a hot sake, only to be told they have none and that he will have to settle for a hot whiskey instead, the bartender stating: “The best I can do for a Japanese detective”.

Scenes like this are important as they continually reinforce *Metropolis*’ cinematic existence as something outside the typical ‘anime norm’. Indeed, much of the commentary on the film makes note of this, with *The DVD Stack* proclaiming: ‘This-twenty-first century Japanese anime isn’t merely a cartoon version of Fritz Lang’s 1927 classic’¹² while *Groucho Reviews* compares the use of music during the closing scenes of the film to Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove* (1964).¹³

What stands before us then are three cinematically distinct cities - primed for destruction. Two are Tokyo - one of the past (*Doomed Megalopolis*), one of the then-present (*X/1999*). The third is a more unknown quantity - the imagined future of *Metropolis*. In each instance, the eventual destruction of the city takes on different properties - informed by the audience and the socio-cultural connotations they bring with them. On one hand, the experiences of their own life and the city/cities they live in - on the other hand, a more filmic notion of ‘experience’ informed by the cinema they have consumed in the past and all the expectations that brings with it.

Destruction of the female body as a prelude to destruction of the city

One consistent theme across all three films is that of bodily violence toward female characters as a kind of preface to destruction of the cities these characters reside in. In all three films, these female characters are characterised as either chastely innocent and/or possessed of an otherness and mystique that sets them apart. Through their destruction or degradation, we see a symbolic marring of ‘purity’;

¹¹ Sullivan, Timothy (2009) 007 on Sake: You Only Drink Twice, *Urban Sake* (12 June) <http://www.urbansake.com/about-sake/007-on-sake-you-only-drink-twice.html> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

¹² Bradshaw, Nick and Tim Robey (2007) *The DVD Stack II: The Essential Guide to the World’s Best DVDs*, Edinburgh: Canongate Books, p205

¹³ *Metropolis*, *Groucho Reviews* <http://www.grouchoreviews.com/reviews/54> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

setting the scene for the larger-scale destruction of the urban environments that will play out around them.

As Lawrence Bird comments in *Serial Cities: The Politics of "Metropolis" from Lang to Rintarô*: "The city is central to the imagery of the animated film - or anime, and cities in this branch of popular culture generally come to a sticky end: they are blown sky high. This is often paralleled with the destruction or transformation of an iconic work of architecture or a human (or quasi human) body at the centre of the apocalypse."¹⁴

In *Doomed Megalopolis*, lead villain Yasunori Kato is depicted as forcefully pushing a pulsating purple orb of magical energy into the opened legs of young woman Yukari Tatsumiya, followed by a squirt of blood as the orb enters - effectively impregnating her. As he states: "You shall allow the curse of 2000 years by the unyielding people to come to fruition in your body" - essentially tying together the fate of her physical body and the city itself.

Commentary has focussed on how this rape-like scene - and the violent, sexually charged tone of the film as a whole - was likely inspired by the recent success of other direct-to-video anime products such as the notoriously graphic *Legend of the Overfiend* (1987),¹⁵ which was so explicit, over two minutes had to be cut out by the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) before it could be released in the UK.¹⁶

In the opening scenes of *X/1999*, we see the mother of lead protagonist Kamui pull a massive, ornate sword from inside her naked body; hands covered in blood and a white, semen-like substance. Upon handing the sword to Kamui, her body then explodes violently into clearly depicted individual pieces.

Later in the film, one of Kamui's allies - 14 year old schoolgirl Yuzuriha Nekoi - is mortally injured, and as she lies dying in Kamui's arms states: "I'm sorry, I wasn't much good to you, was I? I've never been in love as a woman can be in love. I'd have liked to have known someone would cry when they buried me."

As shocking or distressing as these scenes appear, they take on an important significance when discussed in relation to the ideas raised by Isolde Standish in

¹⁴ Bird, Lawrence (2008) *Serial Cities: The Politics of "Metropolis" from Lang to Rintarô*, in *Clare Market Review*, London: London School of Economics

¹⁵ Harper, Jim (2008) *Flowers from Hell: The Modern Japanese Horror Film*, Hereford: Noir Publishing

¹⁶ UROTSUKIDOJI - LEGEND OF THE OVERFIEND, BBFC

<http://www.bbfc.co.uk/releases/urotsukidoji-legend-overfiend-1992-0> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

*Akira, Postmodernism And Resistance*¹⁷ regarding the notion of the ‘tragic hero’ that dominates Japanese fiction - as directly opposed to more traditional Western concept of how a hero is represented on screen.

In Rintaro’s films, these heroines are tragically and dramatically violated as part of each movie’s depiction of battle against the forces of evil. But it is within this self-same violation that the films are afforded additional shock-factor as we see paragons of order and respectability disrupted and dismantled by pure chaos. Quoting Hebdige, Standish outlines: “Violations of the authorized codes through which the social world is organised and experienced have considerable power to provoke and disturb”.¹⁸

In the closing scenes of *Metropolis* - as Ray Charles’ *I Just Can’t Stop Loving You* plays out - we see female character Tima with half of her flesh torn away to expose the reality of her robotic inner workings underneath. Crucially, Rintaro chooses to frame some shots so we only see the human side of Tima - her hair blowing animatedly in the wind - whilst other shots deliberately display her ‘half and half’ nature. As the city collapses around them and the scene moves to a climax, we see Tima’s robot hand clasped by hero Kenichi’s human hand. She then slips and falls to her death, uttering one final line: ‘Who am I? I am who?’ - All concept of her as a person has now been erased - both physically and mentally - replaced by a lifeless robotic husk.

With particular reference to *Metropolis* it is important to note the film’s position within the transnational cinematic landscape at the time of its release. Crucially, it was released in the same year as Steven Spielberg’s *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001)¹⁹, which dealt with many similar themes of what it means to be human - amidst a backdrop of ruined cities.

By interacting with these themes, *Metropolis* elevates itself above the specifically ‘Japanese’ environments of *Doomed Megalopolis* and *X/1999* to handle a more universal question. As many reviews of the movie bear out, it is no longer merely operating within the tight anime ‘bubble’ but in the sphere of a wider (non-animated) science-fiction canon of output.²⁰

¹⁷ Standish, Isolde (2008) ‘Akira, Postmodernism and Resistance’ in *The Worlds of Japanese Popular Culture: Gender, Shifting Boundaries and Global Cultures* (ed.) D.P. Martinez, pp.56-74, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

¹⁸ Hebdige, Dick (1991) *Subculture, the meaning of style*. London: Routledge

¹⁹ Sharp, Jasper (2014) *Metropolis*, *Midnight Eye* (29 June) <http://www.midnighteye.com/reviews/metropolis/> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

²⁰ Runyon, Christopher (2014) A Tale of Two Cities: Rebuilding a Metropolis, *Movie Mezzanine* (31 March) <http://moviemezzanine.com/a-tale-of-two-cities-rebuilding-a-metropolis/> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

Across these three films, we see a gradual scaling-back of the intensity of the violence - from the 15-rated rape and dismemberment in Rintaro's 90s work to the comparatively tame PG-rated destruction of a robot in *Metropolis* - inherently more palatable to a 'mainstream' Western audience - the focus of the violence arguably shifting from that of luridly visual shock factor to that of more thematic significance.

Whether female or machine (or both) however, there is a sense of potential fear or otherness present in the physical manifestation of said 'body' on screen. As Susan Sontag discusses in her essay *The Imagination of Disaster*, there is a long history of the notion of 'dehumanisation' in science-fiction.²¹ On one hand, this can manifest as a kind of animal bloodlust - standing in as a 'metaphoric exaggeration of sexual desire'. In this respect, the symbolically sexual destruction of female bodies in *Doomed Megalopolis* and *X/1999* can be seen as a kind of erasure of the temptations of man implicitly present in the modern urban city.

On the other hand, *Metropolis* presents the flip side of the equation - the danger is no longer man's potential to revert to base animal instincts, but now that he might dehumanise himself so thoroughly through robotics and science that he no longer resembles man himself. As such, the city remains the constant throughout - the signifier for all humanity is and can achieve - both soft flesh and hard artifice, base instinct and rational science, woman and man. One cannot exist without the other.

Marketing mass destruction - from the fanboys to the arthouse

One gauge of the three films' varying endurance and success as transnational products is their availability on home video in the West. *Doomed Megalopolis* was originally released in the UK on VHS in 1995 by Manga Entertainment (the same company responsible for the UK releases of *Akira* and *Ghost In The Shell* [1995]), but never saw a subsequent DVD release (in contrast to the US, which saw the film released on DVD by ADV Pictures in 2001) - the original VHS tapes are now long out of print.

X/1999 saw UK release on both VHS and DVD in 2000 (again from Manga Entertainment) - making it one of the first anime to see release on the then-new DVD format. As with *Doomed Megalopolis* however - both editions are now out of print.

In both these titles, we see a snapshot of the UK anime market in the mid-to-late 90s and early 2000s - a collective effort by Manga Entertainment to build on the audience lured in by showpiece anime features such as *Akira* and *Ghost In The Shell* by

²¹ Sontag, Susan (2007) "The Imagination of Disaster". In Redmond, Sean (ed.), *Liquid Metal. The Science Fiction Film Reader*, New York: Wallflower Press, pp 45-46

offering them more of the same - in an interview with site *The Raygun*, anime writer and academic Jonathan Clements recounts the 'fan-boy' culture of the time:

“[Manga Entertainment] pandered to a significantly larger audience, the tens of thousands of consumers who bought *Akira* and might be persuaded to come back for more. There was a demonstrable demographic of 4000 or so young British males who could be counted on to habitually buy 18-rated cartoons, dubbed into English. Mike Preece spoke of the ‘beer-and-curry’ crowd who would enjoy anime in a raucous environment. We started calling such notional viewers ‘Mangatykes’, and as the decade wore on they began to crowd out the original fans, even at conventions.”

²²

It is this ‘beer and curry’ crowd that films like *X/1999* are specifically geared to target - with the DVD cover art plastered in a number of bright-red quotes from specialist fan-boy publications such as *Animerica* and *Gamers Republic*. A key quote from *Fantasia* adds a quasi-sexual tone to the effusive praise: “One of the greatest orgies of battle and destruction ever seen in a live action film or an animated one... A feast for the eyes”.²³

Here we see the clearest example of the transnational pull of a film like *X/1999* when given distinct marketing impetus by a distributor like Manga Entertainment - the original animated feature dressed up in eye-catching pull-quotes and the allure of a large ‘15’ BBFC label promising violence and perhaps even sexual content.²⁴ In essence, a checklist of ‘shock’ elements almost taking precedence over any notion of the film’s plot or characters.

These tactics are similar to those employed by Tartan Entertainment with their Asia Extreme label, focusing specifically on the allure of the exotic and dangerous to shift high volumes of home-video content on the assumption that it will provide thrills more extreme than those offered by standard cinema fare. As highlighted by Chi-Yun Shin in *The Art of Branding: Tartan “Asia Extreme” Films*: “the output of the label, and indeed the name of the label itself, invoke and in part rely on the western audiences’ perception of the East as weird and wonderful, sublime and grotesque”.²⁵

²² (2011) Look Back In Manga (Part II), *The Raygun* (13 July) <http://www.theraygun.co.uk/?p=2665> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

²³ (2000) *X* DVD cover, London: Manga Entertainment

²⁴ Clements, Jonathan and Helen McCarthy (2015) *The Anime Encyclopedia, 3rd Revised Edition: A Century of Japanese Animation*, Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press

²⁵ Shin, Chi-Yun (2009) ‘The Art of Branding: Tartan “Asia Extreme” Films’ in (eds) Jinhee Choi & Mitsuyo Wada Marciano, *Horror to the Extreme: Changing Boundaries in Asian Cinema*, Hong Kong: Kong Kong University Press, pp 86-87

In contrast, *Metropolis* was released on DVD in 2002 by Sony Pictures (a major, mainstream distributor) with this edition remaining in print for over 10 years - with a new Blu-Ray edition set to replace it in early 2017 from Asian/arthouse movie specialist distributor Eureka Entertainment. This new edition is being marketed as a distinct 'prestige' edition (complete with premium collector's 'Steelbook' packaging). Despite having released a number of live action Japanese films (as well as other world cinema classics such as *Das Cabinet Des Dr. Caligari* [1920]) *Metropolis* is the only anime title on their release schedule, marking it out as a product deemed by Eureka worthy of special attention and capable of sitting comfortably alongside the rest of their catalogue.

The case of *Metropolis* serves as an important exception to the norm in the UK anime market - here we see a feature-length anime product distributed not by an established anime purveyor (Manga Entertainment), but by first a mainstream distributor (Sony) and subsequently by a prestige arthouse label (Eureka).

In comparison to the lurid, fan-boy centric quotes on the DVD cover of *X/1999*, the DVD cover of *Metropolis* instead opts for a lengthy quotation from famed Hollywood director James Cameron: "Metropolis is the new milestone in Anime, a spectacular fusion of CG backgrounds with traditional character animation. It has beauty, power, mystery and above all... heart. Images from this film will stay with you forever. My congratulations to Rintaro-san for his masterpiece".²⁶

Here, not only do we have an enthused seal of approval from an internationally acclaimed director from outside the enclosed sphere of anime-fandom, but a specific mention of 'Rintaro-san' as director - placing *Metropolis* as a 'masterpiece' that bears a specific authorial stamp and visual flair of its own.

Metropolis' distribution in the UK on mainstream label Sony Pictures (specifically, sub-imprint Columbia Tristar) is a vital part of this picture - one in which the significance of the film becomes more than just the film itself - but the accoutrements that accompany its physical release. Suddenly, the film is empowered not only by the 'press release' allure of quotes from the likes of James Cameron, but is enfolded into a wider Sony Pictures structure that affords the movie equal opportunity within its wider catalogue.

This not only includes presence on the official Sony Pictures website,²⁷ but also the inclusion of an entire extra DVD of special features within the product itself, as well as a booklet advertising 'If you enjoyed this title, we recommend you try these' -

²⁶ (2002) *Metropolis* DVD cover, London: Sony Pictures

²⁷ Osamu Tezuka's *Metropolis*, *Sony Pictures*

<http://www.sonypictures.com/movies/osamutezukasmetropolis/> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

followed by a number of live action, Western films such as *Bad Boys* (1995), *Apollo 13* (1995) and *Jurassic Park* (1993). Here we see evidence of the building of a consumer 'habit' that Oliver Dew discusses in '*Asia Extreme: Japanese Cinema and British Hype* - Sony Pictures aiming toward a 'key audience aggregate' where foreign language films (in this instance, *Metropolis*) intersects with 'cult' genre film.

Dew goes on to explain that we see a specific awareness of a desire for more artistically-leaning productions to escape the derogatory 'creepfest' connotations associated with particular strands of Japanese cinema: "This combination, of the cult 'fan-boy' audience and art-house/world cinema audience, is by far the most common aggregation for a successful Asian genre film, as many other examples can attest: of *Audition*, *Variety* declares that its '[lyrical pacing] may allow it to break out of creepfest ghetto [sic]."²⁸

It is in this distinction - between the cult 'fan-boy' audience and the 'art-house', between the implication of low-brow and high-brow as distinct audience demographics in their own right, that we begin to see the role of *Metropolis* as a kind of bridging point between the two - and as such, reaping the benefits for existing in this transitory intersection between the two.

By looking at online movie database *IMDB* we can get a gauge for the corresponding popularity (number of users who rated the film) and reception (average rating out of 10) for these three films:

Doomed Megalopolis - Average rating of 6.5 (from 168 users)²⁹

X/1999 - Average rating of 6.2 (from 2,163 users)³⁰

Metropolis - Average rating of 7.3 (from 17,169 users)³¹

Here we see *Metropolis* emerging with a clear lead, both in terms of rating - and more significantly - number of users who voted for the film, highlighting its broader appeal and elevation above the arguable 'anime fans only' space that *Doomed Megalopolis* and *X/1999* exist in - reflected by their far lower user count. Instead, *Metropolis* is now existing in a similar sphere of popularity to other auteur led animated motion-pictures - for example, Satoshi Kon's acclaimed *Millennium Actress*

²⁸ Dew, Oliver (2007) '*Asia Extreme: Japanese Cinema and British Hype*' in *New Cinemas* vol. 5 n.1, pp 53-73

²⁹ *Doomed Megalopolis*, *IMDB* http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0337283/?ref=nm_sr_1 [Accessed 14 May 2019]

³⁰ *X*, *IMDB* http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0184041/?ref=nm_knf_i3 [Accessed 14 May 2019]

³¹ *Metropolis*, *IMDB* http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0293416/?ref=nm_sr_2 [Accessed 14 May 2019]

(2001), released in the same year as *Metropolis* - which scores an average rating of 7.9 (from 15,403 users).³²

In *Metropolis* then, we see the creation of something different - a kind of emblematic transformation that sees the film existing as both 'anime movie', but also somehow 'beyond' other anime movies by the same director. It is telling to note that anime and Asian cinema critic Jasper Sharp on two occasions comments on *Metropolis* being an 'accessible'³³ and perhaps more significantly, 'safe'³⁴ entry point into the medium of anime for newcomers. Gone are the violent and sexual excesses of *Doomed Megalopolis* and *X/1999* - in their place, a new, 'safe' sheen; and with it, *Metropolis*' sleek entry into a perceived higher echelon of cinematic taste.

Conclusion

With these three films, Rintaro showed a deft ability to adapt to the rapidly changing consumer market of the 90s and early 2000s - from the direct-to-video thrills of *Doomed Megalopolis*, through the 'beer and curry' audience of 'cult' anime product like *X/1999*, to the big-budget international marketing of *Metropolis* as a more cultured art-house piece.

From their Japanese origins amidst disparate source material (manga and lengthy novel series), Rintaro has taken consistent themes and depictions centered around mass destruction of urban environments and applied a cohesive, yet evolving style to these cinematic works. It begins with the inherently niche - stories rooted in the very fabric of Japanese historical events and locales; yet playing with universal visual spectacle - offered through a transnational filter of the violent and sexual extremes that became in themselves key marketing components in the West at the time.

Moving beyond these cult, fan-boy orientated roots, we see Rintaro greet the 21st century with something new - in *Metropolis*, a film that speaks not only to an established, habitually-consuming audience, but that serves as an active entry point to the medium of anime. Dressed in the clothes of Jazz music, timelessly appealing science-fiction themes, flashy CGI and a link (albeit a convoluted one) back to one of the landmarks of Western cinema, we are left with a film that stands at a precise intersection between cult and art-house, low-brow and high-brow - and reaps the benefits of both.

³² Millenium Actress, IMDB http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0291350/?ref =nv_sr_1 [Accessed 14 May 2019]

³³ Sharp, Jasper (2014) *Metropolis*, *Midnight Eye* (29 June) <http://www.midnighteye.com/reviews/metropolis/> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

³⁴ Sharp, Jasper (2014) 10 great anime films, *BFI* (13 May) <http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/lists/10-great-anime-films> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

The explosive, eye-catching statement of on-screen destruction remains, but now it takes on new meaning; part of a wider cinematic language - smoothed off and polished into a product that is arguably just as much influenced by the West as it is by the East. In a world of viewing tastes that were becoming increasingly transnational - swelled by the rise of the DVD medium and film distributors beginning to position anime (or at the very least, the 'right' kind of anime films) as something that could sit comfortably alongside Western live action films, it is only natural that it would fall to the most transnational of the three films to offer itself up to the widest audience.

References

Bird, Lawrence (2008) Serial Cities: The Politics of "Metropolis" from Lang to Rintarô, in *Clare Market Review*, London: London School of Economics

Bradshaw, Nick and Tim Robey (2007) *The DVD Stack II: The Essential Guide to the World's Best DVDs*, Edinburgh: Canongate Books

CLAMP (2013) *Tokyo Babylon - Book One*. Milwaukie: Dark Horse

Clements, Jonathan and Helen McCarthy (2015) *The Anime Encyclopedia, 3rd Revised Edition: A Century of Japanese Animation*, Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press

Denison, Rayna (2015) *Anime: A Critical Introduction*. London: Bloomsbury Academic

Dew, Oliver (2007) 'Asia Extreme: Japanese Cinema and British Hype' in *New Cinemas* vol. 5 n.1

Harper, Jim (2008) *Flowers from Hell: The Modern Japanese Horror Film*, Hereford: Noir Publishing

Hebdige, Dick (1991) *Subculture, the meaning of style*. London: Routledge

Hoad, Phil (2013) Akira: the future-Tokyo story that brought anime west, *The Guardian* (10 July), <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/jul/10/akira-anime-japanese-cartoon-manga> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

Holmes, Chris (2013) Monumental Destruction — Top 10 Landmarks Movies Love to Destroy, *Pop Dose* (14 August) <http://popdose.com/monumental-destruction-top-10-landmarks-movies-love-to-destroy/> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

Lee, Makela (2008) From Metropolis to Metropolis: The Changing Role of the Robot in Japanese and Western Cinema, in MacWilliams, Mark (ed.), *Japanese Visual Culture*

Reider, Noriko T (2010) *Japanese Demon Lore: Oni from Ancient Times to the Present*. Logan: Utah State University Press

Rintaro [encyclopedia entry], *Anime News Network*,
<https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/encyclopedia/people.php?id=2617> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

Runyon, Christopher (2014) A Tale of Two Cities: Rebuilding a Metropolis, *Movie Mezzanine* (31 March)
<http://moviemezzanine.com/a-tale-of-two-cities-rebuilding-a-metropolis/> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

Sharp, Jasper (2014) 10 great anime films, *BFI* (13 May)
<http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/lists/10-great-anime-films> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

Sharp, Jasper (2014) *Metropolis*, *Midnight Eye* (29 June)
<http://www.midnighteye.com/reviews/metropolis/> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

Shin, Chi-Yun (2009) 'The Art of Branding: Tartan "Asia Extreme" Films' in (eds) Jinhee Choi & Mitsuyo Wada Marciano, *Horror to the Extreme: Changing Boundaries in Asian Cinema*, Hong Kong: Kong Kong University Press

Sontag, Susan (2007) "The Imagination of Disaster". In Redmond, Sean (ed.), *Liquid Metal. The Science Fiction Film Reader*, New York: Wallflower Press

Standish, Isolde (2008) 'Akira, Postmodernism and Resistance' in *The Worlds of Japanese Popular Culture: Gender, Shifting Boundaries and Global Cultures* (ed.) D.P. Martinez, pp.56-74, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Sullivan, Timothy (2009) 007 on Sake: You Only Drink Twice, *Urban Sake* (12 June)
<http://www.urbansake.com/about-sake/007-on-sake-you-only-drink-twice.html>
 [Accessed 14 May 2019]

UROTSUKIDOJI - LEGEND OF THE OVERFIEND, *BBFC*
<http://www.bbfc.co.uk/releases/urotsukidoji-legend-overfiend-1992-0> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

Metropolis, *Groucho Reviews* <http://www.grouchoreviews.com/reviews/54> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

Doomed Megalopolis, *IMDB* http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0337283/?ref =nv_sr_1
 [Accessed 14 May 2019]

Metropolis, *IMDB* http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0293416/?ref =nv_sr_2 [Accessed 14 May 2019]

Millenium Actress, IMDB http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0291350/?ref_=nv_sr_1
[Accessed 14 May 2019]

X, IMDB http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0184041/?ref_=nm_knf_i3 [Accessed 14 May 2019]

(2002) *Metropolis* DVD cover, London: Sony Pictures

(2011) Look Back In Manga (Part II), *The Raygun* (13 July)
<http://www.theraygun.co.uk/?p=2665> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

Osamu Tezuka's *Metropolis*, *Sony Pictures*
<http://www.sonypictures.com/movies/osamutezukasmetropolis/> [Accessed 14 May 2019]

(2000) *X* DVD cover, London: Manga Entertainment

Filmography

Doomed Megalopolis (Teito Monogatari). Dir. Rintaro. Madhouse. Toei Video, Oz. 1991.

Metropolis (Metropolisu). Dir. Rintaro. Madhouse. Kadokawa Shoten. 2001.

X/1999 (Ekkusu). Dir. Rintaro. Madhouse. Kadokawa Shoten, Victor Entertainment, Marubeni, Movic, Sega, Shelty. 1996.