

“I Am Michi!”

**Identity Politics in Osamu
Tezuka’s *Metropolis***

by Emi Bryant

Opening with a scientists' conference in the summer of "19XX," Osamu Tezuka's graphic novel *Metropolis* concerns itself primarily with the advancement of technology and humanity's capacity to control it. But underneath the surface of its questioning of science, *Metropolis* is a text deeply concerned with identity politics, which it explores through the main character, the artificial being Michi. Throughout the text, Michi never completely identifies as belonging entirely to one category, so that Michi comes to exist in the spaces between the societal dualities of male/female and human/robot. This leaves the task of classification up to the perception of others within the city of Metropolis. Never completely male or female, human or robot, Michi is subject to others' conceptions of identity. When these categories fail, and the liminality of Michi's identity is revealed, the citizens of Metropolis are ultimately shown to be not ready to accept such a character into human society.

From the beginning, Michi seems to have no internal, self-defined concept of gender. Michi never responds to gendered appellations from others and self-identifies only by name, asserting "I am Michi" rather than "I am a girl" or "I am a boy." The text attributes Michi's lack of gender identity to his/her design, which includes a button in his/her throat by which s/he can physically change gender. To be "born" with this ability to change genders negates any innate concept of one's own gender. To be one gender is to always already be the other, and thus it is impossible to self-identify as only male or female. Not only does Michi's design preclude an internal gender identification, but it forces gender determination onto an external locus. Michi has no knowledge of the button and therefore cannot push it to select one gender: pressing the button and gendering Michi can only be done by someone else. Also, the physical gender shifts caused by the button manifest only in Michi's outward appearance, representing a gender defined by external trappings rather than biologically or otherwise internally determined. A depiction of Michi "in boy form," for example, shows Michi wearing a boy's clothes, sporting a boy's haircut, and appearing visually similar to the other boys Michi's age at school. Michi's gender as a whole is thus determined not by an internal identification but by an entirely societal external

perception -- and, in the case of the button, a manual selection -- chosen not by the self but instead interpreted by the other citizens of Metropolis. But Michi, as simultaneously both genders and neither, confounds these social classifications. When others perceive that Michi can change gender, or that Michi appears as a different gender than they have come to expect, they have trouble accepting Michi as a liminally gendered character because they simply do not have any preexisting social framework for representing Michi to themselves or each other. The citizens of Metropolis define gender as either male or female and have no way of classifying a character that has no gender at all. Thus they are forced to project their own perceptions of gender onto Michi, addressing or referring to Michi by whichever gendered words they perceive to be accurate.

The problem of representation also figures heavily in the visual depiction of Michi. By presenting *Metropolis* in drawings instead of prose, Tezuka presents us with one set external visual depiction of Michi rather than illustrating Michi's identity through internal monologue and more abstract textual description that would invite the reader to form their own image of Michi. Seeing only Michi's external appearance forces us as readers into forming interpretations of Michi's identity based on visual cues within the manga. Tezuka's drawings do not offer his readers any internal view of how Michi perceives his/her identity; we see only these external clues from which we are left to interpret Michi's gender or humanity. Thus we as readers are trapped in the same situation with regard to Michi as the citizens of Metropolis, who also can only see the external trappings of Michi's identity. Even though we know that a trait such as Michi's gender is ambiguous, we learn this through external modes of perception, such as reading Dr. Lawton's will or watching the button in Michi's throat being pressed. We also determine Michi's identity by visually comparing his/her appearance to other characters. For example, if Michi and Kenichi are dressed similarly, Michi is interpreted as male, and if Michi and a mechanical robot slave are juxtaposed, we interpret Michi as human, and not a robot, because of his/her visual dissimilarity to the figure of the robot.

Another significant problem in interpreting Michi's gender, and thus in finding a way to represent it, lies in the language surrounding Michi and how difficult it is to linguistically represent such a physically liminal character. As the citizens of Metropolis need to fit Michi into a particular gender category, so too do I as a critical reader feel the need to fit Michi into a category simply in order to identify him/her by a pronoun. Michi is never referred to consistently by one particular gendered pronoun throughout the text; "he" and "she" are used almost interchangeably to refer to Michi, depending on context. Within my essay, I try to follow *Metropolis's* own pattern of reference. I avoid using pronouns as often as possible, referring to Michi as Michi, the way Michi self-identifies in response to gendered appellations within the text. When a pronoun is absolutely necessary, what I use depends on context. I use multigendered constructions such as "him/her" or "s/he" for moments in the text when Michi's gender is genuinely unclear. For example, in panels in which someone is pressing the button in Michi's throat, Michi is literally between genders. I occasionally use a gendered pronoun, in quotes, in contexts in which a certain gender is implied or necessary. However, I usually default to multigendered pronouns because, even when Michi is outwardly one gender, Michi is always already the other gender at the same time. In the same way that Michi confounds the social structures that instate the categories of gender, Michi also confounds linguistic representation, bringing Michi back, on the level of language, to the same question asked by the text as a whole: can a being that defies these particular structures still exist within them?

The question recurs beyond the sphere of gender in reference to what kind of being Michi actually is: robot or human. Here also Michi is unable to be neatly categorized. Although Michi was created in the shape of a human, as an artificial being, Michi can never be fully human. At the same time, Michi is not technically a robot. Like a robot, Michi has been artificially created, but Michi's body is made from proteins rather than machinery. Once again, Michi poses a problem of categorization. However, as with gender, there exist only two categories of humanoid figures within Metropolitan society. To not be one implies that one must be the other: if Michi is not a human, created within and conforming to traditional human structures, Michi

must be a robot, and vice versa. Even Michi understands this, as, at the end of the novel, Michi allies with Duke Red's robot slaves to rise against the humans. Michi declares his/her allegiance to the robots by saying, "You're artificial beings, aren't you? I'm one of you!" (Tezuka 135). The non-human origin that Michi and the robots have in common allies them. However, this alliance does not solve the problem. Michi and the robots are, in terms of material composition, two very different artificial beings, so that physiologically Michi cannot actually be "one of them." And yet, although Michi's artificial body is structurally closer to a human's, the fact that it is still artificial bars Michi from being wholly "one of them" among humans as well.

How, then, does the question of Michi's liminal gender connect to Michi's status as neither human nor robot, and yet both? When considered as a robot, and also as an androgynous being, Michi does not have the capability to reproduce, and therefore does not have sexual organs. Thus Michi has no biological sex, only gender, a thing entirely determined by human society. To question gender, then, is to question the way humanity classifies itself. If a being does not fit into either of these preordained categories of humanity -- male or female -- the question arises of whether it can be human at all. The question of Michi's humanity thus goes farther than Michi's status as an artificial being: it also begs the question of Michi's gender. Because Michi can never fit fully into either category of human gender, perhaps Michi can never be fully human. This essay explores how Tezuka's graphic novel poses these questions by imagining and representing a character who defies conventional representation.

At "birth," Michi is a being entirely without gender. When Duke Red commissions Michi from Dr. Lawton, he refers to him/her simply as "this being" (Tezuka 29). Even Duke Red's specifications never refer to gender at all. Although he requests that "this being" have the hypermasculine characteristics of superhuman power, the characteristics themselves are gender neutral: he wants a being "that'll fly through the air and swim through water" (28). Michi's artistic representation at this point is also gender neutral. The shape of the body at "birth" is entirely androgynous and perpetually childlike, never to develop any sexual organs or sex

characteristics. At this point, still separate from society, Michi can exist as a non-gendered being. In the space of the laboratory, outside of societal categorization, Michi has no need for gender-identifying pronouns or physical classifications.

But the world around Michi is not yet ready -- or even able -- to accept a liminally gendered figure. This is figured in the golden mask Michi must wear outside of Dr. Lawton's house to hide his/her identity from the rest of society. The mask which serves to keep Michi from being recognized by Duke Red, also functions as a physical barrier between Michi and the outside world. The mask shields Michi and society from one another, preventing Michi from being recognized and also preventing the citizens of Metropolis from having to confront this figure that threatens their clearly defined gender boundaries. At the same time, however, the mask serves as a visible marker of difference, and to be different is to be threatening. Children run from the mask, labeling Michi "a monster" and screaming "If you even look at it, you'll get sick!" (Tezuka 34). Although they know nothing about Michi or Michi's gender, the citizens of Metropolis view Michi's masked figure as a visible other whom they cannot define or understand and thus perceive and label as a threat.

It makes sense that Michi's face be covered, for when Michi's face is finally exposed, so too is Michi's uncertain gender. Even though Michi's body can change gender, the text establishes early on that Michi's face is feminine. Michi's friend Kenichi brings Michi to the Dam Dharma Museum to see the statue called "The Angel of Rome," on which Michi's face was modeled at birth. The museum curator tells Michi and Kenichi that the statue is famous for having "the most beautiful face in the world," a distinctly feminine attribute (40). This face appears to be what allows Michi to be referred to as a girl; this feminine face, Michi's only constantly gender-specific attribute, influences and sometimes ultimately determines others' perceptions of "her." Although Michi is currently outwardly male, dressed in a boy's clothes and with a boy's haircut, people still refer to Michi as "her" or "that girl." Again, although positioned on a body more similar to masculine Kenichi than feminine Emmy, Michi's face, with its large eyes, delicate nose, and eyelashes, is decidedly feminine. Juxtaposed alongside

Kenichi's male face, as in the first panel at the top of page 39, Michi's facial design looks very different:



Compared to the stubby nose and beady eyes of the male characters, Michi's large, full eyes and long slender nose render him/her anything but male, evoking the image of a typical anime girl.

Juxtaposed alongside Emmy, however, Michi looks less different:



The style of Michi's eyes and nose match the way Emmy's features are drawn, visually identifying Michi more closely with a feminine peer than with a masculine one. Despite Michi's physical similarities to male Kenichi, Michi's face still leads Kenichi to refer to Michi as "this girl," identifying him/her with the feminine. Orbaugh's essay recalls this depiction of Michi's face and gender identification in discussing the representation of a clearly gendered, female-identified protagonist of anime and manga: "In many cases the heroine is not a conveniently

masculinized or gender-neutral young female; often she is extravagantly feminine in figure and in style” (Mostow 219). This need for hyperfeminization represents a fundamental discomfort with the idea of “masculinized or gender-neutral” female characters. In the same way that these anime women need a hyperfeminized appearance to allow the reader to still identify them as fundamentally feminine characters, Michi’s appearance in any given panel must be recognizably masculine or feminine, so that the reader can identify Michi with one gender.

Thus, even as a gender-neutral character, Michi is still subject to the tropes of hyperfeminization, which is evident in Michi’s first foray into Metropolis unmasked. In the panel immediately before Kenichi’s entrance, the response of the crowd after Michi saves Emmy is already gender-conscious, based entirely on appearance. One woman looks at Michi and croons, “I’ve never seen such an adorable child!” (Tezuka 38). In Japanese, this “adorable” would probably be “kawaii,” a word meaning “cute” that is applied to hyperfeminized girls in anime and manga. The “kawaii” genre typically features “ultra-cute ... girl heroine[s] with large eyes and a body that is both voluptuous and child-like” (Iida 427). This “kawaii” can never be applied to male characters; it is uniquely feminine. Even though Michi is dressed as a boy, has a boy’s body, and has displayed hypermasculine superhuman power in stopping the vehicle that was about to hit Emmy, the crowd responds only to Michi’s face, feminizing Michi through their perception of his/her feminine features (especially those “large eyes”) and the application of the feminine “kawaii.”

Not only does physical appearance affect the perception of Michi’s gender, but Michi’s gender affiliation appears to form and change within certain heavily gendered contexts. A certain situation or trait that is more the domain of one gender than another will affect the pronouns that others use to refer to Michi. For example, whenever Michi is discussed in relation to family, Michi is referred to with a feminine pronoun. When Michi starts school, even though Michi is in male form, the teacher still refers to “her”: “And let’s pray that she might find her true father any day now” (81). Kenichi does the same thing, even though while Michi is in boy form he refers to Michi as “he.” When Emmy attempts to trick Michi by saying “I have

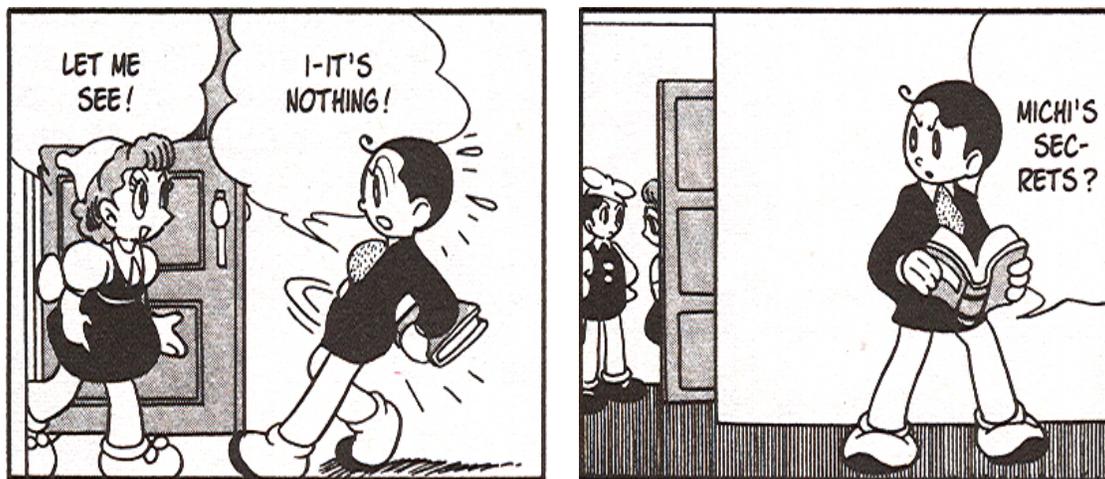
discovered your father's whereabouts," Kenichi immediately switches pronouns: "She doesn't even have a father!" (112-113). Even while denying Michi a role in the family, Kenichi still consigns Michi to the feminine. The hyperfemininity implicit in Michi as family member seems to gender the robot regardless of whether family membership is actually affirmed or denied; the very context of the family has the power to gender Michi.

But there is a contrast between familial femininity and the hypermasculinity of Michi's superhuman power. In his will, Dr. Lawton switches pronouns when moving in and out of the familial context. "Michi believes I am actually her father," he says, again relegating the concept of Michi as family member to the realm of the feminine. However, in the sentence immediately following, he reverts back to describing Michi as male: "he has no idea about his superhuman abilities" (51). Placing Michi outside of the feminine context of the family appears to remove Michi's feminine gender affiliation. But more than that, placing Michi within the context of hypermasculine "superhuman abilities" affiliates Michi as male.

Kenichi and Emmy themselves also represent the duality of gender. Through their respective roles and actions, Michi's two friends come to represent the opposite poles of masculine and feminine identity between which Michi is situated. Kenichi and Emmy are surrounded by respective tropes of masculinity and femininity. Kenichi plays baseball; Emmy sells violets. Where Kenichi is bold, Emmy is shy and submissive. The scene in which Kenichi discovers a book containing Michi's secrets encapsulates this polar gendering of Kenichi and Emmy. Kenichi's and Emmy's initial reactions upon entering Kenichi's house immediately consign them to their hypergendered roles: Emmy responds to a mounted lion's head with extreme, exaggerated fear, while Kenichi responds with bravado, laughing and sticking his hand into the lion's mouth in a gesture of hypermasculine bravery.



Kenichi's action, however, is not only bravado but masculine action and initiative, for which he is rewarded with the discovery of Michi's secrets. Emmy's fear of the lion head keeps her in the passive realm of the feminine. Confined by her fear, she cannot act, allowing the action of discovery to become the domain of the male. Likewise, when Emmy notices the book, she extends only one imperative: "Let me see!" (83).



She stands apart from Kenichi, not even leaning toward him, with her hands in a gesture of vague receptiveness, showing no real physical initiative beyond the one request. In extreme contrast with Kenichi's initiative, Emmy does not move to take, she only stands waiting to receive. When Kenichi hides the book from her, she immediately submits and withdraws, as she is seen in the next panel talking to Michi in the background. Initiative is reinforced as a

masculine trait and passivity as feminine. Emmy's passive acceptance that Michi's secrets are not for her to see and Kenichi's active discovery of them establish Kenichi and Emmy as polar opposite representations of masculinity and femininity.

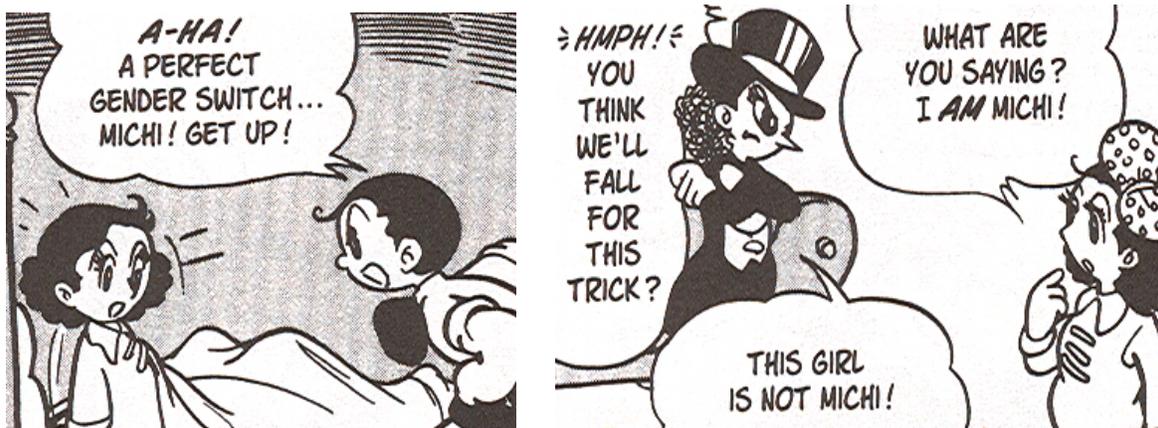
In her essay "Busty Battlin' Babes," Sharalyn Orbaugh mentions that women with fluid or undefined genders must, for some reason, identify as male. She discusses another of Tezuka's works, *Ribbon Knight*, in which the protagonist, "in the absence of a male heir, ... is raised as a boy" (Mostow 207). In Riyoko Ikeda's *The Rose of Versailles*, the female protagonist must also disguise herself as a man in order to assume a hereditary position (210). In the same way as these women are compelled to assume the opposite gender to get beyond the restrictions of the feminine, Michi's affiliation with neither gender also lends the robot the qualities of both roles. His/her genderlessness grants him/her, in a way, the ability to be both genders at once. If Michi were gendered as simply feminine and confined to the domestic sphere, hyperfeminine passivity would prevent her, as with Emmy's passive request to Kenichi, from questing further in search of her real family. Instead, Michi's gender duality allows "him" to take the masculine initiative of actively searching, even though the family "she" is searching for is a feminine domain.

Both the physical changeability of Michi's gender and the social need to identify Michi as one or the other gender are figured in the "button in the throat, which if pushed will change Michi to either male or female form" (Tezuka 84). Even though the button allows Michi to take the physical form of either male or female, the button also denies Michi full identification with either gender. Michi can never be entirely male or female; even while in physically male form, Michi still harbors the capacity to switch at once to physical female form, and vice versa. Thus while phenotypically one gender, Michi still possesses the phantom other gender at the same time. This ambivalence marks Michi's position apart from fully identified members of that gender even as it grants Michi a gendered status. In this way Michi can be seen as both genders at once, but even so, because of his/her inability to fully identify with either gender, Michi is neither gender at all, thrusting him/her into the space between genders.

Throughout the text, Michi him/herself never identifies as either gender, nor does he/she seem to acknowledge gender at all as a defining feature of his/her identity. For example, when Michi, in female form, is caught by Duke Red and his cronies, they order “her,” “All right, you fat broad. ’Fess up!” Michi responds with a denial of “her” perceived gender and a completely ungendered assertion of identity: “I am not a fat broad! I have a name. I’m Michi!” (130).

Michi refuses the gender identification thrust onto “her” in response to her physical appearance as it is perceived by Duke Red’s henchmen. But Michi does not respond in kind, asserting one gender over another; Michi instead defines herself by name, a name designed specifically to be gender-neutral. In claiming this name as the symbol of identity, who Michi really is, Michi denies any gender identification at all and asserts “her” place in the space of between-genders.

However, if Duke Red’s henchmen are any example, the human citizens of Metropolis have proven themselves unable to accept such a liminal, ungendered character. As the woman in the crowd applied the hyperfeminine “kawaii” to Michi on the basis of the feminine face, so too does Duke Red’s henchman identify her as a “broad” because of the a physically feminine form Michi has taken at that time. The most striking example of this need for an absolute identification is the scene in which Duke Red’s henchmen, along with Emmy’s sister Gracy, barge into Kenichi’s house at night to kidnap Michi.



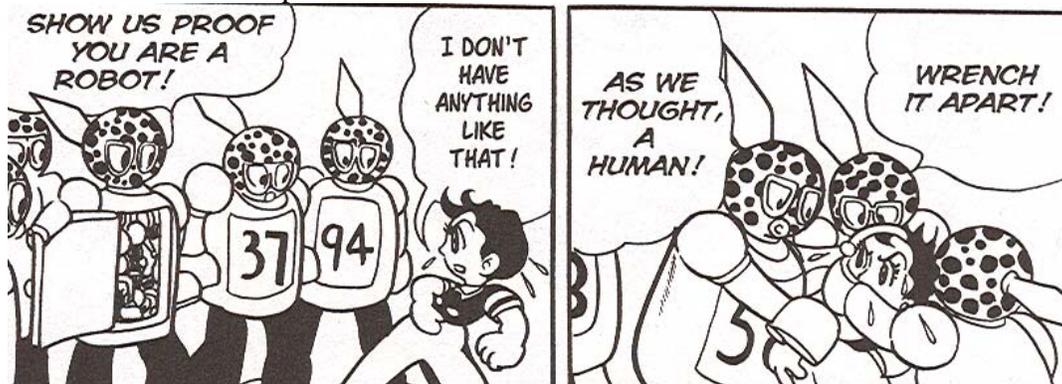
When Kenichi pushes the button to occasion “a perfect gender switch!”, changing Michi from male to female form, the plot is completely foiled. Gracy immediately declares “This girl is not

Michi!” Even when Michi insists “I *am* Michi!”, Gracy is not convinced: “I was positive Michi was supposed to be a boy!” (118). Michi’s own self-identification falls flat in the face of Gracy’s preconceived notions of Michi’s gender. The statement “I am Michi,” carrying no gender in the name and thus reading as “I am a genderless being,” is impossible for Gracy to comprehend. She has identified Michi as one particular gender and cannot even conceive of two genders within the same body. She, like the woman in the crowd and like Duke Red’s henchman, needs the complete and fixed form of one gender or another on which to base Michi’s identity.

In the same way that they need one gender with which to identify Michi, the citizens of Metropolis also need to conclusively identify Michi as either human or nonhuman. Because Michi can not fit into either category of human being, male or female, the question arises of whether Michi is really human at all, and here is where Michi begins to identify with the robots. The robots are kept separate from the humans and work as slaves for Duke Red; as the only other humanoid figures possessed of a consciousness, they serve as the necessary “other” to humans. But the genderlessness of the robots also leads Michi to identify and, more importantly, to be identified with them as a nonhuman figure. As Donna Haraway writes in “A Manifesto For Cyborgs,” “the cyborg is a creature in a postgender world” (Kirkup 51). While the citizens of Metropolis cannot accept as human a character that defies all notions of gender, the robots, having no concept of gender themselves, do not view Michi in this way.

Although the question of Michi’s gender does not pose a problem for the robots, the question of Michi’s humanity does. The robots may not have the human-constructed categories of gender by which to classify Michi, but they are aware of the difference between themselves and humans and the categories which that difference necessarily constructs. While the citizens of Metropolis look at the outward evidence of gender to classify Michi, the robots look at Michi’s human appearance to determine exactly what kind of being Michi is. Upon their first

encounter with Michi, they demand physical proof that Michi is a robot. The proof they offer of their own robot status is to open the doors in their chests and reveal their mechanical innards:



Like Michi, these robots are humanoid in shape, but Michi's body resembles a human's much more closely than do these robots. Michi's body appears human not only in appearance, but in structure: although artificially constructed like a robot's, Michi's body is made of cells and proteins rather than wires and gears. To open this body would destroy it even as it proved its artificiality, so Michi is unable to offer the robots the proof they want. Because of this difference in appearance and construction, when Michi protests "I don't have anything like that!", the robots immediately assume Michi is a human. Unable to identify Michi as one of their own, the robots identify Michi as a human, an other, and decide at once to "wrench it apart!" When Michi demonstrates superhuman strength in attacking them, the robots change their minds and decide that Michi "must be a robot" (Tezuka 135). For these robots, there exist no other categories than "human" and "robot." Like the citizens of Metropolis, they too are unprepared to accept a being that has a place in both categories.

The trope of identifying robots by their ability to harmlessly put their insides on display resonates with the fundamental difference between robots and humans, that of objects versus subjects. What is inside a robot is machinery; the robot is not harmed by showing off its insides because it is simply a mechanical object. A machine is *meant* to be opened; unlike a human, it cannot die when opened up. But with this object state comes the fundamental lack of consciousness particular to an object. Humans trade their inability to display their insides without consequence for a subjectivity and consciousness that sets them apart from objects and

therefore from robots. Because robots do not have the human consciousness that makes them subjects, they are treated as objects. Baudrillard explains the objectification of robots and their consequent slavery:

If, for the unconscious, the robot is the perfect object that sums up all the others, this is not simply because it is a simulacrum of man as a functionally efficient being; rather, it is because, though the robot is indeed a simulacrum, it is not so perfect in this regard as to be man's double, and because, for all its humanness, it always remains quite visibly an object, and hence a *slave*.
(Baudrillard 120)

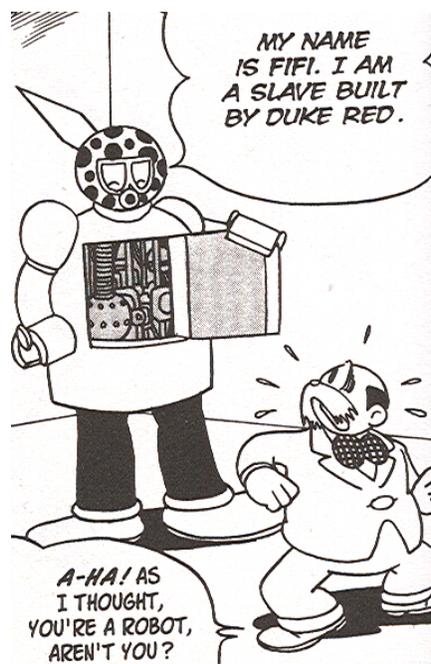
No matter how closely a robot may physically resemble a human, it will never be able to *completely* resemble a human -- that is, to have an innate consciousness -- and thus the robot is always already denied human subjectivity. Because of its lack of subjectivity, the robot must then always be an object and therefore a slave.

The perception of robots as imperfect objects in the shape of humans surfaces in Detective Mustachio's meeting with the robot Fifi, a slave in Duke Red's factory. When the detective crashes into Fifi, his first good look at him -- and the reader's as well -- reveals a figure that, while human in shape, is obviously not human:



Fifi is Baudrillard's "simulacrum" that is "not so perfect ... as to be man's double", as shown when Detective Mustachio responds with an incredulous "What are you?!" (Tezuka 66). To apply the subjective pronoun "you" to Fifi shows that Detective Mustachio recognizes something human within him and can thus identify him as a human simulacrum. But the possibility of complete humanity for Fifi is denied when Detective Mustachio asks "*what* are you" instead of "*who* are you." Even though in the shape of a human and possessing enough recognizable humanity to warrant being addressed as a subject, Fifi's clearly non-human appearance limits his identity to the realm of the objective "what" instead of the subjective and individual "who."

The identification of "robot" with "slave" is also evident in this scene. Fifi introduces himself as "a slave built by Duke Red" and opens the door in his chest to present his mechanical innards. Detective Mustachio responds with "As I thought, you're a robot, aren't you?" (66).



The panel shows Fifi revealing his mechanized, non-human body in the gesture that all the robots use as a means of demonstrating their non-human status: opening their bodies in the way that no human is capable of. Although this gesture reveals visually to Mustachio that Fifi is a robot, Fifi gives no verbal indication of being a robot other than the use of the word "built." Treated as

dialogue alone, Fifi's self-identification as a "slave" who is "built" produces the response "you're a robot, aren't you?" Both "slave" and "built" identify Fifi as an object more than a living being and lead Mustachio to the logical assumption that Fifi is a robot.

If the "humanness" that Baudrillard posits cannot save the robot from its status as "quite visibly an object," this "humanness" must then be the quality of "not objectness," and therefore subjectivity. To be a robot, then, is to be perpetually an object and to exist outside of subjectivity and thus outside of individual identity. But Fifi, despite his objectness, displays a possession and understanding of both his individual identity and that of others. His first remark to Mustachio, "You do not seem like a bad person," demonstrates an ability to discern and connect with the subjective identity, the "humanness," of the detective, which in turn reveals a "humanness" of his own. His reference to himself with the pronoun "I" and his ability to distinguish himself from his compatriots reveals a subjectivity and consciousness that transcends his object status. Fifi's ability to assert his identity with an "I am" brings him, a robot slave, to the same level of consciousness and identity as the humans he is created to work for. Mustachio responds to Fifi's subjectivity as he, from then on, refers to Fifi by his name as he would a fellow human. By contrast, Duke Red and his henchmen still refer to Fifi as "that slave" or "the robot" (71, 72).

Other than the case of Michi, this meeting between Detective Mustachio and Fifi is the only place in which the distinct boundaries between humans and robots blur. The scene in which Detective Mustachio instructs the other robots on how to successfully gain an advantage to revolt against Duke Red is the most telling instance of this blurring as the detective speaks to the robot "others" as one of their own. He not only connects with the robotic other, he also subversively advises an attack against his own people -- humans. But he does not -- and cannot -- do so as a human being; instead, he does so disguised as a rat. He also does not point out a sabotage specific to Duke Red and his cronies, but to all human beings, urging the robots to destroy the food supplies because "eating and drinking are a big issue for human beings" (105). That he generalizes this plan of attack to "the humans" reflects the divide on both sides of the struggle

between “the humans” and “the robots,” as does the fact that, while talking to the robots, he never removes his rat disguise. If he were to suggest a plan to sabotage “the humans” while speaking as a human, the robots would never believe him. But when speaking as a rat, a figure completely outside of the category of either humans or robots, he can connect with the robots in a way that he could not do as a human without his disguise.

Detective Mustachio’s need for disguise underscores the inability not only of the robots to accept and connect with the humans, but that of the humans to connect with the robots. This inability explains their ultimate failure to accept Michi as one of them. Joe Sanders explains why humans and robots fail to connect in his essay “Tools/Mirrors: The Humanization of Machines”:

We don’t want to think of a connection because we don’t want to *feel* any connection. Machines make us nervous when they show any of the independent, seeking consciousness that we associate with being human. Thus, as long as possible, we like to think of machines simply as physical extensions of our wills. (Dunn 167)

To think of an object created for the purpose of mechanically serving humanity as having consciousness is eminently threatening to humanity. Duke Red’s attitude toward his robot slaves illustrates this concept. When Detective Mustachio insists that “even robots deserve some sympathy,” Duke Red dismisses him, telling him “Those things were created solely for work! If you leave them to it they get used to it” (Tezuka 74). Here, Duke Red represents the ultimate manifestation of Sanders’ theory, as the robots are literal physical extensions of Duke Red’s will: unlike humans, they are the only ones who can manufacture toron gas without being affected by it. The manifestation, then, of “independent, seeking consciousness” in these robots represents a dual threat to Duke Red’s supremacy, first by compromising his plans for supremacy over the rest of humanity via world domination, but secondly by nullifying his supremacy over the robot slaves and, as the end of the story proves, jeopardizing his very survival.

But the citizens of Metropolis also display the nervousness that Sanders describes with regard to the possibility of a robotic consciousness. The idea of an overlap between machine and human has always been particularly threatening, even before the advent of the robot.

Christopher Bolton discusses the threat of an ambiguously human creature in both wooden Japanese *bunraku* puppets and the robotic protagonist, like Michi, of *Ghost in the Shell*. The artificiality and thus the clear inhumanity of these figures' bodies contrasts with the infusion, whether by a puppeteer or by the independent force of the "ghost in the shell," of consciousness and humanity. This contrast blurs the line between human and nonhuman. But in the case of an artificial body, the boundaries also blur between being alive and not being alive -- is it possible for a nonhuman and thus non-living body to sustain a human consciousness, and how? For Bolton, "this quality of being ambiguously alive [is] part of any realistic doll's frightening and compelling effect" (Bolton 745). What has heretofore been regarded as an object suddenly takes on a consciousness that approaches equivalence -- or renders it equal -- to humanity.

The idea of a robot possessing a human consciousness is especially threatening for the citizens of Metropolis, for whom robots have always been objects, and, particularly in Duke Red's factory, slaves. As objects and slaves created by and serving humanity, robots can only be regarded as existing outside of and subordinate to Metropolis's human inhabitants. Baudrillard's conception of the robot as an object and a slave, as well as Sanders' figuring of the robot as a physical extension of human will, renders the robot little more than a mechanical doll in the shape of a human. Here is the source of the uncanny, the quality of being "ambiguously alive," that poses such a threat to the status of the fully human. The boundaries between alive and not alive, human and nonhuman are blurred, but so is the boundary between the real and the unreal. By its very definition an object cannot possess a consciousness, and the idea that robots, these manmade objects, suddenly *do* crosses the line into unreality. Instead of the object or slave that he expects, "[man] finds himself confronted by a double who has enlisted his energies" (Baudrillard 121). This is, as Bolton points out,

one source of the ambivalence we see toward the mechanical body -- why it is viewed with both detachment and concern. ... drama featuring artificial bodies succeeds by filling up those bodies with the humanity that they lack, until they become more or less real than the flesh. (Bolton 739)

The uncanny quality, then, of a robot slave become human is that humanity is forced to confront the objectification and commodification of the robot as reflected onto its own body and consciousness. A robot endowed with a human consciousness is no longer an extension of human will put to work. Instead, it is an image of a fellow human enslaved and oppressed. As Bolton writes of *bunraku* puppets, “the pathos ... depends on this ability to oscillate between real and unreal, simultaneously more and less than human” (745). The same applies to the robot slaves. Created as mechanical objects with no capacity for consciousness, they are by necessity less than human. But as a mirror for human existence reflecting human oppression, a medium in which humans can see the kind of suffering humanity could be inflicting on itself rather than on these other figures, the robot becomes more human than humans themselves in its ability to show human potential in addition to the basic state of human consciousness. This object with no capacity for human experience suddenly develops it and, in its oppression, reflects far more of the spectrum of human experience than the human citizens of Metropolis themselves know.

This blurring of boundaries within reality and humanity gives rise to that nervousness that Sanders describes, which leads the citizens of Metropolis to immediately vilify Michi upon learning that Michi is artificial. Even though Michi looks and acts like a human being and has lived among humans, Michi’s alliance with the robots turns the citizens of Metropolis against him/her at once. When Michi attacks the plane that has saved him from the robots, General Notarlin declares “That Michi is a complete monster!” (Tezuka 143). General Notarlin only sees the uncanny and frightening side of Michi, the “more and less than human” that threatens the human subject rather than offering the opportunity for connection. General Notarlin and Inspector Ganimarl refuse to make any sort of connection to either the robots or Michi that would help them understand Michi’s behavior. Their physical absence from the scene in which Michi learns his/her real identity as an artificial being represents their ignorance and inability to

sympathize with Michi, even if only by virtue of not being present at the moment in which Michi changes self-identification. But when Duke Red attempts to warn them of the robot revolt, they refuse to listen and, in doing so, deny themselves any information that would help them understand Michi's motives and feel that connection. Their ignorance switches from inadvertent to willful; they actively refuse, as Sanders says, to think of a connection or to feel any connection, and simply dismiss Michi as a rebellious monster. By contrast, Kenichi, who has made a connection with Michi in the same way as his uncle Mustachio has connected with Fifi, is the only one who displays any sympathy, wondering "if his artificial heart has come back to life" (143).

When the citizens of Metropolis do finally make that connection upon hearing Michi's story and come at last to sympathize with Michi, that connection is incomplete. They no longer call Michi a monster, but they can not relate to Michi as an other in the same way that Kenichi connects with Michi as an artificial being and Detective Mustachio connected with Fifi. This imperfect connection is revealed when Michi's classmates, coming to say goodbye, are physically confronted with Michi's radical otherness in the hospital. Michi begins to dissolve, losing all physical and phenotypically human form, bringing his/her artificiality to the outside and forcing the students to confront it directly. But they are unable to face Michi without the recognizably human body which they came to know and understand as Michi. His classmates comment on the inhuman appearance of Michi's dissolving body, saying "He's got no hands!" and "Even the face doesn't look like Michi!" (161). Only Kenichi, who has connected with Michi as fully as Detective Mustachio connected with Fifi, can look under the hospital blanket and address Michi's actual body as he says his goodbyes.

Ironically, in their need for a recognizably human body, Michi's classmates finally achieve connection with a body that is entirely artificial. Because Michi's classmates can not connect with Michi when his/her body is no longer human in appearance, the only body they can connect with is the statue of the Angel of Rome, which bears Michi's face. Unable to accept Michi's ambiguous artificiality, they flock to the statue that Kenichi brings in, addressing,

touching, and saying goodbye to it instead of to Michi. Although the statue itself never comes to life, Michi's classmates project life onto it to the point at which it becomes a surrogate for the living Michi. Their ability to address the statue rather than the dying body of Michi is ironic physical evidence that they have finally overcome the uncanny effect of the artificial body come to life which originally turned them against Michi.

However, the fact that Michi's classmates need this nonliving body to say goodbye proves that they still need a body that fulfills their expectations. They are unable to face the uncanny spectacle of a dying robot: an artificially created body losing the life and consciousness that it was never meant to have. For Michi's classmates, saying goodbye to statue that is and always was an inanimate object is easier. Where Michi confounds humanity's expectations with regard to the categories of male/female and human/nonhuman, the statue does not. It has no consciousness of its own and exists as an object on which Michi's classmates can project their expectations. The statue then comes to represent not Michi but an idealization of Michi -- it exists as whatever the person interacting with it wants Michi to be. Unlike the living Michi, who continually violates them, the statue fulfills the expectations of the mourning citizen by remaining nonliving and by fitting easily into their categorization of Michi.

The ultimate message of *Metropolis*, as it is spelled out in the text, is that of a warning against the capacity of technology to surpass the boundaries of humanity's ability to support it. At both the beginning and the end of the novel, Dr. Bell warns the reader, "Might the day not also come when humans also become too advanced and, in actuality, as a result of their science, wipe themselves out?" (Tezuka 162). The trope of technology surpassing and overpowering humans allegorizes the failure of human social categories when confronted with a being that utterly confounds them. In the same way that humanity is not ready to support the advances of its own scientific discovery, humanity is also not ready to accept a character like Michi that defies all means of social categorization.

Michi's ability to exist as a member of Metropolitan society fails in two important ways. Most notably, Michi fails to gain and hold a place in society by virtue of being unclassifiable.

Because Michi is at once neither gender and both, at once human and robot, no category can claim Michi as one of their own because Michi is always already their other. Michi exists within a unique category of liminal space. This inability to fit easily or completely into any preexisting category denies Michi any acceptance, and thus any permanent place, within any category of Metropolitan society.

However, not only Michi's place within a social category but Michi's very physical existence as a citizen of Metropolis is also ultimately unsustainable. Michi is marked as an anomaly within humanity by virtue of being an artificial being, but the process of Michi's "conception" and "birth" are also, as compared to human reproduction, unnatural. Dr. Lawton only succeeds in creating life in his laboratory as a "result of the radiation coming from [the] black spots" that Duke Red creates on the surface of the sun (27). Thus, when the source of the black spots is destroyed, causing the black spots to disappear, the artificial proteins of which Michi is composed can no longer survive. Neither can Michi, who dissolves when the black spots are gone. As Dr. Bell tells Kenichi, "Michi's life was owed mostly to the black spots' radiation.... This life ... only existed while those black spots did" (160). While Michi needs a separate category from those of male/female and human/robot in which to exist, Michi also needs a separate physical medium in which to exist on account of owing daily existence to the unnatural black spots on the sun.

That separate physical medium is, of course, the realm of manga. The only way in which a character like Michi, who defies classification and resides in the gaps between categories, can exist is as a drawing. The amorphous black spots appear then as drops of the black ink which, in manga, not only defines the characters themselves but also represents gaps in narrative and character. Black ink demarcates the outline of each character, as well as the panel borders on each page. Characters and events existing in the white space within are easily identifiable both visually and in terms of narrative. But in outlining the panels, the black ink also represents the boundaries between character and background, panel and gutter. It is impossible visually to exist within or to straddle these borders in the same way that it is impossible to exist between

categories in Metropolitan society. Black ink in manga is also used to denote shadow or hollowness, to depict a space into which it is not possible to see. In these kinds of spaces the visual boundaries as well as societal boundaries break down, and it is this kind of voidlike space that a character such as Michi can exist. Michi owes his/her existence not only to the physical radiation of the black spots, but to the kind of spaces that the black spots represent and to the black ink from which he/she is created.

Thus the problem of Michi's existence is traceable back to a human source both physically and metaphorically. Not only the black spots on the sun but the social structure of Metropolis dissolve Michi inside and out. Although outwardly questioning man's relationship to the advance of science and technology, *Metropolis* subconsciously questions the social framework of categories into which Michi does not fit. Michi's dependence on radiation from the sun's black spots seems to be the primary -- and only -- explanation for Michi's dissolution. But Michi's final physical dissolution comes as the climax of a social process that breaks down Michi's identity as others in society have perceived it. As Michi is perceived to be an incomplete member of each category, each questions Michi's place within it until Michi's identity as male, female, human, or robot dissolves in the face of his/her/its status as an incomplete specimen. Before the black spots' disappearance dissolves Michi, Michi's social identity has already been dissolved. The final question of what, then, Michi really *is* -- as Michi has up till this point been defined by what s/he is *not* -- resolves itself in physical dissolution as Michi is questioned out of existence. After the question is asked, and answered negatively, of whether Michi fits into any human category, the final question of whether Michi can exist within the structure of human civilization arises. Because Michi cannot fit into the existing categories of gender and species, it is obvious that Michi cannot figuratively exist within human social structure. But when Michi dissolves, the final question is answered: Michi also cannot physically exist within the structure of human civilization. Through this extensive questioning of Michi's place in society, *Metropolis* supports Dr. Bell's final warning against science going farther than humanity is ready for. In the case of Michi, it is not only the technology of artificial

life that humanity is not ready to accept, but Michi's liminality as a being, proving that the existence of such a character is ultimately unsustainable.

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