

Dartmouth College

Dartmouth Digital Commons

Comparative Literature M.A. Essays

Comparative Literature

Spring 2022

“For Now We See in a Mirror, Dimly”: Dialectical Wholeness in Oshii Mamoru’s Ghost in the Shell

Mari Aida

Mari.Aida.GR@Dartmouth.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/complit_essays



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Japanese Studies Commons](#), and the [Visual Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Aida, Mari, “For Now We See in a Mirror, Dimly”: Dialectical Wholeness in Oshii Mamoru’s Ghost in the Shell” (2022). *Comparative Literature M.A. Essays*. 11.

https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/complit_essays/11

This M.A. Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Comparative Literature at Dartmouth Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Comparative Literature M.A. Essays by an authorized administrator of Dartmouth Digital Commons. For more information, please contact dartmouthdigitalcommons@groups.dartmouth.edu.

AIDA, Mari

May 15, 2022

“For Now We See in a Mirror, Dimly”: Dialectical Wholeness in Oshii Mamoru’s *Ghost in the Shell*

The year is 2029. Accompanied by a cacophony of multi-language radio correspondence and beeping sounds, a holographic map of a city presents itself to us, glaring neon-green against a pitch-black backdrop. As we zoom in on the map, the camera swerves up in the direction of our prior vantage point. The green screen dissipates to reveal the source of the noise, two police-owned helicopters flying away into the night sky. We are now standing next to public security agent Major Motoko Kusanagi, who is wiretapping into a conference between a number of foreign diplomats and a programmer. What is at stake is a probable kidnapping incident, in which the government-affiliated programmer is about to be abducted by an official from the Republic of Gabel, previously accused of infringing on diplomatic law. Kusanagi, with the support of her colleagues from public security agency Sector 9, is preparing to take down the Gabel representative by means of assassination. As armed policemen from other sectors of the public security organization beleaguer the diplomats, Kusanagi jumps from a rooftop and proceeds to shoot the representative from outside the building. Bewildered policemen gather at the shattered windows, only to see an optical camouflage-clad Kusanagi free falling and disappearing into the surrounding city lights (see Fig.1 and 2).

As such, Oshii Mamoru’s 1995 animated film *Ghost in the Shell* starts off with a scene from protagonist Motoko Kusanagi’s daily life as a cyborg police officer. The scene establishes the basic premises of the world that Kusanagi inhabits. From the very beginning, the CGI artwork informs the audience that the film is set in a society that utilizes advanced networking technology as well as the fact that people have live access to such sophisticated

information; the majority of the film's characters are cyborgs albeit to different extents, and the members of Sector 9 take advantage of their physical status to tap into these infrastructures of information. The scene also clarifies Kusanagi's position within this landscape of networks and international crime. Kusanagi is the sole female-presenting character to appear throughout these four initial minutes of the film; in other words, the government's diplomacy sectors and the vast majority of the police force are dominated by men. For Kusanagi to suddenly appear in a male-dominated space of conflict and singlehandedly solve the issue at hand means that she is a subversive figure in what still seems to be a patriarchal society.

Positing such depictions of radically powerful female protagonists at the most introductory sections of its narrative, the film seems to advocate for the revision of conventional power structures, perhaps aligning itself with the political interests of second and third wave feminism. However, I argue that the film ultimately works in precisely the opposite direction via its containment of Kusanagi as a maternal figure in a pseudo-marital relationship with the Puppet Master. Diegetically, the film seems to embody late 20th century feminist projects of reimagining gender, but the cinematic and extradiegetic storytelling involved in the film undermine such ambitious readings, neutering its protagonist's political potentials to complicate our understandings of our gendered, embodied existence.

This essay will explore the ways in which *Ghost in the Shell* constructs its central cyborg figure, in order to provide a case study for one of the principal tenets of cyberfeminism: that technology opens up for politically motivated theorists a realm of prospects and consequences. In order to set the scene for the analysis of the film, I will explore Donna J. Haraway's post-humanist agenda, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" (1985). In this essay, Haraway describes the cyborg, an amalgamated entity of machine and organism, as a figure that encapsulates our embodied existence in an increasingly technologizing

society. What Haraway sees in the image of the cyborg is its potential to call out for better imaginations for who cyborgs are capable of being in the future; in other words, it compels readers to engage in the political activity of scrapping (and carefully building) social boundaries. Regarding this central tenet of Haraway's manifesto, I ask in what ways Kusanagi could or could not be an example of Harawayan cyborgs.

The overarching contention of this paper is that Kusanagi can in fact be understood as such, but the narrative structure of the film is built in such a fashion that it puts the radical cyborg in the conservative position of pursuing dialectical wholeness. In this film, the cyborg, whose symbolic power is predicated on the plurality of her identity, is rendered whole through her conjoinment with another force. This operation is three-fold: the film codes its narrative conclusion, the mental amalgamation of Kusanagi and the Puppet Master, in the language of mythology, heterosexual marriage, and psychoanalytic self-discovery. To delineate the specifics of how the film disarms the cyborg as a metaphor for hybrid subjectivities, I will consult Karen Cadora on her analysis of female characters in US cyberpunk novels. Here, I lay out the premise that Kusanagi's status as a cyborg does afford her a certain freedom from oppressive social paradigms, in this case conventional conceptions of femininity and its relationship to bodies. Then, I will discuss the ways in which Kusanagi is subsequently contained in the rhetoric of wholeness by tracing the narrative trajectory of the film. At its most successful, this analysis will attest for Haraway's less utopian yet equally important assertion, that in imagining future subjectivities, we also risk the possibility of reinscribing the very boundaries that we seek to eradicate.

“A Manifesto for Cyborgs”: A Critique on Euro-American Epistemology

In “A Manifesto for Cyborgs,” Haraway provides a feminist agenda that challenges the symbolic potency of the organic female body in feminist discourse, an attempt that she

describes as blasphemous because of her irreverence towards the very image thought to unite women in an all-encompassing if monolithic “women’s experience.” Positioning her project against second wave feminism as “an ironic political myth” that nonetheless stays faithful to its goals, she presents the cyborg as an alternative metaphor that better accounts for the hybridized existence of contemporary individuals (324). Haraway’s argument is specific to the late twentieth century, a point in history where technological advancements have exposed the arbitrariness of what can be defined as human or non-human. She highlights three important binaries that Euro-American scientific culture has fabricated in order to privilege human existence over other entities—human versus animal, organism versus machine, and physical versus non-physical—all of which have been breached due to industrialization and scientific progress. In such historical contexts, the cyborg serves as a versatile metaphor for the very transgression of these constructed boundaries, a phenomenon that Haraway encourages to embrace as a site of transformation and excitement as well as risk.

How this techno-scientifically oriented image of the cyborg also has the potential to address issues of gender is coded within Haraway’s description of past trends in Euro-American feminist discourse. Early in her manifesto, Haraway states that the cyborg is a post-gender being whose “replication is uncoupled from organic reproduction” (325). Here, she distinguishes the cyborg from the organic human by highlighting reproduction, a bodily factor that Western science has positioned as the determining aspect of what gender one is assigned at birth. By describing the birth of cyborgs in terms of replication rather than reproduction, Haraway breaks free of the Beauvoirian belief that our bodies are inherently sexed in accordance to the type of reproductive organs that we possess.

Referencing more recent feminist texts, Haraway explains her stake in second wave feminism as a counterpoint to ecofeminism, a strain of feminism that privileges nature as opposed to artifacts. In the concluding section to her article, Haraway critiques Susan Griffin,

Audre Lorde, and Adrienne Rich by underscoring their rhetorical reliance on the organic as opposed to the technological (343). What Haraway seems to mean by “the organic” are bodies, the identities of which these scholars validate and differentiate from one another based on the purported “naturalness” of said bodies . Then, Haraway’s cyborg undermines the rhetorical power of the organic body, and in this context the organic female body specifically, to assert its innate authenticity, because it is a reminder of the fact that the once-independent categories of organism and technology have already begun to cross-contaminate. However, this is not to say that Haraway’s aim is to legitimize her project by pitting her theoretical frameworks against those of preeminent feminists; rather, she explains that her political aims as a feminist are congruent with the ones upheld by the three writers. Sketching out a joint project of imagining hybrid identities, she advocates for a feminism that will account for the multi-faceted realities of women living under racism and misogyny.

For the purposes of this essay, it is important to note the technicalities of Haraway’s comparison between her own technophilic cyberfeminism and spiritual ecofeminism, implemented through the juxtaposition of cyborgs and goddesses. If Haraway’s metaphor for a technoscientifically hybridized identity is a cyborg, her alternate metaphor for spiritual ecofeminism is the goddess, which is fitting considering its long-term role as a “common landmark” for feminists looking “toward a return to ‘the natural’” (Lykke 23). While subsequent writings on Haraway’s manifesto identify these two figures as symbols standing in for two different schools of feminism, Haraway herself aligns the goddess with Biblical narratives of an original wholeness to which the goddess must ultimately return.

This comparison between goddesses and Biblical ideology necessitates elaboration on why exactly Haraway puts the goddess in such a parallel. This is especially so because Haraway's critique of wholeness is encapsulated in her rejection of the goddess; she ends the “Manifesto” with the assertion that “she would rather be a cyborg than a goddess” (349).

Haraway enunciates throughout the “Manifesto” that her cyborg stands in opposition to the goddess and associates the latter with wholeness, but how exactly? What does she mean by wholeness anyway?

Haraway unravels her critique of wholeness in short segments that she disperses across the “Manifesto”. In her first problematization of the term, she writes:

The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-Oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic whole-ness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense; [a story which] depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother from who all humans must separate, the task of individual development and of history, the twin potent myths inscribed most powerfully for us in psychoanalysis and Marxism. (325)

For Haraway, narratives of original wholeness are a locus of subordination in which fragmented—that is, deriving from multiple origins—subjectivities are rendered damaged or incomplete. Her usage of the term “fragmented,” as opposed to her alternative terminology “hybrid,” underscores the pervasiveness of the assumption that the normal state of subjectivity is singular; if one assumes multiple identities, one’s identity is *broken* into fragments that collectively represent its plurality. Haraway identifies these narratives in psychoanalysis and Marxism, two of the most influential schools of thought to influence Euro-American academic discourse. Thus, her “Manifesto” is not only a critique of preceding trends in US feminism, but also of the general trajectory that Western academia has taken.

Haraway's association of goddesses with Biblical narratives can be understood in terms of her explication of Christianity, especially in relation to the persistent patterns identifiable in Euro-American epistemology. She suggests that in addition to the two examples raised above,

Christianity is yet another example of narratives that promote a return to the allegedly primordial state of wholeness. While not explicitly stated, critiques of Biblical narratives are coded into the “Manifesto” through its veneration of cyborgs as a postmodern being:

The relationships for forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchical domination, are at issue in the cyborg world. Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein’s monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden; i.e., through the fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished whole, a city and cosmos. The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the Oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust. (326)

Clearly, Haraway is establishing parallels between psychoanalysis and the Bible; both the phallic mother and the Garden of Eden represent an original state of being that becomes lost through the acquisition of knowledge. In accordance with her critique of wholeness earlier in the “Manifesto”, she positions the cyborg as the figure that could potentially lead Euro-American academic discourse out of its epistemological quagmire.

When Haraway juxtaposes the goddess to the Biblical god, she is referring not so much to the myriad goddesses as they stand in actual mythologies as to the goddess as the symbol of spiritual ecofeminism. In one of her few direct references to the goddess, Haraway writes that with the rapid acceleration of technoscientific advancements in the 20th century, “We cannot go back ideologically or materially. It’s not just that “god” is dead; so is the goddess” (335). In establishing the analogy between the death of “god,” the marker of a substantial ideological shifts, and that of the “goddess,” the signifier of material changes, she suggests that the goddess in this context is the one worshipped by feminists advocating for an eco-friendly politics. Noteworthy is the language used to explain their agenda. Introducing the

heated debate between cyberfeminists and ecofeminists, Nina Lykke describes the general trajectory of spiritual ecofeminists as endeavoring “toward a *return* to ‘the natural’” (23, italics mine). Lykke’s diction suggests that in positioning “the natural” as the ideal origin to strive towards, ecofeminism reinstates the binary between nature and artificiality. Hence Haraway’s dismissal of goddesses: they are conjured on the narrative of wholeness, and its by-product, the hierarchical binary between nature and artifice, that she seeks to escape.

Haraway’s rejection of goddesses, in turn, establishes the significance of cyborgs as a metaphorical vehicle of escape. Haraway’s association between cyborgs and science fiction situates the figure largely in the near future, thus making them a point of inquiry for reimagining the sociopolitical boundaries that are so central to the construction of our own identities. By anchoring the cyborg in fiction as opposed to our immediate environments, Haraway successfully portrays the cyborg as a figure that will aid our imaginations as we write our own manifestos for the future. As Haraway states, “who cyborgs will be is a radical question”; this is so because the material yet-to-be-here-ness of the cyborg encourages us to envision the most utopian version of how they/we could manifest themselves/ourselves and shape society accordingly (327). At the same time, this capacity for sociopolitical reimagination means that we also risk the possibility of further entrenching oppressive social norms through picturing the cyborgs. Addressing this two-fold potential of the figure, Haraway calls for responsible negotiations between scientific technology and its social implications in order to productively reconfigure social boundaries.

Will the Real Cyborg Please Stand Up? Kusanagi as a Harawayan Cyborg

Haraway’s production of “an ironic political myth” instigated in feminist discourse and science fiction studies a search for the Harawayan cyborg, the subversive icon that would aid and nourish our reimaginings of a hybridized identity (324). For some scholars, this

search proved to be utterly unfruitful. In her survey of cyborg representations dating from *Frankenstein* (1818, Shelley) to *RoboCop* (1987, Verhoeven), Anne Balsamo goes so far as to refute the central tenet of Haraway's manifesto, that cyborgs call forth a skepticism towards and a consequent restructuring of social boundaries, such as those of gender. For Balsamo, cyborgs are already present in the archives of science fiction, and in a deeply gendered way at that; therefore, cultural representations of cyborgs reproduce restrictive gender stereotypes rather than destabilize them. Reflecting on her cynical commentary on preexisting depictions of cyborgs, she concludes that in order to honor fiction as a potential site of feminist identity production, "we need to search for cyborg images which work to disrupt stable oppositions" (156). Twenty-five years from the initial publication of Balsamo's article, this continues to be an ongoing search due to the unfaltering popularity of cyborgs in science fiction, and more specifically, in the context of this essay, one wonders if *Ghost in the Shell* is home to such figures.

In some regards, Kusanagi, whose cyborg subjectivity the film explores through her interactions with the Puppet Master incident, can be described as the very cyborg that Balsamo seeks in science fiction. Karen Cadora's reading of US cyberpunk novels is enlightening here. In her article "Feminist Cyberpunk," Cadora identifies a female-oriented undercurrent in the mostly hypermasculine cyberpunk tradition. By "tradition," Cadora means the line of science fiction novels that was written or inspired by the contributors of the cyberpunk movement, the most frequently cited authors of which are William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Lewis Shiner, John Shirley, and Rudy Rucker (Murphy 15). In a supportive if exclusive environment, they collectively generated the sci-fi subgenre later recognized as cyberpunk, identifiable by their thematic occupation with two different kinds of invasions: "body invasion," which refer to the varying levels of body modification ranging from cosmetic surgery to genetic modification, and "mind invasion," the umbrella term for

technology that challenges the dichotomy between humans and machines (Murphy 18).

While these characteristics call to mind the “Manifesto” in its attentiveness to transgressed boundaries, the genre itself is uninterested in advocating for Haraway’s political investments. On the contrary, it has been criticized for its thematic alliance with ’80s conservatism, more specifically its veneration of the individualistic American male who “employs his particular performative mastery against a demonized and feminized Other” (Nixon 226). Contrary to its authors’ description of the genre as the political cutting edge of science fiction, this line of early cyberpunk is conservative in its ultimate promotion of male-centered, white American hegemony.

Cadora similarly castigates the genre for its unfulfilled promises of subversive narratives, but her overriding interest is to locate in cyberpunk a potential for feminist interventions. Rebutting earlier dismissals of the cyberpunk genre as an inherent boys’ club, Cadora addresses certain novels, mainly those written in the late 80’s and 90’s, that deviate from heteronormative narratives of male cyberpunks whose expertise is to penetrate and exercise control over a feminized computer matrix. A topic that she raises as part of this project is the status of bodies in feminist cyberpunk novels, that is, the female protagonists of these novels are often tasked with confronting their embodiedness in ways that the characters of traditional cyberpunk novels are not. In particular, many impoverished female characters turn to prostitution or surrogate motherhood in order to provide for their own sustenance, and are thus tethered to their organic bodies (364). These characters, however, are not the main protagonists of these novels; the protagonists, on the other hand, devise alternative methods of survival by exercising their techno-scientific competency. Therefore, Cadora implies that these feminist cyberpunk novels simultaneously address issues of class and intersectionality while positing technology as a potential stepping-stone to liberation.

Arguably, *Ghost in the Shell* follows a similar trajectory by characterizing Kusanagi as a female-identifying cyborg who evades oppression through her technological and combative expertise. Throughout the film, Kusanagi is shown engaging in cybernetic espionage and hand-to-hand combat as part of her duties as a public security agent, both activities of which are enabled by Kusanagi's bodily status as an entirely cyborgized individual. It is implied early on in the film that Kusanagi's occupation affords her financial independence from her family or partner, if such are present at all. At the end of the opening credits, we get a brief view of Kusanagi's apartment where she presumably lives alone (see Fig.3). Visible from her window is a panorama of her residing city, the picturesqueness of which suggests her capacity to afford living in a coveted area. In short, Kusanagi's cyborg body enables her to flourish professionally and financially, and this apparent celebration of the mechanical female body disrupts the all-too-common dichotomy between *man*-made masculinity and nature-oriented femininity.

Towards a Dialectical Wholeness: Psychoanalysis, Mythology, and Marriage in *Ghost in the Shell*

Despite the film's positioning of the cyborg body as the source of independence, it doubly depicts it as the source of anxiety. In fact, the driving narrative of the film, Kusanagi's identity crisis, is predicated on the conditions of her own body. Furthermore, perhaps not surprisingly, the events leading up to the film's conclusion are punctuated with psychoanalytic imagery that visually conveys Kusanagi's yearning for an ontologically stable, singular identity.

In one of the first possible references to psychoanalysis, the film provides at the end of its opening credits an extreme close-up of Kusanagi's face as she wakes up in her own apartment (see Fig.4). Positioned in the lower left corner of the shot is her right hand, the

forefronting of which draws attention to the fact that Kusanagi is looking at it. In this miniscule sequence, Kusanagi opens her eyes, identifies her right hand, flexes it, and sits up on her mattress over a span of approximately eight seconds. This section of the film is radically slow-paced compared to the opening credits, which depicts Kusanagi undergoing maintenance, presumably following the mission depicted at the beginning of the film. Then, it seems that the film places special emphasis on Kusanagi's gesture of staring at her hand.

I argue that this specific detail of the film evokes Lacanian psychoanalysis because it closely resembles "hand regard," a term used to describe infants' recognition of their own hands. This occurs at around two or three months of age, a period in which infants begin to understand their embodied selves by interacting with their own bodies (Rochat 39). The concept harks back to the Lacanian mirror stage, as it similarly situates in early stages of child development the identification of an embodied selfhood.

Moreover, the film situates the hand regard sequence immediately after metaphorical childbirth, tracing early stages of child development. Of importance here are the opening credits of the film, which depict Kusanagi under maintenance in a spectacle of CGI and gratuitous nudity¹. In this sequence, Kusanagi is not so much fixed as rebuilt from her bare bones; the step-by-step exposition of the repairing process reveals the cyborgian materiality of Kusanagi's "shell," the film's vocabulary for an artificial body to which users can tether their minds or "ghosts". In one of the last procedures made to her body, Kusanagi is thrown into a tankful of liquid, in which she floats in a rough approximation of the fetal position (see Fig.5 and 6). Elevated out of the pool to dry, Kusanagi is *reborn* into subsequent consciousness and therefore must rediscover her newly replicated body. Thus, the film places

¹ In his comparative reading of *Ghost in the Shell* and the "Manifesto," Carl Silvio discusses the film's complicity with the male gaze.

Kusanagi's re-identification with her own body directly after her rebirth, effectively recreating the developmental trajectory described by Lacan.

Consider, for a moment, how strange the film's apparent references to psychoanalysis are. Why would it make sense to employ psychoanalytic imagery to tell a story about cyborgs, when the theory was originally consulted upon to explain the physiological conditions of organic humans? My answer to this question is because the conceptual underpinnings of psychoanalysis outline what Euro-American scientific traditions once defined as the normative human experience, and drawing on them allows the film to highlight Kusanagi's problematization of her own hybrid status. Haraway identifies in the phallic mother a narrative of an original wholeness and a flawed subjectivity that is inadvertently separated from it, but I argue that Lacanian mirror stage also comprises such narratives. For Lacan, the mirror stage is a site of identification and alienation; an infant recognizes their body as a unified whole through their identification with the mirror image, but in so doing becomes alienated from their fragmented body when the image comes to replace the self. In other words, "the sense of a unified self is acquired at the price of this self being an-other, that is, our mirror image" (Homer 25). While not built on the idea of a primordial wholeness, Lacan's ideas pertaining to the mirror stage suggest an inherently flawed human existence that wishes for and (mis)identifies with something more complete. Arguably, in its evocation of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the film nonetheless signals its holistic undertones from its very beginning.

The film begins to more concretely problematize the hybridity of cyborg bodies through the Puppet Master incident, in which an anonymous culprit manipulates cyborg civilians by hacking them, reducing them to not much more than a life-size puppet (therefore the moniker "the Puppet Master"). According to the logic of the film, cyborgs are ontologically vulnerable because their cybernetically wired bodies make their minds

increasingly susceptible to external threats. This threat is embodied by the Puppet Master, who targets and incapacitates three victims, all of whom Kusanagi meets in person after they have been attacked.

Perhaps the most significantly harmed of the three, the final victim presents possibilities of mind invasion in the film's description of his ill-fated life journey. The final victim is a garbage truck driver who believes himself to have acquired spyware from the second. The film describes the character's motivation for circulating the presumably spyware-laden floppy disk around the city in detail; he explains that he is attempting to reconnect with his estranged wife and daughter. However, investigations led by Sector 9 reveal that memories of his immediate family are in fact mere illusions, the product of the Puppet Master's modifications to his externalized memory. By detailing this incident in the first thirty minutes of its narrative, the film encourages audiences to understand cyborg bodies through an unfortunate case study that suggests a correlation between cyborgization and the threat to individual subjectivity. In this context, the hybridity of cyborg bodies is not so much a site of reimagination as an issue to be resolved.

In a pivotal scene following the exposition of the Puppet Master's offenses, Kusanagi confirms that she is undergoing an existential crisis, thus defining the narrative scope of the film; it is about Kusanagi's search for a more stable version of herself. Here, Kusanagi is shown scuba diving in the city's adjacent inlet, the composition of which also brings to mind the Lacanian mirror stage (see Fig.7). In a subsequent conversation with her colleague Batou, who suggests that she retire if her occupation is so mentally taxing she can only destress via the potentially life-threatening activity of diving, she says:

草薙:人間が人間であるための部品が決して少なくないように、自分が自分であるためには驚くほど多くのものが必要な。…あたしの電腦がアクセスできる膨大な情報や

ネットの広がり、それら全てがあたしの一部であり、あたしという意識そのものを生み出し、そして同時に、あたしをある限界に制約し続ける...

KUSANAGI. In the same way there are so many parts to what makes a human human, there's a surprising number of things that I need in order to be myself... The vast amount of information and the expanse of the internet that my cybernetics allow me access to—these are all part of me, they produce the conscience that is me, and at the same time, they confine me to a certain breaking point.² (31:41-32:18)

Kusanagi's comments on the necessity of her own corporeal environment is a reference to her institutional relationship with her own body. According to Kusanagi, her current shell is a high-end model afforded to her by Sector 9 as a professional equipment she can and must wear at all times. In the case of retirement, she would be obliged to return her own body to the government as well as have classified information erased from her memory. However, Kusanagi feels that the physical and informatic mobility that her shell enables her has come to define who she is as an individual. She is in a double bind where her embodied identity is bound to her occupation as a public security officer, the duties of which reveal to her just how dubious the concept of cyborg subjectivity is. For Kusanagi, this navigation between the potential risks of cybernetic technology and her own identification with it registers as a state of crisis, something she wishes to evade.

Ghost in the Shell becomes increasingly vocal in its objection to fragmentation as it progresses towards its climax, in which Kusanagi inadvertently merges with the Puppet Master and becomes a cybernetic life form of her own. Leading up to the climax is the sudden revelation that the Puppet Master is in fact not an unidentified cyber terrorist, but

² All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

rather a self-proclaimed organism made of mass data. If the film has already discussed the broken dichotomy between organism and machine through its depictions of cyborgs, the Puppet Master presents and embodies the latter counterpart of Haraway's third binary, that of the material and the immaterial.

How the Puppet Master straddles the material/immaterial binary is evident in the film's audiovisual depictions of the character. The first physical manifestation of the Puppet Master occurs in a scene at what seems to be a Sector 9 affiliated lab. As Batou summarizes, Sector 9 is currently inspecting a shell that has escaped from a factory owned by the leading shell manufacturer Megatech Inc. following a hacking incident that has caused the factory line to start producing shells on its own. The destroyed cyborg torso that sits before them allegedly houses an original ghost in its cognitive system, and it is precisely this ghost that turns out to be the Puppet Master. What is important to note here is that the blonde torso that houses the character is consistently present in the film until its ultimate annihilation during its climax. The film continues to provide a material representation of the Puppet Master, despite the fact that he makes his very first appearance as an intangible, invisible being, quite literally as if he were a ghost haunting Kusanagi. The Puppet Master emerges for the first time during the aforementioned scene on the dive boat. Kusanagi and Batou's debate is interrupted by an anonymous voice reciting a section from the First Epistle to the Corinthians. The film suggests after the climax that this voice belonged to the Puppet Master, who at the time did not have access to a material body to reside in. While providing an instantly recognizable visual marker for the character, the film also signals that he exists outside of his corporeal presence through the employment of such audio effects.

Interestingly, the Puppet Master's double status as material and immaterial being does not conflate these supposedly binary modes of existence. Rather, the film reinforces the dichotomization of these two ideas by mapping them onto the Christian binary of the body

and the soul. The title of the film, which it shares with the original *manga* series by Shirow Masamune, is named after Gilbert Ryle's description of the Cartesian dualism of mind and body, famously stated in his 1949 book *Concept of Mind*. While Ryle employs this comparison in order to delineate the faultiness of Descartes's conceptualization of the human mind (Britannica), the *Ghost in the Shell* franchise collectively appropriates the key phrase from Ryle's book in order to render, acritically, a world in which "ghosts" inhabit the machine that is the "shell." Accordingly, the Puppet Master's seemingly effortless transition from one body to another mirrors the Cartesian and associatively Christian assumption that the mind and body are in a relationship where the former inhibits the latter without their boundaries ever being breached.

The film's sustained preservation of the material/immaterial dichotomy is crucial to my reading of its climax. To provide a more detailed overview of the events that occur within this specific section of the film, and to contextualize it within the film's earlier foreshadowing of an international diplomacy crisis: after the Puppet Master asserts his existence as a cybernetic lifeform to the members of Sector 9, he is kidnapped by the members of Sector 6, the public security agency's foreign diplomacy team. It turns out that the Puppet Master had emerged from an illegal espionage program created by a Sector 6 affiliated programmer, and faced with the Puppet Master's conspicuous attacks on foreign government officials, they are now motivated to expunge all evidence of their attempt at spying. Kusanagi, while attempting to arrest the Sector 6 kidnappers for assault, also hopes to converse with the Puppet Master to resolve her mysterious sense of kinship with the figure. When Kusanagi convinces Batou to wire her to the kidnapped torso, the Puppet Master seizes control over Kusanagi's shell and explains that his goal had been to reach Kusanagi and merge with her, after which the Puppet Master would achieve mortality and reproductive capabilities. Before Kusanagi has a chance to make a choice, enemy aircraft start firing at

them and the two unite just in time to avoid complete erasure. They lose their bodies, but in turn achieve a new form of immaterial existence, symbolized by the image of what seems to be a falling angel (see Fig.7).

Of importance here is the film's elaborate side-stepping of broken binaries. Prior to this point in the film, Kusanagi expresses her anxieties about the embodied precarity of her own subjectivity, but her sudden conglomeration with the Puppet Master consequently enables her to abandon her own shell, the site of worrisome cross-contaminations between organism and machine, self and other. Furthermore, the film positions her next getaway, the realm of immateriality, in a stable binary against materiality. The climax and following resolution of the film thus carries Kusanagi from a state of contested hybridity to singular security. The narrative conclusions of the film, therefore, avoids the question of fragmented subjectivity rather than let Kusanagi arrive at her own answers.

Additionally, the film frames its refusal of hybrid subjectivities in imagery that signal a return to the original state of wholeness. In part, this is accomplished through the usage of Biblical motifs as alluded to earlier. Susan Napier further confirms the film's heavy reliance on biblical and mythical motifs. Drawing on a comparison between the film and its cyberpunk and neo-noir precursor *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982), Napier decodes the complicated, overloaded plot of *Ghost in the Shell* as a story structured around four "falls." According to Napier, these falls are comparable to the biblical falls of the fallen angels in the protagonists' shared desires to find spiritual meaning in life. Napier also points to Buddhist and Shintoist motifs embedded in the film by comparing the final amalgamation of Kusanagi and the Puppet Master to the Buddhist state of Nirvana or the Shintoist tale of *Amaterasu* the Sun Goddess, the latter of which Oshii confirms in a 1996 interview. Whereas Haraway

asserts that she would rather become a cyborg than be a goddess, Kusanagi *becomes* the goddess, thus reversing the “Manifesto”’s rallying cry for hybridity.

In a slightly overlapping approach, the film also employs the vocabulary of marriage in order to signify Kusanagi’s return to a dialectical wholeness. Preexisting writings on the film discuss this in terms of reproduction; for example, Carl Silvio discusses the film’s depiction of Kusanagi as a maternal figure whose partially organic body serves as a vehicle through which the Puppet Master produces his own offspring. As Silvio confirms in his article, this idea of Kusanagi as a maternal figure (as opposed to a paternal one, for example) is strange, because if she were a post-gender being as posited by Haraway’s “Manifesto,” the attribution of any sort of gender onto Kusanagi would be solely arbitrary. The reasons as to why the Puppet Master should regard Kusanagi as a “specifically *feminine* corporeality” is not supported by the diegetic realities of Kusanagi’s life, but rather by the formalistic aspects of the film set up to render Kusanagi as the object of the audience’s gaze (68). Additionally, Silvio critiques the Puppet Master’s description of how exactly their procreation will take place. During his conversation with Kusanagi at the film’s climax, the Puppet Master asks her to “bear [his] offspring onto the net itself,”³ a strange statement considering how the immaterial conditions of their new existence cannot be accounted for by the material notion of “bearing” life (68). Then, during its climax, the film projects the familiar narrative of motherhood onto the cyborg, undermining their capacity to break free of the societal obligations inscribed onto organic flesh. The film, while providing Kusanagi with a way to opt out of her corporeal existence, also reinscribes the supposed centrality of her corporeal existence by characterizing her as a maternal body.

³ Translation by Carl Silvio.

Intriguingly, Oshii describes these depictions of reproduction within the film as a “marriage” rather than what the characters understand it to be, whether it be an attempt at cross-generational survival or a way to transcend material existence. While not explicitly stated in the narrative of the film itself, Oshii communicates this idea via the film’s main musical theme, “謡,” or “Chant” in English. The lyrics are:

吾が舞えば
 麗し女酔いにけり
 吾が舞えば
 照る月響むなり
 夜這いに神天下りて
 夜は明け
 鶴鳥鳴く
 遠神恵賜
 遠神恵賜
 遠神恵賜

When I dance, the beautiful maiden becomes drunk. When I dance, the shining moon echoes. On this wedding day, gods will descend from the heavens and the night bird will sing at dawn. The distant gods shall bless us.

This song makes two appearances in the film, firstly during the film’s opening credits and later during an interlude halfway into the film, when the “camera,” so to speak, cuts to different areas of the city for over three minutes (4:06-8:22, 32:52-36:20). Because both the opening credits and the interlude show Kusanagi in action, one is inclined to think that the 吾, or the “I” of the main theme’s lyrics, refers to her. However, considering the climax, these lyrics could also be interpreted as subtle foreshadowing: that the mental amalgamation

of Kusanagi and the Puppet Master signals the advent of a god-like figure that reigns in a higher order. Importantly, this final merging is referred to as a 夜這い (*yobai*), which refers to a medieval form of courtship or the marriage that results from it.

Furthermore, in a 1996 interview with cultural critic Ueno Toshiya and screen writer Ito Kazunori, Oshii reveals that he had originally envisioned the film's climax to resemble a Christian wedding.

押井:もともとはもっとロマンチックになるはずだったんです。ロマンチックなものを目指してみようと思ったし、結局はラブロマンスだから、教会も欲しいなと思ったのと、博物館を教会に見立てられるんじゃないかと思って、あと狙撃してる時に最後の一撃で装甲板が鳴り響いて鐘が鳴るっていう。

Oshii, on Kusanagi's confrontation with the Puppet Master: Originally, [the scene] was supposed to be more romantic. I wanted to try something romantic, and because this film is a romance after all, I wanted there to be a church.⁴ I also thought I could make the museum stand in for a sort of church and make the last bullet bouncing off the armor plate the wedding bell. (Oshii 72)

⁴ The association between church and romance may not be obvious to the English-speaking reader, because the relative ubiquity of Christian institutions within Anglophone cultures associates church with many different aspects of life. In Japan, however, there is a strong cultural association between churches, Catholic and Protestant, and marriage. In a survey held by Recruit Holdings, the respondents of which were some 3,596 readers of the wedding magazine *Zexy* who had held wedding ceremonies between April 2020 and March 2021, 51.5% answered that they held Christian weddings, the other common options being Shintoist, civil, and Buddhist weddings (116). At the same time, only 1% of the Japanese population describes themselves as holding Christian beliefs as of 2021 (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 35). These numbers outline a situation in which the Japanese public comes into contact with Christianity and its spatial venue, the church, only through wedding ceremonies. Hence Oshii's equation of heterosexual romance and church.

To contextualize what Oshii is discussing here, there are three parties involved in this scene: the Puppet Master, the Sector 9 agents including Kusanagi and Batou, and personnel from Sector 6 who have taken the immobile Puppet Master to an abandoned museum in order to eradicate him and died in the process. Kusanagi and the Puppet Master negotiate, and at the very last moment implement, their unification as Sector 6 aircraft arrive above the museum and start firing at the building, architecture and all, in order to assassinate the Puppet Master.

The film reveals evidence that Oshii realized this idea. Of particular interest are the sound effects used at the moment of the shooting. When the film cues a shot of the blonde torso being destroyed by gunfire, it represents the force of the artillery not only through explosive sound effects, but also via a louder sound comparable to that of a large bell. This shot in fact depicts the death of Kusanagi as she was previously known to her colleagues, because shortly after she is wired to the torso, the Puppet Master dislocates his and Kusanagi's respective ghosts to switch bodies. The blonde temporary shell has been annihilated and so has Kusanagi's usual shell. Then, this shot represents a point of no return in which Kusanagi's two modes of existence, mind and body, have been destroyed, and she can only survive by means of merging with the Puppet Master. If, as explained in the interview, the sound effects outlined here are designed to evoke Christian marriage, the film indeed likens the amalgamation of the two characters to a wedding ceremony.

Now, I return to a section of the "Manifesto" in which Haraway declares that cyborgs, in all their hybrid, ungendered corporeality, do not achieve completion through heterosexual coupling. She writes that "unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden; i.e., through the fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished whole, a city and cosmos" (326). Here, Haraway refers to Frankenstein's monster, who famously threatens his creator Victor Frankenstein to create a female monster like himself so that he can live in the company of a

heterosexual mate. As Haraway identifies, this plot point exemplifies a narrative pattern in which characters are “saved” through their involvement in a heterosexual relationship. The narrative trajectory of the film parallels this in uncanny similarity. In the same way that it depicts post-amalgamation Kusanagi as a transcendental figure in the language of mythology and the Bible, the film opposes the “Manifesto” by making Kusanagi do precisely what the “Manifesto” says she will not do: find solace in heterosexual coupling.

In the final section of the film in which post-amalgamation Kusanagi reflects on her new status as a material and immaterial cybernetic being, she expresses a matter-of-fact acceptance of the changes that took place in the aftermath of the Puppet Master incident. This occurs at Batou’s safehouse, where he has restored Kusanagi using a shell of a young girl he acquired at the black market. When Batou asks whether or not the Puppet Master currently resides within Kusanagi, she answers that he is asking the wrong question.

草薙:いつか海の上で聞いた声、覚えている？あの言葉の前にはこんなくだりがあるの。

「童の時は語ることも童の如く、思うことも童の如く、論ずることも童のごとくなりしが、人となりては童のことを捨てたり。」ここには人形使いと呼ばれたプログラムも少佐と呼ばれた女もいないわ。

KUSANAGI. Do you remember that voice we heard when we were out at sea? There’s a preceding phrase to those words. ‘When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.’⁵ Neither the program called the Puppet Master nor the woman called Major exist anymore.” (1:16:28-1:16:56)

Then, following a short discussion on future rendezvous, Kusanagi embarks on her indefinite journey into the internet, buoyantly wondering where to go next.

⁵ Translations from the New King James Version.

Implicit in Kusanagi's remarks is the belief that her transition into a transcendental being is not a mere transformation but an elevation. Here, Kusanagi quotes the Puppet Master in his invocation of the First Letter to the Corinthians. The 11th verse of Chapter 13, cited above, establishes a clear distinction between child and man by describing the narrator's metamorphosis into manhood, at which point he relinquishes childish things. In this context, maturity is framed as a direct extension of childhood in a narrative of linear progress; once one enters manhood, there is no going back; one can only grow older and wiser. This joint narrative of progress and irreversible change cofunction to connote ascension. Quoting this verse, Kusanagi maps the relationship between child and man onto the one between her past and present selves, implying that she is more satisfied with her current status than her last.

If Kusanagi expresses her contentment through the quotation of the Bible, the film similarly utilizes Biblical passages to fortify its conclusion that Kusanagi's incorporation into a wholeness is indeed a form of salvation. Of importance is the verse following the aforementioned one, which the then-immaterial Puppet Master recites to Kusanagi and Batou as they discuss cyborg ontology on a dive boat.

人形使い: 今我ら鏡以てみる如く見るところ朧なり…

PUPPET MASTER. For now we see in a mirror, dimly⁶... (32:28-32:26)

The Puppet Master trails off mid-sentence, but in its entirety, the verse posits a juxtaposition between the compromised state of things, represented through a mirror, and a subsequent state of clarity which will bring about greater wisdom: "for now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

⁶ Translations from the New King James Version.

When Kusanagi recites the Corinthians in the final scene, the film comes full circle in its psychoanalytic references. Whereas the Puppet Master compares Kusanagi's identity crisis to seeing in the dark, Kusanagi states that she has grown out of it due to her merging with the Puppet Master. Then, the film concludes with Kusanagi transcending the mirror stage. This is supported by the Puppet Master's last-minute explanation of why he chose Kusanagi as his host, which is because he believes he and Kusanagi are alike, almost as if they are mirror images of each other (1:12:22-1:12:30). This remark frames the amalgamation of the two characters as a Lacanian transcendence to wholeness, by which the infant's body and the mirror image converge into an authentic whole that is *not* a misrecognition. Thus, the film concludes its underlying salvation story by means of forming the dialectic of heterosexual coupling and of the infant and the mirror image, opening possibilities for a Brave New World.

“Where Do I Go from Here?”

Thus far, I have critiqued the film's narrative conclusion in a number of ways. I have argued that the film, while providing Kusanagi with a seemingly radical mode of existence, avoids the question of hybrid subjectivities by driving her into a state that presupposes a stable material/immaterial binary. Drawing from motifs present within the “Manifesto,” I underscored the film's reliance on the figure of the goddess, which suggests an incontaminable binary between humans and deity. Additionally, I highlighted how the film forms a dialectical whole of its own by framing the amalgamation of Kusanagi and the Puppet Master as a wedding and a departure from the Lacanian mirror stage. It seems that the film presents a narrative of transformation and transcendence all the while remaining in the familiar circuit of salvation stories.

If the film suggests a way out of the epistemological quagmire of Euro-American scientific culture, it could be through Kusanagi's final departure into the abyss of the internet. The cyborg has been contained in the obsolete narrative of wholeness, but her own narrative extends beyond that which is presented to the audience. Perhaps she will achieve hybridity well after the closing credits are over; we thus reenter the realm of imagination.

Kusanagi's takeoff is instructive to our understandings of and interactions with present-day cyborgs. As we continue to imagine possible renditions of cyborgs in science fiction and in real life, *Ghost in the Shell* marks the political terminus of a certain cyborg in 1995. As much as Kusanagi's final lines are spoken in anticipation of her new life, it is also an invitation to ask how we can negotiate with our immediate discursive moment and the archive underlying it.

Figures

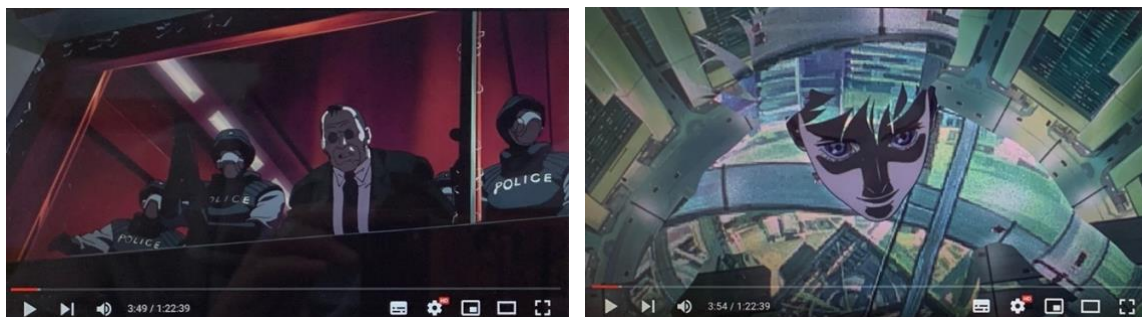


Fig.1 and 2. Kusanagi escapes after executing assassination from Oshii Mamoru, *Ghost in the Shell*, Shochiku, 1995, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDR8Vw0ZY28&t=760s>.

Accessed May 12, 2022.



Fig.3 City views from Kusanagi's apartment from Oshii Mamoru, *Ghost in the Shell*, Shochiku, 1995, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDR8Vw0ZY28&t=760s>. Accessed May 12, 2022.

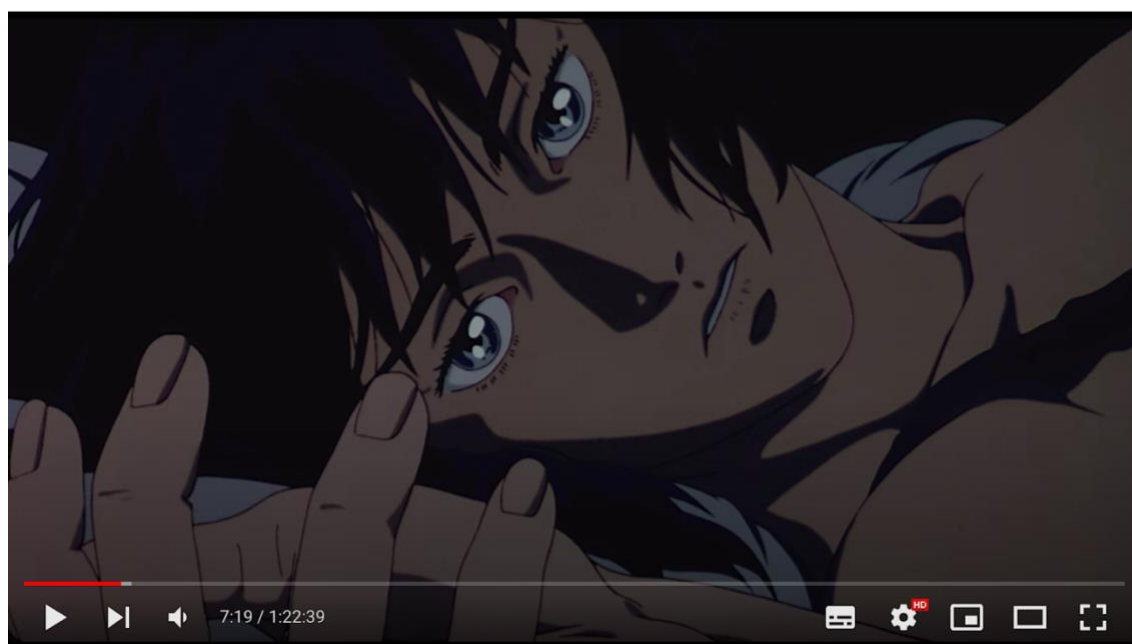


Fig.4 Hand regard moment from Oshii Mamoru, *Ghost in the Shell*, Shochiku, 1995, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDR8Vw0ZY28&t=760s>. Accessed May 12, 2022.

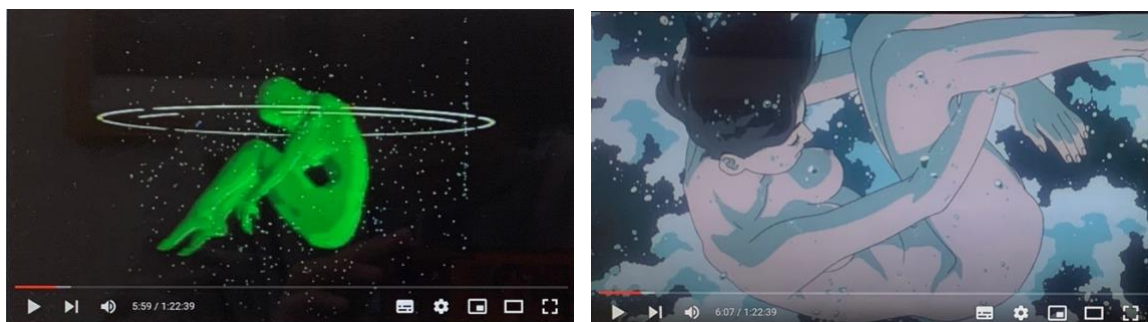


Fig.5 and 6 Kusanagi in an approximation of the fetal position from Oshii Mamoru, *Ghost in the Shell*, Shochiku, 1995, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDR8Vw0ZY28&t=760s>.

Accessed May 12, 2022.

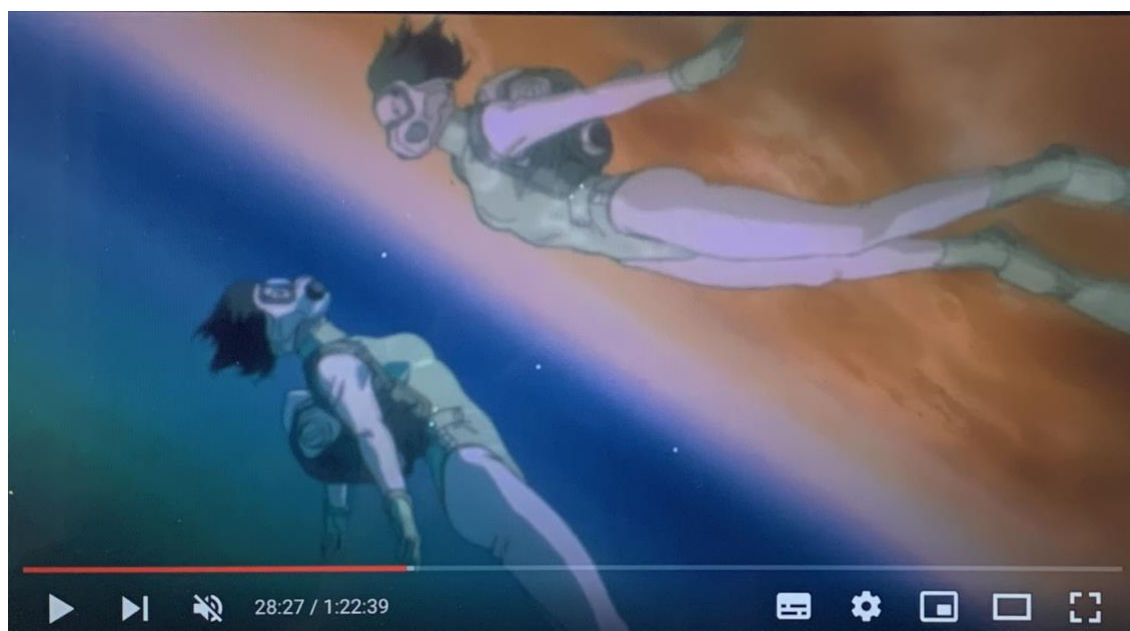


Fig.7 Kusanagi floating towards a mirror image of herself from Oshii Mamoru, *Ghost in the Shell*, Shochiku, 1995, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDR8Vw0ZY28&t=760s>.

Accessed May 13, 2022.



Fig.8 Falling angel from Oshii Mamoru, *Ghost in the Shell*, Shochiku, 1995, _
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDR8Vw0ZY28&t=760s>. Accessed May 12, 2022.

Works Cited

- Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan. 宗教年鑑 [The Almanac of Religion].
- Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan, 2020.
- Balsamo, Anne. "Reading Cyborgs Writing Feminism". *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader*, edited by Gill Kirkup et al., Routledge, 2000, pp.148-157.
- "Bible Gateway Passage: 1 Corinthians 13 - New King James Version." *Bible Gateway*, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+13&version=NKJV>.
- Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Gilbert Ryle". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2 Oct. 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gilbert-Ryle>. Accessed 21 April 2022.
- Cadora, Karen. "Feminist Cyberpunk". *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol.22, No.3, SF-TH Inc., 1995, pp.357-372.
- Chion, Michel. "The Third Reality: In the Mood for Love". *A Companion to Wong Kar-wai, First Edition*, edited by Martha P. Nochimson, John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2016, 462-466.
- Haraway, Donna. "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s". *The Routledge Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, edited by Neil Badmington and Julia Thomas, Routledge, 2008, pp.324-355.
- Homer, Sean. "The Imaginary". *Jacques Lacan*, Routledge, 2005, pp.17-32.
- Lykke, Nina. "Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science". *Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science, Medicine and Cyberspace*, edited by Nina Lykke and Rosi Braidotti, Zed Books Ltd., 1996, pp.13-29.
- Murphy, Graham J. "Chapter 3: The Mirrorshades Collective". *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, editors Anna McFarlane, Graham J. Murphy, and Lars Schmeink, Routledge, 2019, pp. 15-23.

- Napier, Susan J. "Doll Parts: Technology and the Body in *Ghost in the Shell*". *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 103-116.
- Nixon, Nicola. "Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?" *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol.19, No.2, SF-TH Inc., 1992, pp.219-235.
- Oshii, Mamoru, director. *攻殻機動隊 [Ghost in the Shell]*. Shochiku, 1995.
- 一. "映画とは実はアニメーションだった [In Fact, Films are Animation]". *ユリイカ [Eureka]*, interview by Ito Kazunori and Ueno Toshiya, Vol. 28, Seidosha, 1996, pp.50-80.
- Rochat, Phillippe. "The Self in Infancy". *The Infant's World*, Harvard University Press, 2001, pp.28-80.
- Silvio, Carl. "Refiguring the Radical Cyborg in Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*". *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol.26, No. 1, SF-TH Inc., 1999, pp.54-72.
- Zexy Shutoken. *ゼクシィ結婚トレンド調査2021首都圏 [Zexy Marriage Trend Survey 2021, Greater Tokyo]*. Recruit. Co., Ltd., 2021.