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ANIME

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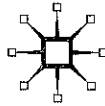
from *Akira* to
Princess Mononoke

Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation

Susan J. Napier

palgrave

for St. Martin's Griffin



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Portions of chapter 4, "Controlling Bodies," first appeared in "The Frenzy of Metamorphosis: The Body in Japanese Pornographic Animation," by Susan J. Napier in *Word and Image in Japanese Cinema*, Dennis Washburn and Carole Cavanaugh, eds. Reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2000 by

PALGRAVE

175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y.

Companies and representatives throughout the world

PALGRAVE is the new global publishing imprint of St. Martin's Press

LLC

Scholarly and Reference Division and Palgrave Publishers Ltd (formerly Macmillan Press Ltd).

ISBN 0-312-23862-2 hardback

ISBN 0-312-23863-0 paperback

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Napier, Susan Jolliffe.

Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke : experiencing contemporary Japanese animation / Susan J. Napier.

P. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-312-23862-2 — ISBN 0-312-23863-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Animated films—Japan. I. Title.

NC1766.J3 N37 2001

791.433—dc21

00-051473

Design by planettheo.com

First edition: May 2001

10 9 8 7 6 5 4

Printed in the United States of America.

For Julia

Moon Prism Power!

Having come to the ultimate in identity deconstruction, Shinji then has a surreal vision of an alternate anime universe, a self-reflexive version of an animated high-school sex comedy that proves to him that there are many possible directions his anime life could go in. With this knowledge he appears ready to begin rebuilding his life and states "I see I can exist without being an EVA pilot." The series ends with Shinji thanking his father and saying goodbye to his mother.

Looking at this final episode unironically, Shinji's story is in a sense a coming-of-age drama as much as that of Luke Skywalker or the protagonists of more conventional *mecha*. Indeed, critic Endo Toru sees the final episode as an explicitly sexual coming of age in which Shinji, through the interrogation of the personas of his fellow female combatants in his mind (his *anima*, perhaps), ultimately is able to separate from his dead mother and move on to a more adult sexuality.¹⁸ At one point in the episode, for example, he is told in Lacanian fashion that "the first person you see is your mother" and at the end of the episode, he says goodbye to his mother. Even if Shinji's "maturation" is perceived in a straightforward manner (and, given the dark tone of the series this would be rather problematic), it still seems to be highly ambiguous. Indeed, in the film *The End of Evangelion*, Shinji's sexual coming of age is shown in the bleakest of terms as the opening sequence reveals him masturbating miserably over the wounded body of Asuka. In contrast to Luke's learning to use the "Force" in the *Star Wars* series, it seems clear in both film and these final episodes that mastery of the EVAs leads only to alienation and despair.

The very ubiquitousness and popularity of the *mecha* genre makes *Evangelion* in general and this final episode in particular peculiarly jarring. Through Shinji's self-questioning, the viewer is insistently reminded of the fundamental worthlessness of the power derived from the mechanical armor, thus undermining the whole basis of the *mecha* genre. The final scenes in which the unarmored Shinji floats gently in a world without directions, boundaries, or human contact are in striking contrast to the scenes of armored bodies in combat that ended many of the previous episodes. In the solipsistic world of *Evangelion*, *mecha* are finally unimportant except as a means to know the self. Even the human body is less important than the mind that creates its own reality.

CHAPTER SIX

DOLL PARTS: TECHNOLOGY AND THE BODY IN GHOST IN THE SHELL

Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden. [T]he cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden.

—Donna Haraway

I am doll parts.

—Hole

By the very act of denying the existence of the ghost in the machine—of mind dependent on, but also responsible for, the

actions of the body—we incur the risk of turning it into a very nasty, malevolent ghost.

—Arthur Koestler

SIMILAR TO EVANGELION, which seems to deconstruct or even to repudiate the technological instrumentalities of the *mecha* genre that concentrates on the complex and vulnerable psychology of its human protagonist, the final work to be discussed in this section, Oshii Mamoru's 1995 film *Ghost in the Shell* (*Kōkaku Kidōtai*, although the English title is used as well) also turns inward in its exploration of the possibilities of transcending corporeal and individual identity. Less popular in Japan than *Akira*, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, or the films of Miyazaki, *Ghost in the Shell* was a critical and cult success in the United States. It remains a favorite of many Western anime fans because of its combination of technically sophisticated (and extremely beautiful) computer animation and its complex and philosophically sophisticated story line.

The plot revolves around a search for the apparently sinister entity known as the Puppet Master (*ningyōzukūai*) that can hack into top-secret computers and high level cyborg brains. Responsibility for the search is given to a top-secret government agency known as Section 9 whose best operative is Major Kusanagi Motoko of the *Kōkaku Kidōtai* (Shell Mobile Force), a superbly effective cyborg assassin. Although part of the *mecha* genre, the film manipulates traditional *mecha* tropes such as the cyborg and urban high-tech settings to explore more inward states of consciousness. Rather than using *Neon Genesis Evangelion's* psychoanalytic lens, however, the framework for this exploration is based on the complex relationship between body and spirit. In addition, *Evangelion* (Shinseiki Ebuangērion, 1997) is more of a psychoanalytic examination of adolescent identity in which technology acts as one more instrument of alienation. *Ghost in the Shell* is a genuinely metaphysical work that is concerned less with individual identity in society than with such philosophical questions as whether one can possess a soul in an increasingly technological age. Furthermore, while the television series of *Evangelion* privileges loneliness and emotional disconnection, *Ghost in the Shell* explores the possibility of psychic connection through technological means.

Its choice of vehicle for this exploration is not a human body but a cyborg one, the beautiful female body of Kusanagi. As its use of a cyborg heroine may hint, *Ghost in the Shell* is one of the least technophobic of any of the works discussed in this section. Instead, it raises the possibility of technology's positive potential, not only in terms of the physical and mental augmentation offered by the cyborg but also in terms of the possibility of spiritual development offered by an artificial intelligence known as the Puppet Master. This Puppet Master offers Kusanagi the possibility of transcending her cyborg body and becoming part of the "net," a reference not only to cyberspace but to a kind of non-material Overmind. *Ghost in the Shell* is a unique text in that it presents the viewer with two kinds of technological futures, artificial intelligence and the cyborg body, as it attempts to reconcile them through a structure that has clearly theological underpinnings. As we will see, however, what it does not offer is much hope for the organic human body, which is seen as essentially a puppet or a doll (the Japanese word "*ningyō*" means both "doll" and "puppet") to be manipulated or transformed by outside sources.

In its exploration of such profound issues as the relations between soul, body, and technology, *Ghost in the Shell* owes as much to American science fiction, such as Ridley Scott's landmark 1982 science fiction film *Blade Runner*¹ or William Gibson's classic 1980 cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer* as it does to any specific *mecha* anime. *Blade Runner's* influence, both in terms of metaphysics and in terms of the film's memorably textured dark mise-en-scène, is very obvious.² *Ghost in the Shell's* dystopian vision of an alienated, near-future world, shadowy government agencies and a dark, urban setting of rain-lashed skyscrapers all evoke *Blade Runner*, while its image of a tough weapon-toting heroine dealing with sinister computer hackers is evocative of *Neuromancer* and other cyberpunk works. At the same time, the film's superb animation, rhythmic pacing, and dark, metaphysical story line give it an extraordinary and unique lyricism all its own. Rather than categorizing *Ghost in the Shell* purely as a *mecha* film, therefore, it might be at least as accurate to call it a "cyberpunk-noir film" with elegiac, gothic, and even apocalyptic overtones. As we saw in our discussion of pornography, the gothic is usually seen as a female mode and it is possible to suggest that *Ghost in the Shell*, in contrast to the other *mecha* works, has a strongly "female" sensibility in terms of the

traditional female links with the irrational and the uncanny and the interior and the reflective.

While the film's basic narrative is strongly redolent of cyberpunk, it is balanced by a lyrical and reflective emotional framework and an often surprisingly slow narrative pace. The film is far less action-driven than most Western cyberpunk or *mecha* anime. For example, many slow, hauntingly beautiful scenes, often involving water (another obvious link to the feminine since in East Asian culture the female principle of *yin* is associated with water), in which the film explores Kusanagi's essential loneliness, counterbalance its brilliant scenes of technological combat (including one tour de force sequence involving the pursuit of an invisible man wearing "thermo-optic camouflage").

In addition, an implicit lament for a lost (or perhaps never really existing) world of human connection is one of the film's more distinctive elegiac aspects. The lyrical scene in which Kusanagi is shown riding a boat down an urban canal, quietly watching the city dwellers moving through the rain clearly conveys this point. Through her eyes, the viewer focuses through the rain on lonely individuals backlit by the urban neon, including a presumably human woman who appears to be a double of Kusanagi herself. At the end of the scene the viewer sees a brightly lit department store window whose shadowy, armless mannequins not only reflect Kusanagi's own nonhuman state but also underline the film's powerful sense of the corrosive loneliness of the human condition. Another distinctive aspect of the film is the figure of Kusanagi herself. Unlike the other "heroes" of the *mecha* works profiled in this book such as Shinji, Sho, or Priss, or the protagonists of *Blade Runner* and *Neuromancer*, Kusanagi is not a human or a human enmeshed in body armor but a cyborg, who, while possessing human features, is actually a technological creation. Her "birth" is shown in a sequence under the opening credits and her non-human quality is underlined by one of the film's catch phrases, "She was born in the net."³

In some ways Kusanagi fits comfortably into scholar Donna Haraway's vision of the cyborg as a creature without human limitations. For Haraway, the cyborg is a liberating entity "not afraid of [its] joint kinship with animals and machines,"⁴ "a creature in a post gender world."⁵ Thus the birth scene shows Kusanagi as both organi-

cally and technologically constructed but totally free of human origins. The viewer first sees her as a series of computerized digits glowing across the screen and then as a mechanical body frame in which her head is opened up to allow for various technological implants. The viewer watches her gradually take human shape as her now flesh-covered body floats in a fetal position immersed in a vat of liquid prior to her final ejection into the real world. This ejection gives no sense of any human agency being involved. Furthermore, although Kusanagi is hardly genderless (she has a very female figure), she is characterized more clearly by her profession of assassin and is never shown with a sexual partner or in any form of sexual association, as if to render her innately free of any basic human ties.⁶

Haraway also points out that "Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden [of Eden]"⁷ and therefore has no concern with its father or mother. As is clear from her birth scene, Kusanagi has no past or any associations with parent or parentlike figures. This is in striking contrast to Shinji's obsession with his parents in *Evangelion*, and is also significantly unlike the "replicants" of *Blade Runner*, who collect old photographs and bond together in a pseudo kinship group. Kusanagi, on the other hand, seems explicitly uninterested in origins or history. A subplot reminiscent of the 1990 film *Total Recall* deals with the implanting of fake memories in an innocent pawn of the Puppet Master, and Kusanagi seems outwardly unfazed by the cruelty of the procedure.

However, Kusanagi is not completely comfortable in her cyborg identity and she does not totally fit Haraway's paradigm of self-satisfied autonomy. The real "action" of the film is not so much the hunt for evil perpetrators or even the Puppet Master but is rather a quest for her spiritual identity. Although outwardly unconcerned with origins, Kusanagi is profoundly concerned about whether she possesses something that she and the film call her "ghost," the spirit or soul that animates her being. Although she often discusses her ghost with herself and her colleagues in dialogue that is striking in its philosophical overtones, it is Kusanagi's cyborg body rather than her mind that becomes the vehicle for this quest. For it is her body, standing at the nexus between the technological and the human, that can best interrogate the issues of the spirit. This is made clear in the narrative

structure of the film, which arranges itself around the theme of the fall, both literally and figuratively. Oshii visually represents Kusanagi's complex and contradictory search in a variety of dazzling sequences that track Kusanagi's body and mind through a series of "falls." In these falls, which clearly have a theological subtext, Kusanagi's body is seen as both vulnerable and powerful, as both object and subject. Furthermore, in the final fall she comes to the point of leaving her body behind.

The first fall privileges the body. It occurs in the opening scene of the film, a sequence occurring before the credits that begins with the words "in the near future corporate networks reach out to the stars[;] electrons and light flow throughout the universe," and is followed by the potentially ominous statement that "the advance of computerization, however, has not yet wiped out nations and ethnic groups" (this introduction is a shortened version of the one that appears in the manga). The view then opens out to focus on Kusanagi standing on the roof of a high building, the wind slightly ruffling her hair, trying to make voice contact through circuits implanted in her brain with her colleagues in Section 9. When one of her colleagues, Batou, complains about "there being a lot of noise in your brain today," she answers flippantly, "It's that time of the month." Unzipping her clothes, she stands on the building's ledge, her slim, apparently nude figure managing to appear both sexual (although in a relatively androgynous way, compared to the typical hypersexualized female body in most anime) and vulnerable at the same time. She proceeds to jump into the darkness and fall downwards, in what seems to be an agonizingly slow process, only to be caught by a strong cable that breaks her fall just outside a window where a meeting is going on.

The scene shifts inside the building to an angry meeting of high-level government officials who are attempting to prevent the defection of an artificial intelligence operative to a hostile country. As the meeting breaks down, the representative of the hostile nation declares angrily, "our country is a peace-loving state." From outside the office window a female voice is heard saying sardonically, "Oh, really?" and gunfire erupts through the window, killing the official.

This scene reveals a number of contradictory elements encompassed in Kusanagi's mind and body. Although she looks "human," she is not really human, a fact that is highlighted by her sarcastic reference

to menstruation while she is connecting a radio implant into her head. She is also both powerful and vulnerable. The viewer is impressed by her physical prowess and fearlessness (her cynical assessment of peace-buildings) and also by her toughness (her ability to leap off tall buildings) and also by her toughness (her cynical assessment of peace-loving assertions). At the same time, however, the body is also shown as potentially vulnerable. Because the viewer is at first not privy to the fact that this is a carefully arranged assassination, his or her first reaction to Kusanagi's fall is one of unease. She is apparently nude, prey to the currents of the air, and falling. It is only the single cable that is able to suspend her, marionette-like in the air. Furthermore her body encapsulates both presence and absence, signified first by her disembodied voice outside the window, and then by the next scene in which after the successful assassination, we see her become invisible, thanks to her thermo-optic camouflage, allowing the viewer to suddenly see, through the disappearing outlines of her body, the vast electronic high-tech city toward which she falls.

Kusanagi's initial fall is metonymically associated with her birth as the film segues into the aforementioned birth sequence. Although both the technological and organic imagery is redolent of science fiction tropes of monster-making, the sequence itself is lyrical, quiet, and rhythmically paced. Unlike Shinji's "birth scene" we are given no sense of horror or fear for there is no emotion shown on Kusanagi's face. Instead the mood is mystical, enhanced by otherworldly music and slow pacing.

In some ways however, this "birth scene" is not totally dissimilar to the one in *Evangelion* in that in both cases the entities being "born" are at the mercy of powerful outside forces. In Shinji's case these forces are focused in his sinister father, giving him an obvious target to resist. Kusanagi's world, however, is fatherless. She is a product of the immense "corporate networks" mentioned in the film's introduction, dependent on them for her career and her identity. In this regard, the slender cable that suspends her as she falls can be seen as having both umbilical associations and associations with a corporate, or at least governmental, form of Puppet Mastery; the institutions literally bind her to her work as an assassin.

Although Kusanagi seems to have no explicit interest in origins or parents, it is interesting that her next "fall" occurs after the scene in which she and Batou observe an unfortunate victim of the Puppet

Master who has been told that all his memories of family life are artificial implants and he really lives alone in a small room. Although apparently unmoved by this vision of mental deconstruction, the next scene shows Kusanagi risking death by diving deep into the rusty waters of the urban harbor. As she comes to the surface, Batou first scolds her for her recklessness and then asks her what she sees deep in the water. She responds with a series of emotions rather than facts: "fear, anxiety . . . maybe even hope." Here Kusanagi seems to be attempting to discover a core self, one that is accessible through the technological apparatus of her diving gear but is encased within the organic womb of the sea. With surprising abruptness, the film then interjects another element that underlines even more emphatically the notion that this is a quest for identity. Kusanagi, still sitting on the boat, suddenly quotes from The Book of Corinthians in the Bible the lines, "For although I see through a glass darkly soon I shall see face to face."

Although the film later reveals that this is the Puppet Master speaking through Kusanagi, it is clear throughout *Ghost in the Shell* that Kusanagi herself is looking through a glass darkly, searching for some fuller image of herself, one that may go beyond her lonely individuality. She seems to achieve this in her final "fall," this time a metaphorical one, a "dive" into the mind of the Puppet Master, whom she has finally located in temporary possession of another beautiful, female cyborg body. The scene where she dives in is a memorable one: By this point in the film both Kusanagi and the Puppet Master's host body have been ripped apart by gunfire so that only their armless upper torsos are left. Placed side by side on the floor of a cavernous hall, supposedly based on London's nineteenth-century Crystal Palace Exhibition Hall,⁸ they strongly resemble the armless mannequins Kusanagi gazed at previously in department store windows. Then, as Kusanagi "dives in," the Puppet Master begins to speak through the mouth of her own body in a male voice, inviting Kusanagi to fuse with him in a world beyond the body. Invoking Plato, the Puppet Master begs her to come out of the cave and into the light.

This scene questions the notion of body and identity in a variety of vivid and disturbing ways. The two armless female torsos at first look utterly helpless, torn fragments of femininity left in an echoing, empty building. Yet the viewer also knows that these are cyborgs, not

"real" human beings. Are they then simply broken machinery ready to become the scrap metal of the postmodern state?

In fact, the film firmly resists any postmodern celebration of fragmentation. We have been coached by Kusanagi's own ruminations to believe that she, at least, has a "ghost" within her machinery, which means that she will live beyond her fragmented body. However, her "dive" into the Puppet Master's mind, and his appropriation of her vocal chords is as disconcerting as it is replete with boundary transgressions. After the dive, Oshii shifts the point of view to the Puppet Master's eyes as we are allowed to look up at the cavernous hallway from the torso's place on the floor. This viewpoint shot achieves a kind of double identification: The viewer is identifying with Kusanagi who is now "identifying" with the eyes of the Puppet Master. Then, when Kusanagi begins to speak in the Puppet Master's voice, a further dislocation occurs because we now see Kusanagi's body as permeable as well. Kusanagi's fall has allowed her finally to leave her body and to begin to move toward a larger, more encompassing entity.

The film ends with one final vivid and genuinely surprising boundary transgression. Rescued by Batou just after the military has devastated the hall and is about to destroy the final fragments of her body, Kusanagi appears in a new body, one scavenged in desperation by Batou. This is the body of a young girl.¹⁰ For the viewer this final image is perhaps the most disorienting one of all. Kusanagi's head remains but her body is no longer that of the sleek, hardened, female super agent. Instead she sprawls in schoolgirl uniform in a large chair, looking like an abandoned puppet. She even speaks initially in a little girl voice, underlining her loss of power and identity.

Although the original manga had Batou scavenging a male body for Kusanagi, the film's insistent privileging of the female body is an important addition. While Kusanagi is never shown in a sexual situation, her uncertainty as to her identity, her dependence on outside forces, and the scene in which she becomes a fragmented torso all suggest some underlying issues that could perhaps be read through a feminist lens. Ultimately, Kusanagi's strength and agility seem hollow, underlined by the many dependent, vulnerable, and damaged modes in which the viewer sees her. Furthermore, the fact that the supposedly sexless Puppet Master speaks in a somewhat masculine voice and

essentially invites Kusanagi to perform a kind of "wedding" with him seems to emphasize Kusanagi's dependent feminine status.

But it is also possible to argue that, rather than making Kusanagi a feminist icon, Oshii is instead using her vulnerable female body and the "feminine" lyrical mode of the film itself to underline the vulnerability of all human beings in a world that is increasingly governed by oppressive and incomprehensible outside forces. The film's solution to this vulnerability is a surprising one, however. At the film's end it becomes clear that Kusanagi has fused with the Puppet Master. Righting herself and regaining her original voice, she marches out of Batou's apartment and looks down at the city spread out below in an echo of the film's opening scene. This time she does not fall but simply stands, asking herself, "So where do I go from here?" The final line of the film is Kusanagi's reflection to herself that "the net is wide and infinite." In contrast to the opening sequence, this final scene ends on a transcendent note as she looks up at the sky and implicitly at the "net."

This final embrace of a technological world is a unique one in comparison with the previous texts profiled in this book or with the American tech noir works we have alluded to. As a number of critics have pointed out, the replicants in *Blade Runner* can be compared with fallen angels, mentally and physically superior creatures who "fall" to Earth in search of their creator, the mysterious head of the Tyrell Corporation, in hopes of prolonging their four-year life spans.¹¹ Kusanagi, of course, is already earthbound and her falls are more connected with a search for identity than for a desire for life. In both films, however, this notion of the fall brings up complex questions of what it is to be human in an increasingly technological world where the gods seem to have disappeared and the human soul seems more and more vulnerable to technological and institutional exploitation. Both films highlight hunts or quests that are both physical and spiritual—in *Blade Runner's* case the hunt by the detective Deckard to find the replicants and "retire" them is played in counterpoint to the quest by the replicants to find their creator and prolong their lives, their "humanity," as it were.¹² *Ghost in the Shell* also features two forms of hunts, that of Kusanagi for the Puppet Master and, implicitly, her quest for her "ghost." In Kusanagi's case the two quests fuse as she finds the Puppet Master and he offers her the opportunity to combine

her ghost with his into a more satisfying form of identity and a new version of "life."

Although both Kusanagi and the replicants may therefore be seen as engaging in broadly spiritual quests, their ultimate aims are significantly different. The replicants want to be "human" in the most organic sense of the word, to live as long as possible and experience as much as possible. *Blade Runner's* emphasis on eyes and seeing underlines the deeply physical aspect of their hunger. In contrast, Kusanagi wants to escape the physical, be it technological or organic, to fuse into a nonmaterial world where her ghost can roam free. In a sense the two films are opposites of each other. While the replicants "fall" into humanness and life in all its heart-breaking transience, Kusanagi takes leave of the human for a chance at bodiless immortality. Both films contain clearly Christian references, such as the dove that Batry, the chief replicant, holds at the end of his life in *Blade Runner* and the Puppet Master's quotations from the Bible in *Ghost in the Shell*. The Puppet Master himself has certain godlike aspects in his vision of creating a new world.¹³ But Kusanagi is obviously not searching for a Christian notion of transcendence. Instead, *Ghost's* other influences may well be both Shinto and Buddhist. For example, while acknowledging the obvious Christian references in the script, Oshii and his screenwriter Ito Kazunori also argue that Kusanagi's final "wedding" with the Puppet Master is evocative of the sun goddess Amaterasu's decision to take part in the world of the gods.¹⁴ In the myth the sun goddess is lured out of a rock cave by seeing her image in a mirror, perhaps the "dark glass" that the Puppet Master has Kusanagi invoke. The film's haunting theme song is also clearly inspired by Shinto liturgy,¹⁵ in its invocation to the gods to come and dance with the human. In fact, Oshii states that the "net" can be equated with the myriad gods of the Shinto religion,¹⁶ underlining the notion that Kusanagi's fusion with the Puppet Master has strongly theological overtones. I might also suggest that the notion of a bodiless union with an amorphous greater entity has clear evocations of the Buddhist concept of nirvana, where the self is said to become like a single drop in a vast ocean.

Rather than trying to emphasize one religious influence or another in *Ghost in the Shell*, it seems safe to say that the issues the film raises are ones that religion and philosophy have struggled with from

ancient times. What is exceptional about the film is its welding of these age-old issues within an extraordinarily contemporary package that manages to be both elegiac and cutting-edge at the same time. *Ghost* may lament the loss of the individual soul epitomized in Kusanagi's forlorn beauty, but it also accepts the new technological world and the possibility of different kinds of spiritual connections.

Unlike films like *Blade Runner* or *Robocop*, which J. P. Telotte says "offer . . . a path back to the private self,"¹⁷ *Ghost in the Shell* turns in a different direction to offer a path out of the self. While the American films seem to privilege a kind of individual humanism as a last resort against the encroaching forces of technology and capitalism, *Ghost* simply repudiates the constraints of the contemporary industrialized world to suggest that a union of technology and the spirit can ultimately succeed. In the world of the film, human bonding, human aspirations, even human memories are finally repudiated, just as the Crystal Palace-like structure, with its nineteenth-century associations, is blown to bits.

It is possible that there may be cultural differences at the heart of these two visions of technology and the soul. As mentioned before, there are Buddhist and Shinto associations with the "net," and it is a truism that a willingness to give up the self into a larger entity has been an important element in Japanese communal morality for centuries. However, Kusanagi's dive into the Puppet Master's mind may also be seen as a form of defiance against the government and the corporations that first made her their tool, a "marionette" whose identity was fixed as an assassin. It is important to remember, moreover, that the notion of a bodiless supermind is one that has been a staple of Western science fiction as well, since at least the 1950s when Arthur C. Clark's classic novel *Childhood's End* envisaged future children linking together into a transcendent greater entity.

Whatever image Kusanagi finally finds through the mirror, it is surely one that will question not only the fixed categories of the machine and the soul but also the basic notion of what it is to be "normal" at the end of the twentieth century. Indeed, all the works mentioned in this section implicitly problematize what it is to be a "normal" human being, offering an incredible variety of alternatives that play with the notion of a fixed identity. Not all of these alternatives are accepted, however. Ranma searches desperately for a return to

normality, *Wicked City* denies the promise/threat of the transforming female body and forces the female back into maternal mode, and the heroes of most of the *mecha* films show ambivalent feelings toward their augmented powers. Even the films that seem to embrace alterity also show its potential for threat. Thus Tetsuo's "birth" into a new universe is seen as accompanied by agonizing pain and Kusanagi must destroy her own body before she can join the net.

Other differences may just be due to the directors' or writers' personal choices. *Ghost in the Shell's* use of a female protagonist may be related to the fact that Shirov Masamune, the author of the manga on which the film is based, has a predilection for tough, active heroines. Whatever the cause, Kusanagi's obvious femininity may be one reason the film seems imbued with a more ethereal quality than either the typical cyberpunk or *mecha* film. It goes well beyond the typical science fiction privileging of the mechanical and the logical, the world typically associated with "masculine" discourse. Although it gives us an indubitably cyberpunk world replete with cyborgs, computers, robots, and other *mecha* tropes, at the same time it is a world clearly imbued with a sense of otherness that seems remarkably feminine.

In fact, *Ghost in the Shell* shares with other works discussed in the previous chapters a fundamental concern or even unease with the body and thus, implicitly, with identity itself. *Ghost in the Shell*, *Akira*, and *Evangelion* all seem to be showing attempts to escape the body and thus the constraints of human identity. The new identity that these characters appear to be seeking is one that transcends the categorizing nature of society, especially that of traditional Japanese society. Perhaps the most memorable vision from the last episode of *Evangelion* is the scene in which Shinji's body floats free in a completely empty white space, underlining his need to go beyond the expectation of others. In Tetsuo's case he frees himself from society in a scene that also contains a vision of white blankness as he metamorphoses into an isolated eye. But this transformation is enacted through apocalyptic violence, the physical correlative of Shinji's mental anguish. Kusanagi, in contrast, seems serenely content to leave her body behind, although her transformation is in some ways an apocalyptic one as well, implying the jettisoning of the entire organic world.

Whether these boundaryless figures are regarded as icons of liberation from a constricting society or as sinister harbingers of an

inhuman future, they all suggest that identity in anime, even in the most basic form of the body, cannot be taken for granted. The metamorphic process lying at the heart of the animated medium ensures that both characters and viewers can explore the rewarding, though sometimes oppressive, possibilities of creating and encapsulating worlds.

PART THREE

*

MAGICAL GIRLS AND FANTASY WORLDS

THE ANIME DISCUSSED IN THE PREVIOUS SECTION deal with the increasingly problematic issue of identity in the contemporary world, emblemized by the ubiquitous trope of the metamorphosing body. The body was inscribed in various forms and in relation to various problems, including questions of gender identification and relations between the sexes, which in this section are issues of particular interest.

Saito Minako has suggested in her book *Kōitenron* that anime can generally be divided into two categories, the “country of boys” and the “country of girls,” implying a very strong gender demarcation in the creation, targeting, narratives, and imagery of anime. Her analysis goes beyond traditional assumptions that *mecha* series and films were more apt to be viewed by males and romances with girl protagonists more likely to have female viewers. She brings up interesting distinctions,