Refiguring the Radical Cyborg in Mamoru Oshii's "Ghost in the Shell"
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In 1985, Donna Haraway first published "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," an "ironic political myth" which theorized the liberatory potential inherent in women's interactions with information technology. While well aware of the role such technology plays in the maintenance of social control and patriarchy, Haraway refuses its demonization, opting instead to hold two contradictory attitudes concerning cyborgs in tension throughout her essay. Though the cyborg, "a hybrid of machine and organism" (149), may represent the final imposition of information technology as a means of social control, it may also be potentially recoded and appropriated by feminism as a means of dismantling the binarisms and categorical ways of thinking that have characterized the history of Western culture. The cyborg, in other words, serves as a representational figure that embodies the capacity of information technologies to erase gender and racial boundaries and the structures of oppression which have historically accompanied them. Simultaneously, it also paradigmatically stands for what Mary Ann Doane refers to as the "individuous network of invisible power relationships made possible through high technology" (211). As Doane observes, despite Haraway's attempt to hold these two perspectives in tension, "the radical cyborg ultimately seems to win out" (211). Haraway, by this account, finally seems to endorse the cyborg as an imaginary figuration of a posthuman, post-gendered subject who has slipped the bonds of dominant culture.

In the thirteen years since Haraway's article first appeared, this fantasy seems to have acquired a great deal of currency in the popular media as well. A recent MCI commercial which proclaims the internet as a "utopian" space devoid of race, gender, age, or infirmity, attests to the growing popularity of this idea, the increasing belief that information technology and "cyberspace" are bringing us ever closer to a world free of social inequity. Usually lost in such corporate endorsements of cyberspace, however, is the other half of Haraway's argument, the sense that the cyborg equally figures the potential for increased social domination inherent in such new technology. Consequently, not all cultural analysts share in this burgeoning enthusiasm for the new frontier. Anne Balsamo, for instance, argues that, while cyberspace and other instances of cyborg culture seem "to represent a territory free from the burdens of history, it will, in effect, serve as another site for the technological and no less conventional inscription of the gendered, race-marked body" (131). By her

account, despite the fact that these technological advancements hold out the *promise* of new identities, they have thus far actually delivered what she terms "the rearticulation of old identities to new technologies" (131). In light of this, Balsamo conceives her role as a feminist to lie in unraveling this process of rearticulation by connecting "seemingly isolated moments of discourse into a narrative that helps us make sense of [cultural] transformations as they emerge" (161).

I am particularly interested in Balsamo's suggestion that the popular discourse surrounding cyborg culture promises something other than what it provides. It is not, in other words, simply that the increasingly complex interfaces between human and machine work to reify traditional dichotomies of gender, but that their various articulations within our social imaginary present them as exactly the opposite. There is thus what might be called an element of seduction at work, whereby information technology often presents itself to us as potentially liberating when in fact our actual interactions with it often reinforce conventional social structures of domination.

Pop-cultural representations of the cyborg participate in this seduction by serving as part of what Gabriele Schwab terms "the fantasmatic aspects of the technological imagination"—that is, the ways in which such representations "become a field of cathexis, an imaginary screen onto which psychic energies from the most archaic to the most up-to-date may be projected" (68). The figure of the cyborg thus represents an imaginary projection into the realm of popular fiction, a trope invested with cultural anxieties and beliefs about contemporary technology. But such fictions, of course, function in society as more than the representation of cultural attitudes; they also perform ideological operations by shaping and reinforcing current belief systems as well. Fictional representations of the cyborg therefore provide ideal sites for the examination of how the interface with technology can be *presented* to us as liberating, as what Althusser would call "an imaginary representation of the relation of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (123), while simultaneously naturalizing and buttressing existing social relations. It should be noted, however, that this process of naturalization may not work in the automatic way that Althusser's model has often been criticized for suggesting. Following Raymond Williams, I wish to view the fictional representation of the cyborg as an ideological site that works "toward the setting of limits and the exertion of pressure and away from a predicted, prefigured and controlled content" (380).

It is not, however, always the case that the *image* of the cyborg appeals to a hope for social justice while our actual material interactions with technology, our "real conditions of existence," further entangle us within networks of domination. Oftentimes, this drama is played out entirely within the realm of the social imaginary itself. In these cases, the radical cyborg is both validated and made to serve the interests of the dominant within a single fictional text. Such texts present and seem to endorse the radical cyborg, an image resonant with liberatory possibilities which solicits a belief in technology's capacity to provide social justice, while simultaneously using this image to support existing

structures of cultural hegemony. The radical cyborg thus imaginarily gratifies various liberatory fantasies which have, in a sense, already been coded in the terms of the dominant because they have been naturalized within the social imaginary itself.

I contend that Mamoru Oshii's animated cyberpunk film *Ghost in the Shell* works in just such a way. In what follows, I will examine how this film, a fascinating example of Japanese animation (or *anime*), participates in the seductive appeal of the radical cyborg. I will argue that it functions as an inverse of Jean-Louis Comolli's "fifth type" of ideological film, a film which "seem[s] at first sight to belong firmly within the [dominant] ideology and to be completely under its sway, but which turn[s] out to be so only in an ambiguous manner" (Comolli 27). For Comolli, such films "throw up obstacles in the way of ideology, causing it to swerve and get off course" (27). *Ghost in the Shell*, by contrast, appears at first sight to subvert radically the power dynamics inherent in dominant structures of gender and sexual difference, while covertly reinscribing them.

It could be argued that cyberpunk lends itself perfectly to just such an ideological process. Several critics have accused its literary manifestations of failing adequately to represent feminist issues and concerns despite the fact that its depictions of the interaction between humans and technology seem to offer just such a promise. Karen Cadora claims that "Cyberpunk's deconstruction of the human body first appeared to signal a revolution in political art. However, closer examinations of the movement have revealed that its politics are anything but revolutionary" (357). For Cadora, cyberpunk is "very much a boy's club" (357), its writers guilty of providing few female protagonists and reiterating feminine stereotypes (357-358). She thus calls for a "feminist cyberpunk," a development which "envisions something that feminist theory badly needs: fragmented subjects who can, despite their multiple positionings, negotiate and succeed in a high-tech world" (357). At first glance, *Ghost in the Shell* appears to offer something akin to this model by providing us with a fragmented female subject who seems to correspond to what Cadora envisions. In spite of this, however, I believe that the film re-enacts the same failure that Cadora locates in earlier cyberpunk texts—that is, the failure to deliver on its revolutionary promise.

The film, in other words, gives an outlet and a voice to the liberatory potential of the cyborg, to Haraway's "ironic political myth faithful to feminism" (149), while simultaneously containing that potential by re-narrating it within another older and better known myth: the dominance of masculine mind and spirit over the feminine materiality of the body. By focusing on the main character, Major Motoko Kusanagi, a female cyborg, and her adversary, The Puppet Master, a life form made of pure data, I hope to provide the critical "opening up" of the text which reveals its reactionary agenda. Because I wish to analyze this film in terms of how it functions as an instrument of ideological containment that seems to be subversive on its "surface" while contextualizing that subversion within a traditional paradigm of sexual difference, my argument will take the form of a dual reading. I will first read the film as a progressive

representation of the cyborg that challenges dominant culture in order to demonstrate how it creates the *illusion* that the dominant is really being challenged. I will then re-consider this reading by re-examining the film in order to show how its subversive potential has been, in effect, de-fanged and redirected to serve more conservative interests.

I should stress, however, that my examination will focus on how this film functions ideologically within the context of American popular culture and that the subsequent reading will necessarily treat the translated version in relation to this culturally specific locale. While the context of the film's original production may at first seem to mitigate against such a reading, Analee Newitz observes that "Although *anime* does often strike us as utterly different, or 'other,' it also quite noticeably resembles—and is influenced by—American culture and generic narratives" (3). Given this resemblance, particularly in terms of thematic content, the consideration of the ideological implications of this film within the context of cyberpunk fiction in America seems both appropriate and legitimate. Significantly, Newitz goes on to claim that the "stake[s] for Americans watching *anime* [are] certainly bound up with gender identity...." (4). While Japanese *anime*, in general, may have a predominantly "cult" appeal in the United States, being consumed by a largely "alternative culture" (Newitz 3), *Ghost in the Shell* appears to have been designed for mainstream consumption. I believe that its popularity in the United States makes an analysis of the film's ideological operations in terms of American cultural norms entirely appropriate.[1]

I. The Radical Cyborg

I would like to begin my first reading by considering how Major Kusanagi's cybernetic construction works within the narrative both to reverse traditional gender roles and, sometimes, to efface them completely. Kusanagi, referred to in the film as "Major," lives in the year 2029. Her body, a composite of organic tissue and machinery complete with enhanced senses, strength, and reflexes,[2] has been manufactured by Megatech, a corporation which specializes in the production of high-tech cyborg "shells." Her mind, or "ghost," consists of organic brain cells housed in the titanium shell of her skull and augmented by a supplemental computer brain, an arrangement which allows her to interface directly with computer systems and sometimes access, or "ghost hack," the minds of other cyborgs. Major, whose original body—the source for her organic brain—never figures in the plot, works as a special agent for Section Nine, a branch of what appears to be the Japanese government (it is never clearly specified) that deals in espionage and counter-terrorism; she is considered to be one of that agency's best operatives. Her incredible competence at her job and her positioning as the narrative's central protagonist effectively invert the gender roles conventionally allocated to fictional characters and afford Kusanagi a degree of narrative agency, an agency which, significantly, is bound up with her cybernetic construction.

Kusanagi's centrality within this narrative can be seen most clearly in the contrast between her and Togusa, one of her male partners. Togusa, a recent

addition to Section Nine from the regular police force, is almost entirely human, having a completely organic body and a brain which has merely been supplemented with "a few cybernetic implants" that allow him to access the data-net. Major's enhanced cyborg body, however, enables her to perform athletic and martial feats that consistently outstrip anything of which Togusa is capable. This increased ability in combat effectively positions her as his superior, though there is never any direct indication that she in any way officially outranks him. Thus, even the most cursory first reading of the film suggests that cyborg technology has endowed a female character with a marked degree of power and positioned Togusa in the more "feminized" role of inferiority.[3] Major makes the decisions in their partnership while Togusa finds himself relegated to the role of "sidekick." While Balsamo claims that "cyberspace heroes are usually men, whose racial identity, although rarely described, is contextually white" (131), one could argue that *Ghost in the Shell* challenges this paradigm by deploying an Asian cyborg woman as the hero of its plot.[4]

While this film may present the cyborg as a vehicle for the inversion of gender roles, its most significant and interesting challenge to patriarchal modes of authority can be located in its valorization of the posthuman, post-gendered subject. This text seems literally to enact Haraway's advocacy of "pleasure in the confusion of boundaries," her conception of the cyborg as part of a "utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender" (150). In Haraway's terms,

> There is nothing about being "female" that naturally binds women. There is not even such as a state as "being" female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices. Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. (155)

Haraway thus values the cyborg for its capacity to dismantle the traditional humanist subject, a figure whose sense of identity is derived from attributes—such as sex or gender—that supposedly adhere in the ontology of his or

her being, but which have actually been socially constructed and ideologically naturalized. While the cyborg can easily (and usually does) represent cultural anxieties and fears about the loss of coherent subjectivity, Haraway prizes it precisely for its potential to contest this essentialism and expose its status as an ideological construct.

Ghost in the Shell dramatizes both of these possibilities through its two main characters, Kusanagi and The Puppet Master, who can be read as allegories of each position respectively. While the film eventually comes (or so it seems) to privilege Major's cyborgian ontology as a vehicle of liberation, in the first half of the narrative she must initially confront the terrifying loss of subjectivity that her identity seems to imply. The Puppet Master, or Project 2051, can be read as a less equivocal representation of how technology can enable one to transcend the prescriptive limits of our contemporary social environment.

Early in the film, Kusanagi undergoes a profound humanist crisis concerning her cybernetic construction and what it suggests about her identity. Despite her success as an operative, Major is acutely aware that her entire sense of self and consciousness are inseparable from the organization to which she belongs; it has supplied all the hardware and software that make her who she is and can repossess them should she ever decide to quit. In a pivotal scene, Kusanagi and Botau, a fellow cyborg employed by Section Nine, discuss the implications of this fact. When Major complains that their cybernetic shells and auxiliary computer brains are all technically owned by others, Botau responds that "It doesn't mean that we've sold our souls to Section Nine." In response, she claims that

> We do have the right to resign if we choose. Provided we give back our cyborg shells and the memories they hold. Just as there are many parts needed to make a human a human, there's a remarkable number of things needed to make an individual what they are. A face to distinguish yourself from others. A voice you aren't aware of yourself. The hands you see when you awaken. The memories of childhood, the feelings of the future. That's not all. There's the expanse of the data-net my cyber brain can access. All of that goes into making me what I am, giving rise to a consciousness that I call me. And simultaneously confining me within set limits.

These remarks harken back to what Haraway terms the "informatics of domination," the "rearrangements of world-wide social relations tied to science and technology" (161). According to the logic of this new arrangement, the constitutive components of our lives, including our identities, can no longer be thought of as natural entities, can no longer be defined by an ontology of essence. The world has, instead, become coded; its elements are defined, not by an inner/outer dichotomy, but by their relational positions within larger systems of information. Kusanagi's sense of self thus does not derive from a supposedly interior source, from a "real self" that animates a body that physically establishes its identity, but rather from her relation to the organization to which she belongs. Because Section Nine actually owns the material underpinnings of her subjectivity, her sense of personhood cannot be

thought of apart from its bureaucratic organizational structure. Major's body thus does not exist as an ontologically stable presence that guarantees her identity, but as an ensemble of parts that circulate within a larger system. In short, the body, and its constitutive parts, behaves much like a signifier within a postmodern information system, its meaning determined not by a self-adhering presence but by its position within the overall pattern. In an interesting elaboration of Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles notes that "When bodies are [thus] constituted as information, they can not only be sold but fundamentally *reconstituted* in response to market pressure" (86; my italics). This is one of the most feared aspects of cyborg technology, its ability to transform the material body into something akin to coded information, thereby making it more amenable and vulnerable to social control.

Because Kusanagi's "inner self" is largely determined by her corporeality—her tactile memories, sensations, and the organic tissue in her skull—that self is subordinate to the systems within which her body circulates. It should be noted, however, that this subordination of Kusanagi's material self already lays the groundwork for the supposed liberation of the mind from the body in the subsequent narrative that follows the conversation between Kusanagi and Botau. In other words, the malleability and submission of the body in relation to the larger system not only makes it more amenable to social control but, by virtue of the very devaluation which necessarily accompanies this process, suggests that it is alterable, or even dispensable, as well. While the body's status as nothing but a "shell" may work to control the occupant of that shell, it also suggests the possibility that the shell could be re-coded, exchanged for another, or discarded entirely. This paradoxical doubling of meanings associated with the cyborg body, the fact that its coded nature can serve the interests of liberation or domination, closely parallels the contradictory nature of cyborg politics as described by Haraway. Though Kusanagi's initial remarks to Botau on this subject emphasize the more terrifying aspects of this sort of embodiment, the narrative will soon privilege the more liberatory possibilities associated with technology's intersection with the body.

Ghost in the Shell provides us with just such an alternative vision of information technology through its chief antagonist, The Puppet Master. For several years, Section Nine has been tracking this entity, a cyber-terrorist who commits acts of international theft and sabotage while masking his identity by ghost-hacking into other cyborgs and using their shells as platforms from which to access the various information systems that he has targeted. Section Nine does not realize that the Puppet Master has no "human" identity at all, but is in fact a computer program secretly created by Section Six, the department of Foreign Affairs. Section Six uses this program, designated as "Project 2051," to commit acts of espionage that will "grease the wheels" of foreign diplomacy. As Project 2051 circulates within the data matrices of the net, however, it somehow gains sentience, becomes convinced that it is a new life form, and escapes the control of its creators.

As a disembodied, electronic entity, Project 2051 represents a truly technologized, posthuman subject, an example of a non-human cyber-con-

sciousness whose computerized existence enables rather than limits. This character reminds us that the informatics of domination do not exclusively serve as a final or more advanced form of social control but as a new set of social relations that can be equally used to contest the dominant. As Haraway points out, "we are not dealing with a technological determinism, but with a historical system depending upon structured relations among people" (165). Cyber-technology's capacity to "dematerialize" the body can thus be articulated with a strategy for escaping contemporary institutions of power. This transcendence of the limits of corporeality constitutes the ideal that cyberpunk fiction itself seemed to promise to its early audience.[5] As Hayles notes, "The contrast between the body's limitations and cyberspace's power highlights the advantages of [a body as] pattern over presence. As long as pattern endures, one has attained a kind of immortality" (81). If we read this comment against the tenets of Haraway's earlier essay, it would seem that this transcendence of the body allows the transcendence of sexual specificity, a concept that Haraway suggests is a social construct of patriarchy.
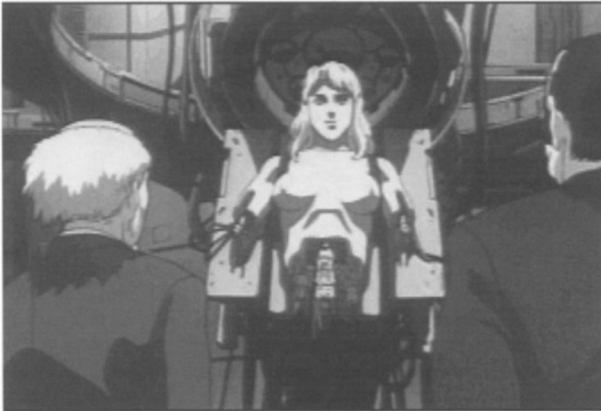
In keeping with this hypothesis, The Puppet Master seems to lack any clear specification of gender or sex. More significantly, this character does not evidence the total *absence* of sexual specificity, but seems to exhibit characteristics of both sexes while technically, as a machine, belonging to neither. When Project 2051 first appears on the screen, it inhabits the body of a female cyborg, having been lured into this shell by operatives within Section Six who desire to recapture it. The film emphasizes the sexual specificity of this shell by representing it as a *naked* body—the cyborg shell has just come off the Megatech assembly line when it is hacked and animated by the Puppet Master and thus would not have been clothed. Soon after its animation, the shell escapes the Megatech production plant and is accidentally run down on the highway by a truck, only to be subsequently recovered by Section Nine technicians. When Chief Nakamura, an administrator from Foreign Affairs, and Dr. Willis, an American scientist who has collaborated on the project, arrive to recover the body, they consistently refer to it as "he," a reference

which confuses the Section Nine personnel. Nakamura informs them that "Its original sex remains undetermined and the use of the term 'he' is merely a nickname the good doctor has given it." Nakamura's voice, however, is juxtaposed with a full-screen frontal shot of the naked cyborg torso, breasts prominently centered. The conflation of the masculine pronoun with the naked female body disorients not only the Section Nine technicians but the viewer as well, as we are presented with a character of "undetermined" sex that figures as linguistically male but visually female. While this scene may not represent the actual *transcendence* of a sexed or gendered identity, it does represent the capacity of cyber-technology to confuse and disrupt its conventional deployment (including the fact that cyborg shells are mass-produced as *either* male or female semblances).
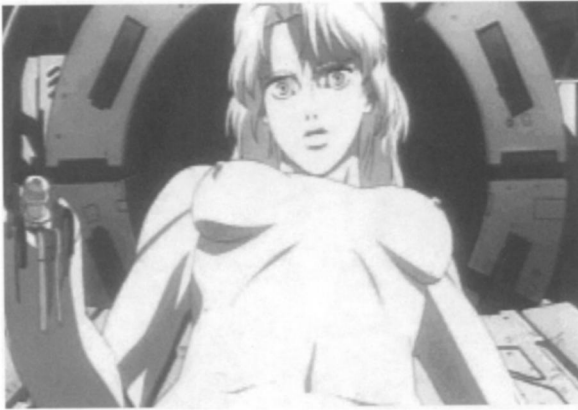
The film's climactic ending finalizes this disruption when Major permanently merges her consciousness with The Puppet Master's to form an entirely new identity. In order for Project 2051 to "truly" become a "living," post-gendered organism, it must merge with an organic lifeform. The Puppet Master, as a disembodied, electronic consciousness, thus seeks out special agent Major as the element that he apparently needs to achieve his plan. The film ends with Major and the Puppet Master uniting their consciousnesses to form an entirely new identity, a completely new individual, that allows them finally to escape the control of the organizations that created them. But how exactly is this escape achieved? How, in The Puppet Master's words, will the two characters, as one, "slip our bonds and shift to the higher structure" of existence?

Though the film is not terribly clear about how this process is fulfilled, I suggest that the answer to this question can be found in the fact that the Major's body is literally blown to bits by Section Six operatives seeking to recover The Puppet Master immediately after the unification takes place. This loss of Major's body requires Botau to purchase a new shell on the black market and transplant her surviving "brain case"—which presumably now holds the entity produced by her union with The Puppet Master—into it. This

new body, because of its illicit and unauthorized origins, seemingly lies outside the systemic network of Section Nine's control. Cyber-technology, while not allowing the ultimate transcendence of the body's limitations, thus enables the individual to "recode" or alter the material conditions of his or her corporeality. If a cyborg body can more readily function as a prison than a "natural" one due to the fact that its composite parts are actually owned by its dominators, that body can also, by virtue of its constructed status, be redesigned or, in this case, exchanged for one that provides a greater degree of personal agency. I will return, in more detail, to this scene in the second half of my analysis, paying particular attention to the fact that Kusanagi's new body is that of a young girl. For now, I wish to consider it as an example of how the radical cyborg can representationally serve as a vehicle for the dismantling of conventionally figured subjects.

In addition to matters of narrative content, *Ghost in the Shell* also subverts the conventional construction of sexual identity in ways that are specific to its animated form as well. While Kusanagi, as a character, may long for a stable and embodied identity throughout most of the film, the visual construction of her body as a narrative signifier can be read as a textual resistance to the gendered body as a key component of subjectivity. How this is so becomes apparent if we consider her, as an animated action hero, in relation to the various male cyborgs depicted in the film. The combination of cyber-technology and the organic has effectively made Kusanagi "superhuman," a state which allows us to categorize her as one of the many animated, superpowered crime fighters who have historically populated the genres of film, television, and comic books. As such an animated superhero, Kusanagi seems closely related to those characters who inhabit what Pamela Boker terms the "thriving art medium" of action comics, "a medium that offers an alternative archetype to American women" (108). According to Boker,

> In the mainstream comic books of the last decade, the question of female inferiority is rarely verbalized within the text, and would be considered a cliché issue. The women superheroes are super-female in their appearance, and the men are super-male, but the concepts of femininity and masculinity, as cultural categories embodying the attributes of passivity and aggressiveness, are all but eliminated. (108)

If we read Kusanagi in this way, we find just such an elimination of conventional gender attributes in her relationship with Botau. Major and Botau are textually represented as hyperbolic extremes of femininity and masculinity respectively, a female body that corresponds to a contemporary, Western ideal of feminine beauty in its physical proportions alongside a gigantically muscled masculine frame. *Ghost in the Shell*, however, visually deploys these bodies as narrative signifiers that have been stripped of the qualities they conventionally signify: passivity and aggressiveness. More precisely, because *both* of these bodies signify aggressiveness and martial prowess within the film, they exemplify something akin to free variation—that is, the material differences between these bodily signifiers do not similarly correspond to differing signifieds. Just as Boker suggests, both bodies signify traits conventionally

attributed to masculinity in a process that effectively "flattens out" and eliminates the importance of sexual difference within the narrative. In a fictional world where strength, speed, and a killer instinct count above all else, it matters little whether one "has" a male or female body when either can embody these traits. There are, of course, problems with such an argument which I will discuss later in my alternative reading of the film. For now, however, I hope to demonstrate how the visual construction of Kusangi as a narrative signifier operates in ways that potentially lend themselves to arguments such as Boker's.

All of these elements—the inversion of gender roles, the valorization of the post-gendered subject, and the reduction of the significance of the sexual specificity of the material body—contribute to *Ghost in the Shell*'s appeal as a resistant film. Several questions, however, still remain to be answered. To what extent have these fictional manifestations of the radical cyborg been redirected and inscribed within more conventional and traditional cultural narratives? To what extent does this film replicate familiar deployments of sexual difference even as it seems to unravel them? Is the contestatory signification of Kusanagi's body within the narrative recontained within a more conventional schema of specularization and objectification of the female body? The answer to these questions will emerge through a closer reading of certain key segments of the film.

II. Traditional Configurations of Sexual Difference

To begin my second reading of this film, I wish to reconsider the visual construction of Kusanagi's body within the text. I have previously claimed that *Ghost in the Shell* can be read as deploying hyperbolized examples of masculine and feminine bodies to signify virtually identical narrative roles, thus "canceling out" the significance of each body's sexual specificity. While the film may invite such a reading, it becomes questionable when we consider *how* these bodies demonstrate their sexual specificity in the first place, how they are visually presented as hyperbolized examples of their respective sexes.

Though Major and Botau are both presented as classic ideals of sexual corporeality, Kusanagi's body spends much more time in a state of nakedness. This is because her cyborg shell comes equipped with thermo-optic camouflage, a technological innovation built right into its skin that bends light rays around the user, rendering her invisible. Thus, whenever she enters combat, Major usually removes her clothing so that her opponent will not be able to see her. There is, of course, always the not-so-brief moment between the undressing and the activation of the thermo-optics in which the audience views her completely naked form. While other characters also have access to such camouflage, they use it in the form of a special clothing which, when donned, creates the desired invisibility. None of the male characters ever disrobe or appear naked.

Additionally, Kusanagi is often cinematically positioned in relation to male characters through the employment of various shot-reverse-shot structures that conform perfectly to Hollywood cinema's familiar inscription of the female body as it has been described by feminist film scholarship.[6] One such instance occurs in the aforementioned scene where Kusanagi and Botau discuss how their cyborg bodies determine their senses of selfhood. The setting for this scene is the deck of a small pleasure boat, Kusanagi having just finished some recreational scuba diving. As the two characters begin to speak to each other, the camera tracks[7] Kusanagi to the doorway of the cabin where she begins to remove her wetsuit. We are then offered a shot of Botau, with mouth agape, looking at her, followed by a quick reverse shot back to Kusanagi, the object of his gaze. In the reverse shot, the female cyborg is positioned with her back to the camera—now the surrogate for both Botau and the spectator's gaze—her wetsuit unzipped to below waist level, revealing the top portion of her buttocks. Because her face is averted from the source of these multiple looks (the camera, Botau, and the spectator), Kusanagi does not return them and thus serves instead as their passive, eroticized object.

This is only one example of many instances in which the subversive potential of Kusanagi's cyborg body is undermined by its specific inscription within the film's cinematic form. The opening credits of the film, for instance, which depict the Major's original construction at Megatech, are similarly problematic. This sequence runs for about five minutes and consists entirely of shots of Kusanagi's naked body intercut with images of machinery and computer screens. At other times, the camera almost seems to take pleasure in surprising the audience by revealing the sexual specificity of Kusanagi's body immediately after it has visually presented it in a way that obfuscates its gendering. The final sequence of the opening credits presents viewers with a close-up of the Major's face as she awakens from sleep. Due to the combination of light and shadows which have been drawn into the scene, one is hard-pressed to determine if we are looking at a male or female visage, an indeterminacy which is furthered by the fact that the character's hair falls across her face. The camera then cuts to a much longer shot of Kusanagi, sitting up and stepping out of bed, clad in a skimpy tank top and panties, her body clearly marked as female.[8]

It could be argued that this blatant objectification is simply part of *Ghost in the Shell*'s sexual hyperbole, its deployment of traditional representations of sexed bodies. Could we not say that while Major's ongoing striptease before the camera facilitates her construction as a classic and traditional signifier of femininity, the subsequent narrativization of this signifier—its positioning within the plot—undercuts its alignment with the conventional? Does not the film, in other words, while undoubtedly relying upon many classic visual tropes in order to represent differently sexed bodies, ultimately eliminate or disrupt the significance of these tropes by assigning all bodies the same narrative attributes? I wish to approach this problem by way of a slight detour through Balsamo's observations concerning the public discourse surrounding female athletics and body building.

Balsamo notes that the dominant conception of femininity has historically excluded women from sport and exercise, the rationale being that such exclusion served "to protect them for the important job of species reproduction" (43). In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, women's athletics have become increasingly popular and a new conception of the female body began to circulate within our culture's public discourses—the athletic, muscular woman. Such an image of the female body would seem to possess a tremendous potential to destabilize normative conceptions of sexual identity because "To be both female and strong implicitly violates traditional codes of feminine identity" (43). Public discourse, however, usually reinscribes such a body within traditional paradigms of femininity through the linkage of its athletic capabilities to more conventional methods of coding women as visual spectacle. In the case of Florence Griffith-Joyner, a 1988 Olympic track and field star, Balsamo notes how the media performed a "process of sexualization" upon her athleticized body, most stories finding "a way to mention her body, not only in reference to its athletic capacity, but more obviously as it served as a mannequin for her flamboyant track outfits" (45). In much the same way that I am arguing for the reinscription and ideological containment of the radical cyborg, the media coverage of Griffith-Joyner's exploits served to contain the subversive potential of her body by coding it according to more familiar feminine attributes, fashion and spectacle.

I would argue that *Ghost in the Shell*'s obsessive objectification of Kusanagi's body works in a similar way. While I have suggested that the attribution of "masculine" characteristics to this character works to minimize the significance of its feminine coding, we can also argue exactly the opposite. The visual objectification of Kusanagi's nudity more likely serves to negate the significance of her occupation of a masculine narrative position. This might not be the case if the film objectified the male cyborgs with equal intensity, if they signified their maleness in a way similar to the signification of Kusanagi's female body. This is the case, I believe, in the action comics referred to by Boker. While "The women superheroes [in those texts] are super-female in their appearance, and the men are super-male," the rendering of their appearances is much more equitable; the artists objectify both sets of superheroes equally (109). Boker's argument does not quite work for *Ghost in*

the Shell, however, because Kusanagi's femaleness emerges in a way that differs so dramatically from the depiction of masculinity throughout the film. In other words, while Botau's features may correspond to a dominant ideal of masculinity (muscularity, broad shoulders, square jaw, etc.), these features emerge for the viewer as a necessary part of the narrative; there is no gratuitous lingering of the camera's gaze on his body in shots that seem designed exclusively for erotic enjoyment. For Kusanagi, the film deploys rather conventional cinematic devices to reproduce normative codes of feminine beauty as a way of recontaining the destabilizing threat posed by the radical cyborg to dominant conceptions of sexual difference. Kusanagi is thus reinscribed within one of our most familiar paradigms of femininity: woman as sexualized object for the enjoyment of the male gaze.

This is, of course, not the only way in which the film conducts its operation of recontainment. *Ghost in the Shell*, in what is perhaps the film's most powerful ideological strategy, also invokes and mobilizes the familiar paradigm of "woman as maternal body" as its chief means of disarming the radical cyborg. While the film's ending, the final psychic union of Kusanagi and the Puppet Master, seems to valorize cybertechnology for enabling the progressive recoding and manipulation of the material constraints of the body by a newly liberated mind, it curiously seems to rely upon a traditional conception of the body in order to make this point. While Haraway privileges the radical cyborg for its capacity to recode the sexual subject and reconfigure gender roles, the final merger of Kusanagi and Project 2051 unfolds within a very conventional narrative of corporeality. As I noted earlier, The Puppet Master's need to merge with an *organic* life form—or at least an entity like Kusanagi who possesses organic tissue—coincides with their mutual re-embodiment in a new cyborg shell which is not embedded in Section Nine's system of control. Surprisingly, however, this process of re-embodiment ultimately ends up gendering the material body in a way that perpetuates the body's historical construction within the narrative of patriarchy.

How this gendering takes place emerges into sharper focus with the consideration of Elizabeth Grosz's claim that

> Patriarchal oppression ... justifies itself, at least in part, by connecting women much
> more closely than men to the body and, through this identification, restricting
> women's social and economic roles to (pseudo) biological terms. Relying on
> essentialism, naturalism and biologism, misogynist thought confines women to the
> biological requirements of reproduction.... (14)

In keeping with this history, masculinity has been traditionally more closely aligned with the mind, reason, and consciousness. Haraway envisions the radical cyborg as a means of overcoming precisely this sort of patriarchal coding of the female body as a site of reproduction, a hypothesis that our previous reading of the film seems to bear out. After all, as my first reading has demonstrated, *Ghost in the Shell* seems to present Kusanagi as just such a "re-coded" female cyborg. If we temporarily bracket our re-reading of Kusanagi's highly objectified visual inscription and remind ourselves that, diegetically, her cyborg construction seems to eradicate or invert her alignment with conventional gender roles, then there really should be no reason to assume that her material embodiment, so desired by The Puppet Master, stands as a specifically *feminine* corporeality. Furthermore, given Project 2051's problematically gendered identity, we should also have no reason to associate its disembodied consciousness with some masculinist fantasy of pure reason. We *would* have no reason to make these associations were it not for the fact that the film rhetorically presents and explains the union of these two characters in language that replicates the rhetoric of conventional, heterosexual reproduction.

Once The Puppet Master approaches Kusanagi and explains what he needs her for, the language of his proposal aligns Major with a very traditional feminine role, one that is synonymous with "the biological requirements of reproduction" decried by Grosz. This alignment becomes most clear when Project 2051 enters Kusanagi's shell and psychically informs her that "you will bear my offspring onto the net itself." Consider for a moment just how strange this claim is. The new, posthuman subject produced by their union results from an *amalgamation* of both Kusanagi and the Puppet Master, a relationship in which the "parents" actually cease to exist, the offspring being a literal combination of their respective subjectivities. Such a form of reproduction potentially problematizes normative heterosexual reproduction because the parents, in this case, do not really *produce* a completely "new" person so much as they *become* it. Simply put, Kusanagi does not "give birth" in the traditional sense of the term. The parents, thus, *are* and *are not* the child, a state which, while not completely dissimilar to the account given us by human genetics, certainly seems to differ from it in significant ways.

The most important of these differences lies in the fact that Kusanagi's body does not serve as a passive vehicle that produces a new body. Instead, it resists its conventional deployment within patriarchy as "passive and reproductive" (Grosz 9) by actually becoming the child, a role which it shares with the "father." There is thus really no *need* for The Puppet Master to describe Major as the "bearer" of his offspring because she really is no such thing. Yet this is precisely how he describes her. The evocation of this conventional trope of reproduction, the female body as the bearer of life, profoundly qualifies the

subversive potential of the film's ending by transforming Kusanagi's radically re-coded and resistant cyborg body into a maternal body, a vehicle for the production of offspring. Because this final scene is entirely packaged within the familiar rhetoric of this trope, it is difficult for the audience not to think of Kusanagi as anything other than a "mother," a maternal figure whose role is ultimately synonymous with her corporeality. The fact that the new (Kusanagi/Puppet Master) entity's replacement shell is that of a child further strengthens the efficacy of the reproduction trope as a vehicle of containment. Finally, when we consider that Project 2051 effectively ghost-hacks into Major's shell and takes possession of it, controlling all of her physical actions during this scene, we find that her body is not only maternal but passive as well.

By assuming a dominant, controlling role in this relationship, by occupying the position of one who enters the female body and enables it to bear its cybernetic fruit, The Puppet Master is effectively inscribed within this scene as male. Though he has no sexual identity according to the logic of the plot, his positioning within this reproductive trope is thus unequivocally male in relation to the maternal body. I contend, therefore, that the sudden activation of this trope within the film's climactic scene undoes the destabilization of binary sexual difference that *Ghost in the Shell* seems to have presented to us. The evocation of this trope in the film's ending, the point in the narrative most strongly associated with explanation and resolution, lends even more force to the recontainment of the radical cyborg within the paradigm of maternity.

We can thus read the film as a cultural site that works to produce a certain ideological belief, a belief in the persistence of traditional gender roles and sexual identity despite the profound technological changes impacting our culture. But, as Haraway contends, our contemporary and future interactions with technology have the capacity to impose both a "final ... grid of control on the planet" and provide the means to restructure our "lived social and bodily realities" for more positive ends (154). In many ways, *Ghost in the Shell* replicates both of these possibilities in its narrative structure and visual depiction of a female cyborg, a process that is perfectly in keeping with its status as a part of our social imaginary. I would argue, however, that the film does more than simply *mirror* certain contradictory cultural attitudes towards technology, that it works instead to *resolve* these contradictions by privileging a more conservative version of sexual identity than that offered to us by Haraway's radical cyborg.

I doubt that this resolution stands as a complete totality, however. The mere fact that one can read elements of radicality into this text at all reveals that the social imaginary is a site of contestation as well as of ideological production. I think, however, that *Ghost in the Shell* ultimately encourages us to resolve the film's contradictions by seeing Kusanagi as a maternal figure. It places more "pressure," in Williams's terms, on such a reading and in so doing naturalizes the alignment of women with motherhood and/or an eroticized spectacle offered for visual consumption. So while various public discourses may endorse information technology as the gateway to a new utopian frontier, it is perhaps wise

to remind ourselves of Balsamo's cautionary advice that such discourses often "reproduce, in hi-tech guise, traditional narratives" about gender and sexual difference (132).

NOTES
    1. On the popularity of *anime* in America, see Kenny, Marin, and Pollack; on *Ghost in the Shell* specifically, see Chute and Newman. For coverage of Oshii's career, see Patten. The magazine *Animerica*—whose title alone suggests a fusion of Japanese aesthetic and American ideological interests—had a cover feature on *Ghost* and an interview with Oshii in their February 1996 issue.
    2. Kusanagi figures as another incarnation of cyberpunk's popular "razorgirl" character, the female cyborg whose technological enhancements make her a lethal soldier and whose most famous version is probably Molly Millions from William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. There is, interestingly, some disagreement about how efficacious such characters are in the service of feminist agendas. Nicola Nixon, for instance, claims (following similar arguments by Samuel R. Delany) that characters like Molly represent an unacknoweldged debt on the part of their creators to earlier feminst sf, particularly Joanna Russ's character Jael from her novel *The Female Man* (222). For Nixon, cyberpunk versions of the razorgirl have generally been "depoliticized and sapped of any revolutionary energy" (222). In contrast, Joan Gordon argues that characters like Molly, who serve no explicit feminist agenda, still stand as positive representations of women: "for a woman to enter the human army as an average soldier with no distinction in rank, privilege or job position is, on the covert level, a feminist act" (198).
    3. For a complementary argument about how the technological colonization of the male body in cyberpunk literature can be seen as a feminizing process analogous to castration, see Ross (153).
    4. Coleman offers an extended reading of *Ghost* specifically in terms of issues of race and ethnicity, deploying the concept of "invisibility" to describe how the film seems to efface conventional markers of identity, a process about which she is generally more sanguine than I am.
    5. Whether or not it delivered on this promise is, of course, another matter. Peter Fitting notes that "Despite the eager reception of [William] Gibson by some tech enthusiasts and New Age visionaries, his work is certainly not an unquestioning endorsement of technology. Rather, computers and cyborgs have lost their previous charges, the positive or negative valorization so central to earlier SF" (302).
    6. There is a considerable body of material on this subject, going back to Mulvey's classic article. See also Silverman and Studlar.
    7. For an analysis of the similarities and differences between live action cinema and animation, see Small and Levinson. Noake provides a comprehensive overview of the cinematographic conventions of animated films. For a discussion of *anime* specifically in terms of its representational conventions, consult Brophy.
    8. In this respect, *Ghost in the Shell* seems to differ from the general trend in technologically-oriented Japanese *anime*. Newitz comments that the women heroes of this genre "use their power openly, but tend to hide their gender in one way or another.... What these *anime* demonstrate is the way male and female bodies are largely indistinguishable once wedded to *mecha* technologies" (8).

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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* seems to espouse a political agenda that is in keeping with feminist theorizations of the cyborg, it covertly reworks this agenda into an endorsement of conventional configurations of sexual difference. The film gratifies desires for a strong, multiply-positioned female protagonist who uses technology as a means of empowerment, while simultaneously containing her subversive potential by re-narrating it within an older and better known paradigm: the dominance of masculine mind and spirit over the feminine materiality of the body. The film thus functions as an instrument of ideological containment that seems to be subversive on its "surface" while contextualizing that subversion within traditional narratives of sexual difference. (CS)