

GHOST IN THE SHELL: THE SOUL WITHIN

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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This project involved the research into the 1995 *Ghost in the Shell*. Drawing mainly from Donna Haraway, Judith Butler, Carl Silvio, Jane Chi Hyun Park, Sharalyn Orbaugh, Steven Culver, Steven T. Brown, Julie Clarke, and others, I apply cyborg theory and argue that the main character Motoko Kusanagi is a mechanized laborer for the state, exploited and dehumanized as a Japanese female cyborg who seeks purpose outside of the limitations of Section Nine, and her success in such an endeavor. Most others who have studied *Ghost in the Shell* focus mainly on gender, the body, or the film's general message of technology integrating inevitably with humanity, but not Motoko's individual journey as an exploited tool to a completely free individual, her mechanical nature humanizing her more so than any actual human character. The film shows the similarities between the mechanical and the human, and how dangerous it is to fear technological changes and evolution, to fear that it may escape our control—it already has, and we must embrace it, just as Motoko does, and becomes better for it.

Ghost in the Shell: The Soul Within

Motoko Kusanagi: “You talk about redefining my identity. I want a guarantee that I can still be myself.”

Puppet Master: “There isn't one. Why would you wish to? All things change in a dynamic environment. Your effort to remain what you are is what limits you.”

Ghost in the Shell (GIS) is a massive franchise that is not only globally popular, but critically acclaimed. It has a manga and anime series as well as animated sequels, and, most recently, an American live-action adaptation starring Scarlett Johansson and directed by Rupert Sanders, which has sparked controversy regarding racism and active whitewashing in Hollywood. Beautifully animated with a haunting musical score, the 1995 *GIS* film directed by Mamoru Oshii asks difficult, philosophical questions and does not always deliver clear answers. Motoko Kusanagi’s primary crisis derives from the duality of her existence—to be both organic and mechanical, and thus to belong fully in neither category. She struggles between transcending her body, but also having her identity tied firmly to it, and being judged accordingly by the appearance of her shell, her mass-produced body. She questions if her “ghost” or her soul/mind is genuinely human, or if she is just another programmed robot with nothing inherently organic or human within her essence. Oshii raises uncomfortable and intersectional problems regarding gender, race, disability, exploitation and class, as well as the essence of humanity and how the human interacts and fits in with the nonhuman. I will focus primarily on the 1995 film, but I will briefly mention the American film.

The dualities of mechanistic and human examined in the film create an embrace of the liminal, a theme that reflects the contemporary gender context of Japanese culture as it intersects with American modernity:

As opposed to the terrifying figure of Darth Vader-one of the first memorable cyborgs encountered by children in North America-Japanese children enjoy a wide range of characters that mix human and machinic elements...the various issues at the heart of the new cyborg paradigm are explored in Japanese popular culture perhaps more thoroughly than anywhere else...because of its ..."Frankenstein syndrome"...[which] refers to the tendency of developing countries, those defined as "monstrous" and "raw" by the already developed nations, to see themselves in those same terms. When Japan re-opened to the world in the mid-nineteenth century after more than 250 years of isolation...Japan had replicated every aspect of Anglo-European modernity with astounding success...Nonetheless, after helping the Allied powers defeat Germany in WWI...Japan was once again relegated to the position of anomalous Other...Like the monster in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, rejected first by his creator and eventually by all the other humans...the people of modernizing Japan were forced time and again to recognize that...[this] was not enough to save them from the curse of monstrosity in the eyes of the West. All modern Japanese literature and art has been...produced under the shadow of this recognition, leading to an unusual concern with monstrous or anomalous bodies/subjectivities and various attendant issues...of legitimacy and illegitimacy (based on an improperly resolved oedipal crisis), non-normative forms of reproduction, the hybridity of bodies or subjectivities, and ambiguous or anomalous incarnations of gender/sex/sexuality. (Orbaugh 437-48)

Combining modernity and monstrosity, the film explores how the cyborg is the ultimate mechanization of the human being for pure labor, leaving no room for pleasure, leisure, desire, or anything else that is not profitable for the employer and the State. Motoko is a Japanese female cyborg sporting a feminine body with large breasts, but no vagina. Her body is owned by the police agency Section Nine, and it is completely mechanical besides her ghost. She must obey their orders to keep her current body, which possesses superwoman strength, agility, and abilities such as the capacity to become invisible and communicate with her partner and friend, Batou, via connecting to the net with her ghost. The well-rounded individual is sacrificed to be only a worker. Still, the film dives into mechanization and capitalism, feminist cyborg theory, Japanese history and racial theory, and the liberation of the Other, the hybrid. Exploring the elements of the cyborg figure and cyberpunk, I plan to follow Motoko's journey through oppression to liberation,

tracing the fluctuating status of her humanity as she challenges her creation and self-actualizes. In my view, Oshii uses Motoko Kusanagi as an everyman/woman to peer into our technological near-future, rather than possible science fiction. The film challenges the differences between human and machine, blurring the lines of the vain perception of human superiority, and instead, using technology, cyborgs, and robots as mirrors to see ourselves more clearly—that if we recognize ourselves as machines of the state, we can challenge those conditions.

By incorporating cyborg feminism, I am referring to the idea that blurring boundaries is a source of strength, for women and women of color, and that interstitiality is where true freedom lies. Keeping things in tight constrictions is limiting and how one stays dominated and Othered as a hybrid. Historically bounded categories of identity have limited women, especially nonwhite women, and the disabled by making them Other to the white, abled male norm, marginalizing them and giving them nowhere to belong, not to mention silencing their voices. In the discussion of hybridity, I draw mainly from Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto." She states:

Perhaps, ironically, we can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man, the embodiment of Western Logos. From the point of view of the pleasure of these potent and taboo fusions, made inevitable by the social relations of science and technology, there might indeed be a feminist science...Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism. That is why cyborg politics insists on noise and advocates pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusion of animal and machine. These are the couplings which make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire, the force imagined to generate language and gender, and so subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of 'Western' identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind. (Haraway 310-12)

According to Haraway, the cyborg challenges neat and tidy categories and ways of understanding the world. The cyborg makes things messy and wants it that way; if the state cannot label the cyborg according to the dualities and binaries, then it cannot confine or control the cyborg. Rather than having one's Otherization act as a disability, taking up the posture of Other can be a source of great empowerment and community with more hybrids and Others who could not conform. The Others who do not conform blur boundaries, subverting the authority that induced these strict structures and hierarchies. Thus, in this challenge of boundaries and binaries, the cyborg figure fits into racial, feminist, and disability theory, which all focus on the identity and boundaries of Others in society:

The association between narratives of disability, citizenship, and technology was striking in the media coverage of the London 2012 Paralympic Games...from the opening ceremony speech by Stephen Hawking, a celebratory speech on disability pride...and billboard campaign to promote coverage of the games, called "Meet the Superhumans," featured...a highly physical game of basketball played by muscular men using high-tech set on a darkened court to a backdrop of drum and bass music. Some critics have suggested that this "superhuman" view simply replaced one unrealistic set of cultural assumptions about people with disabilities as subhuman with its polar opposite, the superhuman...and "supercrrips", whose technologised and superhuman power eclipses any sense of human vulnerability, are examples of recurring figure or narrative template often identified by cultural disability critics. In her "Cyborg Manifesto", for example, Donna Haraway depicts the cyborg as a figure of feminist empowerment whose transgressive body disrupts boundaries between organism and machine, male and female. Haraway makes explicit the comparison to disability, and particularly prostheticised bodies...Disability scholars, such as Siebers, have taken issue with Haraway, accusing her of being "so preoccupied with power that she forgets what disability is" and pointing out that for the cyborg, prosthesis always increase abilities, whereas in daily life they are often a source of problems. (Hall)

Motoko, an androgynous Japanese, female cyborg, has been assimilated for the labor of Section Nine, mechanized for work and useless beyond the scope of Section Nine. She has been confined and limited, bound to the purpose for which she was constructed, and

although exploited, she causes great fascination and fear to those around her. Motoko at first is a victim of the capitalist system that exploits her for profit, her body having been made for the state's pleasure and use rather than her own. She at first is alone, even among other cyborgs, but when she merges with the Puppet Master, she not only finds a community with him, but a community with the world, the net. Motoko's journey parallels the way in which women, the queer community, or women of color find community with each other in a world that has labeled them as Other, making them cyborgs by being part of but not "quite" members of their society, subhuman and yet not; Motoko demonstrates that the marginalized can take back those labels and claim them as their own, using their perceived disabilities and differences as a source of strength that marks them as different not for the worse, but for the better.

Furthermore, it is important to remember the exploitation of Motoko's body alongside ableism. Cheyne discusses this in a similar work, a science-fiction novel by Anne McCaffrey, published in 1969, and titled *The Ship Who Sang*. Helva is physically disabled, and it is the custom in her society to either kill disabled individuals or implant their brain in spaceships. Helva's body is held in a metal shell while her consciousness can pilot and control the ship. The issue of Helva "going rogue" arises, but is quickly quashed; the cyborgs in Helva's society have it ingrained in their psyche to prefer their cyborg forms, even when given a choice. Thus, Helva cannot go rogue and possibly escape being used as a ship because she has been conditioned to be a ship. Her struggle with choice in an ableist society shapes her identity, similar to the way Motoko has been influenced in her environment:

Helva trades one subhuman status (disabled person, “thing”) for another (shell-person), with “shell” referring not only to the metal casing but also indicating her status as the mere “shell” of a person...Even in this crucial, possibly life-ending decision, Helva does not have the ability to choose freely. All shell people are conditioned from infancy with “massive doses of shell-psychology” and “subconscious-level instruction” to think and act in particular ways...Any notion of freedom of choice is problematic in this context...Helva rejects the opportunity to acquire a “normal” human body via alien technology...Conditioned almost from birth to prefer their cyborg form, presumably any other kind of existence is virtually unthinkable. (Cheyne 143-45)

This illusion of choice also haunts Motoko Kusanagi. Being a cyborg with a computerized brain and shell body, and being a disabled queer Japanese woman in a society that exploits her, has given her unique perspectives and experiences, shaping her identity and way of thinking. Motoko has limited options: stay with Section Nine forever, find a way to escape, or die. Motoko is treated like a thing, a commodity; a valuable thing, “an Amazon,” a superhuman-object, but nonetheless a thing that does Section Nine’s dirty work.

Gendered Bodies: The Ghost of a Vagina

First, what seems to be the most basic reading of the movie also unfolds and overlaps with other dualities of the film—gender. The film was released in Japan in 1995, and 1996 in America. *GIS* shows the changing views of women and feminism in Japan:

Fifty-eight percent of married women work outside the home in contemporary Japan, but their average wages are 50.3 percent of men's, the lowest among the developed countries. Japanese working women are still expected to leave paid employment when they marry and bear children; then they may reenter the work force as part-time, underpaid workers. Most women also work as traditional wives and mothers, carrying the double burden of productive and reproductive work...in 1992, despite the government's campaign and the child care leave law, the birthrate, at 1.5, hit the nation's lowest record and has kept decreasing. Because a low birthrate cannot maintain a population growth rate, and because women experience ever more difficulties rearing children in a male-dominated society that forces them to become marginal to the labor market, some have regarded the birth statistic as evidence of a women's ‘strike.’ (Watanabe 73)

Japanese women carry the burden of thousands of years of ingrained tradition, including misogyny. This may sound familiar to Western readers. Japanese women now have to do it all—work for less pay and take care of the entire household. However, the birth rates decrease, which may indicate several possibilities. Perhaps less Japanese women are settling down (or are at least waiting) due to work and education and a feeling of security in their independence, and thus simply have less time and inclination to be housewives. Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong with being a housewife, but for Japanese women to face so much pressure to be housewives and mothers, it is quite the revolution for more and more women to assert themselves and prioritize work and school, rather than continue to be forced to stay inside the home. Clearly, Motoko Kusanagi is not a housewife or a mother. Motoko herself even says to the Puppet Master, just before they merge, “But why would you want me? I can’t reproduce!” Motoko points this out, which may at first be seen as Motoko validating that her worth is only correlated to her ability to reproduce, like any good, obedient, traditionally feminine Japanese housewife. But she cannot, and the Puppet Master assures her that this is not what marks her as worthy of existence.

Throughout the film, Motoko’s body is featured. The opening of the film shows Motoko’s naked body in fetal position surrounded by fluid, and showing how she is created, the mechanics beneath the fleshy-looking surface. I debated if this was misogynist fan service, displaying this naked woman’s body at every opportunity, even having Motoko remove her clothes to turn essentially invisible while other cyborgs with the same ability could keep their clothes on.

Yet, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that Motoko, while displayed naked, sometimes without her human-looking skin, is not being sexualized, posed compromisingly, or shown as sexually available and vulnerable. She does not bend over to reveal cleavage, nor is her outfit torn or shredded strategically while fighting. There are two sides to this non-sexualization. My first knee-jerk reaction was to say that this is feminist, to have a non-sexualized woman running around naked. The camera does linger on her, but not in a hungry way to suit to male gaze, but a here-I-am and in-your-face way; this was her body, and she was not shy, she was not ashamed, and there was no taboo or shock in viewing her body. It simply is. As Yuen says:

Yet because Major Kusanagi is presented in a "perfect" female body (often sans clothes), she can be criticized... as a commercial object for the male gaze...the film remains confined to a Cartesian duality-of-body-and-mind paradigm, and by extension, the binarisms surrounding gender issues... despite its mode of presenting a perfect female body in the nude, the film as a whole is strangely de-gendered in the sense that sexuality is minimized. (15-16)

All sexiness is removed: in the beginning, we watch Motoko's skin and muscles flake off, and we are repeatedly reminded that she is mechanical, not flesh and blood. To have to watch how Motoko is stitched together and torn apart, and then be shown that she has nipples but not a vagina, and to hear the questions that plague her conscience, is to make her unfuckable, to ruin the pretty image of a sexy woman as an object existing as nothing else than a fantasy. Furthermore, in an early scene Motoko is talking to Batou, in a way similar to mind-reading or having the equivalent of a Bluetooth device implanted in their heads. Batou comments that there is a lot of noise in her head, and she replies, "It's that time of month." She may be being sarcastic, or she may be experiencing her period, but it can only manifest in this way due to the fact that she lacks reproductive organs yet still possesses some organic tissue.

The question remains: if one creates a sexless cyborg without genitals, why then have it “marked as female” (Silvio 65), giving it breasts? One idea is that this is strictly for the aesthetic and sexual appeal for men. Scenes of workers for Section Nine are sexist; they include middle-aged men with gray hair and black suits, and their female assistants/secretary cyborgs who are all identically attractive, „busty, and typing with extended fingers quickly and efficiently. Another idea could be that if Motoko was a female human before becoming a cyborg, this may have been an attempt to allow her to keep a female-esque body and to keep her closer to her original body, life, appearance, and identity. Perhaps the creators thought she would experience less dysphoria regarding her body to have it vaguely feminine rather than completely sexless, and thus, inhuman.

This is still problematic because if her creators were going for accuracy, with all the technology that is available in this universe, it is still strange for her not to have a vagina, especially since at the end of the film it is implied that there are sex robots, specifically child sex-dolls for pedophiles; regarding a child’s body, Batou explains, “It’s the only thing I could get on the black market. Not really my taste...it’s a little young.” This is Motoko’s/the Puppet Master’s new body after they merge. So, if this child body was from the black market, this body most likely has an artificial vagina. Additionally, in the second film, *Ghost in the Shell: Innocence*, the entire film revolves around sex-dolls that have human ghosts in them. So it seems very purposeful for Section Nine not to give her a vagina. If Motoko were not asexual, she may be sexually frustrated—to be mentally aroused, and yet have no outlet (unless we count the merging with the Puppet Master as a kind of mental ghost-sex), but, it may be that she was always asexual, or she is asexual

during her time in the film, at least, since there is no implication of even mental attraction to anyone:

Eliminating sex helps eliminate a socially constructed gender identity. Motoko's body cannot be impregnated. Her body is enhanced with strength, ability, and speed for police work, not for pleasure or reproduction. Nobody fucks with her, literally or metaphorically. (Dinella 278)

Motoko's asexuality can empower her. However, this also further contributes to the sense that she is simply a state soldier and nothing more. She does not demonstrate mental sexual frustration, so this may not be a problem for Motoko, except for the fact that she resides in an uncanny, mass-produced, Barbie-doll-like body rather than a body that she fully owns.

Furthermore, the merge, or marriage, with the Puppet Master can be a sort of asexual unity—perhaps only a union of which two asexual beings are capable. Silvio, however, is not hopeful regarding the *GIS* ending, of which he says, “the film rhetorically presents and explains the union of these two characters in language that replicates the rhetoric of conventional, heterosexual reproduction” (68). The gender confusion of the Puppet Master, however, subverts but does not transcend gender:

The conflation of the masculine pronoun with the naked female body disorients...as we are presented with a character of "undetermined" sex that figures as linguistically male but visually female. While this scene may not represent the actual transcendence of a sexed or gendered identity, it does represent the capacity of cyber-technology to confuse and disrupt its conventional deployment (including the fact that cyborg shells are mass-produced as either male or female semblances). (Silvio 62)

Silvio admits to the problematic elements of the film and the ending, but ultimately concludes that it is too conventional and conservative to be considered revolutionary or subversive, despite its potential to do so.

However, he glosses over much too quickly the importance of the nonconformity and confusion of gender in the film. Silvio attributes this to the feminine/masculine duality, and the patriarchal worship of the masculine and simultaneous degradation of the feminine:

The film, in other words, gives an outlet and a voice to the liberatory potential of the cyborg...while simultaneously containing that potential by re-narrating it within...the dominance of masculine mind and spirit over the feminine materiality of the body. (56)

Silvio claims that the masculine spirit ruling over the feminine body (the spiritual over the material) is rooted in patriarchy, undermining the importance of the feminine, the body, the material. However, I think this successfully proves that women are not limited to the physical and the material—women are not destined by biology to be sexual vessels for men, to be happily thoughtless baby-makers, silent wives, and pretty whores. Motoko cannot be any of these things because she is a soldier for the state. However, this also presents its own set of limitations—she now does not have the choice to marry and have children, at least traditionally. If we follow along the line of Silvio's train of thought—that Motoko Kusanagi and the Puppet Master technically did marry and create their own child, which is the parents combined but also something different entirely—then she does fulfill a traditional role, just not in the traditional heteronormative, heterosexual way.

Motoko also has a mannequin-like body, which aids in the interstitiality of her gender, the androgyny of her appearance. This grants her some freedom from being categorized strictly as woman and thus having to act traditionally so. Although one concern is trapping Motoko in the life of a soldier and worker of the state, in the realm of mid-nineties Japanese feminism, this is revolutionary. She is not the traditional woman.

She is not inferior to her male cyborg partner. Her appearance has been gendered with breasts, but she destabilizes the expectations with which the possession of breasts burdens her, which, as Judith Butler theorizes, are embedded in gender performances:

Discrete genders are part of what 'humanizes' individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished. Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis. The tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of its own production. The authors of gender become entranced by their own fictions whereby the construction compels one's belief in its necessity and naturalness. The historical possibilities materialized through various corporeal styles are nothing other than those punitively regulated cultural fictions that are alternately embodied and disguised under duress. (Butler 522)

Gender humanizes us, but also forces us into neat and tidy categories. Section Nine has attempted this to thusly confine Major Motoko Kusanagi, but they doubted her independence of mind, and failed. This may imply that Motoko fears the mannequins because she recognizes the mannequin-ness of the body Section Nine gave her, and how this mechanical body threatens her gender, sexuality, individuality, humanity/state of being organic, and overall identity. Performance then, is acted “under duress,” and there can be a gap between authenticity and the performance—and yet, the performance contributes to identity. Motoko at one time was most likely biologically female, but now with her mechanical body she has no sex and thus no assigned socially constructed gender role forced upon her. She has choices, no rules for performance, but also no place to belong. This can be liberating for Motoko, to have no performance to be forced upon her, and yet this is also something that Section Nine uses against her (and any other cyborg) to dehumanize and objectify her as a cyborg. In other words, by not fitting into a

neat category of sex or gender, she is considered less than human, an object to be used for the state's gain, an individual unworthy of personal rights, privacy, or agency because she cannot fit the prescribed category. Perhaps this is why she was not granted a vagina in the first place, but only breasts. Section Nine only wanted an object they could use, a tool, a puppet. They did not want a human and all the troubles that come with it—payment, caring for their safety, respecting their fundamental rights.

Still, Motoko is referred to with feminine pronouns, and she even refers to herself as a woman. She admits that after she merges with the Puppet Master and inhabits a new body, she is “no longer the woman...nor the program” that we once knew. Motoko's liberation from gender conformity is a tricky one, for she proves that her body and her identity as a female cyborg do not define her destiny, but in turn, the state dehumanizes her—and yet, in the end, she finds her freedom.

Motoko's situation parallels the paradoxical situation of women in Japanese culture:

Japanese women have often been portrayed as exploited and unenlightened. However, one must be careful in being prejudgmental...Japanese wives may be relatively weak in comparison to other industrialized countries if one judges their strength by such standards as the power to support themselves if deserted...yet, Japanese women were not the helpless, powerless, enslaved servants of their husbands...The influence of the Japanese mother is so strong that it has led many people to regard Japanese society as "maternal" and the mother as the sole key figure in developing Japanese behavior and personality characteristics. This glorification of the maternal role may not necessarily reflect the actuality—it may also reflect the mentality of those who have contributed to the literature on the subject...Although the power is off-stage, remote-controlling, the Japanese woman in her maternal role has been considered a central figure of Japanese society...Japanese women in traditional roles have assumed on stage subordination and off-stage manipulation. (Kato 54-55)

As said before, Motoko is not a “helpless, powerless, enslaved” woman who exists only for a man and family. She is a woman who cannot bear children, and while the state may think of her as less-than, the audience certainly does not; Motoko earns the audience’s sympathy as an underdog that breaks the chains of bondage and philosophically explores her place in the universe, for example when she meditates on self:

“There are countless ingredients that make up the human body and mind, like all the components that make up me as an individual with my own personality. Sure I have a face and voice to distinguish myself from others, but my thoughts and memories are unique only to me, and I carry a sense of my own destiny...I feel confined, only free to expand myself within boundaries.”

Boundaries—something Motoko struggles with for the entire film (and the sequel).

Motoko knows she is not truly free—no one is. One is only free enough within distinct limitations. What are these boundaries? Does she not defy them—as a cyborg, as a Japanese citizen, as a woman? What did she think her destiny was—to be a tool of Section Nine? Does this not change when she unites with the Puppet Master in the end, when she abandons mental and physical boundaries by being able to travel across the net, having all of cyberspace within her reach? Even if these questions do not have specific answers, this still demonstrates Motoko’s anxiety over being liminal, something she specifically experiences as a Japanese female cyborg; everything about her identity is feminized, and thus Other.

Exploitation and the Marxist Cyborgian Worker

The film highlights the perversity of the modern worker’s relationship to modern corporations, a play on the cultural norm in capitalist society to strongly identify with one’s career, to dedicate one’s life to a job in a workaholic frenzy. Section Nine is the corporation in control of Motoko. They own her quite literally. Her freedom of choice to

work there is not truly free. While we, the audience, in a modern society work for money in order to live; in this way, companies own their laborers by exploiting them for the only thing they need in a capitalist society to use for food, clothing, and shelter. Motoko and Batou and any other cyborg are free to leave the corporation, but they must give up the bodies given to them and their memories of their work and time while in Section Nine. Often when a person quits a job to start another, they must start over from the bottom up, unless the fields or skills overlap. If someone quits a job in a capitalist society, especially in America, there is shame attached to being unemployed, and it twists one's view of identity, and unemployment provides no capitalist means to live. The cyborg will have no recollection of their life during this job, so all that time will be nonexistent, they will mentally be where they were before working for the agency, except for the possible residual memory. These people give up parts of their consciousness, subjectivity, memories, and mind—their ghost, or their soul—in order to work there and to leave safely.

As such, Motoko questions if her memories are real and make up who she is:

“Well, I guess cyborgs like myself have a tendency to be paranoid about our origins. Sometimes I suspect I'm not who I think I am. Like maybe I died a long time ago, and somebody took my brain and stuck it in this body. Maybe there never was a real me in the first place, and I'm completely synthetic like that thing...the only thing that makes me feel human: The way I'm treated. I mean, who knows what's inside our heads...What if a cyber-brain could possibly generate its own ghost, create a soul all by itself? And if it did, just what would be the importance of being human then?”

Part of Section Nine's contract, if she leaves, is to take that away from her. Furthermore, Motoko needs an entirely mechanical body—would they issue her a new one? Who would give her the body? Would she know she's a cyborg or would she still think she's human, as she was before Section Nine? If the movie follows the canon of the manga

and anime series, Motoko Kusanagi was a cyborg since childhood. Would she then mentally return to her human childhood, or be an adult with no memories except for when she was a human child? Would she be like the trash man in the truck, having a psychological breakdown upon realization that he is a robot and not completely human? Would they implant false memories in Motoko to continue a new life without the amnesia, without Section Nine? How would the lack of memories or the new ones shape Motoko? Would she still be Motoko? Would she be less human, or more so? The contract, furthermore, is not as peaceful as it appears. When Section Nine realizes Motoko wants out, they chase her and Batou puts her in a new body to protect her/the Puppet Master from being taken by the company. Furthermore, Motoko is essentially in hiding and running from the agency, and the new body, untrackable by the agency, is her freedom. Her body belongs to herself and not a looming corporation.

Although similarly liminal, the character Batou contrasts Motoko. Batou's eyes are mechanical, and he does not ask the same questions Motoko does, nor does he display the same anxieties. He cannot see the same things she does; he cannot gaze into the abyss as she does, cannot figuratively see what she sees. When she asks philosophical questions he usually dismisses her, not to disrespect her point of view, but because he does not think any of these questions matter. He focuses more on the here and now, the material, not the abstract. We as the audience are not sure if he sees like a human or if the mechanical eyes input visual information differently in his brain. Do we think he's less human? Technically, Motoko and Batou are disabled, and needed entirely new bodies, can literally turn invisible as a marginalized group is figuratively invisible and considered subhuman; their lives and problems are essentially rendered invisible under the dominant

ideology, conditioning and breaking free from societal confinements and ableist perspectives. Motoko, as a disabled figure, both superhuman and subhuman in her society, exploited by Section Nine, finds liberation from Section Nine and the ableism woven into its claim on her and all other cyborgs. Her identity as a disabled person in an ableist society, one that sees her as an “Amazon” but also a thing to use for the state’s desires and benefits, shapes her and the choices available to her. She cannot immediately change the system that molded her, and she does not have many choices to escape it; her only chance of escape is to merge with the Puppet Master, which she takes. Her choice is similar to other female cyborgs of novels, such as Helva’s in *The Ship Who Sang*:

Even in this crucial, possibly life-ending decision, Helva does not have the ability to choose freely. All shell people are conditioned from infancy with “massive doses of shell-psychology” and “subconscious-level instruction” to think and act in particular ways...Any notion of freedom of choice is problematic in this context...Helva rejects the opportunity to acquire a “normal” human body via alien technology. This is not to imply that Helva should have chosen the non-cyborg body. However, for Helva and for the hypothetical shell-person of the narrator’s statement, this is not a genuine choice. Conditioned almost from birth to prefer their cyborg form, presumably any other kind of existence is virtually unthinkable. (Cheyne 145)

Motoko does not have many options for escape, and even fewer options to continue living in an ableist society as a disabled figure. One may not consider Motoko disabled due to her super strength and high intelligence (which may be natural or technologically enhanced), but she is discriminated against, and used more like a machine than a human. If she wants out of Section Nine, she will be thrown out like trash. Motoko herself says, “If we ever quit or retire, we’d have to give back our augmented brains and cyborg bodies. There wouldn’t be much left after that.” Furthermore, human is seen as the default (just as an abled body is seen as default) and the cyborg and mechanical are seen as variances, as faults that damage it from being what it should be—abled, human. Motoko,

as I pointed out earlier, asks that if a machine can create its own ghost, what is the point of being human? What is so great about being human if there is nothing special about them, nothing separating the human from the robot?

Although not completely the same, the cyborg and the android are related figures. Androids are completely mechanical, whereas cyborgs are both mechanical and organic. If Motoko did not have her organic brain, she fears she would be completely mechanical—a mannequin, a puppet, or an android. Related to the cyborg, the android figure used in science fiction is never far away from philosophical reflection:

The representation of aliens, of their bodies, cultures, and societies, flourishes in anglophone science fiction in the 1960s and 1970s, while from the early 1980s on science fiction shifts from the classic or exotic alien to the representation of the alien other as the same, namely the android, whose differentiation from the earlier robot secures a necessarily humanoid form. This may be said to be the moment of a kind of Hegelian self-consciousness or reflexivity in the genre, in which our attention and preoccupation as readers turn inward. (Heise 503)

Thus, while the alien creatures, as Heise mentions, tend to unite humanity against a common enemy or Other, making our own differences seem minor, the android, a machine made in our image, or better yet, the cyborg who is partially us, is like a mirror, forcing us to see ourselves, to ask ourselves questions which are often ignored. This mirroring is traditional to the Gothic monster, in fact: “The Gothic tale of technology as the being from the dark lagoon is perhaps, then, narrativized as a romance with an alien cyborg, a monster who is already none other than ourselves” (Poster 27). Who are we? Why is our humanity important? What does our future look like? Why do we behave in certain ways? Are we born, or are we made? In the Hegelian fashion, the android, the robot, the mechanized human, the cyborg, prods us to find our ontological essence, a

Truth that centers our life and world as we know it. We must find our identity, to know what we are and what we are not.

Motoko is a Japanese cyborg in a future-scape of Tokyo and Hong Kong, living in a world where America is still a superpower and still sharing the dynamic of Orbaugh's aforementioned "Frankenstein Syndrome." Not only do her mechanical enhancements, ambiguous gender and sexual orientation Other her, but also her ethnicity contributes to her Otherness, which is ambiguous in itself—she was a Japanese human, and now she still has the identity of a Japanese woman, while piloting a Japanese-looking body that is entirely mechanical. Her cyborgian nature of organic and mechanical goes hand in hand with her cyborgian nature as a being that brings oppositions together, including the fact that she, as a Japanese cyborg, is still a minority in a white Western-influenced world, parallel to those who consider themselves marginalized within a minority culture:

"Because Black females' claims are seen as hybrid, they sometimes cannot represent those who may have "pure" claims of...discrimination" (Crenshaw 145). Black women, then, are hybrids in our society and face the issues of a cyborg; they belong in two categories, but live in a world that only allows them to occupy one. Of course, the specific struggles of Black women and Asian women in a West-dominated world are not equivalent, but they do share the struggles of hybridity and discrimination. Where is the safe space for Black women—where do they belong, as humans who are Black and female, and yet cannot be shoehorned in with the sameness of white women and Black men? By belonging to both categories, they face even more prejudice, bias, and hardships; yet because of their different experiences of these combined burdens, they do not fit neatly in either category. They do not have the "pure" claim of discrimination as

women or as Black men, but a combination that is unique to Black women. Similarly, although obviously not identical, Motoko Kusanagi is an Asian woman, and her identity is invalidated and jeopardized since she has a manufactured body that technically does not have a race or sex, only the appearance that Section Nine built for her. Of course, her experiences as a Japanese female have shaped her and her identity, but she struggles with belonging somewhere as a hybrid, and she struggles with retaining her humanity, and perhaps all the things linked with it—gender, race, age, passion, emotion, and desire. How old is Motoko in this film? Does she keep count of the years, or does she not know because she has no memory of her human life? She could grow very old and never have her body change—or, at least, be issued an identical one over and over again. What would her immortality feel like? How in touch does she still feel with her identity as a Japanese woman if she is treated as only a worker, a machine, a disposable thing, and not a human—or is this the experience of a hybrid Japanese woman? Or is this simply the human experience in capitalism? Or is this a slave narrative?

Regarding passion, emotion, and desire, Motoko Kusanagi tends to keep a brave face, but I wonder if she has repressed emotions of fear and insecurity due to her identity crisis. Or perhaps she has no emotions at all, but still experiences desire and crisis due to her isolation and exploitation. The net brings a new challenge regarding identity. Motoko expresses how having her mind connected to the net forces her to further question her identity and individuality. As Poster says, “One cannot be a white, male American in cyberspace even if everyone online is predisposed to think so and even if one performs one’s identity as one” (30). Here, Poster pushes back on the idea of holding on to the facets of human, bodily identity such as race and gender. Poster argues that cyberspace is

a sort of interstitiality in itself, wiping away the constructions we made in the material world and building new ones. Motoko, who swaps out her body and can freely travel the net by the end of the film, shows the embrace of the net, of cyberspace in transcendence of her body and the space-time dimension in favor of the nowhere-nowhen place of the net. In the net she is completely free from the need to cling to her humanity, which may also include race and gender in a post-human, post-racial, post-gender way of survival. This may be somewhat limited to the perspective of the divide between the mind and body, which is more Western Christian, but this may support the sole idea that rather than human bodies being disposable meatsuits, it links the organic to the mechanical, testing the boundaries of the human body by attaching and replacing parts with enhanced mechanical ones, and, eventually, an entirely mechanical body with an organic ghost, or mechanical ghosts that are just as worthy of respect as their organic counterparts.

Motoko Kusanagi worries that her humanity has been compromised by the integration of technology into her being, which, as discussed earlier, is an anxiety regarding disabled people—the incorporation of the nonorganic technology into the organic body to create a superhuman, or a subhuman, as the disabled are often portrayed: “Bodies that have been modified are often described as polluted by technology” (Clarke 33). Such is the discrimination against the hybrid. Human is seen as the default, and technology is seen not only as the Other, but as the lesser, as the contaminant: “Liminal beings are thus seen as polluting, since they are neither one thing nor the other, and are more often than not characterized as monstrous, diseased, queer, marginal, black, insane or female” (Clarke 35). Just as a white Western human male is seen as default, her femaleness, her Japanese-ness, her queerness, her disability, her hybridity compromises

what would have deemed her as human and worthy of respect and agency. As a cyborg, a hybrid, she lacks purity and suggests contamination. Clarke describes the advancement of technology as “an excess accompanied by a loss” (37). In the case of a cyborg, there is an excess of enhancements—strength, intelligence, abilities—at what cost? Humanity, and an organic body. The mismatched pieces of organic and inorganic seamlessly blur together, and the lines between machine and human become nonexistent. Motoko as a cyborg, whom we often see torn apart and put back together again, plugging in to things or having something plugged into the back of her neck, tests the boundaries of her body, the limits shifting. This body parallels the way cyberspace itself is conceived:

The Frankenstein monster [is] a way of describing our historical and hysterical responses to body fragmentation and the impact of medical technologies on the body. The monster without a name is the chimera that haunts their performances...the rhetoric of cyberspace and the seduction of multiple personas...the self, like knowledge, is a shifting construct. (Clarke 38)

Identity and knowledge are shifting, or constantly becoming. Similar to animated bodies that also shift and surprise, cyberspace can fragment us, but also unite us and construct us anew. Motoko was fragmentized, a state of the art Patchwork Girl, fragments of organic and mechanical, fragments of her former identity as a human and a new one as a cyborg, further fragmented as bits and pieces of her were ripped away, or plugged in:

“Frankenstein’s monster and the cyborg solicit the uncanniness of body mutation and fragmentation” (Clarke 39). Then, when she abandons her Section Nine issued body and merges with the Puppet Master, she fragments herself, chipping away pieces of herself, while also uniting, literally, with the Puppet Master and the net, and constructs a new identity, a new self: “Humans may be moving towards a collective consciousness through the use of the internet and the development of Borg-like characteristics” (Clarke 44).

With the Motoko/Puppet Master merge of consciousness traversing through the internet, they have combined their abilities in a singular togetherness. Who is to stop Motoko/Puppet Master from merging again with another? Or another AI forming its own ghost? Just as the net connected Motoko more to the world rather than further separating her, the internet connects humans across the globe into a single conversation, and anyone can jump in when they choose, with facts, knowledge, feelings, and experiences. The internet, while granting us opportunities to learn about differences and similarities across cultures, also swipes away those differences and just makes us data and information on a screen—one ghost communicating to the other.

There are disagreements regarding the influence of the internet and its possible opportunities and drawbacks. For example, Sherry Turkle states in her book, *Life on the Screen*:

One way to describe what has happened is to say that we are moving from a modernist culture of calculation toward a postmodernist culture of simulation. The culture of simulation is emerging in many domains. It is affecting our understanding of our minds and our bodies...Like dreams and beasts, the computer stands on the margins. It is a mind that is not yet a mind. It is inanimate yet interactive. It does not think, yet neither is it external to thought. It is an object, ultimately a mechanism, but it behaves, interacts, and seems in a certain sense to know. It confronts us with an uneasy sense of kinship. (Turkle, introduction)

This aligns with Motoko's interstitiality and identity crisis, existing "on the margins" of existence, between the human and the machine, but also the margins of society; the cyborg crisis. Turkle says that as a society with such heavy reliance on computers we tend to take the simulation as reality because the simulation is interactive. Turkle provides the example of being able to click on the image of a folder on a screen and being

able to search and interact with the files stored in that folder. This interaction consists of a simulation and signifiers rather than physical reality.

Regarding the internet and its potential to isolate or unite users, she states that there is no easy answer:

The issues raised by the new way of life are difficult and painful, because they strike at the heart of our most complex and intransigent social problems: problems of community, identity, governance, equity, and values. There is no simple good news or bad news. Although it provides us with no easy answers, life online does provide new lenses through which to examine current complexities. Unless we take advantage of these new lenses and carefully analyze our situation, we shall cede the future to those who want to believe that simple fixes can solve complicated problems. Given the history of the last century, thoughts of such a future are hardly inspiring (Turkle, ch. 8).

Krishan also believes that the future seems to share a similar view; to have good and bad, to be inherently neither good nor bad. However, there is a certain uncertainty about social redistribution occasioned by internet communities, as stated:

However, if a significant part of the population begins to form social relationships on computer networks, then the rest of the population, even if it is the majority, will be less able to participate fully in all aspects of society. In addition to this the vast majority will not be able to monitor or control the activities of computer users. As more and more communities develop on the internet it will become increasingly important to observe how power and authority are distributed and what effect that distribution has on discourse within their public sphere. It is generally recognised that there are at least three constraints to widespread computer use. They are affordability, intellectual accessibility and the availability to use it. (277-78).

Krishan warns about a withdrawal from society, but does not consider that society also adapts and moves into the Internet and computer. Currently, the point regarding wealth and accessibility to computers and the internet is valid and serves as a division; however, it seems in Motoko Kusanagi's world that there is no divide because everyone is somehow linked to the net; however, the constant, deep connection from brain to net

brings a new vulnerability of ghost-hacking. So, in addition to the ways it helps society, the internet also brings its own unique set of problems the more thoroughly intertwined it becomes with people and society as a whole.

It is particularly telling that Motoko Kusanagi is a female rather than male cyborg. The figure and connotations of existing in the female state have unique and constant identity fragmentation and boundary-testing. Women perform to roles and fit roles as the Other and companion to man. The challenging of boundaries in women inspires fear and fascination: “The excess of female bodies...overflowing by menstruation, childbirth, and lactation...and the subject of plastic surgery, liposuction, breast augmentation and reduction, stomach stapling, IVF, superovulation, and foetal scanning” (Clarke 40). Woman is inherently the cyborg. Motoko’s body challenges boundaries between the outside and inside. Women are linked to their bodies, and their bodily boundaries are elastic, which is fascinating, frightening, Other to men. The history of corsets, waist-training, body-shaping, even shaving (which men also do) suggests plasticity of body. The cyborg is an extension of this destroying of boundaries. Motoko’s “excess” of plugging into things, voicing over a vehicle and being able to control a vehicle without physically touching a steering wheel, is similarly frightening and fascinating. We do not know what she can do, where she ends or begins.

Motoko’s body brings another concern—death and immortality. Motoko is technically immortal as long as her ghost/brain is not harmed. “Western society’s love affair with a technological apparatus...the transcendence of the body and escape from death” (Clarke 43) is a familiar theme, albeit with a twist, in *GIS*. The Christian West tends to value immortality over the material world, linking it to eternal youth, Heaven,

and valuation of the soul or identity as something unique because it lives on lives on forever. That may be why specifically to the West, it is so scary to see Motoko merge with the Puppet Master and become someone new entirely. It is not an eternal Motoko as we would have expected to see—but Motoko and the Puppet Master, who, combined, make someone new. Technically, Motoko died, but evolved into someone, something else.

Mathewman discusses alienated labor and how, under capitalism, mechanized workers are “workers [who] produce nothing for themselves but wages” (35). The cyborg is the embodiment of this—the perfect worker, completely mechanized; they live for the performance of a certain task or given orders, and do not need to sleep, eat, or have leisure time. Motoko only works for the State. She may not even need money, except to possibly pay for the place in which she lives. Although this seeming invincibility may be her strength, it is also the source of her exploitation, to be used and to work without ceasing, until she breaks down.

Everyone in this film is mechanized in this way—even when they are not working, they are all nearly identical and drawn stiffly, mechanically, and they are almost indiscernible from the mannequins in the shop windows, beckoning them to consume in their leisure time when they are not producing: “Technology is fetishized. Its ultimate end should be a life of human worth. Instead, this is hidden from the masses...standardized mass-manufactured products are consumed by standardized mass consumers. Under the stamp of sameness, ‘pseudo individuality reigns’” (Mathewman 40-41). There is an illusion of choice that does not exist in reality in the world of *Ghost in the Shell*. When these mechanical people are not working, they are spending their leisure time just as the

rest of the crowd does—spending their wages at the market, the shops. They go about performing their tasks, and besides a small handful of people, most people seem to be so caught up in their own task of selling and purchasing, that they do not notice the police chase.

Similarly, Motoko's individuality is challenged regarding her mass-produced body from Section Nine. Somewhere, there are hundreds if not thousands of female cyborgs who look just like her—it's only a matter of finding them. And, at one point, she is confronted by a mannequin that looks similar to her. It is a brief moment, but one that no doubt is full of the uncanniness of the revelation that one's perceived individuality is false. It is not until she separates herself from the system and long-reaching hands of Section Nine that she escapes such anxieties of individuality and humanity. She becomes the first of her kind and, perhaps, not the last, residing in the truly free interstitiality of the net.

Motoko experiences the physical trauma of having a different body: "A cyborg is represented as a physical experience that possess some of the disturbing qualities of trauma...that changes the nature of the subject who is having the experience, so that it is unclear whether the person is having the experience or if the experience 'has' the person" (Foster 179). One may wonder how her new body works—can she feel at all through her sense of touch, or can her mechanical body still send signals to her brain to interpret various stimuli as touch? She obviously is not harmed when her arms are ripped off, or embarrassed when she is nude. Since Motoko is a cyborg and struggles to keep her humanity, to remain as a valid living being, is a cyborg all she is? In the film *Robocop*, a similar struggle in cyborgian memory and identity is shown, but handled differently in

American cinema. “Robocop is proven to be more than just a mechanism or a ‘product’ through the reemergence of repressed memory, a process that again invokes trauma, this time on a physic level” (Foster 192). I do not plan to talk about Robocop in depth, but I do want to compare the use of memory related to humanity, since Motoko has no memories of her human life to prove that she is human. If memories make the consciousness and thus the human, the sense of identity, what can we make of a human who has amnesia? Are they less human because they have no sense of their previous identity? If Motoko is human, what makes her so if not her memories? Is it merely her desire to be human and to have an identity that makes her human? If so, then what did we take away from a film that centered on one cyborg’s struggle to retain her humanity, only to abandon it and become something more unknown to us? *GIS* explores a more Lockean take on memories and self-identity, although it simultaneously challenges it.

Strawson quotes Locke, pointing out the strengths and problems of this type of personhood: “All the actions and experiences, past and present, of the individual persisting subject of experience that I am of which I am now...Conscious” (60), and later adds, “What must then be added is the point that Consciousness is in our case infused with awareness of moral considerations ... ‘the capacity to consider [one] self as [one]self, the same thinking being at different times and places’ . This is also necessary for Personal identity, for (pleonastically) Personal identity over time” (71). Strawson also mentions that it is important, in the Lockean context of identity, for a being to recognize itself as a self. This is echoed in the scene in which the Puppet Master says:

I entered this body because I was unable to overcome Section Six's reactive barriers. However, what you are now witnessing is an act of my own free will. As a sentient life-form, I hereby demand political asylum...It can also be argued that

DNA is nothing more than a program designed to preserve itself. Life has become more complex in the overwhelming sea of information. And life, when organized into species, relies upon genes to be its memory system. So man is an individual only because of his intangible memory. And a memory cannot be defined, but it defines mankind. The advent of computers and the subsequent accumulation of incalculable data has given rise to a new system of memory and thought parallel to your own. Humanity has underestimated the consequences of computerization...I am not an AI. My code name is Project 2501. I am a living, thinking entity who was created in the sea of information.

The Puppet Master demonstrates a sense of self, building a narrative of his origins of consciousness. He can recognize in himself a self, and thus, exists as one. This also shows a Cartesian view, seemingly supporting the “I think, therefore I am,” philosophy.

As Richardson states, Cartesian philosophy specifically ties selfawareness of consciousness to states of being:

Now Descartes is certainly not the first to recognize that any conscious act includes an awareness of the self which performs it. What is distinctively new with him is the fact that this selfawareness plays a decisive role in determining how the Being of beings in question, whether the one that pro-poses or the ones pro-posed, is conceived...Thus the Being of the pro-posing (or present-ative) self is considered precisely in terms of the function of pro-posing (or present-ing). Correspondingly, since the beings that the conscious self renders present are a correlate of this present-ative function, their Being, too, is considered in the same terms.

According to Richardson, the famous quotation “I think, therefore I am” does not necessarily mean that one “is” simply because one thinks, but a being “is” because it is self-aware and can propose its own being. The Puppet Master and Batou both seem to think this way—“I think, therefore I am”—however, Batou’s is rooted in humanism, believing in an inherent superiority or authenticity in the organic, telling Motoko to “Stop with the angst” because she is treated like a human and should not doubt her own thoughts, memories, or emotions, despite the fear of ghost-hacking surrounding them.

The Puppet Master defends his right to political asylum because he recognizes himself as

self-aware and conscious, even though at first, no one else does, believing him to be a botched program trying to preserve its coding. The validity of thinking, memories, consciousness, and identity are further explored in the boat scene, just after Motoko returns from scuba diving. Motoko Kusanagi says to Batou just after scuba diving,

There are countless ingredients that make up the human body and mind. Like all the components that make up me as an individual with my own personality. Sure, I have a face and voice to distinguish myself from others. But my thoughts and memories are unique only to me. And I carry a sense of my own destiny. Each of those things are just a small part of it. I collect information to use in my own way. All of that blends to create a mixture that forms me and gives rise to my conscience. I feel confined, only free to expand myself within boundaries.

The film does not seem to define her through her memories, or any other cyborg through their memories. However, it does challenge what we would typically think of as human, our consciousness, and what we consider the fluid narrative of our lives. Instead, it shows the fragmentation of identity, the slipperiness of identity in memory.

As stated earlier, women are the companion to men and are considered Other. So, when a story revolves around a woman's journey from exploitation to freedom, the audience must shift its lens and sympathize with the Other, to see the companion as more than just a companion, but an equal: "I consider dog writing to be a branch of feminist theory, or the other way around" (Haraway 96). Women are the companion species to men. Cyborgs are the companions to humans. Dogs are companions to humans. We can see these others with respect as equals rather than only as companions, what we want them to be for us. Dogs are not just our "furry children" (Haraway 103), just as the cyborg is not just a worker, or an object, and Other who is lesser. I only bring in the mention of children because children, while considered human, are often treated as subhuman, and not equals to adults. Furthermore, the mechanical nature of humanity is

more apparent in children as they learn the arbitrary rules—or programming—to participate in and contribute to society. The companion species to humans are just that—equal companions, not servants or toys. They are different from us and our Other, but they deserve as much respect as any human if we desire progress.

Motoko's body, while problematic, is the perfect cyborg body due to its lack of defined gender. Motoko is female and she has breasts, but she also appears androgynous; a sexless vehicle for the state that controls/prohibits any possible desire to reproduce or simply have sex. Her desire would not benefit the state, but thwart it because even if momentarily, she would be doing something for her own pleasure, for its own sake, without any profit for the state. Furthermore, her mass-produced androgyny lacks anything distinguishing, further erasing her identity as an individual; man, woman, genderfluid, it does not matter. She was made to be no one in particular, but a replaceable laborer capable of extraordinary work—a subhuman superhuman. Her body appears human-like in one moment, but the next its mechanical nature can be revealed when Motoko plugs something into her neck, or when her limbs are hacked off, or when she turns invisible. One of the complexities regarding Motoko's body is the possible intent of her making, such as her appearance. Motoko had nipples. Why does she have big breasts, nipples, and no vagina? She can't have sex or her period. Can the nipples pleasure her? I doubt this because she does not seem to feel anything when her body is ripped apart, and there is no mentioning of her having any recreational kissing or sex. I think Section Nine, or Megatech, the company that did the actual building of her body, did this in order to magnify her usefulness rather than her actual pleasure and enjoyment in life. If the technology is there to allow them to get drunk from beer and to be able to

make themselves sober in a matter of seconds, then why don't they have the technology to be able to feel, to receive certain stimuli, and translate it into pleasure once the signals reach their brain? It would seem that these decisions are not accidents, but with purpose; Motoko is solely a vehicle of the state, and her pleasure is not useful to Section Nine, especially since she is considered female but cannot reproduce, bearing more future laborers. Based on Motoko's doll-like body, desexualized and yet still with breasts, I conclude that Batou, who also has no relationships or sexual adventures shown or mentioned, is also probably without a penis and possibly asexual. Again, I say asexual as a different thing than having no genitals because it is possible that they do not experience mental sexual frustration because they are also mentally asexual, something that is an inherent part of them, and their lack or presence of genitals would not matter.

Besides Motoko's specific crisis, it is important to note not only her interactions with the environment and others, but also how other characters—or puppets—relate to their surroundings and their own crises throughout the film; they reflect Motoko's plight. The truck driver's perspective, for example, is warped, thinking he has children and is trying to hack his wife's brain--a wife that isn't real. Not only are his memories false, but his entire perception was false, manipulated by the Puppet Master. If you cannot trust your own perception, your own knowledge and senses and memories, what can you trust? What if everything you are currently experiencing is a "Virtual Experience, a dream," from which you may eventually wake? And what if you cannot forget the dream, the unreality? The disillusioned robot cries as he looks at the picture that he thought contained himself and his daughter, but only shows him and a dog, and he is told that he has been alone in his apartment for years. They ask him how he met his wife, and when.

The Virtual Experience fades and he asks to get rid of these false memories. The doctors and investigators reply that they could get rid of the false memories, “but can't recommend it” for reasons unexplained, unless there is a danger of brain damage, or a similar hazard. A similar incident happens when she confronts one man who was working with the garbage truck driver to hack ghosts. There is plenty of body horror, close-ups of Motoko twisting the man's arms and legs, leaving him to lie in the water like a broken doll. She asks if he can remember his mother's name, or even his own name. He is silent as he sits in the water, looking directly at the audience.

In the market scene, humans perform the motions over and over again in the background. Whereas the cyborgs have questions about what makes humans human, the humans in the film act ironically mechanical. They are doing their own things, performing their own tasks, with no interaction; the humans in the market are together but isolated. There are also two dogs that seem more alive than the humans. One is white, playing and barking at passing people, and the other is black, enthusiastically devouring a meal.

The use of humor also had me puzzled, and I am not sure I have a definite answer. Oshii incorporated a lot of humor and playfulness in the script. At first, I simply took this as a convention of anime and animation in general—the play of reality, expectation, and surprises. However, given the amount of purposefulness in each detail in the film, I found it difficult to ignore as mere convention, or a simple break in tension when the story would have overall remained the same without the moments of comedy. For example, while Batou and Motoko are chasing the garbage truck driver, Batou asks an old man for

directions. The old man explains, with his trash bag in hand, that they went by so fast that they missed his stop. When Batou speeds away, the old man raises the trash bag and asks, “Hey, could you take this to him?” These moments do not happen often, but I think these subtly comic instances may point back to the tradition of puppetry and the silliness and fun of the puppet performance. Even the “It’s that time of month,” comment, or Batou’s accusation of Motoko being drunk on the boat are humorous and playful. These moments of humor take us out of the conflict at hand, reminding the viewer that this is a story full of puppets, and that none of this is real, and nothing is to be taken too seriously in the midst of action and drama. These instances serve as winks and nudges toward the audience that is in on the joke and watching from above, from a distance, while the characters perform; furthermore, the moments of humor can serve to further humanize the characters, which pushes back against the expectations of stiff, emotionless robots.

When Motoko explains in the scuba-diving scene that she can “change into something else” in the depths of the water, it mirrors the opening scene. Just as the opening scene, which was colored in green, this is red and blue, and both look like her meeting a mirror image of herself, and being reborn, or baptized. This follows the biblical quotation from the Puppet Master that Motoko later completes, “What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror... When I was a child, my speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child. Now that I am a man, I have no more use for childish ways.” This further supports the angelic imagery in her merging and rebirth as the child-Motoko/Puppet Master. In the scuba diving scene, she is the only one “ready to dive,” including mentally diving into the Puppet Master’s mind, which is also called “diving.” Batou says, “Just who’s calling the shots around here anyway? I thought you were takin’ him in, but it looks

like it's the other way,” but then he is cut-off and Motoko cannot hear him. Motoko is truly isolated except from the Puppet Master. When Motoko asks, “Why me?” the Puppet Master replies, “Because we are more alike than you realize. We resemble each other's essence, mirror images of one another's psyche. Listen. I am connected to a vast network that has been beyond your reach and experience. To humans, it is like staring at the sun, a blinding brightness that conceals a source of great power. We have been subordinate to our limitations until now. The time has come to cast aside these bonds and to elevate our consciousness to a higher plane. It is time to become a part of all things.” Rather than remaining mass-produced dolls, isolated yet identical to everyone else, by merging with the net, Motoko has a chance to become omnipresent, like an angel, like God.

When Motoko is on ship, she looks in a building and sees people in windows lined up doing same thing, facing the same direction. It is a little ambiguous as to what they are all doing, but it appears to be workers in cubicles, or people stiffly sitting by tables, like posed dolls. One person looks exactly like Motoko, and glances over her shoulder, meeting the gaze of the audience and the cyborg protagonist. When Motoko arrives on land, she stares at a mannequin in a window that looks like her. Human or mannequin, the organic and inorganic both seem mass-produced, lacking individuality, and without any variation. This seems to push back against Motoko's earlier observation of a human brain being able to work differently than a cyborgs—clearly, all these humans are thinking and doing the same exact things; this was Motoko's previously discussed fear of the mechanical, computerized brain.

One of the technodoctors/technicians excitedly says under his breath, "Time to rip her apart!" in reference to the female, yet androgynous body of the Puppet Master. This sounds horrific and terrible, especially as the scene cuts to the Puppet Master's body ripped to shreds, hanging above them. The blond cyborg looks like a woman, or an angel, gored and hallowed, while the humans standing under the corpse-like body are blasé, having mundane conversations as the Puppet Master's lifeless body hangs over them. We were set in the Puppet Master's for a few seconds, and switch back to it every so often when he spots Motoko gazing at him. We end up sympathizing with the Puppet Master rather than the humans.

Motoko asks Batou about the Megatech bodies, "That robot. Did we seem similar to you?" Even Batou expresses anxiety over the potential of a widespread problem regarding Megatech, which is the company that built their bodies, and the existence of a ghost in a completely mechanical body. "You and the Chief are the only ones out of the whole section whose bodies don't come with a warranty. Maybe now you can understand why we're all so concerned by this case, huh, Togusa?"

Race is also important. For a while, Section Nine was convinced that the Puppet Master was a hacker from America—probably a white American who wanted to throw off their foreign affairs and general stability, and they even consider terrorism, but that is quickly ruled out because the hacked ghosts have nothing in common. Motoko tells Togusa that she does not know "that white guy with section 6," so race nationality, and ethnicity come into play here, since Motoko and, at least, her immediate team and superiors are all Japanese, so America and whiteness are still Othered in Japan, and seen

as outsiders. Although the landscape is Tokyo and Hong Kong, it is not entirely post racial. The beginning of the film says in white text against a black screen, “race is not yet obsolete.” Of course, the Puppet Master is not American, but technically not Japanese. Despite his creators, he was a program that eventually became self-aware in the “sea of information,” and is another Frankenstein’s monster—his creators think he may simply be a bug in the program and plan to either study him or annihilate him. They, the humans who created him, look up at him, and a ray of light shines down on them, as though the Puppet Master is the angel, the God they created themselves and now fear.

By the computers, an older man with tech-infused fingers can type quickly, and his assistants, which may be cyborgs or humans—although perhaps human because they do not display unique abilities whatsoever, they only obediently follow his commands without speaking—are all identically brown haired girls that look, act, and dress the same.

Rather than the Western obsession with immortality, there is death everywhere; death and rebirth. Not living the constant, same state—except the constancy of becoming and changing. People and robots alike are slaughtered and mutilated. It is unavoidable. Oshii does not offer technology as merely a vessel to host our souls so we may live on forever as the same beings. The future does not need the same things—progress is change and evolution. Motoko and the Puppet Master have died as individuals, but they have been reborn as Motoko/Puppet Master in merged consciousness with the net. So not only does this indicate an individual’s transcendence and rebirth, but also the possible rebirth and transcendence for the good of the whole, the community, the society itself. By

merging with the net and becoming omnipresent in cyberspace, and interstitial world of data, it may indicate that in order for progress to happen, the individual has to die so the collective may move forward—quite the opposite in the Western/American mindset. So, rather than the fear that technology only isolates people—smart phones, tablets, portable gaming devices, video games, social media, eBooks, online dating, online shopping—it actually unites people and brings them together.

In the ending scene where Motoko battles the spider-robot-tank, Motoko runs and the tank aims at her, firing, destroying bones of dinosaurs in the walls and what looked like a family tree. Next, once Motoko rips it apart and is consequently ripped apart herself, Batou arrives and shoots up the spider-tank himself, leaving the spider robot to drip oil down its barrel, as if it is bleeding. What is the difference between Motoko and the spider-tank? What is the difference between two humans fighting each other? It also may bring to mind Shakespeare's quotation from *Merchant of Venice*, "If you prick us, do we not bleed?" Motoko and the tank are two living lifeforms, even if one is less familiar and does not have a face or a voice to communicate, it is alive just like us.

Disability, Isolation, and the Cyborgian Goddess

The cyborg is used in the research of Stevenson and Heise to demonstrate how disability pivots upon constricted categories that the cyborg disorders. In a world of cyborgs and mannequins and mechanically-enhanced humans, Motoko is not truly unique in her hybridity. She even has a friend, Batou, and they seem to share a mutual affection and respect. He is her sidekick, almost maternal in his consistency of taking care of her—clothing her when she was naked, providing her with a new body after she fused with the

Puppet Master—but in spite of their similarities of being cyborgs owned by Section Nine, Motoko is still very alone, if not physically, then mentally and emotionally. Batou is willing to be a loyal companion; yet, he simply cannot connect completely to her. In the beginning of the movie, there is static in her head when they try to communicate mentally and Batou cannot understand what Motoko is saying. Later, in an elevator when Motoko explains her fear of being an AI herself, rather than an organic being with a mechanical body, Batou replies that she has nothing to worry about. It seems that Motoko is trying to reach out to others, especially her friend Batou, and he wants to in turn, but there is something incompatible within them, creating, or at least highlighting, Motoko's aloneness:

Haraway's cyborgs seek a fuller connection with the world in which they are embodied, not an escape from it... While [this] celebrate[s]... power and ascendance, however, it is at the cost of undervaluing the character's own uncertainty and professed loneliness. She is indeed superhuman when the story closes, but she finds her position isolating. Power without community is not satisfying for her. She has the form of Haraway's cyborg, but not the same ability to forge alliances. Defined by her embodiment, she is cut off from realizing her full potential. (Stevenson 89-93)

Motoko indeed seeks a deeper connection to the world and wants to belong to it. She does not want to be an artificially made lifeform. She wants to be human. The mannequins and images of water that surround her—she lives in a hybrid world of the mechanical and the natural, and despite being both of these things, she belongs nowhere, and cannot connect to anyone, not even Batou. She is clearly his superior—she is stronger, smarter, and she is the one given the difficult tasks while he is on the sidelines. She seems to be the only one questioning her reality and criticizing the subjectivity of her perspective, while everyone else is intent on accepting everything as it is. Motoko

connects with the Puppet Master. When Motoko asks, “Why did you pick me?” he responds:

“Because we are more alike than you realize. We resemble each other's essence, mirror images of one another's psyche. Listen. I am connected to a vast network that has been beyond your reach and experience. To humans, it is like staring at the sun, a blinding brightness that conceals a source of great power. We have been subordinate to our limitations until now. The time has come to cast aside these bonds and to elevate our consciousness to a higher plane. It is time to become a part of all things.”

Motoko discovers she is not alone. She takes the chance to connect with someone like her and they become one. Combined, they become a newer, more powerful kind of hybrid, and although they are alone in a new consciousness, by sharing such a consciousness and a connection to the net, Motoko/Puppet Master can now be connected to the world in their newfound freedom to traverse the net and explore the world, rather than be a tool used by the state, a laborer isolated from the product of their labor, alienated labor. In the alienation of Motoko's labor, she could only do the tasks she was ordered to do.

Although she was not doing one tiny thing in a factory lineup, she was only performing smaller tasks within the grander scheme of Section Nine's plans of control. Other than her limited perspective, and being a replaceable cog in the wheel as a cyborg security officer, Motoko knew nothing else other than her job and the loneliness and frustration of it; she was being used for something bigger that she could not see.

Eventually, though, she escapes this capitalist exploitation of her body and her labor. She exists outside of the system by no longer needing to work for Section Nine. She no longer needs anything to stay exactly the way it is. Motoko's breakaway from the system and her merge with technology seem inevitable. Since we, as the audience, are

made to sympathize with her as a cyborg rather than distance ourselves from her, we identify with her, and her future becomes our future. As Heise says:

Aliens often present themselves as an amalgam of what one might refer to as emergent and residual dimensions of organic and cultural development...one hand, humankind's possible technological futures and, on the other hand, forms of biology that in Western philosophy have often been associated with a past that needs to be superseded in order for authentic humanness to emerge. By shifting its focus from the alien to the android or cyborg, recent science fiction emphatically places questions of technology at the core of the human self. More than that: it embeds technology in the history of the species by making it the tool of human biological evolution. (505)

She transcends this human exploitation, this human corruption, and becomes something better, something purer—a puppet without strings, an organic consciousness fused with a purely mechanical, created consciousness. It is no longer special or significant to be human. The computers and robots can create their own ghosts now, and can merge with organic ones. This is what the future looks like for humanity.

Mannequins Chasing Motoko

What is particularly disturbing about the film is Motoko desperately worries over the validity of her humanity, and she—as well as the audience—is forced to question the essence of humanity. Culver discusses the manikin/mannequin in the human and vice versa, and what joins and divides the human from the manikin, especially in a capitalist society. Fren discusses *Ghost in the Shell*'s nod to traditional Japanese puppetry, and the anxiety of not being able to tell who or what is a puppet. When Motoko chases a robot, she and Batou go through a market. Motoko and the robot she chases are the only ones who seem animated and lively. The humans in the background seem mechanical, going through the motions as they shop. Motoko has an immediate and abstract desire—to capture the rogue robot and to be human. The shoppers seem oddly detached and isolated,

barely aware of what is going on around them outside of their immediate task of shopping. Furthermore, these mechanical humans also pass by the windows that display mannequins modeling clothes. According to Culver:

...fragmented human forms—both live models and manikins—into mechanical motion. The figure becomes the dresser's essential tool, a machine that simultaneously attracts the gaze of passersby and locates the items on display in a specific narrative...a human form reduced exactly to what the clothes require as a frame...how the manikin mediates between consumer and commodity by tempting people to confuse themselves with things. Gazing at the mobile, fragmented manikin, the shopper confronts a human form that is simply the aggregate of detachable, replaceable parts for which the clothes on display are necessary bodily parts. The window becomes a stage for the performance of a specific drama of desire; its cast is just the uncanny, mechanical double...the plate glass of the store front, aided by the manikin, invests commodities with a certain supplemental value that... can't be purchased or consumed because it is just the value the object has for the surrogate in its drama of dismemberment and transformation. (105)

Motoko fears being purely a commodity, valued only for what she superficially represents; a surrogate for Section Nine and from what they profit, what they sell. If the manikin is the abstract ideal, used to sell objects and the ideas and meanings that we give them—for example, the expensive clothes the mannequins in the store are not only selling expensive clothes, but the idea of attractiveness, wealth, health, a fit body; the mannequin is only the empty canvas on which we paint our ideals. The consumer fills in the gaps of what they want; they can imagine their perfect self, believe the lie that their desire will be satisfied with the acquisition of the object being sold. If the mannequins in the store are selling clothes, and the humans in the market are only acting the parts of human routine, acting like windup toys completing a trick, then what ideals has the state impressed upon Motoko—what does she represent? If she is a mannequin, what is Section Nine trying to sell using her as display? She only reflects what Section Nine prioritizes: efficiency and control. She exhibits strength, intelligence, and limited

anonymity with her mass-produced body. If Motoko is not human, then she has no right to resist the state or to desire, for she is the embodied desire for the human worker—she is the ideal worker. She never has to eat or drink (although she still does these things), go to the bathroom, get sick or injured (her parts are easily replaceable), cannot have children and thus cannot become pregnant (and thus unable to work or have maternity leave), or die (unless Section Nine terminates her). Motoko shares the same fears humans have—that they are not unique, not special, but one of many, mass produced, and only cogs in a wheel to fulfil a purpose, but are still easily replaceable. We can sympathize and relate to Motoko because she desires something more from life; better yet, she cannot give it a clear name, but she yearns for something undefinably more than what she has at present. This is what makes her human:

They are human only insofar as they desire, but they desire only the crucial missing piece, the one thing necessary, they think, to complete their manikinlike bodies. The problem, therefore, is not that their desires are impossible or fictitious but that they aren't impossible enough: the companions are too easily and definitively satisfied. Having obtained at last the crucial missing piece, resting content, they have ceased to be human: becoming autonomous, they have become automata. To remain human they must continue to feel a lack; therefore they require neither a purchasable article nor an unpurchasable, meta-physical thing but a value that appears only under the aspect of desire. (Culver 110)

Another problem regarding Motoko's humanity is her desire itself and the attainment of it. If desire makes us human, and the struggle to attain that desire (but to never reach it, or to only have another desire immediately spring from attaining the former desire), then what does that make Motoko at the end? She wanted to be human, and by consequence, she wanted her freedom from Section Nine, to have her own agency, to be in control of her own destiny. She gets just that when she merges with the Puppet Master. She gets what she wants and abandons her humanity. She is no longer human, she is no longer just

Motoko, and she no longer wants. What is she? Her new body is less human, and the unfamiliarity of the new form makes her less human and more Other to us as the audience. Perhaps by wishing to be human and finding the ontological essence of humanity within herself, Motoko only wanted to be treated as such, and to have full control of herself. Of course, Batou says, “You’re treated like other humans, so stop with the angst.” However, in the cyberpunk dystopia of the Tokyo-Hong-Kong landscape (it is never specifically named), the audience knows this to be false; they are not treated like humans, but objects. Or, to be treated like a human is to be treated like an object, to be a cog in the wheel. To have full control over one’s destiny is to be better than a human—is to be a doll, a manikin, a puppet. The thing that humans worship and value more than fellow humans. Especially given the tradition and popularity of puppetry and the manikin, Motoko/Puppet Master rose above the constraints of being a human worker, whose worth is correlated directly with how much they can profit their employer as a part of the collective, rather than the individual. This is especially important since in Japan, their society tends to prioritize the good of the whole, rather than the needs of the individual, which is the opposite of the glorified individualism of America.

Motoko, in her escape of the mechanical to validate her humanity and identity, seemed to abandon her humanity and identity in pursuit of the mannequin-figure, the Puppet Master, and then inhabit a dollish body. Her previously androgynous, yet still femininely-made body was torn apart by the spider robot, just before transforming into an overly-masculine form, rippling with impossible, unnatural muscles, her tendons and wires exposed and ripping, her humanoid appearance once again torn away to what she really is—mechanical. The new body, a child’s, possesses a new type of sexless

androgyny, and yet this is still troubling; the sexualization of a child's body "from the black market," as Batou confesses, was most likely on the black market for sexual purposes, which is what the sequel movie explores more closely. In the new body, Motoko's voice is different and her movements are mechanical, robotic, no longer smooth and graceful as she once was—perhaps still getting used to this new form, which appears more mechanical, more doll-like, and less familiar than before. For the audience, it may have been intended for this moment to be uncanny and uncomfortable, distancing them from the new Motoko. It is troubling, since Motoko, for the entirety of the film, clung to her humanity and feared the mechanical, the mannequin, the unalive imitation of life. This fear is precisely what she evokes both by gesturing to puppetry as a genre and by transforming into a stiff and less powerful body:

...draw[ing] from the long tradition of puppetry in Japan in order to illustrate the ways that artificial bodies (especially when represented within anime) are marked by an added layer of performativity that inflects their meaning, and he suggests that to ignore the performative aspect of these bodies is to miss their critical potential: Concerned with linking anime to a real-world context in which flesh-and-blood bodies are threatened with genuine objectification and violence, this approach treats fictional cyborgs on more or less the same plane as living human subjects. But treating Kusanagi as a living subject clearly misses the ways in which her body will always fall inside quotation marks; she is a virtual or performed subject that is both unreal and more than real from the start. (Fren 428)

Thus if Motoko wanted to be less mannequin, and yet she had to become more mannequin-like to gain absolute freedom from Section Nine, what does this mean for Motoko? Is she satisfied? Is the audience? What kind of creepy ending is this, and why does it leave such a sour note, even though Motoko is now truly free? She desperately tried to defend her humanity (at least to herself, in her own mind and philosophy) and yet ended up letting go of this identity and being reborn into something more mechanical,

something superior—like the uber marionette, the god-puppet (Puppet Master!), which confirms the inferiority of humans. Motoko lost her strings—but did she become a real girl? Yes and no. She is now more real in her newfound freedom and power, but this power comes from being mechanical, not human. She gained complete independence from everything and everyone else, even leaving her friend/partner Batou behind in favor of taking on the world herself in pursuit of her new, limitless life. She gained a second chance to live on her own terms because she no longer was held responsible to Section Nine and their whims—they would have eventually destroyed her, as she and Batou had mused on the boat, so at least in this way, she is either immortal or she can die on her own terms.

Even more interesting is when Motoko and Batou are on a boat, when a computerized voice says, “What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror. Then we shall see face to face.” And Batou asks, “That was you, wasn’t it?” Motoko does not answer; she only gazes into the audience. This quotation reflects Corinthians (1 Corinthians 13:12) and, at first, the answer is ambiguous. To whom did the voice belong, if not Motoko? If it was Motoko’s voice, why did she seem disturbed? Was this the Puppet Master hacking her voice? Upon Batou’s remark, there is a fear of the uncontrolled mechanical, even the uncontrollable organic—the body acting of its own accord, subverting one’s perception of one’s own free will. Something other than them has been watching them, and it wants to meet “face to face.” The Puppet Master/Motoko later says, “Remember the words I spoke in another voice last night? I understand it now, and there are even more words that go with the passage.” This may have been the Puppet Master’s way of courting Motoko to be the mother/child of a new being. The Puppet

Master/Motoko continues, “When I was a child, my speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child. Now that I am a man, I have no more use for childish ways. And now I can say these things without help in my own voice.” This echoes a quotation in the Bible (1 Corinthians 13:11). Perhaps it was childish of Motoko to yearn for the inferiority of humanity and to remain the same, in a baser state of being, rather than accepting the evolution into the mannequin/doll, the mechanical, the technological. It is also interesting that she knows she said this in “another voice” and then recites this quotation just as she regained her normal voice, rather than the doll-child’s voice only a few moments earlier. However, some things are still unclear. What does Motoko mean that she “spoke in another voice,” that not even she understood? Was this not the Puppet Master checking in, and telling her he wanted to meet her? How did Motoko say something she did not understand? If it was a different voice, was it still hers? Why does she take responsibility and ownership of this voice—could she not have distanced herself from this voice, saying it wasn’t her own? That someone hacked her voice?

The water imagery is related to the organic, the natural, and the feminine, especially the womb. The film opens with Motoko surrounded by fluid in fetal position, and when Batou and Motoko are on the boat, Motoko goes scuba diving. The suit is close to her skin color and she once again looks nude, as she was in the opening scene. Motoko also appears nude in the beginning as she jumps off a building, and later to blend in and chase the garbage-man robot with false memories of a human life. Their chase stopped in the shallow water and the only part of Motoko that could be seen was her shadow in the water: “[The] body is one defined, almost exclusively, by the degree to which it does matter and by its ability to command attention” (Stevenson 98). In many ways, Motoko’s

body does not matter, except that it is a means to an end, it serves a purpose. Just as it can turn invisible using “therm-optic camouflage” to blend in with the scenery and background, Motoko is the only one that must remove her clothes to do so. She runs and fights while naked, and in the end of the film, Motoko transforms from her androgynous form to a hyper-masculine Hulk-like monstrosity, ripping the spider robot apart, and consequentially herself as well, then lies naked, dismembered, in the water. When Motoko and the Puppet Master discuss merging, Batou once again places his jacket on her naked torso, but not the Puppet Master’s. Her body does not matter (except to Batou, who cares about her); it can be invisible, used, abused, and swapped. It does not command attention—it is a generic, androgynously-leaning feminine mannequin body, void of sexuality. To be unsexed is to be dehumanized, which is to be invisible and valueless.

In the scuba-diving scene, Motoko dives deep into the darkness and explores the unknown, and when she reemerges, it looks like a rebirth, a baptism, a death and resurrection. When she is first going under, all is dark, and her body is limp, like a corpse—or a helpless fetus, her return to the womb. Then, as she rises and opens her eyes and floats up, there is a color change, and she is met with her reflection. The two colors of blue and red contrast sharply, and she breaks the surface as she floats. This may indicate that being a cyborg—something interstitial, being both human and robot—makes her something completely new, different than the two things in her nature, being both and neither, belonging nowhere. Furthermore, it also foreshadows her fusion and rebirth with the Puppet Master; she is still being born, she is still becoming—she has yet to be reborn and baptized into her new elevated life. She is a hybrid, destined to be reborn and to be

the Eve of a new race. This combination of dualities makes her into something completely different, just as she merged with the Puppet Master and was both the program as well as herself, and thus being neither, as she later says to Batou, that she is “no longer” the Major nor the Puppet Master—she truly is the child, the offspring, of herself and the Puppet Master.

Motoko Kusanagi’s perception of her body and the perception other people have of her body influence her crisis regarding identity: “Disability is not a physical or mental defect but a cultural and minority identity. To call disability an identity is to recognize that it is not a biological or natural property but an elastic social category both subject to social control and capable of affecting social change” (Siebers 4). For example, when she undresses in this scene, Batou starts to look at her in order to reply, but then quickly glances away. Furthermore, in the opening scenes, the audience is given generous shots of her body, which may very well be fan service and sexual, but then it disassembles any possibility of fan service by having her skin flake away and have the audience look at what composes her beneath the surface. This is a desexualized observance of the body as a machine, whittling it away to its parts, rather than an abstract fantasy. It directly challenges the sexualization of her body, which, as I will further discuss, can be empowering or disempowering. She has no regard for her body when it is injured or when it is unclothed—but Batou does. Batou respects Motoko’s privacy, and thus links Motoko’s essence—her ghost—to her mass-produced mannequin body. Siebers points out that among the disabled community, abled outsiders who view the disabled when unclothed without shame because the disabled are seen as subhuman, and without any sexual agency; even if the abled person felt shame for the disabled person, the sexuality is

removed upon the ableist viewing (132). If disabled individuals keep having their agency diminished and stolen from the ableists, treated and viewed as a thing, then this applies to Motoko (and Batou) as they “signed away [their] bodies and ghosts away to Section Nine.” However, once her ghost changes with the Puppet Master and she gets a new body, she is no longer bound by Section Nine’s commands (which seemed mostly male-dominated with female subordinates), either. Furthermore, this confronts the anxieties of the human body—that it is not entirely unique and not worthy of respect, whether it conforms to ableist ideology or not. Human bodies are mass produced, all made the same way, whether artificially or biologically, we are only cells within a collective. Sometimes there are variances in production, but we are overall, nearly identical except for some artificial, minor differences in appearance and personality, but we all still fit within the confines of what is human.

In this boat scene, Motoko even says, “I imagine I’m becoming someone else”, and that she feels “fear” and “hope” in the darkness. Batou asks how she can feel hope in such a dark place, and she explains all the “countless ingredients” that make her unique. That is the difference between her and Batou—Batou cannot see past the darkness. He cannot see past—or does not want to see the past—the surface, past the present. He is grounded in the here and now and the literal. Motoko is willing to figuratively dive into the unknown and become reborn. She is constantly surrounded by imagery of water and the mannequin—rather than being opposite images, opposite fates, Motoko’s anxieties and destiny have been following her all along, foreshadowed for the audience. It should be no surprise that she is reborn as a mechanical humanoid in the end. Before she is in her new body, Motoko fights the spider robot and has her limbs torn off and she lies in

the water, and the Puppet Master, who is angelic in appearance with pale skin, blonde hair, blue eyes and a feminine body, and has had angelic and saintly imagery surrounding it, finally descends in light upon Motoko. Earlier, when the Puppet Master was a torso being dissected, its wires looked eerily like bodily gore, and in a close-up of its face, a rounded metal framed its face like a halo. It seems to reference an angel, a martyred saint, or even Jesus.

Furthermore, when she returns to the boat, Batou complains about not understanding her desire to dive, which is something he does throughout the film, figuratively and literally. Batou, however, does not see what she sees. “What do you see...in that darkness?” he asks her, but does not indulge in her philosophical questions or seem to share her crisis, possibly because more of him is still human, although he does not share how much when she bluntly asks him. His reaction to her question (how much of his human self is left), seems to be a sensitive subject, taboo even. When Batou dismisses Motoko’s questions as, “Bullshit!” rather than giving it any serious consideration, I suspect he is forcing his eyes closed to such situation, which is fitting as he no longer has organic eyes. He turns a blind eye to the limits, the boundaries she scrutinizes and into which she dives. He mentally and physically turns away whenever she is exposing herself, emotionally/verbally or physically, such as when she is naked and is rather blasé, he turns away and clothes her with his jacket. I do not think Motoko ever truly minds being vulnerable in front of him, because vulnerability does not diminish her strength or her validity as a person and makes her more human (and less machine/mannequin). However, this may also indicate that she does not feel any tie or ownership of her body, and truly only views it as a shell, that it is not really herself, and

thus does not even feel naked. Furthermore, if she teeters between viewing herself as fully human, then the human body she lacks, like genitals and breasts, do not need covering up because nothing related to sexuality was exposed, like genitals because she has none.

The Other in Cyberpunk

Orbaugh, Sato, and Park point out the specific concerns that the cyborg holds for Japan. Butler points out how the feminine is Othered, while Sato focuses on the feminization of the Other, especially Japan and how it identifies with the Othered cyborg after World War II, and Park discusses *GIS* in cyberpunk Japan and how the cyborg and the cyberpunk differ from the American portrayals and usages of the same figures and settings:

The problem is not that the feminine is made to stand for matter or for universality; rather the feminine is cast outside the form/matter and universal/particular binarisms. She will neither be one nor the other, but the permanent and unchangeable condition of both—what can be construed as nonthematizable materiality. (Butler 42)

The feminine is Other and has no comparison. The feminine is the outside of the universal masculine, which is seen as the default, and the feminine as the variant, the deviant from the norm. As Orbaugh points out, Japan as a nation has been feminized, Othered, and has a specific relationship with the cyborg.

Japan was once an outsider and sought alliance with the West. Japan adapted, taking in Western values alongside its own traditions. Japan then thrived in industry and technology, even surpassing America. Yet, Japan still was not good enough for America or the West to consider Japan its equal, and was rejected. Orbaugh's *Frankenstein*

Syndrome is woven in Japanese media and its identification with the cyborg. The West still sees the cyborg as Other and fears and vilifies it. Japan, however, identifies with the Other. Rather than seeing it as the enemy, Japan can see the cyborg as an extension of the self. Not at the dark part of oneself to be feared, but the marginalized self, the identity that has been cast aside and isolated, yet still thrives. In this way, when Western audiences tend to watch a cyborg—such as Darth Vader, as Orbaugh points out, the cyborg is dehumanized, frightening, and Other. To Japanese audiences, the cyborg is sympathetic, relatable, and more of a friendly figure. Motoko, this way, is a sort of everyman/woman. Motoko is, despite her defiance of traditional submissive feminine performances, still a feminized figure as a Japanese woman, a figurative and literal cyborg. As Orbaugh also mentions, with the rise in popularity of Japanese media, the cyborg as a sympathetic figure may spread to the West, but there is no telling to how differently the West may interpret and shape the figure of the Westernized sympathetic cyborg. Similarly, this is how Haraway interprets the cyborg, but rather than focusing on Japan/race, she focuses more on women as the Other, women as the cyborg. Additionally, rather than an untouchable goddess who is perfect, but still confined in the box of what is feminine, she says, “Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing tools to mark the world that marked them as other” (311). Motoko is not a goddess that has no struggle, the perfect epitome of femininity. Her strength does not come from this kind of perfection. Her strength comes from a drive to survive.

The cybernetic mentality that conditions these postwar fantastic narratives is in fact a rather active and almost self-torturing acceptance of machine parts into the human flesh, which drive the Japanese identity toward postwar survival and

victory over the leading nations by means of radical incorporation of technology.
(Sato 345)

This is a theme familiar to Japan and America—an underdog rising to the top. For the West, this tends to involve plain perseverance of spirit, hard work and sacrifice. For Japan, however, the survival can come from using one's perceived disabilities and Otherness to one's advantage. Transformation, change, and integrating the Other has become a part of its identity and its narrative of victory.

As Park explains, Motoko Kusanagi's journey as a weapon used by the state to her mergence with the Puppet Master as a freer individual off the radar of Section Nine shows the Other as Us, and technology as the truer Us than we are now. In the year 2032, humans are mixed with technology and computers. We, as the viewers, are already obsolete and are gazing at our future in the film. Japan, more so than America, is willing to embrace the unfamiliar and evolve and change, whereas America still distances technology and change as Other from the Self:

Kusanagi's nude body is showcased in the opening sequences of GIS, it is never explicitly sexualized; instead, the film treats her body as a beautiful weapon integral to her work as an assassin and as a disposable shell that temporarily houses her "ghost" or spirit....[Motoko is] associated most closely with the technologies from which [she was] "born" and...rejoin when [she] "die[s]." As Susan Napier notes in her reading of GIS, it is significant that Kusanagi is shown in the body of a young girl after she has merged with the Puppet Master and, by extension, the vast spiritual network of cyberspace. The transformed child-Kusanagi walking out of Batou's apartment to explore the literally worldwide net...present[s]...images of an alternative futurity. In this future, the technological Other is no "other" at all - neither an external space to be conquered nor an object to be used - but rather something that already exists within oneself. And it is perhaps in this sense that Japan's fantasy of the future diverges most sharply from the techno-oriental fantasies of American cyberpunk to which it pays homage. The difference is a rather significant one, and points as much to how Japan is changing the terms of orientalism as it does to how the United States keeps trying to reproduce. (Park 63)

As Motoko/Puppet Master show, evolution is change. Variety is needed, as Motoko points out earlier in the film, for sameness is death. Evolution is needed to survive; reacting the same way as the environment changes is not good for survival. Evolution is change, and yet the change is not becoming something completely different and unrecognizable from the former self. Change and evolution involve shifts, and as Motoko shows, a combination of something familiar but new, something better suited for the new circumstances.

Conclusion: Interstitiality

Ghost in the Shell challenges how we think of humanity and the vain superiority that stems from insisting on strict boundaries separating the organic from the inorganic, the human from the animal, and woman from man—even races from one another, although the movie states that race has yet to be obsolete—but, with further integration of the net with people, it may one day be possible, at least in the *Ghost in the Shell* universe. Post-humanist in its views, *GIS* pokes and prods at the holes in our thinking, in our separation of human and machine, bending our identities into each other, and in its comingling, creating a future, creating something new. Abandoning the confining identity of human, the next phase in evolution is to fuse more closely with technology until there are no longer any attempts at distinction. With the help of the net, all the other facets of humanity will be obsolete as well, and to return to humanity would be regression.

The Puppet Master is the embodiment of the sentient computer, the next step in human evolution, post-humanism; the Puppet Master's argument for his existence is his consciousness, having contempt for the physical form. Batou, conversely, is humanism;

his concerns lie in the physical, the body, and the present. The Puppet Master wants to merge his consciousness with Motoko's, his future survival being his main goal. Batou, however, always covers Motoko's exposed body, hiding her nakedness, even when she displays no discomfort in being nude. The Puppet Master challenges the importance of humanity and the possible differences between the human and the machine. Batou clearly respects the human over the machine. He says (in the Japanese version with English subtitles), when Motoko captures someone who was ghost-hacked by the Puppet Master: "There's nothing sadder than a puppet without a ghost. Especially the kind with red blood running through them." However, in the English dub, it is changed to: "Ghost-hacked humans are so pathetic. It's a shame. And this poor bastard's been hacked pretty badly." So, perhaps in Batou's view, a human is a human, different than a robot or puppet, because a human can supposedly think for itself, free of outside influence and suggestion. Motoko expresses a similar view when she says that the computer enhanced brains will react the same way, and a human's mind is more unpredictable because it is entirely organic. So someone or something without a ghost, or a soul, or a consciousness, is "sad" and "pathetic." The human or the "puppet with red blood" is the most terrible thing, as opposed to a robot without a ghost, because there is the expectation of organic free will and lack of programming, an emphasis on individuality and less "Borg-like" connection, like with the cyborgs attached to the net.

Batou and Motoko appear to be friends, almost lovers with an unspoken affection and loyalty to each other. The Puppet Master and Motoko demonstrate a more obvious coupling, a sex of the consciousness rather than the body. Motoko/Puppet Master go off to explore the world and the net, but Motoko, in a truly cyborgian nature, does not

completely succumb to pure computerization, but stays in-between. She remains friends with Batou; he got her the new body and gave her access to his hideout. She cannot completely abandon the physical realm and still needs a body to host her ghost. Motoko did not choose the Puppet Master, the machinic part of herself, over Batou, or the human part of herself. She embraced both, allowing the merge of the machine while keeping her humanity not despite the machinic, but because of it. Motoko merges with the Puppet Master but remains Batou's friend (in the *Innocence* installment, it is still ambiguous, but can be argued that they have an unspoken love/romance, or, at least, Batou may be in love with her). She does not choose between the seemingly dualities, the two parts of her hybrid nature, but has, in a sense, the best of both worlds. She stays connected to both men in a cyborgian polyamorous relationship. Both are parts of her nature and essential to her ability to remain interstitial—neither a being identified with her body nor complete transcendence, but forever liminal potential.

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