CHAPTER 1

GENDER IN CLASSIC AND JAPANESE CYBERPUNK

1.1 Introduction and Scope

As the first wave or classic cyberpunk gave way to more women-friendly, if not outright feminist narratives, it became clear that a distinction was drawn on various lines simultaneously. This particular mode of writing emerged in sync with the burgeoning women's rights movements specifically in the USA, and situated these marginalized narratives at the center of the cyberpunk universe, where the central concern shifted from the reframing of the humanist metanarrative to an explosion of the varied understandings of gender, performativity and sexual identity in a cyberpunk world. The protagonists shifted from the classic straight, white male to a gay Chinese (*China Mountain Zhang*), a Japanese engineered gynoid (*The Windup Girl*), a lesbian hacker (*Trouble and her Friends*), or a technologically indentured slave and a male android concubine in a fundamentalist state (*Nekropolis*), among many others. Their stories projected contemporary socio-cultural marginalizations onto a cyberpunk world to explore the ramifications of technology on the construction and condition of hitherto invisible categories.

Therefore, the term *feminism*, in the context of the current study, is less about a specific definition or understanding of the multi-faceted term; rather, it is largely indicative of the ways in which it challenges the narrative elements of classic cyberpunk on multiple levels - that of gender roles, sexual orientation, ecological damage and representations of racial/cultural identity, thereby becoming inclusive of entities beyond the standard *straight, white male*.

The emergence of such a second wave arose from no specific, identifiable incident - while the first (and for a long time, the sole) female writer who wove gender into cyberpunk, Pat Cadigan, can be called the bridge between classic cyberpunk and feminist cyberpunk, at no point in cyberpunk history was the writing limited to only feminist concerns. Researchers have frequently used the term 'feminist cyberpunk' in an attempt to classify second-wave cyberpunk fiction that made use of non-white/male/straight protagonists, depicting worlds where technology and gender remade frameworks to view the latter category.

Carlen Lavigne, in her work *Cyberpunk Women, Feminism and Science Fiction: A Critical Study* (2012), makes an attempt to locate feminist struggles in the narratives of various authors between 1995 and 2005 in a bid to examine the raging issues of gender and cultural identity addressed by those writing prominently in the second wave. Meanwhile, Kathryn Allan in her work *Bleeding Chrome: Technology and the Vulnerable Body in Feminist Post-Cyberpunk Science Fiction* (2010) locates a similar attempt to study the ramifications of technology in a feminist posthuman framework.

However, with the explosion of simultaneous issues being explored, examined and reframed under the misleading umbrella term "feminist", it is apt to reconsider the nomenclature ‘feminist cyberpunk’ to replace it with a more appropriate all-encompassing term *postcyberpunk.* Rather than an escape from defining the scope of the post-classic cyberpunk works, it points to the ever-expanding multiplicity of issues examined by different authors. However diverse the concerns of such narratives, they are definitely set in a high-tech near-future world (accommodating varying degrees of the classic cyberpunk cityscape), controlled by corporations in complicity with crime, dealing with corporeality and thereby interrogating the systems that use and abuse power.

Regarding such narratives, Lawrence Person writes in an article on *Slashdot* in 1998:

The best of cyberpunk conveyed huge cognitive loads about the future by depicting (in best "show, don't tell" fashion) the interaction of its characters with the quotidian minutia of their environment. In the way they interacted with their clothes, their furniture, their decks and spex, cyberpunk characters told you more about the society they lived in than "classic" Science Fiction stories did through their interaction with robots and rocketships.

Postcyberpunk uses the same immersive world-building technique, but features different characters, settings, and, most importantly, makes fundamentally different assumptions about the future. Far from being alienated loners, postcyberpunk characters are frequently integral members of society (i.e., they have jobs). They live in futures that are not necessarily dystopic (indeed, they are often suffused with an optimism that ranges from cautious to exuberant), but their everyday lives are still impacted by rapid technological change and an omnipresent computerized infrastructure.

Person argues that the term 'postcyberpunk' is apt to describe a "world of accelerating technological innovation and ever-increasing complexity in ways relevant to our everyday lives" (ibid), where the locus of action is the social space in the post-third industrial era, consisting of dataspheres and cybernetic invasive technology, with repercussions on the lives structured around it, be it male or female, white or non-white, straight or gay. Talking about the underlying power structures in cyberpunk, Aciye Gülengül Altintaş states:

> In this fictional world, the unison in the hive becomes a power mechanism which is executed in its capillary form, not from above the social body but from within. This mechanism as Foucault remarks is a form of power, which "reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives." In postcyberpunk unitopia 'the capillary mechanism' that Foucault describes is literalized. Power

> touches the body through the genes, injects viruses to the veins, takes the forms of pills and constantly penetrates the body through its surveillance systems; collects samples of body substance, reads finger prints, even reads the 'prints' that are not visible, the ones which are coded in the genes. The body responds back to power, communicates with it; supplies the information that power requires and also receives its future conduct as a part of its daily routine. More importantly, power does not only control the body, but also designs, (re)produces, (re)creates it according to its own objectives. Thus, human body is re-formed as a result of the transformations of the relations between communication and power (99-100).

Studies in Masculinities, meanwhile, have been informed by feminist theory, to investigate and interrogate ideologies, and subsequent actual and anticipated behaviours that surround the ideas of masculinity, to not only challenge their "performativity", but also reveal the multiple masculinities underneath the universally privileged idea of "the man", which is more often than not, a "hegemonic masculinity". (Connell, xviii).

The construction of masculinity has been integral to the construction of femininity in any patriarchal society, fraught in a binary conflict. Emerging in the 1990s as a response to Gender Studies being focused exclusively on the normative, hegemonic constructions of the non-male in a patriarchy, Masculinities studied the idea of "manliness" through interdisciplinary lenses of culture, history, economics, politics, arts and psychology to question uniform narratives of "real men", looking at the idea of "manliness" in different cultures at different points of time, pointing at the hybridity of ideas, instead of boxing up masculinity in an essentialist, oppressive, singular narrative.

The idea of masculine, then, is just as complex and varied as the idea of feminine. The chapter looks at both men and women in the chosen texts, from hegemonic positions of

essentialist frameworks of gender, to study how not just non-males, but also males are represented in cyberpunk.

1.2 Cyborgs, AIs and Augmented Humans in American Cyberpunk

The focus of my work, therefore, is not to identify the second wave as a monolithic feminist discourse, or to claim that the second wave paid particular attention to feminist concerns – rather, the word "feminist" here is more akin to the umbrella term, which concerns itself with a vast range of issues that masculine literature has conveniently evaded. Therefore, the term feminism here evokes no specific understanding of feminist values - rather, it is indicative of a trend in second-wave cyberpunk that deviates from the classic patriarchal cyberpunk in the delineation of various issues conventionally falling under the umbrella term of feminism.

Technology, in cyberpunk, has imitated, or enhanced human behavior in multiple ways, seeking to foresee the possibilities inherent in the human-machine-intelligence triangle, and the philosophical ramifications of the new world order on our constructed, relatively stable and conditioned ideas of gender, identity and humanity. The ways in which cyberpunk has envisioned the fusing of the body, the machine and deep learning pathways, have been wide in scope. Initially limited to a sentient robot or an AI (Isaac Asimov to Philip K. Dick) or a human-machine interface (James Tiptree Jr. to William Gibson), cyberpunk has evolved to imagining cyborgs and Augmented Humans that no longer require a physical apparatus to maintain its alleged superpowers. While it does not mean that the interface has been removed from cyberpunk narratives or that the celebratory mood of the Gibsonian relinquishing of meat has been carried forward, there has been an increasing number of narratives that depict a possibility of invisible and inseparable augmentations to the human body, with more drastic consequences to our imagining of the gendered self, than a machine attachment that is still

foreign.

Cyberpunk has been traditionally drawn into neat waves – classic cyberpunk, and feminist cyberpunk (though it would be more appropriate to call it postcyberpunk), implying that classic cyberpunk focused on the male protagonists as smart, savvy crooks on the periphery of the "Haves", relegating to women those even more peripheral tasks of ensuring men the success they deserve – professional and sexual – by being highly supportive, adequately (not excessively) smart, polished and sexy, and secondary to the male. It seemed reminiscent of the image of the ideal housewife, who existed in the periphery, but occupied an important space of a man's life, being adequately smart, adequately intelligent, sexually appealing, catering to a man's needs – professional and sexual – by being essentially secondary to him.

A minor difference in these two paradoxical roles – a high-tech hacker and a highly skilled housewife – was the shift in loyalties – while the latter was devoted to the man, the former was usually devoted to her own agendas. Apparently feminist, this stance however, pays only lip service to a more logical engagement of technology to gender, and gender roles. Despite the superficial change in circumstances, the primary task she performs is that of ensuring the man's success.

While there is currently little debate on the limited scope allotted to female characters in classic cyberpunk, followed by a resurgence of cyberpunk that expanded in terms of both, defining cyberpunk as a genre with reference to its core elements, as well as a shift in the plotlines and portrayals of characters, the roles of men in American cyberpunk remained undisputed. Men seldom played second fiddle to women, and women increasingly began to have their own narratives, agendas and roles, identifiable as separate from the men's.

Butler's seminal work *Gender Trouble*, which coined the term "gender performativity", to examine gendered human behaviour as a "tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them." (179), remains a pivotal concept in examining the roles of men and women in cyberpunk.

As Ross writes about the classic wave as "a selective zeitgeist" and a "limited narrative, shaped in very telling ways by white masculinist concerns" (152), a statement that holds true for much of the bulk of cultural productions around the world, it is important to note that the figure of the cyborg holds a crucial place in understanding our engagement with gender and gender roles. The cyborg figure, as Haraway remarks "would not recognize the Garden of Eden" (151), seemed to be a metaphor for a genderless world. As Teresa de Lauretis remarks upon the cyborg as "not only beyond gender, or ungendered, but also efficient, clean, indestructible and sexless" (46), Claire Sponsler defines cyberpunk as "a reinterpretation of human (and especially male) experience in a media-dominated, information saturated, post-industrial age" (251). Nicola Nixon identifies Gibson's "masterful masculine heroes" as "metaphoric rapists" who "use a feminized technology for their own ends" (229), pointing to the kind of gender roles men and women have played in Gibson's works. However, Jenny Wolmark has simultaneously contested the solely sexist perspective of cyberpunk, stating that "the description of cyberpunk as 'boystown' is too superficial" (115), further adding that "feminist science fiction has had an undeniable influence on cyberpunk, both in its refusal to accept the generic limitations of this traditionally masculine genre, and in its concern to reframe the relationship between technology and social and sexual relations" (110). In fact, Gibson has acknowledged that Molly from *Neuromancer* is a tribute to Joanna Russ' Jael from *The Female Man* (Wolmark 116).

While the journey of Science Fiction from the 40s of Asimov and Tiptree and Moore, to the 50s of the conservative but entertaining Pulps, to the 60s and 70s of feminist utopias and finally the 80s of cyberpunk-postcyberpunk has been asymmetric in terms of representation, or even consideration of anything except the "white, straight male", with apparently women being made powerful agents of their own will in their own right, it was still much akin to paying lip service. Wolmark, pointing out how the genre indicated no significant advancement in terms of equal representation for women, noted that:

> Even characters like Molly Millions or Laura, Bruce Sterling's heroine from the 'professional' management class in his novel *Islands in the Net* (1988) are indicative of the presence and influence of feminist Science Fiction, but they cannot be said to be an expression of cyberpunk's own willingness to tackle questions of gender identity and subjectivity (121).

Cyborgs seemed to represent the ultimate advancement in human history, one that seemed impossible not very long before – the possibility of relinquishing one's body without relinquishing existence, or getting an altogether new, stronger, better body. Desires that had been previously manifest solely in fantastical works or baseless scientific wish-fulfilment now seemed very real and possible. With the cyborg figure came the possibility of not just fighting nature and death, but also the social ills that accompany a fixed body – fixed identities, fixed genders, perhaps the notion of identity and gender itself.

Classic cyberpunk, in its technophilia, exalted in the renunciation of the body – Case in *Neuromancer*, or for that matter, even Molly herself – cyborg, as a figure, was hardly ever meant to be an escape from gender or sexuality or even identity. Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985), saw cyborg imagery as possibly instrumental to bringing down the binaries of man/woman, organic/inorganic, and so on. Further stating that "Cyborg

imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves" (Simians 181), she charted a way for other critical theorists to engage the cyborg figure in their discourses on gender. Sadie Plant argued, "The cyborg betrays every patriarchal illusion, dragging the human into an alien future in which all its systems of security are powerless. This is the runaway autoimmunity of a humanity that is no longer itself: the frontier of patriarchy's automated defense networks has already become cybernetic, and so female" (506), pointing to a far-fetched, though apt, imagery of the cyborg figure as just as threatening to the male order of the world as females themselves.

The cyborg thus became a pinnacle on which feminist hopes for the future rested. It exemplified a flexibility that could question the very fundamentals of gendered behaviour, and along with it, the source of power that each gender carried. Mary Catherine Harper has noted that the figure of the cyborg "stands at the center of a feminist biology, a feminist Alien Other, a feminist technology, and what is emerging as a post-humanist technological subjectivity" (403). Cyborgs became the centre of discussion, a tool to battle conservative ways of looking at women and other minorities trapped in a bodily existence. A contending view, however, echoed in Despina Kakoudaki, is apprehensive of the cyborg's ability to change the status-quo: "When the intelligent machine acquires human skin and competent language use (when it is able to 'pass for human') it cannot escape gender, race, sociality, the potential for violence, and existential dilemmas" (167). In other words, it is the very identification with humanity that renders a cyborg incapable of surmounting the odds it hopes to defy.

Samantha Holland, in her study on cyborgs in cinema, offered a similar observation. Male cyborgs were usually macho, sometimes asexual (*Terminator, Robocop),* while female cyborgs were usually "fucking machines" (164). Claudia Springer likewise observes,

"gender, rather than disappearing, is often emphasized after cybernetic transformation" (171). On a very similar note, Holland argues: "The central fear seems to be that in a possible cyborg future, biological gender would disappear, rendering patriarchy's centrally constituting hierarchy of masculine over feminine untenable. So, asserting an essential masculinity simultaneously with an essential humanity seems imperative … ensuring that even with no biological gender, the hegemony of masculinity can be sustained" (167).

While such a statement might be construed as a panicked, paranoid reaction towards a genre that primarily looked at the course of humanity in cyberpunk, the subsequent parts of the chapter will show how consistent female and male roles have been, in response to cyberpunk universe's varied ways to survive. Much in tandem to this sentiment, Karen Cadora observes, "… what is often ignored about the cyborg is that it arose out of Haraway's desire "to build a political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism." Masculinist cyberpunk is faithful to none of these. In fact, one might even say that it builds itself in opposition to these concepts. That Haraway's cyborg has become the metaphor of choice for such a movement is both strange and ironic" (360). Yet, fiction by authors such as Laura Mixon, Maureen F. McHugh, and others are testimony that alternate worlds, even in cyberpunk, can be created. Cyborgs," says Cadora, "can ground a political vision in which identity is fragmented and contradictory, yet not without power. A cyborg is a multiply positioned subject enabled by technology. It is this side of cyborgs that feminist need to learn more about" (360).

1.3 Japan and Cyberpunk

Cyberpunk had never wholly been a Western affair. Parallel to the West, it was Japan in the East that produced a prolific amount of cyberpunk works. While there has been an undeniable exchange of influences on both sides of the Pacific, and it is difficult to demarcate

where the West exercised influence over Japan, or vice-versa, it is evident that despite overwhelming similarities in the overall tone of the subgenre, cyberpunk in Japanese productions was moulded in very different ways.

Among many areas of divergence, gender representation is one of the most visible ones. While classic cyberpunk struggled to see female characters as protagonists, or as independent characters with their own narrative arc, Japanese cyberpunk of the same era had little qualms about women onscreen. Manga and anime have long been the most popular cultural productions of Japan, enjoyed over a significant part of the globe, especially the US since 1980s. Moreover, many anime have been adapted from manga, making it apt that the study considers them both for an inquiry into their gendered meanings.

Furthermore, Japanese scholars such as, Takayuki Tatsumi, Sharalyn Orbaugh, and Kumiko Sato voice concern about the way the rhetoric of cyborgs and posthumanity is discussed only through a Western lens. Thus, Japanese cyborgs are viewed as derivatives of the West or viewed monolithically without a historical context. Japan's cyborg discourse might share many aspects with that of the West, given Japan's avid consumption of Western literature. However, as Tatsumi argues, "the logic of the imitation has been replaced by one of synchronicity—synchronicity between American and Japanese works" during the 1980s because the discursive interplay between foreign and native sources has been more common (Japanoid 13-16).

Burst! and *Akira* have been universally acclaimed to be the first major cyberpunk anime. But it was with *Ghost in the Shell* that anime enjoyed massive popularity in the US as a medium meant for adults as much as for children. Consequently, anime received literary critical attention as well as appreciation for its nuanced perspective on the future.

Ghost in the Shell (1995) was originally a manga created by Masamune Shirow, adapted into a movie by Mamoru Oshii. Set in 2029 in Tokyo, it traces the journey of its protagonist Major Motoko Kusanagi as she teams up with Batou, another fellow-cop, chasing the antagonist hacker Puppet Master, who turns out to be a rogue AI created by the United States, which declared itself to be 'a sentient life form, demanding political asylum' as it became self-aware. Moreover, the Puppet Master intends to acquire a cyborg body, to merge its data form into, resulting into a new posthuman self. The cyborg body it ultimately merges into is Kusanagi's, whose entire body, apart from her brain, is inorganic.

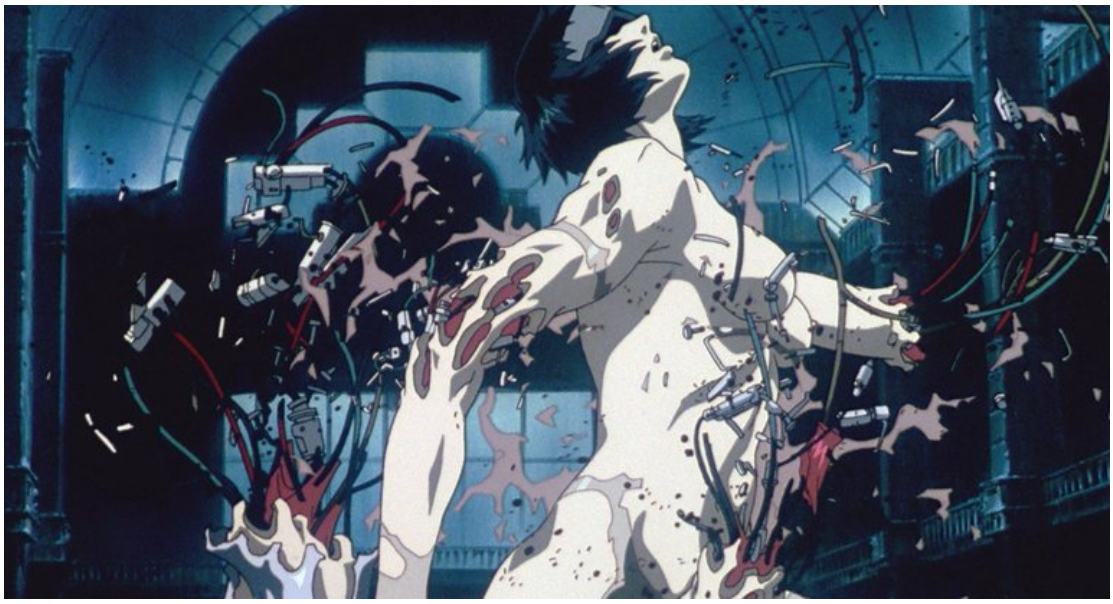
Gender in *Ghost in the Shell* is located in two spheres – one in the resistance to patriarchal assumptions about the female self, and the capitalist ownership of the body, though not particularly of the female body. The viewer's first acquaintance with Kusanagi is on the rooftop as she prepares to assassinate a high-level bureaucrat, shedding all clothing from her voluptuous body, to enable the 'thermoptic camouflage' to render her invisible. The first sequence allows the viewer to assume that the bare-breasted Kusanagi is yet another femme-fatale trope that has been a staple of Science Fiction and much popular fiction since long, until a later scene reveals the details of Kusanagi's body as an inorganic assemblage of wires, metal and skin-like material, with only her brain being a part of her former organic self. This juxtaposition of the sexually charged nude body followed by the mechanical step-by-step assembling of Kusanagi in a production facility breaks down the fetishization of the female body usually expected. With no hint of romance budding between any characters, no sexual tension aroused in any sequence, it is clear that the provocation occurs solely in the mind of the viewer, that has anticipated a role for the female lead.

Figure 1.1: *Ghost in the Shell (1995)* Cover

This initial depiction of Kusanagi might prompt one to locate the nudity, and the dimensions of Kusanagi's body as an unnecessarily sexualized object, derived perhaps from Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze", with the woman as image and the man as the bearer of the look (Visual 837-38). However, the body, beyond the nominal assignation of a biological trait of either male or female, holds no sexual or gendered meaning. While it does not claim that the world is genderless, it showcases a setting where gender has become useless, or perhaps lost its significance in the key operations of power, which have shifted from cultural representations of the body to capitalist concerns.

The female body, then, is little more than a nostalgic remainder of the human self. Not only is there no productive use of the biology, or the gendered body, the setting allows the viewer to take in a world where the body is irrelevant except as capital. It is evident in an exchange when Batou, whose body is his own organic one, suggests that Kusanagi could always leave if she wanted. However, she would have to give back the body and the memories it contained.

Figure 1.2: *Ghost in the Shell.* Destruction of Kusanagi's body



However, capitalism depends on the workers' perception of the capitalist order as natural order. For that, the marks of production must be erased, and made seamless with the product. Laura Mulvey writes that "a commodity's market success depends on the erasure of the marks of production, any trace of indexicality, the grime of the factory, the mass moulding of the machine, and most of all, the exploitation of the worker" (Fetishism 4). Kusanagi is thus desexualized after the initial disrobing scene, since the marks of her production are foregrounded. What she reveals is not the social order that revels in the female nude body, but the erasure of the social self and the body as a cultural marker in a post-industrial world, where body is a genderless commodity.

This is especially revealing as the epigram preceding the film states, "In the near future: corporate networks reach out to the stars, electrons and light flow throughout the universe. The advance of computerization, however, has not yet wiped out nations and ethnic groups" (Ghost in the Shell, *Opening Scene)*.

It is useful to compare the film sequence with Shirow's original manga *Megatech Machine 2: The Making of a Cyborg*, wherein Kusanagi witnesses the creation of a cyborg

similar to herself while another cyborg briefs her about the process. While Oshii creates a Brechtian 'alienation effect' in the viewers while still keeping them engaged, Shirow details the production in multiple frames, while adding in his author's notes regarding the process:

> Major Kusanagi is deliberately designed to look like a mass-production model so she won't be too conspicuous. In reality, her electrical and mechanical system is made of ultra-sophisticated materials unobtainable on the civilian market. If she appeared too expensive, she might be suddenly waylaid on a dark street some night, hacked up, and hauled off to be sold (103).

Figure 1.4: Shirow's Original Manga. *Ghost in the Shell*

A critical point of difference in the critiques of capitalism in the two works lies in their grounding of bodies: While the manga locates it in explicit critiques of class and larger

social effects such as the elimination of labour unions, or consumption as violence against poor nations, the anime eliminates all overt references, and marks them upon the bodies of Kusanagi, and the desperation of the Puppet Master to acquire a body in order to survive. The body, of course, disappears as a gendered entity, and becomes solely a medium to contain consciousness and free-floating data.

Batou, on the other hand, with his organic muscular body, inescapably masculine in its appeal, is contrasted with Kusanagi, in that he assumes the role of a side-kick, usually relegated to females, while Kusanagi flexes her muscles in the final battle.

Project 2501, also known as The Puppet Master for its ability to hack the shells of important officials for information, is the other major character in the anime, who only appears as a male voice until the very end, when it persuades Kusanagi into merging their bodies. It is then that the viewer can see it, as a blonde Barbie-body. The scene preceding this finale is where Kusanagi simultaneously embodies a blurring of gender distinctions when her nude female body bursts into a masculine ripple of muscles in a violent attempt to corner the Puppet Master. With the torsos of both torn, and Kusanagi deciding to dive into the Puppet Master's shell, it is revealed that the Puppet Master had deliberately led events to reach this dive, since he could copy itself but “cannot reproduce combinations which allow for diversity and originality”.

Figure 1.5: Merging of Puppet Master (left) with Kusanagi (right)

Persuading Kusanagi to merge her body with its consciousness, so that she can "bear [their] varied offspring into the Net," reveals the final act which marks the female body as essentially different than a male body. Reproduction, in the form of a formless merger of torn bodies connected by wires, into a new consciousness, carried in the now-teenage body of Kusanagi as her body is destroyed along with the Puppet Master's as rival agents attack them during the merger, is again separated from a physical union of a male and a female body, thus making the break between the body as a cultural product complete.

The manga, however, has a slightly different ending. The replacement body for Kusanagi is that of an androgynous male, instead of the teenage girl, suggesting the end of a world recognizable in terms of gendered identity.

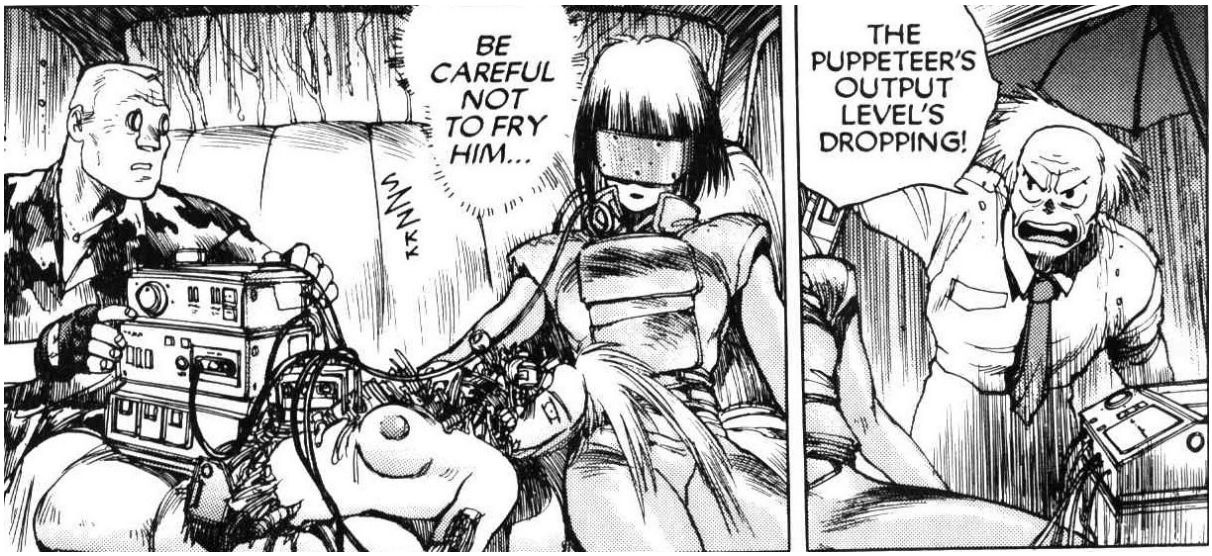


Figure 1.6: Shirow's Original Manga: Ghost in the Shell

Oshii takes the cyborgean imagery further in *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* as he engages with *ningyo* (human-shaped figures) in the 2004 sequel to *Ghost in the Shell.* The discursive limits of the human are stretched as the movie engages intimately with the various forms of dolls, automata, puppets, cyborgs, androids and other *ningyo*. Oshii's female androids are disconcerting to the human eye in its challenges to the assumptions of the future of humanity in a posthuman world, in their visual appeal. Explicitly modelled on German surrealist Hans Bellmer's grotesque, erotic dolls, the characters "evoke the uncanny on many levels, such as the repetition of déjà vu, the blurring of boundaries between life and death, animate and inanimate, and the doubling of the self in the figure of the doppelgänger" (Brown 14). Evoking "unfamiliarity at the heart of the familiar" (Brown 14), it provides a paradigm into the evolving relationship that we might share with other *ningyos* in our world.

Figure 1.7: *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*. Suicide of the Dolls

Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence is set in 2032, three years after the disappearance of Kusanagi, as Batou continues to work with the military. The perspective thus shifts from Kusanagi in the first film to Batou in the second instalment. Batou, "an agent of the elite Section 9 Security Force and a being so artificially modified as to be essentially cyborg," as he is described in the prologue to *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*, is brought in to investigate a crime attributed to gynoids, "hyper-realistic female robot[s] created specifically for sexual companionship" (Freiberg 100), who have murdered their owners and then self-destructed.

The opening scene depicts an unnamed landscape reminiscent of an Eastern and Western mingling, with Japanese and Cantonese being the primary languages, and an architectural structure described by Oshii as "Chinese Gothic" (Waldby 43). The opening credits follow the first film's depiction of the manufacture of Kusanagi's body, in that it recasts the sequence to show the manufacturing of the gynoids, underscoring both, the artificiality and grotesqueness of an otherwise perfect body, and the loss of personal ownership or identification of the body with the consciousness that would inhabit it.

The first gynoid Batou is sent to investigate, the Hadaly-model, invokes a dual reference – a female android of the same name in *The Future Eve*, a French novel whose author Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam first coined the term "android", as well as the Japanese humanoid bearing the same name, created in 1995 at Waseda University in Tokyo. In conversation with Police Coroner Haraway (named after Donna Haraway), Batou learns that the gynoid deliberately malfunctioned in order to release itself from Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics, that prevented them of inflicting harm on human beings, making them "capable of self-authorizing attacks against humans." Haraway adds that "it's because humans discard robots once they're redundant" that gynoids become "vagrants and degenerate" as "a protest against their own obsolescence." The subsequent discovery of the book titled *The Doll* by Hans Bellmer marks the undeniable engagement of the anime to the titular dolls.

The line between organic life and its simulations have been blurred, in very telling ways, as Batou responds to the needs of his two dogs, one subsequently revealed to be a clone, and the other a machinic simulation in the memory of his real dead dog, further underscored by holograms of an adolescent girl in Bellmer's book.

In a subplot derived from Episode 6 from Shirow's manga, it is learnt that the *yakuza* gang responsible for a murder, used to supply adolescent girls for "ghost dubbing", the process of transferring human consciousness into the gynoids, to make them more desirable.

The disengagement of the body as the seat of identity, and the unreliability of the mind to take the place of the body is further underscored by Batou's cybernetic implant being penetrated by revengeful yakuza members who prompt him into a simulation of threat and cause him to release bullets into his own body. The DNA, which has been the seat of human genetic information for many years now, is further dislocated from human evolution, as

Batou remarks that "if the essence of life is information carried in DNA, then society and civilization are just colossal memory systems and a metropolis like this one, simply a sprawling external memory."

Oshii reflected on his engagement with "borderline cinema" in an interview as follows:

> The subject of borders is not something I obsess over, but I have always had an interest in them in an inherent way. I always feel as if I'm living on a borderline. Although I actually live in Japan, I always feel slightly removed from myself. I find more inspiration in imaginary space-time continuums. In my opinion, cinema is essentially linked to these space-time continuums, and in this way, one creates a "borderline cinema." Of course, I realize that some directors are only interested in real life, but the opposite is true for me. My motivation as a director is rooted in these imaginary space-time continuums—somewhere that is not here, sometime that is not now [koko ja nai dokoka, ima de nai itsuka]. I want to make films that explore these spaces in time and these characters who are nowhere and somewhere at the same time. By taking this approach, my films always end up dealing with a borderline place and with characters coming and going from this place. I want to repeat that I am neither obsessed nor consciously interested in the subject of borders. It is simply and intrinsically my primary motivation as a director. (*Interview, Avalon).*

Oshii's unnamed geographies, too, in sync with the posthuman bodies, reflect a post-cultural world where the lines between cultural aesthetics, landscapes and architectures have blended so smoothly so as to make it impossible to untangle one from the other, making it simultaneously Japan, China, Europe, or any other place, to be, precisely, borderline places — "somewhere that is not here, sometime that is not now" (*Interview, Avalon).*

The confusion between reality and simulation is taken further as Batou and his fellow officer visit Kim at his mansion, which is filled with holograms, wherein Batou gets lost among the holograms, ultimately to discover Kim's dead body in his study. In a classic twist, Kusanagi speaks to Batou through her hologram, warning him that Kim's death was as much projection as other holograms, prompting Batou into making the simulation talk back from simulated death.

In an epic scene, Kim postulates at length on the philosophy of dolls, human relationships and reality. The anime takes its name *Innocence* as its central theme, focusing on the retrieval of one innocent girl allegedly supplied by the yakuza to the Locus Solus that caged them in coffins and inserted their consciousness into the gynoids, effectively draining them of any concern for their victims in the long haul.

As Christopher Bolton notes in "From Wooden Cyborgs to Celluloid Souls," the dolls in Ghost in the Shell are sourced from a long tradition of Japanese puppet performance known as *ningyō jōruri* (or *bunraku*). Bolton argues that we can better understand the performative aspects of anime—that is, "the virtual or artificial nature of animated 'actors,' who are always already technological bodies" (754) — if we identify the cyborgean bodies in anime with the possessed, artificial bodies in the Japanese puppet theater. He further underscores the posthuman crisis in the destabilization that he describes as "the divide between body and voice" that is "foregrounded by the ventriloquistic medium of animation" (754).

Bolton further points at an "interconnectedness of characters linked by the network and other surveillance technologies who can listen from a distance, transmit without speaking, or (in the case of the Puppet Master) speak through others' mouths" (755).

"Just as we are becoming wrapped up in the characters and their story," writes Bolton, "the animated quality of the bodies will come to the fore in a way that reminds us momentarily of the illusion" (755).

The opening credits roll, with a choral melody by Kawai Kenji (three variations of which recur during the course of the movie) underscores this concern with the puppets. Titled "Song of Puppets", it features a mythical Japanese form called a *nue* (a creature with a monkey's head, a raccoon's body, a tiger's legs and a snake-tail), grieving through its song about the inanimate spirits of flowers, lamenting "their being in this world of life, / Their dreams having faded away," awaiting the dawn of a new world in which the "gods will descend" (Davis 30).

In Japanese culture, *nue* is a chimera, which transforms into a black cloud, a harbinger of misfortune. A very popular instance is from the Tale of the Heike, where it made Emperor Konoe sick before being vanquished by Minamoto no Yorimasa. In the context of *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*, as the *nue's* "Song of Puppets" is played during the opening credits, the viewer sees the manufacture and assembly of a gynoid. The song announces the disappearance of the organic self, pointing to a puppeteering, or "pulling the string" aka hacking that would be the new world order.

Invoking the image of the dolls, then, points to multiple ways of seeing humans in the future – while possessing a seemingly female body, it refuses to fall into the discourse of gender, or possess any traits of gendered behaviour – rather, as a mechanical commodity, it reflects, re-inscribes and reproduces the singular instability of "the self", or any outward or inward identification with "the self". The genderless world does not echo Haraway's optimism for an equal world – it foretells a world in which the value systems we predict in the future become irrelevant, obsolete, and no longer in the hands of humans.

Psycho-Pass (2012), an anime TV-series, directed by Naoyoshi Shiotani and Katsuyuki Motohiro, takes place in an unspecified time in near-future Japan, where omnipresent sensors continuously scan people's minds for signs of anxiety that may result in violent crimes. Psycho-Pass is the aggregate data of the plausibility of a person committing a crime, and an alarming rate of the pass would alert members of the Public Safety Bureau to use Dominators (similar to guns) that automatically modulate their responses at the person aimed at based on the data on their Pass. The Sibyl System performs a cymatic scan of the brain to measure the Crime Coefficient index, and Inspectors lead a team of Enforcers (themselves "latent criminals" with high Crime Coefficients) to contain people marked with higher-than-normal levels of the index.

Akane Tsunemori, the protagonist, is a young, bright student who makes it to the elite forces as an Inspector and is initially reminiscent of the "kawaii" trope of cuteness attributed to most female characters that aren't already sexy. As a petite, small, desexualized, but naïve girl, Tsunemori gradually comes across as an introspective person who emerges from

Figure 1.7: Tsunemori's first day at work

Figure 1.8: Tsunemori as Inspector

simplistic notions of right and wrong to masterfully handle complex situations by the end.

While no character is cyborg, and the invasion of technology is visible in public life,

while either absent or invisible in the body, the anime still retains the core cyberpunk themes of invasive technology and human life being at the judgement of intelligent machines. Amongst a sea of male characters, Tsunemori, Yayoi, and Shion, are the only females. Yayoi, an Enforcer, is the stereotypical femme fatale, exuding sensuality, while Shion is unremarkable in both her characterisation, as well as attributes. Tusnemori, on the other hand, looks kawaii, although her dressing, and her accompanying desexualisation limit the extent of kawaii she exudes.

While kawaii means “cute”, or “adorable” in its current modern sense, the origin word “*kawo-hayu-shi*”literally means “face flushed”, associated with “embarrassment, awkwardness, and self-consciousness”. Eventually, it took on the meaning of a behavior that caused others (especially older males) to feel protective in a romantic way. Commercial merchandizing of kawaii, however, put the term in an enforced usage of a set of behavior and mode of dressing.

Tsunemori cannot be categorised as kawaii in that extreme sense, although her wide-eyed looks and naivete regarding the complexities of lived reality exude a sense of conventional cuteness, her dressing befits an Inspector, and so does her later introspection and questioning of self-worth as a worthy Inspector.

Yayoi and Shion are weakly fleshed out characters, notable only in their ability to catch the viewers eye, and a brief lesbian scene towards the end of the series, as they are walked in upon by Tsunemori. While Tsunemori is definitely female and not unattractive, Psycho-Pass is notable in its ability to keep the gender and sexuality of its characters away from influencing the plot.

While the anime does not, like *Ghost in the Shell*, create an embodied, but genderless

world, nor does it attempt to portray a world where gender equality is normative; rather, it moves away from the stereotypical tropes of projecting young women as attractive subjects of interest, pity or distress to male protagonists, or the male Enforcers as being conscious of being led by a girl. Tsunemori's concern for Kogami Shinya, an Inspector now demoted to an Enforcer, does not translate to emotion beyond the confines of her profession, and no romantic interest is created for her. In the end, with Inspector Ginoza, her superior, being demoted to an Enforcer, Tsunemori takes his place, to lead a new set of Enforcers.

The success of *Psycho-Pass* probably lies in its effortless naturalization of a world where women might lead a position usually reserved, or at least considered appropriate for men, where physical attributes or standards of beauty, or themes of feminine love or weakness were eliminated to create Haraway's ideas of genderless worlds, even if only at workplaces.

The lesbian act of Yayoi and Shion, on the other hand, represent no real advancement in queer narratives, as it was a brief scene in a non-referential context. The only claim it can perhaps make is of presenting an alternative world for sexual companionship beyond the heteronormative world.

Neon Genesis Evangelion (1995) by Anno Hideaki and Gainax Studios, and produced as a TV show as well as two movies, was a hugely successful anime with a multi-layered plot dealing with cyberpunk apocalypse, corporate conspiracies, Jewish mysticism, Oedipal complexes, and kawaii girls. Set in 2015, it depicts a near-future with an overlap of genres: *shounen*, mecha, Science Fiction, and action. Fifteen years after "an angel" causing the "Second Impact" that melted polar ice caps, created more natural disasters and killed people, it depicts new angels attacking Earth again. The angels are aliens that appear in varied forms, ranging from bacteria, to rings, to monsters. The only weapons that can destroy these angels

are Eva, huge mecha-suit creatures.

Figure 1.9: Neon Genesis Evangelion Cover

For unexplained reasons, Eva must be piloted by fourteen-year-olds who are in complete sync with their Eva, and in the course of an attack, this empathy allows for an exchange of the deepest insights into each other. This syncing with the Eva has to be psychological on the part of the pilots – however, the actual process of "jacking in", referred to by Orbaugh as "INTERcorporation" (442), involves a phallic-shaped plug inserted in the orifice of EVA, who releases an oxygenated fluid upon this contact which fills the pilots' body. Orbaugh further states, "each of the cyborg's two components – the mechanical Eva and the biotic Shinji – has penetrated into and filled the other; each has been incorporated by the other" (442).

Orbaugh further states that this merging of Eva's machine component and the human exhibits "the INTERcorporation and interpenetration of two relatively equal components, to produce a third, hybrid product: the cyborg" (442). Far from merely being an assertion of

patriarchy, the anime tries to explore "what it is to be human in relation to the machine, a machine that increasingly seems to dominate, to construct, and ultimately to interfere with the reality of human nature" (Napier 423). Rather than a male assertion of power over the passive female EVA, the "characters make conscious decisions to retreat into their own fantasy worlds" (Napier 421), and it is the jacking in to the Eva that provides the pilots the necessary willpower to sustain the strain.

The three principal characters who pilot their Evas are Ikari Shinji, Rei Ayananmi, and Asuka. General discourse on these characters have applauded the Gainax Studios for a reversal of gender roles, wherein men are soft, unsure and passive, whereas women possess the stereotypical male values of strength, courage and stoicism. However, a detailed analysis of each character presents a more complex picture.

Women in shounen anime are often portrayed as traditional figures who uphold their *tatemae*, or who one is supposed to be, as opposed to *honne*, or who one really is – hence, they are either 'normal women' taking care of the house, the husband, or the boyfriend, or the 'abnormal' kind that awkwardly and incompetently tries to work outside the home, ridiculed by a man (Kincaid), only to fall in love, surrender, and thus become a foil for the protagonist. *Neon Genesis Evangelion* makes uses of its own genre to subvert and deconstruct these rigid demarcations of power, exploring relationships between men and women, technology and freedom, and individual and community. Women, against the tradition of most shounen forms, are consistently intelligent, as well as resourceful. And yet, despite them being put in the highest position of the organization NERV, much like our social and professional structures, they are second-class citizens of the military, and the critique of gender norms are laid bare as "the style and content of the genre can be read as either reinforcing gender norms or fundamentally challenging them" (Alexy 71).

While the women themselves have been portrayed as strong, capable and resourceful, it is the community that is projected as deeply patriarchal, insecure and domineering. For instance, in Episode seven "A Human Work", when the head-scientist, Ritsuko points out major safety concerns, her male coworkers ridicule her belief in her competency publicly, specifically locating her gender as the primary reason for her being incorrect, further pointing out that her feminine sensitivity and overemotional nature was responsible for such errors of professional judgement.

Moreover, the appearance of women, in concert with much of *shounen* genre, is catered to the male gaze. The women of the anime are "often cinematically positioned in relation to male characters through the employment of various shot-reverse-shot structures that conform perfectly to Hollywood cinema's familiar inscription of the female body as it has been described by feminist film scholarship" (Silvio, "Refiguring").

Alexy argues that "representations of femininity within anime tend to construct women as other, desirable but not entirely human, or less agentive than male protagonists," putting forth that women, as they create their image and identity, are devaluing their role in society as intellectuals (71). No matter how intelligent or insightful, female characters have had to accept denigration from men, both in terms of verbal showdowns, or an unnecessary sexualization of their bodies. Eden Lackner argues that the lack of respect or recognition for women's work in certain social contexts may be a response to the growing presence of women taking on more masculine roles, as women perform acts of heroism and become more sexually prominent (127).

Sexuality and sexualization play intricately with the identity of the characters, as they struggle with issues ranging from self-worth (Misato) or engage in comic relief of fantasies and perversion (Shinji). Right from the first episode, we see Misato, Shinji's mentor figure,

turn up in skimpy skirts deliberately to tease him, and make him perpetually shy and awkward by wandering around naked in the apartment they share. More than a mere sexualization to appeal to the male fandom, however, this holds deeper concerns for Misato as she simultaneously reworks her strained relationships with the men in her life, through deep introspection, and a parallel drawing of lines to evade sexual and sexist harassment.

Ikari Shinji, the male pilot, presents a characterization vastly different than other male characters in the anime. In noting his engagement with the conventional masculine traits, he fights the aliens, Napier says, "with the greatest reluctance and after a display of temper, fear, and vulnerability that seems less than conventionally heroic" (Machines 425). Far from being a shy teenager in the company of assertive women, a foil to the macho females, or a celebratory model of the soft male in contrast to the rough men of shounen anime, Shinji is seen to struggle with his internal conflicts of sexuality, trust and friendships in more understated, subtle ways. Amidst the personal turmoil of Rei, Misato and Asuka, Shinji is bombarded with images and ideas that disconcert him, as he develops feelings for Kaworu, the last Angel in the guise of a human. While Kaworu is verbal in his affection for Shinji, Shinji himself does not reciprocate them in words until after Kaworu's death, although his love is apparent in various non-verbal ways. It is only when he grows comfortable with his feelings for Kaworu that he discovers the latter's identity, and is compelled to kill him, being watched by NERV.

While the females in NGV put up a careful evasion of sexual appearance at work owing to discrimination (Kincaid), Shinji is regularly chastised for not being manly enough (by Asuka), a reminder of his unmanliness. Asuka, on the other hand, regularly checks her coworkers for signs of them being aware of her sexual needs, only to be disappointed, as they see her merely as a shattered girl, with the sole exception of Shinji, who sees her as a woman.

This rejection, particularly coming from Kaji, Minato's ex-boyfriend, who Asuka desperately tries to seduce, is indicative of her struggle to be recognized as a sexually aware adult, instead of being cast aside as a girl unaware of her own sexuality. The rejection, by Japanese standards, comes from a tradition of sexualizing the naivete of young females, as "female characters can be seen to become more desirable precisely because they appear unaware of their desirability or sexuality" (Alexy 72).

This identity is reinforced as the NERV community is reminiscent of the Japanese social structure and the role of women in an arguably modern, yet deeply patriarchal society. This surpasses the notion that "Japanese gender roles revolve around their vertical society where someone's identity is a part of their group identity" (Kincaid), in an era where the higher the qualifications of a woman, the lower her work lifespan will be, owing to male ideas of bonding over office parties, long working hours, and the expectations of the society regarding the roles of spouses and motherhood vis-à-vis the workplace.

Rei, similarly used and discarded by the male patriarchal commander of NERV, Gendo Ikari, is a series of clones created from Yui Ikari, Shinji's mother and Gendo's wife, for the purpose of providing flesh to Lilith's soul, a tool to enact the "Third Impact" to fulfill Gendo's ideas of the Human Instrumentality Project, in the hope of reuniting him with his dead wife. Rei, effectively becomes the quintessential fetishized image of man's wishes for self-fulfillment.

However, it is noteworthy that Rei, from the director Hideaki Anno's own interview, stemmed from his four-year battle with clinical depression, and *Evangelion* was a "deeply personal work" for him. As he stated in a 1997 interview, "Rei is probably [the character] closest to my deep psyche. I don't really understand her. The truth is, I have no emotional attachment to her at all" (Hideaki).In an interview with *The Atlantic,* Anno describes Rei's

popularity amongst otaku "as the product of a stunted imaginative landscape born of Japan's defeat in the Second World War". While it has little explicit connection with the Post-War perception of women, this "stunted landscape" has been crucial in the way women have been portrayed and accepted in the otaku psyche. About this, media critic and psychologist Tamaki Saito states that otaku are the result of "the interactions between the modern media environment and the adolescent psyche in Japan" (Saito, "Beautiful," 9).

Like the rest of the world, the WWII presented a masculine crisis as women in Japan gained greater freedom in terms of their future choices of career, and especially marriage, while the defeat of the nation marked the male psyche permanently as a form of unmanliness. Concurrently, as manga and anime flourished in the decades of the '70s and the '80s, otaku culture became largely a flight response for escaping the pressures of a post-war society that still expected a great deal of conformity. Otaku, as were thus seen as "fleeing from reality" and adulthood through their vested interest in anime and manga, hence the crossover between the otaku lifestyle with *hikikomori* isolationism (Saito, "Beautiful," 17).

Tamaki Saitō argues that the fixation on female characters like Rei is a psychological process of projection and possession, a reactionary phenomenon to Japan's post-war gender roles which relieves contemporary male anxiety through the "illusion of women" as a comfort object (227). Deprived of personhood in anime, the female characters become an easy projection of male desire, in their "lack" of subjectivity. As detailed in Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, film offers men the powerful pleasure of voyeurism (scopophilia) by providing images of women that can be objectified and consumed. The oppressive power of the male gaze manifests as the association of "scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (835). The male production of the fictional female image thus sees her depicted as a "signifier" and an

idealized fantasy onto which “man can live out [his] phantasies and obsessions…by imposing them on the silent image of a woman still tied to her place as *bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning*” (833).

Rei’s immense popularity largely owes itself to the very fact that — to borrow a phrase from Mulvey — she is “an illusion cut to the measure of desire” (840), a “silent image of a woman” whom others can project onto. Justin Wu argues that Rei’s personality “gives fans plenty rooms of imagination on what she really thinks and feels” (Wu). Lead character designer Yoshiyuki Sadamoto, elaborating upon her appearance, designed to seduce the male gaze, says “Her character was locked in as translucent – like a shadow, or the air. The kind of girl you can’t touch. The girl you long for, but there is nothing about her that you can hold” (Sadamoto).

Being a clone with no autonomy over her body or her life, and being just and *image and a body*, rather than a person, Rei is surrounded by images of physical collapse, such as “pills and bloodied bandages”, thrown into disarray as she rejects Gendo’s initiation of the Third Impact by saying, “I am not a puppet”, in a final effort to reclaim her identity. Anno notes that Rei’s apparent passivity towards life, and a willingness to die is not merely a product of her having “the barest minimum of what she needs to have” (a body and consciousness), but in the acute awareness that she’s a clone, that “even if she dies, there’ll be another to replace her, so she doesn’t value her life very highly” (Samuels). Suicide, apparently, in Japan, comes across less as shocking, scandalizing, or a desperate, yet unjustifiable act. It is generally accepted as a logical outcome by a sane individual/group who no longer sees a point in their existence, irrespective of their material circumstances.

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