

**INESCAPABLE PRINTS: PANOPTIC  
SURVEILLANCE AND VIOLENCE IN JOÃO PAULO  
CUENCA'S *O ÚNICO FINAL FELIZ PARA UMA  
HISTÓRIA DE AMOR É UM ACIDENTE***

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**ABSTRACT:**

Brazilian writer João Paulo Cuenca uses futuristic Tokyo as a venue for his antithetical love story that portrays a father ensnaring his adult son through a city-wide surveillance network. Foucault's panopticism in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) reflects the wire taps and hidden cameras in Cuenca's dystopic novel, revealing how technology intensifies the scale ranging from virtual invasion to physical brutality. Much as social media has changed the definition of "friend" and blurred the division between public and private life, the protagonist's social web reveals that alliances are deceiving. Cuenca's work exhibits the alarming reality in which concepts like identity and friendship are manipulated by society's most powerful members. Cuenca's dystopic society permits and encourages the multifaceted dehumanization of women's bodies and analogizes media presence as a tool for personal freedom, illicit surveillance, and violence.

**KEYWORDS:** dystopia; Panopticon; media; gender identities; exile; digital footprints; João Paulo Cuenca

## 1. Introduction

As the internet expands and virtual connectedness pervades many aspects of daily life, our applications, caches, and cookies record everything, from the obvious to the obscure, about our identities, preferences, and desires. This tendency to register and digitalize our lives is at once comforting, convenient, and disconcerting. While we gain resources to record memories, we also surrender control over those files, now vulnerable to possession by anyone who can find them. Likewise, invasive patterns like stalking, ostracism, and shaming are now possible on amplified scales because of the connectedness and breadth of online communities. The use of networks as a tool for both vision and surveillance is a major theme of Brazilian author João Paulo Cuenca's 2010 novel *O único final feliz para uma história de amor é um acidente* (published in translation in 2013 as *The Only Happy Ending for a Love Story is an Accident* and hereafter cited as *The Only Happy Ending*).

Launched by Brazilian publishing house Companhia das Letras in 2010 as part of the series Amores Expressos, *The Only Happy Ending* is a dystopic sci-fi anti-love-story thriller set in the near future in Tokyo, Japan. The Amores Expressos series, which commissioned over a dozen Brazilian authors to live in various countries overseas for approximately four months in 2007, required each writer to produce a novel set in their respective destination. João Paulo Cuenca was sent to Tokyo, a trip that resulted in his writing *The Only Happy Ending* (Guedes). In it, protagonist Shunsuke Okuda, a materialistic businessman, is targeted by his father Atsuo Okuda, a famous former poet and mastermind mob boss. Atsuo's human network consists of hired agents like Prof. Suguro Shibata; a famous exotic dancer Kazumi who performs at the bar Shunsuke frequents; and Romanian Iulana Romiszowska, a waitress at the same bar who happens to live with Kazumi and becomes Shunsuke's girlfriend. As if this web of relationships is not a tangled enough source of intelligence, Atsuo also receives audio-visual feeds, transcribed phone conversations, and intercepted mail correspondence in his central surveillance room dubbed "the Submarine," collected through his wide-reaching network of surveillance hardware called "the Periscope." Much like today's computer and phone screens, the periscope allows for observation of the world while refracting any image of the viewer and hiding his/her identity.

Throughout the course of the novel, told through various voices and textual genres including dreams, Shunsuke's narration, the voice of a sex doll, narrations

of the periscope surveillance, and magazine interviews, Shunsuke's life unravels. He starts out as a relatively normal corporate *salaryman*, the Japanese term for a white-collar male employee, typically very loyal to his company and its culture ("The Salaryman" 2020). Shunsuke starts to date Iulana and soon becomes obsessed with her, deciding to quit his job to spend the ensuing months dating her sporadically. His existence effectively ends when his father orders an arson on a train in Tokyo, killing Iulana and many others, and maiming Shunsuke. As a paraplegic, he is forced to return to his father's house, thereby reconstructing the family structure of his childhood, except that his mother is deceased and her ashes reside within the silicone sex doll purchased and used by Atsuo.

As I aim to establish, Cuenca's novel features a modern, futuristic panopticon much like that examined by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1975). Weissman (2021) demonstrates that the internet can be a virtual panopticon, while Tonus (2014) asserts that Cuenca's novel features panoptic surveillance. Yet, the hybrid manner in which Cuenca's characters employ the execution and suggestion of surveillance, their implications for mental health and abuse, and the wide spectrum of violence the novel depicts have not been explored. I also intend to explore the intersections between human and technological networks, especially Cuenca's employment of analog technologies to entrap the protagonist and those in his social network.

Finally, in this article, I will show how definitions of the self and of one's identity can be altered by oneself and by one's contacts. In a world of closely connected networks, perception and consumption play influential roles in the formation of one's identity, which manifest connected and sometimes conflicted forms as they are public, private, imagined, and ascribed. These fluid and problematic definitions of self as one's own and others' object of consumption creates unacceptable situations of commodification and violence, which is why this discussion of networks allows for a necessary debate on rape culture and other less obvious ramifications of media violence.

## 2. A futuristic panopticon

In addition to examining this work as an example of the blurred lines between the power of networks (internet, social media, etc.) to grant freedoms and facilitate

illicit surveillance and stalking, I intend to show how the expectation of sanctioning that occurs in these networks mimics, in this case, the self-regulation resulting from victim conditioning in abusive relationships. Constrictions of inter-personal and emotional freedoms may seem inconsequential to some readers; however, I aim to demonstrate that they are just the first steps toward more easily observable forms of violence. Therefore, captivity should be understood not only as physical control, but also as psychological violence. Foucault (1975) explains that Bentham's *Panopticon*

reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions – to enclose, to deprive of light, and to hide – it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two [...] Visibility is a trap. To begin with, this is made possible – as a negative effect – to avoid those compact, swarming, howling masses that were to be found in places of confinement, those painted by Goya or described by Howard. Each individual, in his place [...] is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. The arrangement of his room, opposite the central tower, imposes on him an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility. And this invisibility is a guarantee of order (Foucault 1975, 200)

As in Foucault's description, Cuenca's panopticon also encloses – but not physically. While Shunsuke is allowed to roam freely for most of the novel during day or night, a recurring confluence of blurriness, darkness, and moisture on the streets of Tokyo evokes what Foucault attributes to Goya's paintings (Foucault 200). Cuenca describes the streetlights of Tokyo reflecting off of pavement puddles and showing through hazy fog. In Cuenca's panopticon, Atsuo's assets who surveil and guard Shunsuke are prisoners themselves, whether aware of it or not. Their actions to record and control Shunsuke's behaviors are merely preambles to the horrific violence they will facilitate against Shunsuke and suffer themselves. Eventually, the psychological enclosures that all of the captives' experience give way to physical captivity (Yoshiko and Shunsuke), disability (Shunsuke), and death (Kazumi and Iulana) at the end of the novel.

Jeremy Weissman discusses the panopticon of modern media, especially social media, ultimately illustrating that inequalities of vision and power often lead to psychological and physical violence. In Foucault's panopticon, the expectation of always being watched conditions prisoners to modify their own behavior to conform to the permissible array of behaviors. As Weissman suggests in *The Crowdsourced Panopticon* (2021), the internet functions in much the same way.

Weissman argues that the panopticon constructed from the multiplicity of social media users is especially devious because the internet creates invisibility. In Plato's *Republic*, invisibility is a powerful weapon bestowed through a ring to the character Gyges,<sup>1</sup> allowing him to infiltrate the royal palace, seduce the queen, and execute the king, thereafter taking his throne (1941, 44-45). Weissman analogizes the internet as the "digital Ring of Gyges" (Weissman 2021, 10). The anonymity afforded by inhabiting an online sphere causes a de-inhibition of unapproved impulses, like sexuality and violence (10-11). Cuenca's novel provides several examples in which anonymity and complicity interweave to promote violence.

As Weissman suggests, one of the staying powers of the internet is its ability to induce conformity because of the perennial expectation that someone is watching. In addition to the anonymity provided by the shield of the computer or phone screen, the converse occurs: "a culture of 'sharing' or surveillance, where our thoughts, words, and actions are broadcast to a global audience for permanent viewing and judgment with possibly devastating consequences" (Weissman 2021, 14). For instance, unintentionally divulged footage, when released to the world, becomes disseminated and archived for repeated future viewing. Therefore, the subjects of this illicit surveillance lose power and are made vulnerable to public judgment, sometimes incredibly cruel. Meanwhile, the viewers remain completely protected by anonymity (14). This is a phenomenon Cuenca describes in *The Only Happy Ending* as Atsuo Okuda's advantage: "...the Periscope Room [is] the cockpit of his anonymous observation post. [...] To observe and to remain invisible" (2013, 3). A principal difference between the scenario Weissman describes and the premise of *The Only Happy Ending* is that Atsuo is the single viewer of all of the illicit, unapproved surveillance. As the mob boss and mastermind of the violence and surveillance executed in the novel, Atsuo is the sole consumer of the network feeds, including phone taps and video recordings.

The only other viewer to gain access to the 'submarine' is Shunsuke himself, who reveals to readers that "The job of operating the periscope falls to me. It's my inheritance" (Cuenca 2013, 3). Though never clarified textually, this revelation in the second chapter of the book occurs chronologically after the plot events of the

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<sup>1</sup> By rotating the ring on his finger, Gyges can switch from being visible to invisible, a trait he uses to infiltrate different spaces in which to manipulate his situation and gain power through seduction and violence.

entire novel. We presume that Shunsuke's monitoring of the periscope begins only after he has been forcibly returned to his father's home by the deadly accident alluded to in the title.

The physical hardware of the periscope is described in detail:

The pieces of this submerged vessel are bugs on telephones, cameras, and microphones hidden in rooms and one-way mirrors in bathrooms all over the city. Our frogmen, workers who monitor the movements of anyone worth watching, can break into mailboxes and follow anyone for as long as Mr. Okuda deems it to be necessary. (Cuenca 2013, 3)

Just as the internet viewers in Weissman's discussion are protected by the digital invisibility ring of Gyges, Atsuo Okuda is protected by the infrastructural reach of his periscope network, as well as his ability to farm out his espionage to "frogmen." Shunsuke admits: "I got used to the surveillance from an early age. I learned how to watch others by being watched by my father" (3).

The dehumanizing effect of this arrangement becomes more apparent when Shunsuke and Iulana go on a date to the zoo in Ueno. In front of the baboon cage, Shunsuke comments, "'When I go to the zoo, I always think that we are walking on an exhibition platform. The animals are observing us. They are behind bars but we are imprisoned by something much bigger.' [...] In some fashion, Iulana Romiszowska is a little like the animal, at least in her brief Japanese existence [...] she is almost illiterate" (Cuenca 2013, 36-37). Cuenca's tendency to dehumanize Iulana and other women pervades the novel and will be discussed in this article. For now, it is worth noting the connection between being on exhibition and being illiterate or, in other words, losing language – a principal tool for human agency and self-control. In Shunsuke's mind, the "much bigger" entity that imprisons him and other people is more confining than the captivity experienced by zoo animals.

Since Shunsuke is one of the narrators in this novel, his induction as a viewer of the submarine effectively includes readers as viewers. At different moments throughout, readers are reminded of their inclusion: "Iulana is wearing men's pajamas. Kazumi, just a red camisole and panties. If Iulana looked at her friend, as we are doing now, she would still notice that Kazumi's bare feet are especially perverse today" (Cuenca 2013, 39). Readers' invasion of the women's privacy resurges in this episode: "... from this point the two will speak more softly [...] as if they knew that we, in fact, could hear them" (41). This surveillance is brought up

repeatedly. For instance, Shunsuke narrates: "... we wait for the subway, under the eye of the submarine camera of Mr. Okuda..." (64). Even in Shunsuke's own house, the protagonist is subject to surveillance: "The submarine captures a few seconds of silence between us ... What we see now, through the periscope, is our first breakfast" (74).

The novel features other textual genres, like a memo from Atsuo's executive spy, revealing human espionage and a phone tap, one of hundreds carried out every year:

URGENT

Attention: Mr. Atsuo Okuda

From: Suguro Shibata

I attach the partial transcript of phone communication #437... that took place between the editors of *Literature Today* magazine, and your son. . . According to my records, Mr. Shunsuke, after leaving the foreigner at the subway station the afternoon of the trip to the zoo [...] answered the following call, logged in our archives as #437 of the year... (Cuenca 2013, 45)

These examples are just pieces in the litany of invasive auditory and visual surveillance orchestrated by Mr. Okuda. Though the targets include those in Shunsuke's inner circle, the overarching objective is to tighten Mr. Okuda's grip on his son. Though Shunsuke survives most of the novel technically free, he is socially and psychologically ensnared. The effects of such constraints on Shunsuke's autonomy can be explored within the context of studies on captivity. Looking at criminal detention systems, Victor Shammass enumerates five fundamental deprivations discovered through Gresham M. Sykes's classic ethnographical study of New Jersey State Prison. These deprivations are commonly known as the "pains of imprisonment," or the categories of suffering imposed by modern incarceration:

[...] the loss of liberty, desirable goods and services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy, and security [...] Contrary to the deterrence hypothesis, which claims that longer or harsher terms of imprisonment reduce crime by increasing the costs of offending, inmates [form] an inmate culture that could result in an elevated commitment to crime. (Shammass 2021, 1, 2)

In sum, the losses that occur during incarceration instigate manners of coping that harden criminals exposed to the "corrections" system instead of deterring criminal offenses in the first place. Shunsuke constantly suffers from the loss of autonomy and security, deprivations that intensify after he is maimed and returned to his father's house. In the end, Shunsuke is also deprived of his liberty; his

powerlessness and complete captivity within Atsuo's home culminate to force his complicity as a consumer of the surveillance captured by the submarine.

The circumstances of captivity in Cuenca's novel are not easily defined as imprisonment, but are instead nebulous and progressive, meaning that a wide constellation of constraining techniques culminate with a clearer situation of captivity at the end of the novel. While this progressive scale of captivity presents a challenge by evading categorization as imprisonment or abuse, it nevertheless appropriately offers readers the chance to consume the material more perceptively and empathetically. As Laura L. Finley (2016) alludes in her monograph on abuse and assault in popular culture, the lack of overwhelming visual or clinical evidence is a major reason why victims of many kinds of abuse hesitate to get help. They "fear being judged, worry that they will not be believed, think they may suffer from retaliatory violence, and don't know whom to tell" (xxii). By cultivating careful and critical readers, we may be able to equip a society that more readily recognizes the initial signs of coercive, controlling relationships and that confronts cultures that accept abuse in any degree, a shift that may allow victims to feel more empowered to find a viable way out of these situations. One question remaining is whether this novel's deployment of violence is executed responsibly and in a way that promotes careful treatment of the topic of domestic violence.

### 3. Violent technology clash

*The Only Happy Ending* effectively illustrates the technological dimension of surveillance like that explored by Weissman, merged with a more sinister and unsettling psychological conditioning that makes the panoptic network so effective. Cuenca aptly illustrates the emotional and physical abuse that conditions Shunsuke over the years. The novel also leads readers through the internal repercussions of that abuse as it returns to haunt and censor Shunsuke's psyche. Lisa Rivera (2014) explores the relationship between coercion and captivity, both physical and psychological. She explains that

[...] because psychological captivity amounts to adopting a captor's intentions, it may involve a more extensive loss [than physical captivity]. What is given up is not only free agency but identity. Like the physical captive, the psychological captive's movements, actions, and body are under the control of a person or persons who benefit from this control. [...] What is distinctive about



psychological captivity is that the near total control over someone's action that physical captivity achieves through physical barriers and force can be accomplished in the right context without those barriers and without force. (256)

Applied to Shunsuke's case, the years of child abuse set the precedent for his inhibited autonomy. When he perceives his own deviation from his father's volition, images of his father interrupt his thinking. Atsuo's poetry, which coincided with the abusive episodes during Shunsuke's childhood, emerges as the vestige with which Shunsuke associates his father's control.

The most unique feature of the psychological noose enclosing Shunsuke is the juxtaposed integration of traditional, seemingly obsolete, Japanese cultural traditions with techniques that are technologically facilitated. Atsuo's profession as a mob boss is fully hidden from the world, which knows him as a retired Tanka poet, the last one still alive. Atsuo's status as the only living poet of this genre, and the fact that he publicly retired many years ago, establish Tanka poetry as extinct. In addition, Atsuo himself and insight into his poetry are understandably revered and sought after. Ironically, Atsuo's poetry in the novel lives a double life of excellence on one hand and poor, perverse quality on the other. In the adult Shunsuke's psyche, Atsuo recites terrible verses as he engages in destructive acts on a large scale, like destroying an entire neighborhood. And in Shunsuke's childhood memories, the composition and recitation of poetry coincided with acts of extreme child abuse. A few examples will demonstrate this juxtaposition of destruction with poetic creation.

One dimension of this abuse is Atsuo's exclusion and ostracizing of his wife and son. Shunsuke confesses, "The laurels for his poetry, the public recognition [...] Many times we'd hear about it from the newspapers or the radio. He made a point of not sharing it with us" (Cuenca 2013, 46). This experience fragments Atsuo's celebrated public persona as an individual phenomenon while he isolates his own family within the home. Atsuo is also violent throughout Shunsuke's childhood: "...the great poet yanked me out of bed [...] to recite a poem to me, or, more often, slap me around [...] My head would bounce off the door frame while I was still half awake" (46). This juxtaposition places poem recitation and slapping as interchangeable punishments that interrupted Shunsuke's safety and sleep.

Shunsuke also suffers years of sexual abuse by mistresses forced by his father and with his spectatorship:

Since my early childhood, he introduced me to his lovers, and then, after describing his trysts to me in detail, he read me the beautiful poems that he wrote for each one of them. [...] When I grew up, we even shared some of those sad women – Mr. Okuda would put them up to sleeping with me. [...] while he watched us, he would write his poems right there, on long rolls of paper. This started when I was twelve. (Cuenca 2013, 48-49)

Both describing trysts and forcing his son into them are physically and psychologically violent acts. By placing Atsuo's own sexual descriptions and poetry in succession, the abuser associates his poetry with a pornographic context, even if the content is not perceptibly related. Likewise, the fact that Atsuo composes new poems while witnessing the sexual abuse of his own son steeps those poems in the context of child pornography. Sadly, Shunsuke doesn't succeed in escaping the physical abuse until he leaves his parents' house; even so, the surveillance of all aspects of Shunsuke's life, even intimate, is still fed to the mob boss.

Among the many traditional, old-fashioned pastimes Atsuo enjoys is cleaning and eating poisonous fugu fish. Since fugu can now be cultivated without poisonous parts, the hobby of purchasing the poisonous variety to clean them is an unnecessary and obsolete practice. It seems that the very unnecessary part is what interests Atsuo. Shunsuke explains how even this hobby was an avenue to terrorize Atsuo's family: "My father studied for years, and he knows how to clean and filet a fugu and take out the poisonous parts of the fish. Even so, every time he forced us to eat it, I imagined he had left in some poison on purpose. Yes, that's how we lived" (Cuenca 2013, 41).

The various forms of abuse suffered by Shunsuke unfortunately reflect the situation of many people in the world who, as children or adults, have no perceptible recourse to escape from inhumane treatment. Atsuo's perverse behaviors adulterate the responsibility and privilege of parenthood. Furthermore, the novel seems to illustrate the violation of art that is not just juxtaposed with Atsuo's violence; it is perversely harnessed as a tool of abuse. The entire childhood of abuse conditions Shunsuke to self-audit as an adult; this phenomenon manifests as a hallucination of his father's terrible poetry.

A notable episode in which Shunsuke imagines his father's censorship as a flashback to Atsuo's poetry occurs during the young man's first dinner date with Iulana. Shunsuke imagines his father's voice floating in verses:

*A foreigner this time, son? [...] Oh, what the ashes of your dead mother whisper into my ears!* To disguise my irritation in seeing the ghost of my living father, a faded and badly finished reflection of myself, I ask the waiter for another beer. [...] [Atsuo], as always, ignores me and declaims, without meter, terrible verses [...] when I think [he] has finally disappeared, I hear a shout. [...] It's my father, who reappears behind Iulana... (Cuenca 59-61)

Atsuo's poor poetry runs on for several pages. Understandably, the mental interruption Shunsuke experiences is disruptive and traumatic. His memories of Atsuo pervade his wakeful imagination and constantly tempt him to consider how his father would judge his behavior. It is no wonder that Atsuo's poetry is the medium through which imagined utterances by the poet surface in his mind. In a later episode in which Atsuo becomes the size of a building and destroys an entire neighborhood, his only utterances are verses directed toward Shunsuke (Cuenca 83-87). The novel clearly establishes a connection between poetry and abuse, made evident by the recurrences of this invasive poetry in Shunsuke's mind. Just as the expectation of sanction in the panopticon influences prisoners' conduct, so too does the memory of Atsuo's invasive abuse return to Shunsuke in the form of poetry to alter his behaviors.

#### **4. Disposable agents**

As Rivera (2014) points out, psychological captivity can make victims susceptible to loss of agency and identity. In this scenario, psychological captives modify their behavior to such a degree that their physical activities also fall under their abuser's control. Because psychological control causes the physical control, victims are often suspected of complicity in their own victimhood (256). A similar phenomenon of self-auditing occurs on social media, where exposure to the worldwide network carries with it the opportunity to be judged and ostracized publicly. Weissman's discussion of the double-edged sword of visibility online lends to a fruitful examination of notoriety and invisibility. Another way of describing the precarious dynamic of online presence is a double-sided mirror. Whereas one party is restricted to their own screen (reflection), the party on the opposite side enjoys full visibility. These circumstances tend to disempower the observed and inequitably arm the observer with the power to ascribe an identity to

others, as well as to criticize and exclude them. Therefore, online identities are highly susceptible to falsehood for many reasons, including each person's power to falsify their own identity as well as the ability of the masses to criticize others and craft narratives of misinformation about them. These dynamics are congruent with Foucault's notion of "docile bodies" (1975, 320). The disciplined, institutionalized bodies reflect order, discipline, and conformity as common threads in the body politics of Cuenca's novel. What takes this beyond the abuse and exploitation of a mob novel is the interplay of human control and technology. The accessibility of commerce on the internet and the utilization of human and signal networks to facilitate violence transform the episodic violence and exploitation into a commentary on body politics and coercion in the internet age.

In *The Only Happy Ending*, human identities are nebulous and subjective, increasingly dependent on the perceptions of outside entities and defined by others. The result is a transactional, body-centric culture that further disempowers the oppressed by robbing them of the right to speak and define themselves. In this section I will analyze the various individuals whose identities are simultaneously defined and blurred by external voices. A second objective of this section is to illustrate how this seemingly benign genre of distortion creates a breeding ground for violation and creates compounding iterations of abuse.

The opening words of *The Only Happy Ending* are uttered by a non-human, the custom silicone doll purchased by Atsuo Okuda and whom he names Yoshiko. More than just a physical entity, she possesses many attributes that challenge our inclination to call her an object. Beyond her role as the most trustworthy narrator of the novel, she also fills a crucial familial role. The body of Atsuo's late wife, Hiroko (Shunsuke's mother), is cremated and placed in an urn inside Yoshiko's body.

Early on, Atsuo literally dictates Yoshiko's self-concept. She states:

The world began only at the instant that Mr. Okuda opened the box and said the word. He said: Yoshiko. And Yoshiko became my name. After Mr. Okuda said Yoshiko, I gained, in addition to a name, many beginnings and an ending. I begin at the tips of my fingers [...] the skin that covers the emptiness in my body and the entire surface that makes me who I am. I could not be anything else because I have this body, and I only have this body, I am this body. (Cuenca 2013, 1)

The allusions to the biblical creation story arise in the connection between speech acts, like speaking light and other physical phenomena into existence. In this case, Atsuo's utterance of Yoshiko's name initiates her existence. Atsuo's words also constitute the main form of communication between the two, as Yoshiko explains:

Mr. Okuda addresses me in verse [...] the poems and the lines of the poems multiply and combine infinitely, and through them Mr. Okuda makes me see not just the beautiful feelings he has for me but also for the world outside, and what is above him and below him, because I have never left nor will I ever leave this house that is my house and also Mr. Okuda's house. And, if I think about it, really, my house, my only house, is Mr. Okuda, himself. (Cuenca 2013, 2)

Previously static concepts like intelligent life and human consciousness gain new meanings in this novel. For instance, the silicone doll's self-awareness challenges the very division of inanimate versus animate. At the same time, it is ironic that Yoshiko, who narrates chapters in our novel, cannot differentiate her consciousness from her body. Continuing that irony is the passage that grapples with the definition of "house." If taken as a locus of inhabitation, Yoshiko's assertion that Mr. Okuda (Atsuo) is as much her house as the actual house where they both live, she unknowingly touches on a prodigious acknowledgment that her body inhabits one space while her consciousness (of which she is unaware) is contained within her owner-companion's purview. Like Shunsuke's psychological captivity, Yoshiko also exists at the will of Atsuo.

While it could be easy to categorize Yoshiko's consciousness as AI (artificial intelligence), there is no indication that she is configured with hardware or software that would support machine learning. Instead, her intelligence is anomalous. Not only does her creation of language exceed the limits of reality; she presents a growing sophistication as she becomes more and more critical of the farces Atsuo constructs around her. In addition to the talking doll, a talking cigarette vending machine working as a security guard outside Atsuo Okuda's room alludes to the presence of automated intelligence that blurs the line between beings and objects. In the real world, examples include automated chat bots that provide customer service, or automated social media accounts posing as individuals online. In the scene, Kazumi and the vending machine converse for more than half a page before she realizes that the shining light in her eyes is not held by a person guarding the room, but instead, emanates from a machine. She asks:

“Hey, are you in there?” Kazumi knocks with her splayed hand on the buttons of the machine.

“I *am* the Machine. Don’t hurt me.” [...]

“Why am I talking with a Cigarette Vending Machine?”

“I could ask the same question.”

“Please let me pass.”

“What would you do to get by me?”

“I could unplug you.”

“Don’t be an idiot. I can be anything. And you know that, Kazumi...”

“How do you know my name?”

“You are very famous among us, here in the submarine.” (Cuenca 2013, 98-9)

Early in this dialogue, the vending machine appears to be just a machine entity with the ability to perceive and communicate. In the end, however, it becomes apparent that the machine is a vessel through which the submarine surveillance entity connects to the world. As we will see, machines and humans under Atsuo’s employ are interchangeable and dispensable. If the machine were unplugged, the entity on the other end of the periscope would reappear through another vessel. This episode congeals the novel’s consideration of humans, machines, and other hybrid entities (like the doll, Yoshiko) as vessels at the disposition of Atsuo, whose ubiquity through these vessels is a simile for the inescapability of the internet. While it might be understandably assumed that Atsuo is the one speaking through the vending machine, readers perceive that the machine constitutes a separate consciousness than that of the villain because Atsuo’s voice interrupts the voice of the vending machine.

Just like the cameras, wire taps, and other machines constructing the periscope, Atsuo’s operatives are also dispensable. The narrators in the novel describe bodies, especially women’s, as a collection of parts, much like a machine or automobile. Commodifying female bodies is excessive and almost formulaic in the novel. For Kazumi, the exotic-dancer-turned-mob-spy, the body is the instrument for her livelihood and survival, as well as the target of objectifying, dehumanizing gazes. From the outset her body dictates both her success and her demise. As the narrator introduces her, there is no discussion of her mental or emotional attributes:

She is the most lucrative and famous dancer of the [bar]. A private dance or just the company of Kazumi at the table for thirty minutes can cost hundreds of thousands of yen. [...] This woman with big eyes, rouged cheeks, small ears, black

hair always impeccably smooth and down to her waist, is coveted by the clients, the managers, and by the clients and managers of other establishments on the street. (Cuenca 2013, 18)

Kazumi's material worth is the only dimension of value described by the narrator, value that seems to add up as the sum of her enumerated body parts. When Kazumi is summoned to visit Atsuo, the surveillance network, speaking through the cigarette vending machine working as a door guard, again uses mathematics to rationalize Kazumi's worth:

What attracts men and women to you are mathematical equations: you are a collection of miraculously harmonious polygons, the only one of the human species with that level of geometrical precision [...] How do you feel about finding out that everything is summed up in a bunch of measurements? You are your body, nothing else. (Cuenca 2013, 99)

The objectifying assertion that Kazumi is no more than her body echoes the affirmations fed to Yoshiko about her body and her existence. The question "How do you feel..." is rhetorical; the vending machine does not wait for or desire an answer. Besides commodifying Kazumi's body, this utterance adds insult to injury as it indicates that Kazumi's feelings and opinions are unworthy of a listening interlocutor.

Shortly after this visit to Atsuo, Kazumi is victimized by his orchestrated crime. He hires several teenage boys to murder her, covering it up as a gang rape. During the heinous attack, police sirens signal the arrival of law enforcement. The officers pull up and, upon recognizing the infamous Kazumi, smile in approval and retreat to allow the crime to continue. This complicity is likely provoked by allegiance to Atsuo and direction by him, illustrating the far reach of his power and the corruption of the police. It is catalyzed by Kazumi's very infamy. Perverse male pleasure, both of the criminals and spectators, drives the disgusting acts that rob Kazumi of her life.

A new participatory dimension exists through the narration of this chapter, the only one executed in a second-person voice. The chapter begins, "You, Kazumi, leave work and go home [...] you feel a whack on your shoulders [...] You hear a siren [...] Now you are carried [...] You think, I must be dead [...] And then you feel vertigo [...] and you let yourself fall like a child" (Cuenca 2013, 105-107). This narration (abridged here) yet again deprives Kazumi of the last vestige of agency – her voice. The violence described is at once too graphic and too simplified, since

no words can do justice to the injustice of this kind of violence, especially when the words are stolen away from the victim.

Kazumi's suffering is observed from the outside multiple times: by her attackers, by the periscope surveillance, by the police, by the narrator, and by us, the readers. This many gazes without action, including the smiling policemen and the narrator who takes away Kazumi's very voice, should lead us to ask what this says about media violence. A.S. Hamrah (2010), who asserts that violence portrayed in the media makes torture more acceptable to the viewing public, demonstrates how media glorification of torture appeals to viewers and has come to be known as "torture porn" (79-80). Whereas Hamrah might argue that horrific violence, whether shown or left to the imagination, is what attracts the viewers who enjoy it, David Trend (2010) asserts that "Part of what makes media violence appealing to viewers is the extent to which it is anesthetized and transformed by production technologies" (31). However, unlike "new violence" movies that produce violence so excessive that they critique its use in media (Trend 33), this novel's portrayal of violence is just euphemistic enough that we might say that it evades classification as *graphic*. Still, the violent acts are methodically described through the pain that Kazumi feels. In this way, the violence is glorified and runs the risk of merely provoking readers instead of critiquing the crimes.

As if to reiterate the insult that Kazumi is nothing beyond her body, Atsuo's extinguishes her existence through torture and mutilation. This episode is just one more in a novel ridden with an obsessive focus on the female body. The cigarette vending machine's formulaic definition of Kazumi's existence as a physical body and nothing else echoes Yoshiko's naïve assertion that "I could not be anything else because [...] I am this body" (Cuenca 2013, 1). Yoshiko's only contact with the world is through Atsuo. We may, therefore, assume that her words, especially those uttered so early after the formation of her consciousness in the world, come from Atsuo. To hear the same rhetoric projected from the periscope through the vending machine indicates that Atsuo's ideals exist independently within the network. The incredibly flawed notion that women are nothing beyond their bodies becomes even more devious when we realize that it has become programmed into an artificially intelligent entity. In this case, superficial, misogynist rhetoric has been learned by the surveillance machine that permeates Tokyo.



Atsuo's injudicious attribution of material value to women's bodies is a tendency he passes along to his son, Shunsuke. The protagonist's negligent consideration of women as commodities becomes apparent as he itemizes their features, much like the narrator lists Kazumi's bodily attributes. Shunsuke's tendency to dehumanize women like Iulana begins before he even meets her. Hours before he sees Iulana for the first time, he and his girlfriend Misako break up, which triggers Shunsuke's obsession with replacing her. This urgency evokes what we would expect from a person who had lost house keys or broken a phone. Shunsuke, however, describes replacing his girlfriend as though she were an essential object. When he sees Iulana serving drinks at his favorite bar, he refers to her as "the woman who would succeed Misako" fourteen times in two pages. In addition to this repetition that echoes an auction house recitation, Shunsuke itemizes Iulana's bodily attributes: "... her skin is rosy, and she has the big round eyes of a horse [...] inflated breasts like helium balloons. The toes of the woman who would succeed Misako are thick; the calves of the woman who would succeed Misako are solid" (Cuenca 2013, 13). As her body parts are listed, they are compared to objects or to the features of animals. She is objectified, animalized and commodified to an extreme degree. We observe how Atsuo's disregard for people as anything more than pawns has been passed to his son. Sadly, Shunsuke was abused and, in the process, observed harmful habits regarding the treatment and consideration of other human beings.

These women's bodies are regarded in similarly exploitative ways that suggest a readiness to occupy and take over. On one level, Shunsuke and his father treat women as though they were plots of real estate to explore and conquer. The void created by Misako's absence is filled by Iulana, a substitution that Shunsuke obsessively plans across the spaces of her body. Once they become intimate, Shunsuke claims, "Having [her] gave me an unfamiliar sensation of power," a body that had been "used" by others before (Cuenca 2013, 69). Among the many problematic angles of this statement is the fact that it reveals how Shunsuke views his interaction with her as transactional and possessive, not to mention that he approaches the experience as a consumption of what he considers to be a disposable body. On another level, images described in the novel make rhetorical use of the women's bodies as territories for other bodies to occupy. Iulana experiences a recurring dream in which she, as a child, is "stuck [...] into some dolls with the body

of an older woman” and violated repeatedly (41-43). Her friend also experiences the oneiric realm of bodily violation and powerlessness, once taking the inanimate figure of a doll as the symbol of female disembodiment and disempowerment. In one of Kazumi’s dreams, she inhabits Iulana’s body and looks into a mirror: “...she notices Iulana’s look, through which Kazumi can see *herself*, imprisoned in the body of her friend. It’s the dead look of a doll” (66). Ultimately, this very fate of imprisonment within a foreign body falls upon Shunsuke at the closing of the novel. The arson Atsuo orchestrates causes Shunsuke’s disabling paralysis, returning his body and entire existence to the guardianship of his father.

## 5. Conclusion

In examining social media networks alongside this social-technical mob network, several comparisons stand out. The most apparent issues emerge in the dimensions of freedom and surveillance, which are influenced by a wide spectrum of physical and psychological constraints. On social media, users choose to expose themselves to the privileges and risks of participation. The freedom of expression allows them to control the degree of their own information sharing, although the greater the volume of information shared, the greater the risk that control over it is also shared. Shunsuke is not afforded this same potential of risk and reward, however. From his childhood, his psychological and physical autonomy is torn from him as he is subjected to verbal, emotional and physical abuse. Though he grows up and succeeds in physically leaving the house, and even enters society as a gainful corporate employee, the psychological conditioning to which Atsuo accustomed him is triggered with his poetry. Ironically, Atsuo’s privileged position as the last great Tanka poet intersects with his exclusive role as the controller, as his image alone can trigger Shunsuke’s hyper-vigilance. Atsuo’s poetry is perverse, not superficially, but rather implicitly, for it coincides with his physical and sexual abuse of Shunsuke. Sexual exploitation is a major theme in this novel, interweaving through multiple levels of the narrative, including the oneiric and commercial realms. For instance, the novel pointedly reveals how entire sectors of Tokyo’s service industry depend on various uses of women’s bodies. The unnamed adolescents who gang rape Kazumi and the unnamed lovers of Atsuo who, upon his orders, molest Shunsuke, represent a sector of violence-for-hire that, collective and

anonymous, resembles once more the invisible threat of online exploitation. Without failing to acknowledge the agency and culpability of these anonymous actors, I also seek to show their subservience in a society invisibly controlled by Atsuo, a violent mastermind. Similarly, though Kazumi and Iulana, and in the end, Yoshiko, are instrumental in entrapping Shunsuke into dependence and imprisonment within Atsuo's house, all three exist at the behest of the mob boss. All three women live under Atsuo's control; when Kazumi and Iulana fulfill their utility to Atsuo's scheme, they are violently eliminated. In addition to their dispensability as vessels in Atsuo's network, just like surveillance devices and the cigarette vending machine, the violence against these women reiterates the objectification of their bodies as disposable. Atsuo possesses exclusive power in his network, while everyone else is disadvantaged by information scarcity, especially Shunsuke. At the center of the panoptic submarine, only Atsuo enjoys unlimited observation and anonymity. We can only hope that those at the center of our social network panopticons choose to govern vision into our lives with considerably sounder ethics than the villain in *The Only Happy Ending*.

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