

Corporeality and Culture

Bodies in Movement

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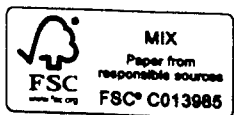
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Chapter 6

The Animation of the Cyborg Trope: Oshii Mamoru's *Ghost in the Shell*

Sebastian Schmidt-Tomczak

In her recent book *The Posthuman* (2013), feminist theorist and philosopher Rosi Braidotti likens the question surrounding the posthuman condition to those concerning other 'posts', such as postmodernism, postcolonialism and postindustrialism. While not drawing direct parallels, she highlights that the discourse on what is and has been emerging from the uncertain legacy of humanism is lagging behind these other fields of enquiry. Braidotti then formulates a non-absolute, yet very decided, critique of the liberal humanist subject, which has its roots in Renaissance humanism. She lays bare the ways and mechanisms by which it has infiltrated constructions of subjectivity up to the present. These, she argues, still rest on long-standing ideas of freedom, individuality and reason that empower some subjects but disenfranchise others. The parallel Braidotti sees between antihumanism and posthumanism is this shared opponent – a human model that 'stands for normality, normalcy and normativity. ... The human is a historical construct that became a social convention about "human nature"' (27). The thus constructed liberal humanist subject becomes the template for identifying others – that is, for identifying that which is inferior: 'to be different from' came to mean to be 'less than' (28). To effectively critique this legacy of humanism that is so deeply inscribed in Western European epistemology as well as in everyday life, poses considerable difficulties and requires a self-reflexive approach, which Braidotti phrases very succinctly: 'The emphasis falls ... on the difficulty of erasing the trace of the epistemic violence by which a non-humanist position might be carved out of the institutions of Humanism' (30).

As Elizabeth Stephens argues in her chapter in this volume, the result of this economy of normalcy and humanity, is a growing category of beings that are seen as anomalous, or 'monstrous'. In this chapter, I will take a closer look at a particular type of 'monster' – the cyborg – as a trope that has been faced with this challenge ever since Donna Haraway first published 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century' in 1985. The figure of the cyborg became instrumental as a foundation for a politics tackling systemic disenfranchisement based on race, gender, sexuality, and class

in a globalising and increasingly technological world. I here want to think about how the intellectual capacities of the trope can continue to be harnessed, and I will explicate this by turning to one particular visual cultural product.

Taking Oshii Mamoru's 1995 Japanese cyberpunk anime feature *Ghost in the Shell* (*Kōkaku kidōtai*¹) as my primary analytical subject, I will show that the film embodies many of the tenets of a cyborg perspective on the world, and as such deserves to be looked at critically and seriously. The cyborg, as imagined by Haraway (2004), does not merely illustrate a fight against oppressive binaries such as self/other, mind/body, male/female, reality/appearance, truth/illusion (177), but it points to a place of unity in which these distinctions have never mattered. In other words, I argue that *Ghost in the Shell* can be seen not as reactively critical of binaries, but as being productively ignorant of them. The goal in this is not to practice historical amnesia, but to emphasise the cyborg as a figure of enrichment and celebration, not as a defiant or angry reformer. It has long served to dismantle harmful politics and ossified thoughts, but in *Ghost in the Shell* it has already constructed an identity for itself that does not depend on what it attacks and what *it is not* (such as dominations of race, gender, sexuality and class), but on what *it is now* (independent of such dominations). In *Ghost in the Shell*, the cyborg and cyborg thinking are not defined through their oppositional relationship to previous oppression, but as free agents setting their own agenda of affinity, not identity – to pick up on a distinction made by Haraway (2004, 155). *Ghost in the Shell* is premised on a new reality,² but that new reality is not a new normal and not defined in opposition to virtuality; in it, nothing is assumed, and nothing is expected, but everything is subject to questioning. What *remains* of the cyborg, then, is not a matter of the past, but, ironically, a matter of the future; a future in which 'the utopian dream of the hope for a monstrous world without gender' (181) has transformed from a possibility into an opportunity.

This chapter has three main sections. Following a brief introduction to *Ghost in the Shell*, the first section is a discussion of the concepts of life, cognition and individuality that shows that understanding the individual as a closed and independent system is not only unproductive, but also potentially harmful through processes of exclusion. I will also argue that breaking down the boundaries which are assumed to define and create the individual does

1 The movie is based on Shirō Masamune's manga of the same name, serialised from May 1989 to November 1990.

2 Part of the purpose of this chapter is to rethink conventional distinctions between the 'real' and the 'virtual' and other binaries. However, I will still be using the term 'reality' in a way that is similar to the notion of 'world' as the locus of posthuman cognition. In these instances, 'reality' should be read as in binary opposition to any concept of the 'virtual'.

not entail getting rid of the individual, but rather exposes these boundaries as constrictive. The second section fleshes out the trope of the cyborg to show how it can be mobilised in a different kind of writing and analysis, drawing on *Ghost in the Shell* to make explicit the implications of such an approach. Lastly, I will condense my findings and support my central claims by again showing how the full potential of cyborg thinking is embodied in Oshii's anime as well as in the politics of our own contemporary world.

Ghost in the Shell

Before moving into the discussion part of this chapter, a few remarks are needed regarding the logic behind choosing *Ghost in the Shell* as the main body of evidence. I focus on Oshii's film in order to think about the cyborg on a deeper level, although my findings will extend into our own culture more broadly. The film deserves to be looked at in detail, for serious scholarly engagement with the genre continues to be relatively rare. Since Susan J. Napier's book *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (2005, based on first edition from 2001), works such as Steven T. Brown's *Tokyo Cyberpunk* (2010) have been important contributions towards an intellectual emancipation of this part of Japanese visual culture. However, Brown's readings for the most part follow established (psychoanalytic) theorisations of identity and (post)humanism that are appropriated and then applied in this different context. It does not investigate what the philosophical constructions and considerations developed *within* anime have to offer to contemporary ontology. Brown's contribution is the bringing together of rigorous intellectual thinking with representations that for the longest time were destined to remain in the depths of fandom and popular culture – a far cry from the attention of academic publications. While introducing anime as an understudied genre of visual culture into existing theorisations is a step forward, there is an opportunity for re-theorisation that should not go unused. Cyberpunk narratives often question the constructions of identity from the perspective of the relationship between the real and the virtual, the digital and the analogue, humanity and technology, and one goal of this chapter is to think about the implications as these binaries become less clear in a world that is increasingly reliant on information.

Ghost in the Shell lends itself to this enquiry as it set new standards for what visuality in anime could be, earning much fame for its blending of traditional and CG animation techniques. It falls into a genre of cyberpunk that was shaped significantly by films such as *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) or *AKIRA* (Ōtomo Katsuhiro, 1988), but it was also adjusted to everyday life in the 1990s that came with an increasing availability and dissemination of technologies such as mobile phones and the internet. It went on to inspire the Wachowski

Brothers³ and their *Matrix* franchise, the first film of which was released in 1999 and triggered a great deal of attention at the intersection of techno-scientific and social concerns, in Hollywood and in academia. Within the history of the genre, *Ghost in the Shell* therefore occupies an interesting position, characterised neither by the complete novelty of its themes, nor by the kind of cult status attained by *AKIRA* or *Blade Runner*.

Information, Cognition, Individuality

In the near-future Japanese setting of Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*, the Puppet Master, a so-called ghost hacker, infiltrates people's 'cyberised' – that is, technologically augmented – brains, using them as marionettes to commit data theft. The hacker – whose gender falls outside of binary norms – then plants artificial memories into the victims' cyberbrains, rendering them not only unaware of having committed any crime at all, but also creating in them the illusion of a life and reality that is not theirs. As the narrative progresses, it is revealed that the Puppet Master is not a 'person' in any conventional sense, but a computer program covertly developed by a government agency. The Puppet Master argues that the code which constitutes it is no different from the data of a DNA sequence that is at the core of biological reproduction: the computer code and the genetic code may be stored in different media, but what ultimately enables human individuality is the capacity to remember and the existence of memory, not the question of whether this memory is cerebral or hardwired. The Puppet Master, in an attempt to escape the government agency which created it and which is trying to whitewash their conspiracy by extraditing and executing it, hacks a production facility and downloads its coded existence into a serialised female cyborg body. This cyborg is picked up by Section 9 of the Police, a secretly operating unit that is led by Chief Aramaki Daisuke and under the operational command of the film's protagonist, Major Kusanagi Motoko.

During a lengthy philosophical monologue in Kusanagi's presence, the Puppet Master claims that 'life is like a node that is born in the sea of information'⁴ – in other words, that life is infinitely contingent. At first glance, this 'infinity' would seem hemmed in by the metaphor of the sea as an ultimately bounded entity. However, this issue washes away with the original Japanese⁵ which speaks of

3 See interview from 6 November 1999 on the Warner Video website. <http://www.warnervideo.com/matrixevents/wachowski.html> (accessed 27 February 2014).

4 'Seimei to ha jōhō no nagare no naka ni umareta kessetsuten no yōna mono da'.

5 Given that dubbing and subtitling are not always consistent, I am considering the Japanese language version as the authoritative source for my discussion. Based on this, I may qualify the English language editions with my own translation of the Japanese.

a 'flow' (*nagare*) of information, leaving open-ended the question of whether the 'information' is by any means limited or contained. Just as flow is denied material integrity, so too is the same implied for life itself, here described as a 'node', which is a type of knot or entanglement, or a local swelling in a larger area. As such, it is hard to determine the boundary of a node, just like it is difficult to specify where exactly an entanglement or a swelling starts. Drawing such a boundary between a node and its surroundings would therefore be an artificial act, a constructed fiction like drawing on a map the boundaries of a city through its urban sprawl. The relationship between life (a node) and its source (the sea of information) is here de-hierarchised and understood as subject to constant and dynamic change.

Oshii's *Puppet Master* is not alone in understanding humanity in this flowing and fluctuating way. In her foreword to the 2003 anthology *Prefiguring Cyberculture*, N. Katherine Hayles writes that 'understanding human cognition will increasingly mean analysing the affordances that suture us into the flows of information as we are incorporated into systems that are at once material and conceptual, virtual and real' (xiii). 'Human cognition' here stands in for what it is that makes us human; what, so to speak, enables us to say 'us'. We can thus say that there is nothing outside of those flows of information and that, at the same time, those flows only exist because of the congealment that allows them to enter cognition. In other words, this system of information produces itself by way of making itself knowable.

In the midst of increasingly densified or congealed information, questions of diversification and reproduction arise. In *Ghost in the Shell*, Major Kusanagi and her⁶ partner Batō, a muscular, soft-spoken cyborg with mirror lenses implanted in his eye sockets, manage to connect the Major to the *Puppet Master* in order to conduct a 'dive' into its cyberbrain. It turns out that this connection with Kusanagi had been the *Puppet Master's* goal all along, leading to a merger of the two ostensible individuals. When government snipers take out the *Puppet Master's* cyborg body, Batō manages to salvage Kusanagi's cyberbrain and give it a new body – that of a young girl. This is symbolic in a number of ways; the birth of a new entity, it means that diversifying and reshuffling the

6 The bodies of the protagonists are highly sexualised along conventional stereotypes – consider Kusanagi's large breast size and Batō's muscular build – and are quite unapologetic about it. In the case of Batō it is unclear how many biological functions his body retains, given that it is not entirely prosthetic. The relationships between sexuality, biological reproduction, sex, gender and body certainly do not follow conventional patterns and, similarly, the protagonists' gender identities are not taken up or clarified either. In this vein, my use of gendered pronouns is conventional, but it should not be seen as implying that the reasons for saying 'she' or 'he' are based in conventional assumptions about differences between women and men.

nodes that founded the identities of the Puppet Master and Kusanagi has a renewing or rejuvenating effect, as opposed to the stagnation that would result from simply duplicating or adding sets of code. It further illustrates that this renewal is forward-facing, leading to a 'new generation of being' that is not growing 'denser' or 'bigger' in its flows of information but, if anything, is even more flexible and dynamic in reconfiguring itself in a younger form. Identity as something settled and contained becomes ever more tenuous and melts into the 'flow of information' in drastic ways. The merger of Kusanagi and the Puppet Master moves the idea of reproduction towards that of a more contingent process, and away from a concept of the individual as something constituted in and of itself – that is, obtaining individuality by way of meeting a certain 'human norm' or having fixed boundaries.

However, as much as this type of reproduction seems to be forward-facing, it is also an expression of a longing for the past. Film and media theorist Mary Ann Doane writes: 'Reproduction is the guarantee of a history – both human biological reproduction (through the succession of generations) and mechanical reproduction (through the succession of memories). Knowledge is anchored to both' (118). In *Ghost in the Shell*, of course, any easy distinction between biological and mechanical reproduction is undermined: by presenting both technology and biology as coded realities, the mechanical aspects of what we believe to be biological are laid open, and vice versa. The Puppet Master and Kusanagi both have origins that do not fit this distinction in the first place, and thus the re-organisation of their existential nodes into one should not be seen as being in opposition to conventional notions of reproduction. Rather, what is presented as the foundation of their reproduction-through-merger is a principle of diversification or enrichment – a goal that underlies both biological evolution and technological progress. As such, the bio/technological binary is not *overcome*; it never even applied.

Katherine Hayles writes in her groundbreaking book *How We Became Posthuman*, quoting C.B. Macpherson's definition of the liberal humanist subject: 'if "human essence is freedom from the wills of others", the posthuman is "post" not because it is necessarily unfree but because there is no a priori way to identify a self-will that can be clearly distinguished from an other-will' (4). From a posthuman perspective, the conscious mind that insists on selfhood by way of fallaciously distinguishing self-will and other-will must be seen as 'a small subsystem running its program of self-construction and self-assurance while remaining ignorant of the actual dynamics of complex systems' (286). In other words, it relies on boundaries being drawn out of ignorance, or as expressions of coercive power relationships. Importantly, this does not mean the end of all ideas of individuality, but it *does* entail the end of individuality as a closed system; the end of selfhood as self-sufficient.

The trope of the cyborg, as it was first introduced by Haraway, has been crucial in challenging the politics of exclusionary practices and oppressive discourses. In the following section I will look more closely at examples of how it has been instrumentalised, and will show how cyborg thinking inheres in *Ghost in the Shell*. The cyborg has long transcended its initial definition of being a cybernetic organism;⁷ it has moved on to become an embodiment of the posthuman condition. The next step is to recognise that our reality is already a cyborg reality – if only we allow ourselves to see it as such.

Writing Cyborgs

Let us now look at a few examples of how the cyborg has been discussed or mobilised in critical writing. For example, feminist scholar Anne Balsamo positions the cyborg as something to think with:

Cyborgs open up productive ways of thinking about subjectivity, gender, and the materiality of a physical body. Those fundamental terms and binarisms which the cyborg challenged by rendering them hopelessly ambiguous are also part of a system of knowledge and power by which all of us have been oppressed. That they are now eroded or in crisis should not necessarily be cause for remorse. For if the epistemology of the centralized, rational, human-male-self runs into difficulty 'reading' the cyborg, there is another mode of thought and struggle which has long labored to move beyond the central, the rational, the dominant perspective. That epistemology, that practice, that struggle – is feminism. (157)

In this description, the cyborg challenges binaries as well as political and epistemological oppression, and presents alternatives. Thus, normative constructions of 'subjectivity, gender, and the materiality of a physical body' are recognised as political realities requiring intervention. Balsamo claims that binarisms are rendered 'hopelessly ambiguous' when confronted with the concept of the cyborg. While this wording would benefit from some clarification (it is unclear how radically different am-BI-guity is from BI-narism), the bottom line is clear: as soon as the long-harboured certainties of liberal humanism melt away, feminism is ready to take control of a new type of discourse, the only certainty of which is that normative and rational thought leads to the exclusion of many voices, and to social constructions that are no match for the complexities of our lived reality, and possibly harmful in their imposition.

⁷ The term was coined by Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline in their 1960 article 'Cyborgs in Space', which discusses the idea of technologically enhancing a human body so that it would be able to survive in an extraterrestrial environment.

Another example comes from Tess Williams' contribution to the volume *Scifi in the Mind's Eye*.

Monsters, humans, and cyborgs change rapidly, making a farce of gradual adaptation and natural selection. They play on the tension between fixity and mutability, illustrating not just the horror of the predator, but the horror of the body under pressure and the ungovernable, unpredictable agency of the body's changes in response to pressure. They do not obey the supposedly nonnegotiable codes of the gene as the control of science slips, and their talent for symbiogenesis suggests origins stories and narratives of possibility that sit uneasily with the closed, static, self-contained, sleek understanding of the classical body. (133-4)

Here, the cyborg jumps into the gaps that open up as the scientifically-controlled body begins to split into parts that do not add up to form the neatly integrated entity imagined by liberal humanist thought, replacing a narrative of limits with 'narratives of possibility'. Again, the cyborg intervenes through breakdown of binaries (fixity and mutability), showing that their parts are not as easily discernible as was previously thought. Thus, the cyborg sits very uncomfortably with the dominant late twentieth- and early twenty-first century discourses of the body, which privilege scientific cleanliness and order, and try to erase a view of the body as infectious, messy and teeming with countless organisms, threatening its individual wholesomeness.

My point here is not to critique the way in which the cyborg trope is positioned by Balsamo and Williams. Rather, I wish to emphasise that in these writings it has been tied to political projects that resist certain types of systemic and epistemological oppression and discursive violence in relation to gender and traditional understandings of what a body is. Neither gender nor body politics are a matter of the past, but they are undergoing change. Where the cyborg used to be solely a *responder* it has now also assumed a *presence*. It is infecting thought wherever the 'normal' no longer seems relevant; wherever unpredictability is the only thing that is predictable. In *Ghost in the Shell*, for example, Kusanagi is not a cyborg that responds to oppression relating to gender, race, sexuality or class. Instead, her cognition is constituted in a flow of information in which discrimination based on these categories achieves nothing. In other words, I will argue that the cyborg's existence should not be tied to things it is pitted against, but should depend on the constant re-formation of relationships, making it knowable in ever-new ways; otherwise its subjectivity may become irrelevant, like a programming language the use of which wanes over time. The technology scholar Tim Lenoir (2007) hints at an impending change in the conception of cyborgism in science studies:

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The cyborg has performed yeoman's service for science studies. Examining narrative constructions, metaphors, and discursive networks under the cyborg banner powerfully exposed assumptions as well as political, military, and economic interests embedded within technoscience since the 1980s. ... When the biological and the digital are no longer ontologically distinct but inhere in one another, we will most likely confront a more elusive trope than the cyborg, conceived narrowly as a human-machine hybrid, where the machine is a (possibly dangerous) supplement, tool, and extension of the human. (216)

If the trope of the cyborg is used as a tool working in a specific struggle, it is bound to change or become redundant as some conflicts are dissolved and others emerge. The reason for this is twofold: first, the trope becomes part of the discourse and gradually disappears into it. Second, it is read in an increasingly literal fashion (as a biological-digital organism in Lenoir's case), which makes it more difficult for the cyborg to be adapted to different contexts. The fact that the cyborg has been a success story for challenging discursively inscribed power relationships is due to its promise of helping us reconsider the way we think. In other words, it has been successful precisely because it was not going to be a temporary remedy. Rather, it carries a promise of helping us build a mutable and flexible foundation for the work we do. The cyborg's purpose was never to fight a particular politics of oppression, but to help us change the way we approach any and all politics.

Cyborg politics is active, not reactionary; ignorant, not obnoxious; aggressive, not angry. For example, the fact that an un-gendered anime character like the Puppet Master ruminates on the parallel between programmed and genetic code should make us think less about our own flawed discourses on modes, technologies and ethics of reproduction, and more about how those discourses could be thought differently. The limits to the quality of a response may be proportional to the quality of that which it responds to – poor conditions may only inspire poor solutions. The cyborg trope was never just there to turn poor fantasies into better ones, but to enable fantasies that previously had been altogether unimaginable.

Returning to Lenoir's assessment, what is at stake could be described as the survival of a cyborg way of thinking and writing in the context of a changing political landscape. The notion of survival already surfaced in Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto': 'Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other' (33). Earlier in her text, Haraway makes 'an argument for the cyborg as a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality and as an imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings' (8). Three notions stand out in these passages: survival, fiction and imagination. I would like to suggest that fiction and imagination can form the basis for

survival. This requires us to employ tropes, not to explain or paraphrase what is literal, but to keep literalness at bay. The cyborg trope is something that is neither fictitious nor imaginative, but a construction of boundaries that direct our new understanding of posthuman cognition as sutured into endless flows of information.

In the introduction to her *Reader*, Haraway comments on her use of tropes in the writings: 'These papers are full of tropes. ... Tropes swerve; they defer the literal, forever, if we are lucky; they make plain that to make sense we must always be ready to trip' (2). Thus, if we do not expect to always be steady on our feet, that is, if we do not expect to be able to grasp and explain all meaning perfectly, we will not be taken by surprise when we walk on unstable ground. The crucial implication of this is that we cannot think of 'patterns' of cyborg thinking and writing as in any way prescriptive, as mere tools to be applied to different circumstances. Whenever tropes seem to provide us with perfect explanations and certainties, we are on the wrong track. Instead, one of the first things we must be ready to trip over are the temptations coming from traditional liberal humanist epistemologies. Like the encounter between the Puppet Master and Kusanagi, which causes them to reorganise at a higher level of complexity by pulling the conceptions of individuality from under their feet like a metaphorical rug, we have to be willing to enter into relationships that have the potential to challenge the foundations of our thinking, again and again.

Animating Cyborgs

Ghost in the Shell ends shortly after Kusanagi awakens in Batō's house, finding herself in her new robotic body. She leaves soon after, on terms that carry uncertainty as to whether she and Batō will meet again. Stepping outside, she asks herself: 'Where should I go? The net is truly vast'.⁸ The camera then pans to a view of the nearby city skyline, and it is with this image that the film ends. *Ghost in the Shell* invites us to think about the connection between the body of the Major and that of the city. Elizabeth Grosz (2003) has commented on such relationships:

The body and its environment ... produce each other as forms of the hyperreal, as modes of simulation which have overtaken and transformed whatever reality each may have had into the image of the other: the city is made and made

8 'Doko e ikō kashira ne. Netto ha kōdai da wa'. It needs to be mentioned that in contemporary Japanese the suffix 'wa' at the end of an utterance is commonly used by female speakers only. In male speakers it often marks a practice of impersonation or gender-bending.

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over into the simulacrum of the body, and the body, in its turn, is transformed, 'citized', urbanized as a distinctively metropolitan body. (507)

This passage hints at a continuity and fluidity between the city and the body – one can become the other and vice versa; as such, the two are never entirely separate. This notion helps break down the boundaries that are often assumed to ground individuality. Grosz writes that the body and the city *produce* each other, so their relationship possesses a productive power. It may be impossible to tell the city and the body apart, their boundary being elusive at best, but this also means that we need to rethink what a boundary is; here it appears to enable contact and connection rather than cause separation. This notion is further explored in Karin Sellberg's chapter in this volume, where the protagonists become one with each other and the environment through perpetual motion.

Carrying this thought into the film, Kusanagi's final utterance implicates not only the internet but also the body and the city in her assessment of vastness. Indeed, it is the aspect of vastness that establishes the deep and unifying connection between the body and the city. This scene also suggests that the net has always already been vast, but that only Kusanagi's new vantage point enables her to recognise this. What had seemed to be a clear-cut boundary between her and the Puppet Master turned out to be a profound connection that eventually reorganised itself into a bigger and richer cognition. Looking at the city with this more complex and expanded understanding of her own subjectivity and its endlessly networked and flowing existence, Kusanagi now fully inhabits vastness itself, as opposed to a specific body or city (or a specific race, gender, sexuality and class, for that matter). This might well be why, after asking herself where she should go, she does not move at all, for she is already on the move, being one with the never-ending flow of information (*jōhō no nagare*).

Melting into informational vastness does neither imply the end of Kusanagi's body nor the city, however. It only means that if these seem distinct and isolated, it is because their boundaries are constructed as strict separators rather than connections. The body and the city are not different *things* here, but rather different *perspectives* on a flow of information that produces the world by way of comprehensive inclusion and continuous movement, not by way of locking knowledge and perception into categories and binaries. Vastness means opportunity and openness, not definition and limitation; this is why Kusanagi poses a question regarding movement ('Where should I go?'), rather than one of being ('Who am I?'). While these two questions ultimately lead to the same thing, they frame their respective objectives in radically different terms – one holding on to lost notions of ontological fixity, the other celebrating movement and mutability.

The difference between being and moving is also explored in Rosemary Deller's chapter in this volume, and it is at the core of harnessing the cyborg's

potential for enabling a deeper understanding of cultural products such as *Ghost in the Shell*, but we will see that it also helps us make contemporary reality in general legible in new ways. *Ghost in the Shell* is not a text that angrily attacks oppression, but one that aggressively celebrates opportunity and movement. Here, being does not consist of the establishment of boundaries, but of the movement between nodes of density in a flow of information. This movement has no final destination, thus the question is not 'Where should I go in order to stay there?', but rather 'Where should I go in order to keep moving?'. Kusanagi answers this question herself when she states that 'The net is truly vast'. Movement is not necessarily a matter of aims and arrival. For Kusanagi, it is an opportunity to observe and understand her own existence, knowing that there is no point in holding on to binary categories that will soon be washed away.

Kusanagi has flipped a switch from rejecting to embracing her own mutability; from categorical exclusion to comprehensive inclusion in an increasingly information-based society. She is not a problem solver, but a *problem absorber*, practicing a politics not of aggression and identity, but of unity and affinity.⁹ She overextends, overconnects and oversaturates herself. What makes Kusanagi a cyborg, and a posthuman cyborg at that, is not her robotic body, but the fact that understanding her cognition means 'analyzing the affordances that suture [her] into the flows of information as [she is] incorporated into systems that are at once material and conceptual, virtual and real' (Hayles, 2003, xiii). A system can be virtual and real at the same time when the binary separating these two concepts is dissolved and they become semantically exchangeable. I would like to close by bringing up one such example from *Ghost in the Shell* that exposes the deep connection between these seemingly oppositional concepts.

After apprehending a man they had first assumed to be the Puppet Master, Kusanagi and Batō soon realise that he is in fact a mere victim of the hacker. Using payphones across the city to conduct his hacks, this unwitting pawn believes that he was hacking his soon-to-be ex-wife's cyberbrain in order to locate his daughter. It turns out that there is no wife, no divorce and no daughter, but the man has been living by himself for years and has never been married. The memories of matrimonial life, including the strong affection for his daughter, had been simulated inside his mind by the Puppet Master. Realising that his own existence has been based on an illusion, he asks whether it would be possible to remove all the artificially created memories from his

⁹ Haraway (2004, 155) uses this distinction between identity and affinity to critique what she describes as the searching of a 'new essential unity' on behalf of US leftists intellectuals and feminists. This is in opposition to the work of scholars such as Chela Sandoval that recognises that the formation of unified identities is purely an expression of networks of power, and that actual identity politics should be grounded in analysing those networks rather than pretend that they do not exist (155–6).

brain. After pointing out the considerable risk involved in such an operation, given the difficulty of differentiating between artificial and natural memories, Batō says: 'whether lived experience or dream, all existing information is reality and illusion at the same time'.¹⁰

To categorise different types of information into reality and illusion is here seen as futile. As Hayles articulates it, the character is incorporated into systems in which distinctions between ostensible opposites are arbitrary at best. All information in his cyberbrain is simply information, and while it may be appealing to divide it into different ontological categories, this does not add to our understanding of his cognition. If anything, such categories become monuments to our own shortcomings in reaching such an understanding, and to our inability to accept a world that is too big to fit into either our hands (in the form of an information storing device) or our minds.

A comparative look at the Japanese and English language versions of *Ghost in the Shell* makes this idea more poignant. There is a fascinating discrepancy in the translation of Batō's statement about fiction and reality: the term 'lived experience' is a simplified English translation of the original Japanese *giji taiken* ('simulated experience' or 'pseudo-experience'). While Batō's overall argument is maintained, a suggestive shift occurs here. In the English version, a conventional differentiation between 'reality' and 'illusion' would associate the former with the 'lived experience' and the latter with the 'dream'. This is reversed in the Japanese version: a 'dream' is that which is owned and experienced by its dreamer and therefore 'real'; what is forced upon the man as 'lived experienced' by the Puppet Master is really a 'pseudo-experience' and is not actually grounded in how he lived his life, but rather in how he falsely remembers the experience of it. What the original Japanese and the English translation reveal when juxtaposed is the futility of absolute categories and associated meanings. It does not matter whether the translators intended this semantic shift – once more, any assumed importance of opposing categories melts back into the flow of information (*jōhō no nagare*). Thus, the word we should use in relation to the translation is possibly *consistency* rather than *discrepancy*, as it appropriately emphasises that reality and illusion are not different things, but different perspectives on the same thing.

Kusanagi's experience is not as far removed from our own as it may seem at first glance. The narrative setting of *Ghost in the Shell*, with its profusion of advanced technology and robotics, tells a story of what on the surface looks like a distant future, but the themes are strikingly contemporary. In an era of avid discussion concerning civil rights – racial, gender and sexual rights among others – and of an increasing awareness of the similarities in the systemic disenfranchisement of those with less power, it is becoming more and more clear

10 'Giji taiken mo yume mo, sonzai suru jōhō ha subete genjitsu de ari, soshite mabarashi nan da.'

that there is more that binds than that separates our social categories. A shared posthumanity builds affinity between disadvantaged groups, rather than another level of categorisation. Identity categories are constructed in dependence on the oppressive web of power that marginalises them. Like the net has always already been vast for Kusanagi, we are always already cyborgs. However, it is only with the heteroglossia of technology and the wide dissemination of many previously unheard voices that we become better equipped to recognise this. We are becoming aware of our shared affinities, and we are finally able to discern and acknowledge the voices of those whose identities complicate humanist norms and idealisations.

The idea of the contemporary cyborg is not a dream of a slick and omnipotent being that effortlessly travels through time and space. As it cannot transcend history and politics, it often appears clumsy and disorganised. However, as Haraway (2004) writes about tropes: 'they make plain that to make sense we must always be ready to trip' (2). In order to maintain our ability to trip, we have to keep moving along the flow of information through which our cognition emerges and constantly reorganises itself. The conception of world without categories, binaries and oppression, a posthumanity unhindered by hierarchies and inequities – where we are all free and connected at the same time – may indeed be a utopian dream. It is, however, a dream worth nurturing – because if there is one thing to be learned from *Ghost in the Shell*, it is that dream and reality may be more closely related than we think.

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