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The World and Japan: Animated Anxiety in a Global Age

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Abstract

The spread of pop cultural productions out from one country across the world is the very expression of globalism. The significance of Japanese anime and manga in America is becoming increasingly apparent; that it is no longer simply a product for the Japanese market, for the exclusive consumption of its particular culture, means that it has placed itself within and recognized itself as part of that globalized world. On the one hand, the positioning of anime within the larger world has its advantages for its writers and the culture at large, by providing Japan a voice in that world. On the other hand, despite anime's spread across the world and the potential benefits of globalization, within the narratives of anime itself there persists a strain of anxiety and suspicion regarding the prospect of increased economic and cultural globalism. In anime's villainous multi-national corporations and its frequent depiction of a de-humanizing internet (*Ghost in the Shell, Serial Experiments Lain*), we see a fear that the integration of economy and the melding of culture threatens identity at the level of the individual and the nation. This essay analyzes the ambivalent representations (narratives and images) of globalism in literature (the novels of Haruki Murakami) and also more popular forms of culture such as anime; and it considers both in light of sociologist Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, in order to explore how these narratives articulate their anxiety about the impact of the global system on the individual and about the formation of identity in a global age.

Keywords: globalism, anime, *Ghost in the Shell*, Haruki Murakami, Niklas Luhmann

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摘　要

全球化表現之一就是通俗文化從一個國家擴散到另一國家。日本動漫與漫畫在美國的重要性日趨明顯；它不再是僅為日本市場的產品，不僅是為此一特定文化的消費，這些事實顯示出它將自身置於一全球化世界之中並且視其自身為此一世界之一部分。一方面來說，動漫自我定位於更大世界，對於其創作者與其特定文化，有其一定優勢，亦即提供日本在世界的一個發聲地位。但另一方面，儘管動漫在世界上的擴張以及全球化潛在的收穫，在動漫敘事本身之內，持續存在著揮之不去的焦慮與疑惑，針對不斷強化的經濟與文化的全球化。在動漫之中，如邪惡的跨國公司以及常見對於非人性質的網路〔《攻殼機動隊》（*Ghost in the Shell*）與《玲音》（*Serial Experiments Lain*）〕，其中我們看到針對經濟的統整與文化的匯合對於格人與國家身份的威脅之恐懼。本論文分析針對文學作品（村上春樹的小說）中有關全球化愛恨交織（敘事與意象）的再現，同時亦將論及其他更通俗形式，如動漫；再者，論文將援引社會學家魯曼（Niklas Luhmann）系統理論，以便能夠探討敘事如何能表達對於全球系統在此全球化年代對於他們個人以及其身份形成之衝擊的焦慮。

關鍵字：全球化、動漫、《攻殼機動隊》、村上春樹、魯曼（Niklas Luhmann）

The spread of pop cultural productions out from one country across the world is the very expression of globalism. The significance of Japanese anime and manga in America is becoming increasingly apparent;[1] that it is no longer simply a product for the Japanese market, for the exclusive consumption of its particular culture, means that it has placed itself within and recognized itself as part of that globalized world.

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[1] On the anime boom in the 1990's, see Susan J. Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime: Japan as Fantasy and Fan Cult in the Mind of the West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 15-17. On the popularity of anime in America and its global power and appeal, see also: John A. Lent, "Anime and Manga in Parts of Asia and Latin America," in *Animation in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. John A. Lent (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001), 85-87; Laurie Cubbison, "Anime Fans, DVDs, and the Authentic Text," *Velvet Light Trap* 56 (2005): 45-57; Fred Patten, "Anime in the United States," in *Animation in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. John A. Lent (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001), 55-72; Carl Silvio, "Anime, Both Global and Local," *Science Fiction Studies* 29.3 (2002): 489-491; Shinobu Price, "Cartoons from Another Planet: Japanese Animation and Cross-Cultural Communication," *Journal of American and Comparative Cultures* 24.1-2 (2001): 292-305; David Desser, "Consuming Asia: Chinese and Japanese Popular Culture and the American Imaginary," in *Multiple Modernities: Cinema and Popular Media in Transcultural Asia*, ed. Jenny Kwok Wah Lau (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2003), 179-199. Brian Ruh, "Creating 'Amateur' Manga in the US: Pedagogy, Professionalism, and Authenticity," *International Journal of Comic Art* 7.2 (2005): 375-394; Wendy Siuyi Wong, "Globalizing Manga: From Japan to Hong Kong and Beyond," *Mechademia: Emerging Worlds of Anime and Manga* 1 (2006): 23-45; Sean Leonard, "Progress against the Law: Anime Fandom, with the Key to the Globalization of Culture," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8.3 (2005): 281-305; Mary Grigsby, "*Sailormoon* Manga (Comics) and Anime (Cartoon) Superheroine Meets Barbie: Global Entertainment Commodity Comes to the United States," *Journal of Popular Culture* 32.1 (1998): 59-80; Antonia Levi, "The Americanization of Anime and Manga: Negotiating Popular Culture," in *Cinema Anime: Critical Engagements with Japanese Animation*, ed. Steven T. Brown (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 43-63; Helen McCarthy, "The Development of the Japanese Animation Audience in the United Kingdom and France," in *Animation in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. John A. Lent (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001), 73-84; and Anne Allison, "The Japan Fad in Global Youth Culture and Millennium Capitalism," *Mechademia: Emerging Worlds of Anime and Manga* 1 (2006): 11-21.

On the one hand, the positioning of anime within the larger world has its advantages for its writers and the culture at large. For *Comic Party*'s Taishi Kuhonbutsu, a visionary if comically unrealistic thinker, this movement of Japanese pop culture out into the world is the chance to secure Japan's (and his own) place at the head of a revolution in which the world is reformed into a brotherhood of manga artists and readers. A less sweeping though more plausible possibility is that an anime circulated around the globe, such as that of Hayao Miyasaki, may offer the means to reach the world with a message about the fragility of that world and the imperative need for its unity.[2]

On the other hand, despite anime's spread across the world and the potential benefits of globalization, within the narratives of anime itself there persists a strain of anxiety and suspicion regarding the prospect of increased economic and cultural globalism. In anime's villainous multi-national corporations and its frequent depiction of a de-humanizing internet (*Ghost in the Shell, Serial Experiments Lain*), we see a fear that the integration of economy and the melding of culture threatens the individual's sense of self, of (cultural and moral) values, of meaningful social connections.

This essay looks closely at Mamoru Oshii's anime film version of *Ghost in the Shell* in light of systems theory (developed by Niklas Luhmann, among others), an important recent sociological model for understanding the nature of globalism and the global society.

The essay proceeds in three parts. Part one examines Haruki Murakami's view of globalism in the 1980's, depicted in his 1988 novel *Dansu Dansu Dansu* (*Dance Dance Dance*). Then part two of the essay outlines Luhmann's system theory and its relation to Oshii's film. Part three concludes by providing a close reading of the themes and images of *Ghost in*

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[2] Napier sees the world-wide popularity of anime as "one of the few benign visions of globalization currently available" (*Anime* 6), the other "interaction between different cultures [seeming] to mainly inspire hatred" (*Anime* 5). Anime is for her an example of "soft power," because unlike hard military or economic power, it is "seductive," attracting rather than coercing people (*Anime* 6). Napier, *Anime*, 5-6.

the Shell, arguing that while the film (like Murakami and Luhmann) begins with the premise that one must accept the unchanging character and presence of the global system, the ending of *Ghost in the Shell* ponders a different response than Murakami's to the anxieties and problems created by that global system.

I use the complex and thought-provoking work of Murakami and of Luhmann to illuminate the ideas in Oshii's animated film, and to underscore the fact that——despite the (especially American) prejudice against "cartoons" and the assumption that animation is only for children or, at best, is mild entertainment for adults——Japanese anime is (or can be) equally complex and thought-provoking as a surrealist novel or a sociological essay.[3] All these works contribute to a fuller understanding of each other and to our own development of a response to life in the global age.

I. The Flat World of Globalism in Haruki Murakami's *Dance Dance Dance*

> The fact that a non-Western cultural product should serve as an increasingly viable alternative to the American popular-culture dream factory is of enormous interest for a number of reasons. On a general level, it suggests that, even in the twenty-first century, the world is not nearly as homogenous as might have been feared. Anime and manga clearly struck a chord by offering something different——

[3] Anime has received increasing attention from Western scholars, including the publication of a journal (*Mechademia*) devoted to the field. For thoughtful essays on science-fiction anime, *Ghost in the Shell* and *Lain* in particular, see Anna Notaro, "'Innocence Is Life': Searching for the Post-Human Soul in *Ghost in the Shell 2*," *International Journal of Comic Art* 9.1 (2007): 610-622; and also Susan J. Napier, "When the Machines Stop: Fantasy, Reality, and Terminal Identity in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Serial Experiments: Lain*," in *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime*, ed. Christopher Bolton, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., and Takayuki Tatsumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 101-122.

> stories, characters, and themes that were not only alternatives but were sometimes implicit critiques of the dominant Western entertainment industry.[4]

Before the international anime boom in the 1990's, before anyone could make a claim like Napier's that anime was an important means of preserving Japanese culture and of injecting variety into the system of global culture, the narrator of Haruki Murakami's *Dance Dance Dance* lamented the staleness of modern life in 1980's Japan. While his story is a record of his strange, dream-like adventures at the Dolphin Hotel and his surreal meeting with the SheepMan who exists in an alternate dimension (acting as a kind of switchboard operator, he says, helping the narrator make connections), it is also a record of the banality of the world in which he lives.[5] He needs help from the paranormal because he himself is lost, disconnected; what is most frightening in his world are not the visions or the ghosts or the spooky rooms that really should not exist, but what ordinary life has become.

The narrator works as a freelance writer of restaurant and product reviews for women's magazines. It is a lucrative job which allows him to do just about anything he wants with his time, but he sees it, he says, as "shoveling cultural snow"; his work is a necessary contribution to society, but depressing in its very necessity:

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[4] Napier, *Anime*, 5.

[5] The novel is very complicated, but the basic plot is that the narrator has a dream of an old hotel he used to stay in and of the woman he used to stay there with. He has not seen her in years and in that interval his life has fallen apart. He decides that he will return to the hotel and try to find her (even though he does not know her name or where she lives). Returning to find a new hotel on the spot of the old one, he begins a series of strange adventures involving ghosts and psychics and murderers. But what interests me here is his descriptions of the ordinary world from which these surreal adventures provide the escape——as I discuss below, he links the banal flatness of that world to the influence of capitalism and the spread of global (in his view, largely American) culture.

> Well somebody's got to write these things. And the same can be said for collecting garbage and shoveling snow. It doesn't matter whether you like it or not——a job's a job. For three and a half years, I'd been making this kind of contribution to society. Shoveling snow. You know, cultural snow. (7)

Why does anybody need to write restaurant reviews? Because the modern world is a world of information:

> Why shouldn't people just go where they feel like and order what they want? Why do they need someone to tell them? What's a menu for? And then, after I write the place up, the place gets famous and the cooking and service go to hell. It always happens. Supply and demand gets all screwed up . . . . I find what's pure and clean and see that it gets all mucked up. But that's what people call information. And when you dredge up every bit of dirt from every corner of the living environment, that's what you call enhanced information. (116)

It is easy to survive in such a world because it is easy to find a job in a capitalist society (if one is not choosy)——there is always snow to shovel (12). But why persist in such a life? Because there seem to be few alternatives:

> And [I did my work] with not one speck of ambition, not one iota of expectation. My only concern was to do things systematically, from one end to the other. I sometimes wonder if this might not prove to be the bane of my life. After wasting so much pulp and ink myself, who was I to complain about waste? We live in an advanced capitalist society, after all. Waste is the name of the game, its greatest virtue. Politicians call it "refinements in domestic consumption." I call it meaningless waste. A difference of opinion. Which doesn't change the way we live. If I don't like it, I can move to Bangladesh or Sudan.

> I for one am not eager to live in Bangladesh or Sudan. (12)

While investigating the owners and the reasons behind the construction of the new Dolphin Hotel, he comes to realize that it is an impossible task, because he is trying to unravel an infinite web, the faceless, interconnected web of global capitalism:

> That's how the system works . . . . Granted, this sort of thing isn't new to the modern age. But everything before is nothing compared to the exacting detail and sheer power and invulnerability of today's web of capitalism. And it's mega-computers that have made it all possible, with their inhuman capacity to pull every last factor and condition on the face of the earth into their net calculations. Advanced capitalism has transcended itself. . . .
>
> Although I didn't think so at the time, things were a lot simpler in 1969. All you had to do to express yourself was throw rocks at riot police. But with today's sophistication, who's in a position to throw rocks? Who's going to brave what tear gas? C'mon, that's the way it is. Everything is rigged, tied into that massive capital web, and beyond this web there's another web. Nobody's going anywhere. You throw a rock and it'll come right back at you. (55)

Years before the internet, the narrator describes a centerless, web-like system of information out of human control, like the society in Luhmann's system theory and the information networks in *Ghost in the Shell* and *Lain*.

Having breakfast one morning with a mechanical engineer ("He looked like a mechanical engineer, and that's just what he was"), the narrator reflects on the nature of this modern Japan and his relation to it:

> He spoke to me first, telling me he serviced jets for the Self-Defense Forces. Then he filled me in on how Soviet fighters and bombers invaded our airspace, though he didn't seem particularly upset about it. He was more concerned about the economics of F4 Phantoms. How

> much fuel they guzzled in one scramble, a terrible waste. "If the Japanese had made them, you can bet they'd be more efficient. And at no loss to performance either! There's no reason why we couldn't build a low-cost fighter if we wanted to."
>
> That's when I proffered my words of wisdom, that waste is the highest virtue one can achieve in advanced capitalist society. The fact that Japan bought Phantom jets from America and wasted vast quantities of fuel on scrambles put an extra spin in the global economy, and that extra spin lifted capitalism to yet greater heights. If you put an end to all the waste, mass panic would ensue and the global economy would go haywire. Waste is the fuel of contradiction, and contradiction activates the economy, and an active economy creates more waste.
>
> Well, maybe so, the engineer admitted, but having been a wartime child who had to live under deprived conditions, he couldn't grasp what this new social structure meant. "Our generation, we're not like you young folks," he said, straining a smile. "We don't understand these complex workings of yours."
>
> I couldn't say I exactly understood things either . . . . No, I'm not used to things; I just recognize them for what they are. There's a decisive difference between those two propositions. (19-20)

The old generation does not understand the system. The narrator does, however. Even if he claims not to understand exactly how or why the system came to be, he understands its "workings" (as his frequent discussions of capitalism make clear)——he just does not do anything about it. The principle of recognizing the system for what it is (without necessarily condoning it or "being used to it") links Murakami's view of the global world with those of Luhmann and the characters in *Ghost in the Shell* which I discuss below. Such a principle marks the fatalism inherent in such views, distinguishing them from more antagonist or revolutionary engagements with globalism.

For Luhmann, defining the true nature of a global society requires forgoing traditional ideas about the nature of society and beliefs in the utopian possibilities of society; such is the task that confronts the sociologist, not proposing revolutionary changes. As we will see in *Ghost in the Shell*, any response to the perceived problems of the system must come through change in the individual, not at the level of the global system and society. For Murakami's narrator, as the title of the book indicates, the solution is for the individual to dance and keep dancing, to keep moving in the hopes of finding a less stale, less banal existence.

Such an attitude cannot really be described as "anti-globalism" since the system is accepted as an inevitable (and unalterable) reality. Still there is anxiety about the consequences of living in this global system——fears about how to construct identity, about how to assign and to determine value. The successful people the narrator meets tend to be either prostitutes or actors, and he begins to wonder about his own identity:

> Drinking alone at night, I fixated on sex with Mei [a prostitute] . . . . Shoveling snow. An oddly isolated memory, unconnected to anything . . . . But ever so real. Down to the smallest details, in some sense even more vivid than waking reality, though ultimately unconnected. I liked it that way. A self-bound meeting of souls. Two persons joined together respecting their illusions and images . . . .
>
> Caught in the cross hair of the real and the imaginary.
>
> Take Gotanda [an actor]. His doctor persona was all image. Yet he looked more like a real doctor than any doctor I knew. . . .
>
> What was *my* image? Did I even have one?
>
> *Dance*, the Sheep Man said. *Dance in tip-top form. Dance so it all keeps spinning*.
>
> Did that mean I would then have an image? And if I did, would people

> be impressed? Well, more than they'd be impressed by my real self, I bet. (160-161)

The richness of the novel stems in part from the way in which the narrator navigates his way through this world of image and corporate capitalism. It is not quite as simple as saying that the system is bad. Not only does one have to accept the system because it exists, but the truth is, it has its pleasures. That is part of its power, its ability to seduce, given that even the narrator enjoys himself at times: he makes a distinction between shoveling snow in women's magazines and shoveling snow with a prostitute in a luxurious room at the home of his actor friend; and while the unending references to American popular culture (McDonald's, Dunkin'Donuts, the endless lists of songs and popular artists) seem to betray an anxiety that there is no more room for Japanese culture, there is no indication that the narrator does not enjoy his hamburgers and donuts, not to say the music he listens to (and which ultimately helps him to connect to a new friend, the teenage girl Yuki, whose life is full of these American influences).

Still, on balance, the narrative presents a critique of the system which has produced this society, the most significant cost being the loss of the aberrant, the strengthening of the forces of normalization and regularization, the limiting of possibilities.[6] This lamentable process is figured in the fate of the Dolphin Hotel. The original hotel was an oddity burned into the narrator's memory:

> The hotel should never have been built where it was. That was the first mistake, and everything got worse from there. Like a button on

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[6] We will see that in *Ghost in the Shell* the global system, for all its problems, brings with it the exciting possibility of endless cultural productions, for "the net is vast and infinite". But Murakami's narrator is living in a time before the expansion of the internet and the implication is that while American pop culture products may be vast and infinite in number, they are in his view difficult to distinguish from one another, and their growing presence comes at the cost of limiting other (namely Japanese) cultural products.

> a shirt buttoned wrong, every attempt to correct things led to yet another fine——not to say elegant——mess. No detail seemed right. Look at anything in the place and you'd find yourself tilting your head a few degrees. Not enough to cause you any real harm, nor enough to seem particularly odd. Who knows? You might get used to this slant on things (but if you did, you'd never be able to view the world again without holding your head out of true). (3)
>
> That was the Dolphin Hotel. Normalness, it lacked. Confusion piled on confusion until the saturation point was reached, destined in the not-too-distant future to be swallowed in the vortex of time. Anyone could recognize that at a glance. A pathetic place, woebegone as a three-legged black dog drenched in December rain. Sad hotels existed everywhere, to be sure, but the Dolphin was in a class of its own. The Dolphin Hotel was conceptually sorry. The Dolphin Hotel was tragic. (3)
>
> A far cry from its name (to me, the "Dolphin" soubriquet suggested a pristine white-sugar candy of a resort hotel on the Aegean Sea), if not for the sign hung out front, you'd never have known the building was a hotel. Even with the sign and the brass plaque at the entrance, it scarcely looked the part. What it really resembled was a museum. A peculiar kind of museum where persons with peculiar curiosities might steal away to see peculiar items on display. (3-4)

The old Dolphin Hotel was, for all its problems, original, a celebration of aberration. The new Dolphin Hotel, built on the ruins of the old, is a westernized, international hotel——a study in regulation and control:

> It had been transformed into a gleaming twenty-six story Bauhaus Modern-Art Deco symphony of glass and steel, with flags of various nations waving along the driveway, smartly uniformed doormen hailing taxis, a glass elevator shooting up to a penthouse restaurant. A bas-relief of a dolphin was set into one of the marble columns by

> the entrance, beneath which the inscription read:
>
> *l'Hotel Dauphin*
>
> I stood there a good twenty seconds, mouth agape, staring up at it. Then I let out a long, deep breath that might as easily have been beamed straight to the moon. Surprise was not the word. (21)
>
> [In the lobby] a group of well-dressed, middle-aged men sat on facing sofas, nodding and smiling magnanimously. Jaws thrust out, legs crossed, identically. A professional organization? Doctors or university professors? On their periphery——perhaps they were part of the same gathering——cooed a clutch of young women in formal dress, some of them in kimono, some in floor-length dresses. There were a few Westerners as well, not to mention the requisite salarymen in dark suits and harmless ties, attaché cases in hand. (22-23)

With "conference rooms outfitted for simultaneous translation" (28-29), "light blue blazered young women with toothpaste-commercial smiles" to greet visitors at reception (24), and a banal painting of "some Hokkaido marshland" ("nothing outstanding artistically, but impressive, if only for its size" [22]), the Dolphin Hotel——and by extension, Japan as a whole——is transformed by the untraceable conglomerates of the global system into a tourist stop, "practically an amusement park" ("the world was full of ways and means to waste time [29]), "an idiotic Star Wars high-tech hotel-a-thon" (30-31).

With the flattening of the world comes a crisis in communication and connectivity. In this global world, information (useful or not) is more plentiful and more easily accessed, and connections (by phone, by computer, by cultural products) between people around the world are multiplying. And yet, with the rise in connectivity comes an increasing sense of disconnection at the level of individuals and families. The narrator, looking at the phone in his room ("ticking away [like a time-bomb] with possibility") reflects:

> Now the phone company. All those lines coming together. Lines

> stretching all the way from this very room. Connecting me, in principle, to anyone and everyone. I could even call Anchorage if I wanted. Or the Dolphin Hotel, for that matter, or my ex-wife. Countless possibilities. And all tied together through the phone company switchboard. Computer-processed these days of course. Converted into strings of digits, then transmitted via telephone wires to underground cables or undersea tunnel or communications satellite, ultimately finding its way to us. A gigantic computer-controlled network.
>
> But no matter how advanced the system, no matter how precise, unless we have the will to communicate, there's no connection. And even supposing the will is there, there are times when we don't know the other party's number. Or even if we know the number, we misdial. We are an imperfect and unrepentant species. But suppose we clear those hurdles, suppose I manage to get through to Yuki, she could always say, "I don't want to talk now. Bye." *Click*! End of conversation, before it ever began. Talk about one-way communication. (125-126)

To be connected to everyone "in principle" but not in fact. This concern melds with the narrator's concern about the falsity of images and the uniformity of culture and tastes, all products of the modern global system. The peculiar outcome of this system is that while people are becoming more alike (sharing more information and tastes and behaviors), they are seduced by a false sense of connectedness. But connectivity is a questionable ideal, like the doctor his actor-friend plays in TV commercials: completely false, but seeming so real, it takes the place of reality. False connections take the place of real connections, and it becomes hard to tell the difference. For the narrator, real communication and genuine connectedness is not so simple, beyond the capacity of global computerized networks; it is far too human:

> . . . the uncertain and imperfect grounds upon which volitional

> communication must necessarily base itself. So very imperfect, so utterly arbitrary, so wholly passive. . . . Well, that's communication. Imperfect, arbitrary, passive. The lament of the not-quite-pure idea . . . . (126)
>
> We [my wife and I] got along well, but what she was after, the image in her mind, was somewhere else, not where I was. She wanted a kind of autonomy of communication. A scene where the hero——whose name was "Communication"——led the masses to a bright, bloodless revolution, spotless white flags waving. So that perfection could swallow imperfection and make it whole. To me, love is a pure idea forged in flesh, awkwardly maybe, but it had to connect somewhere, despite twists and turns of underground cable. An all-too-imperfect thing. Sometimes the lines get crossed. Or you get a wrong number. But that's nobody's fault. It'll always be like that, so long as we exist in this physical form. As a matter of principle.
>
> I explained it to her. Over and over again.
>
> Then one day she left. (126-127)

The narrator, himself divorced, is surrounded by disconnected individuals and broken families. When he is asked to escort a teenage girl left behind at the hotel back to Tokyo (her parents are divorced and her distracted mother forgot her), he jokes: "fun for the whole family" (106). But his meeting with Yuki——whose name means "snow"——results in a new kind of work, a more meaningful shoveling: in the breakdown of one family is the beginning of another, albeit a patch-work substitute family.

The narrator's re-connection to the world and to other individuals is a slow, complicated process unfolding throughout the novel (the novel is in a sense that very process) and is not limited to his relationship with Yuki. But this interest in surrogate families connects the theme of this novel with much

of Japanese anime, which is full of stories of single-parent families or children living on their own, in which lonely isolated children reconnect to the world by forming unusual (but family-like) arrangements with new characters who enter their life.[7]

Lain is interesting in this sense given that it, too, is a work concerned about the danger of over-connectedness in a world of global networks. The title character, Lain, is (like the Puppet Master in *Ghost in the Shell*) a program that grows beyond the control of its creator, developing autonomy and sentience through its interaction with the Wired (the information network). For a long time, however, she does not realize her true nature, and perceives herself as a human girl (though a sad and lonely one, disconnected from others). Her greatest desire is to have a normal family and normal friends, both of which elude her as she must come to accept that she is not human and that her place is in the information network. The plot (in which Lain begins thinking of herself as a disconnected human girl who learns about computers in order to connect with those around her, only to find that she is in fact the sum of the network, the program which structures the information system, and so ultimately connected to everyone and at the same time to no one) reinforces the notion that not all connections are equal and that we should be cautious about the connectivity promised by the global information network.

In notable contrast, *Ghost in the Shell* does not seem especially interested in the issue of family and re-connectivity. Or rather, I will argue below, the film suggests that globalism (despite the many anxieties it engenders) contains within itself (in the form of the "vast and infinite"

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[7] *Tenchi Muyo*, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, and *Love Hina* all have unusual "families" which fit in this category, just to name a few of the more well-known anime titles. In my article on Japanese appropriations of Western medieval narratives, I note the way in which *shojo* manga and anime domesticate Western knights in order to create this kind of surrogate family. John Lance Griffith, "Integration and Inversion: Western Medieval Knights in Japanese Manga and Anime," *Medieval and Early Modern English Studies* 17.1 (2009): 89-119.

information network) a solution to many of the problems of identity and disconnection it seems to create. That is, while all these works begin with the premise that the system must be accepted (investigated and understood) for what it is (with revolution dismissed as an option), the mood of *Ghost in the Shell* is much closer to that of Luhmann's sociological theory of systems: issues of human connectivity and humanist concerns (about, say, moral behavior and emotions like love) are not particularly important. Where Murakami's narrator, having accepted the system for what it is, retreats from the system in search of solace, at the end of *Ghost in the Shell* Motoko Kusanagi re-enters the system, having accepted it for what it is.

Communication is not exactly the "hero" of Luhmann's systems theory (as it is for the wife of Murakami's narrator), but it is in some sense the main character, the engine of the system, in that communication is the means by which the system draws the boundaries and makes the distinctions which define the system and which ultimately impact every (human) individual observing the system. The next section of this essay explores in more detail the systems theory of Niklas Luhmann in order to prepare for a discussion of the narrative and visual representation of the global system in *Ghost in the Shell*.

II. Systems theory and Japanese anime

To underscore the thoughtfulness with which anime creators such as Mamoru Oshii (*Ghost in the Shell*) approach the problem of globalism (and the presentation of anime in general), I approach these pop culture works in relation to a theory equally complex and thought-provoking, Niklas Luhmann's commentary on systems theory and the global society.

For Luhmann, as a sociologist, the main goal is to define the nature of modern society. There is no question that a global system exists: "'International,' indeed, no longer refers to a relation between two (or more) nations but to the political and economic problems of the global system" (1).

This state of affairs is evident particularly in the realm of science, which "is not differentiated into regional, ethnic or cultural sciences but into disciplines and research fields" (1). This is a point made in passing by Luhmann in his essay, but a significant one for understanding both the world view of many anime and also perhaps the success of this particular pop culture form across the globe.

The two main works I discuss below (*Ghost in the Shell* and *Lain*) are both science-fiction anime, both driven by an interest in and careful presentation of the relation between society and technology, of the way in which a society is defined by its use of, misuse of, and sometimes use by technology. Unlike many of the other iconic Japanese (science-fiction) anime, which feature robots (especially giant robots piloted by Japanese children or teenagers), *Lain* and *Ghost in the Shell* concern themselves with computers, specifically the internet and other various forms of information storage and exchange. Robots are not a specifically Japanese phenomenon, of course; but while there are robots in Western science-fiction culture, they are not quite as prevalent and, more importantly, tend to take a different form (more often androids as opposed to their Japanese counterparts which tend to be giant machines piloted by humans).

Different forms lead to different functions, both at the level of plot and the level of literary symbolism. Androids are facsimile humans, independent beings, reflecting human existence, its behaviors and its own image of itself. Giant robots have a symbiotic relationship with their pilots and, like the cyborgs in the world of *Ghost in the Shell*, raise questions about the intimate relation of dependence between humans and their machines.[8]

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[8] Cyborgs are more appropriate than giant robots to the world of *Ghost in the Shell* because while both cyborgs and giant robots encourage questions about the symbiotic relation between humans and their technology, the image of the cyborg expresses the fear of losing the human to technology——an anxiety similar to the anxiety over the internet, over the blurring of the line between human and computer, between the physical world and the world

The internet, however, is by definition a global phenomenon. Concerns about information security and identity in the internet age go beyond Japan precisely because while cultures are not connected by their interest in robotics, they are connected by the internet. Language aside, the images in *Ghost in the Shell* and *Lain*——of cables and humming drives and glowing screens and flashing data across those screens——are much less identifiably Japanese than the images in giant-robot anime. Thus the world view of such computer/internet anime is that of a global society in which Japanese cultural identity, its cultural specificity, is largely absent. This world of science, a monolithic science without nationality or borders, is also potentially what connects these works to viewers around the world. Science fiction writing can take different forms in different cultures around the world (as in the example above of the different kinds of robots in the East and the West), but science itself——especially that associated with computers and the internet——makes for thematic and iconographic material that can be processed by readers and viewers in just about any modern industrialized part of the world.[9]

Luhmann's interest is less in the issue of the individual's relation to science and technology than in defining what a modern society is, how the individual is related to the system. Understanding his interest in this problem helps us to appreciate the fact that *Ghost in the Shell* and *Lain* are not just imaginative visions of a future world or simple commentaries on the dangers of technology; these works are preoccupied with what it means to be part of a system, to be a bit of data in a modern sociologist's theory of systems, to have

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of information, which we see expressed thematically and cinematographically in these works.

[9] Another explanation for the anime boom in the 1990's and for anime's spread across the globe is the rise of dvds and the internet, the anime industry's close connection to developing technologies: "There are many reasons behind this boom, but one of them is surely the revolution in technology, which allowed the rapid dissemination of anime across the world. . . . Also by the mid-1990's, the VCR explosion was beginning to crescendo, to be followed soon after by the development of DVDs. By the twenty-first century fans were downloading the latest anime directly off the Internet" (Napier, *Anime*, 16).

one's identity defined in relation to a system, in particular to this global system whose nature is defined by its resistance to human control and by its impersonal trafficking in information.

Systems theory is an important recent contribution to the field of sociology and has its political, economic, and philosophical applications.[10] It is, however, notoriously complex. Following is an outline of the basic principles that are relevant to a discussion of the more sophisticated anime concerned with identity in the global age.

Systems Theory: a brief outline

The problem of identity (of how the individual establishes an identity in the modern world) is at the heart of Oshii's anime, and is also integral to Luhmann's analysis of how to define a modern society:

> the concept of society proclaims a specific combination of difference and identity, of differentiation and reconstructed unity, or, in traditional language, of the parts and the whole. In traditional societies, whether antique, medieval or early modern, the principle of differentiation has been stratification, or hierarchy . . . . (2)

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[10] It has been noted that while Luhmann's work has not received a warm welcome from American scholars, it is well known in Europe and around the world, including Japan. See Albert Mathias, ed., *Observing International Relations: Niklas Luhmann and World Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2. Luhmann's writing is extensive. I use his article, "Globalization or World Society?: How to conceive of modern society," http://www.generation-online.org/p/fpluhmann2.htm [originally appearing in *International Review of Sociology* 7.1 (March 1997)], as the primary text in the discussion of his ideas below. For more on his ideas and their influence on sociological, political, and economic theory, see Hans-Georg Moeller, *Luhmann Explained: From Souls to System* (Chicago: Open Court, 2006); Michael King and Chris Thornhill, eds., *Luhmann on Law and Politics: Critical Appraisals and Applications* (Portland: Hart 2006); and Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, *Niklas Luhmann: Law, Society, Justice* (London: Routledge-Cavendish, 2008).

The basis of society——what separates one society from another, what determines the individual's relation to and inclusion in one group as opposed to another——is the identity that the individual establishes through unity (with others like himself) and difference (from others unlike himself).

Though anime is particularly interested in how the individual navigates relations of unity and difference in the modern global world, Luhmann's primary concern is how to determine what kind of society, what kind of system, that new global world is. He argues that the principles of unity which held societies together in the past have all failed or proven illusory: the unity provided by the Church in the Middle Ages gave way to secular concepts of unity such as the Enlightenment principle of human happiness and the 19th century principle of "solidarity" (of moral obligation). But for Luhmann, the modern world is neither a happy nor a unified place. Modern capitalism promises freedom and equality, and claims to organize its culture around shared expectations of and strivings toward a better life. But these promises and claims are only empty hopes (only "aspiration . . . reproduced by the mass media and the mass markets as an aspiration"[3]). Why? Because they are principles dependent precisely on the future, a future which "can never become present" (3).

So if societies emerge through differentiation and identification, but the old forms of unity are no longer credible, what holds the modern society together, what is the means of differentiation and the source of one's identity in the global society?:

> difference and identity [are] no longer framed by statificatory (or hierarchical) differentiation. Stratification would mean that we could know the addresses of influential people . . . and that we would be able to change the structure of society by appealing to reason, by critique, by reforming institutions, or by revolution. But this has become more than doubtful. . . . The predominant relation is no longer a hierarchical one, but one of inclusion and exclusion; and this relates

> not to stratification but to functional differentiation.
>
> Traditional societies included and excluded persons by accepting or not accepting them in family households, and families (not individuals) were ordered by stratification. Modern society [however] includes and excludes persons via function systems . . . . Function systems presuppose the inclusion of every human being, but, in fact, they exclude persons that do not meet their requirements. (4)

In this modern society, social hierarchies have disappeared and there is equal opportunity for access and power——but only insofar as one is useful to the system. Luhmann laments that, even though such societies claim to promote equality and freedom, there are many people outside such societies who are poor and do not have access to legal or political power (4). So there will never be total inclusion or unity, even in a "global" society. But also notable is that while this global society continues to exclude, its means of inclusion is different from the past – it is the system which has the power to include or exclude. And this system is both anti-humanist and inhuman: it produces a "society without top and without centre; a society that evolves but cannot control itself" (9). Some people gain more power than others, but people who fail are not really being "exploited" or "suppressed"; they have simply proved insufficiently useful to the system. "Nor are there at the higher level of society, actors or dominant groups that use their power to suppress these people" (4). Powerful individuals or groups are simply trying "like everyone else, [to] use their networks to their own advantage" (4)——but they cannot in any meaningful sense be said to control such networks. This recalls the Murakami narrator's lament (quoted above) that, unlike in 1969, there is no longer any one to throw rocks at——one is not being oppressed or excluded or controlled by individuals or even recognizable groups, but by a faceless system of networks outside of any individual's or any single group's control.

"Network" is a key concept in *Ghost in the Shell* and in *Lain*, and we will return to it. But to clarify: modern society is a system, a network, a

series of interrelated functions that include or exclude individuals on the criterion of utility. An individual is useful or not, and so a member of society or not; depending on the degree of utility and his ability to use the network to advantage, he then becomes a more or less powerful member. And what structures the system (a society "not in control of itself" [9]), what allows it to draw boundaries which include or exclude people, what allows it to arrange people in a hierarchy of more and less power, is information ("communication"):

> Society generates its external boundaries by its elementary operations. These are boundaries between the recursive, self-referring network of communications on the inside, and everything else (including human bodies and minds) on the outside . . . . Each communication identifies itself by referring to past communications and by opening a limited space for further communications . . . . [Communication] has to reproduce both the memory function and the oscillator function, the past and the future of the system. This requires . . . the drawing of boundaries . . . . (6)

Of course, if communication here meant simply the transfer of data, we could imagine a system that is purely maintained by computers exchanging information, in which all human beings become useless. But that is not, I think, Luhmann's conception and not the overriding concern in *Ghost in the Shell* or *Lain*.

Communication in Luhmann requires consciousness. Why? Because the (societal) system Luhmann is talking about is an autopoietic one, that is, a system which creates itself by distinguishing itself from everything that is outside it ["the environment"]; but it cannot observe itself (6-7). This means that (1) individuals are not really "part" of the system[11]——they are

[11] "Individuals are not and cannot be 'parts' of society, and it makes no sense to speak of 'participation'"(8). Human beings are important to the system because their consciousness

outside the system observing it; and (2) such observation is essential to the perpetuation of the system[12]:

> Conscious states in the environment of the system have to be presupposed at any moment in time, in every single communicative operation. They have to be presupposed, not only for the time being, but also in the form of a possibility of future communication on the one hand, which links up with what has been said or written before, and, on the other hand, in the form of a past that has already successfully reduced uncertainty and in which individuals have committed themselves to continue communication. This structural coupling of consciousness and society . . . presupposes the reciprocal inaccessibility of consciousness for communication and of communication for consciousness. The other side cannot be reached, it can only be imagined; for no system can operate outside of its own boundaries. The structural coupling depends upon language as a linking device, but there is no super-system organizing this coupling. Language is not a system.
>
> Moreover, this is the only direct coupling that connects the societal

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can observe and mediate the communication by which the system draws a boundary (between it and everything that is not it) and defines itself. Of course, any human being will do. Individual "reproducing consciousnesses" are more important than individuals. The individual is not especially important since individuals "are easy to replace, they die anyway and they live in great numbers" (8).

12 Human beings are part of the environment, not the system, but they are a special part of that environment: "Society constructs its environment around a basic distinction, that between human individuals (bodies and minds) and other environmental facts . . . . This distinction is drawn by society itself, by its communicative processes . . . . For only the consciousness of individuals is structurally coupled with the autopoiesis of the societal system. Only consciousness can irritate communication in a way that is compatible with autopoiesis and the operational closure of the system. All other environmental changes (physical, chemical, biological, e.g. death) can only have destructive effects" (7).

> system with its outside. Only consciousness can produce the noise necessary for the emergence and evolution of social order. Only conscious operations can perturbate the communicative system and create preconditions of sense-making within this system. Everything else——say, death, fire, earthquakes, climatic shifts, technological catastrophes——can only destroy communication. Such events can, of course, be observed, that is, thematized by the social system, but to do so requires communication and, as its external condition, consciousness. (7)

The "extraordinary importance" of the individual lies in his own ability to reproduce, in his existence as a "reproducing consciousness" (7-8). It is consciousness which has the power to influence memory, the boundary between past and present communications:

> The system cannot match its internal observations with its reality, nor can external observers compute the system. Such systems need a memory function (i.e. culture) that presents the present as an outcome of the past. But memory means forgetting and highly selective remembering, it means constructing identities . . . . (6)

So, for Luhmann, this modern global society is a system that grows and reproduces itself, but is not controlled (or controllable) by any one group, let alone one individual. The individual is not so much a part of the system as an observer of it; and the individual's relation to that system (and perhaps to some extent his position with respect to others) is based on communication, access to information, and the construction of memory (both social memory or culture and individual, personal, memory).

Whether Luhmann's observation of this system is accurate, or even whether his argument is sufficient to prove the existence of such a global system, is not demonstrable here in my essay nor essential to its own observations about Japanese popular culture——nor indeed all that important to Luhmann himself:

> A theory of society, whether true or false, and this makes no difference here, contributes to the self-description of the society. It is communicated within society to convey a description of society . . . . It produces a text that implies a collapse of the distinction between a subject and its object, between the observer and the observed . . . . (12)

Which is to say that while there may be other ways to describe and to understand globalism and the global system, Luhmann's observations (as sophisticated text) are part of the conversation, part of the system, or at least part of its description because they are communications about that system. And I think an especially thought-provoking part of the conversation with respect to that part of the global system which is undeniably driven by the internet and other transnational regulators of communication and information. Moreover, with respect to my interest in Japanese anime, Luhmann's text provides concepts and vocabularies——*re-entry*, *memory*, *network*, *consciousness*, *autopoiesis*, *identity*——which are very much at the center of works like *Ghost in the Shell* and *Lain*; and which provide us one means of analyzing these equally serious, equally complex, works and their anxieties about globalism, about the consequences for the individual living in such a global system.

III. *Ghost in the Shell*: Individual in the Information

Ghost in the Shell is a manga written by Masamune Shirow, published as a serial between 1989 and 1991. A film version, directed by Mamoru Oshii, was released in 1995. I begin with a detailed description of the opening of the film, deliberately avoiding for the moment a clear outline of the plot. For anyone who has never seen the film, this description will seem disjointed and disorienting. For those who have seen the film one or (many) more times, it will serve as a reminder of what one's first experience of this film is like: a moment of disjunction and disorientation. As I argue below, it

is the disjointed and disorienting presentation of (important) information at the beginning of the film which captures (in visual and thematic form) the film's theory of globalism and its impression of what life is like in the modern global society.[13]

Caption:

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.

The opening image is of a satellite tracking two helicopters circling above a city building; this map dissolves into an image of the cityscape rooftops, the camera zooming down to a single rooftop and a woman with dark glasses sitting, waiting. The sound of an electronic signal is heard, gradually resolving eventually into recognizable speech. As the woman listens, we shift to her perspective and see the room below on a green screen (as if perceived with night-vision goggles). Voices are heard off-screen:

"There's nothing to worry about. You can try it again once you're in our country."

"Try it again?"

"Just as there's no such thing as a bug-free program, there's no program that can't be debugged. Am I wrong?"

"You don't understand. We still don't know if it really is a bug. Project 2501's original purpose was——"

[13] The following description of the action and setting is my own; quoted dialogues here and throughout the rest of the essay are transcribed from the English language track of the film. *Ghost in the Shell*, DVD, directed by Mamoru Oshii (1995; Manga Video, 1998).

"Major, Section 6 is ready to move in."

The camera cuts back to the woman on the roof, now in profile against the metallic city skyline.

"Major!"

[A woman's voice:] "I hear you."

A few frames later, she takes off her glasses and we see that a set of cables are plugged into a series of jacks drilled into the back of her neck; both these devices are presumably her means of monitoring the situation in the room below. Again an unseen voice is heard: "There's a lot of static in your brain."

She takes off her glasses and speaks aloud for the first time. "It's that time of the month." She rips out the cables from her neck, stands up, strips off her coat, naked underneath. The camera shifts to a view just above street level, observing people move in and out of the main entrance of the building. A different male voice is heard. "Won't there be trouble if Section 9 butts in on Section 6's operation? That diplomat's a pretty well-known bastard."

The camera shifts to a cramped, almost claustrophobic, interior. A man wearing a headset sits in front of a panel of computers; a second man also wearing a headset leans over his shoulder. The standing man speaks: "Even if they catch him there, all they can do is deport him. We're the only ones who can get our hands dirty." The man sitting down turns to a third man (also monitoring a computer bank) and says, "They're moving. Take us over to the extraction point." The camera shifts to a street level perspective, and an angular, truck-like vehicle without windows pulls out into traffic.

The camera then shifts back to the rooftop, the woman taking off the safety on her pistol. Placing it in her thigh holster above her white

stockings (her only clothing, other than white gloves), she steps to the edge of the roof and we look down over her shoulder to the scene below, all metal and concrete buildings and elevated roadways. She spins around and lets herself fall backward over the parapet. The camera perspective shifts to a point in the air across from the roof and as she falls we see the ornamentation on the roof, classical fretwork and a gargoyle mask (possibly flanked by two other faces). Her eyes are wide and fearless, as we then shift to her perspective of the inverted cityscape. The camera shifts perspective again and her feet smash the stone face of the gargoyle she lands on below.

The camera shifts inside an ornate building (marble walls, carpeted floor), looking down a flight of stairs, as armed men in flack jackets, helmets, and gas masks rush up. They are joined by others emerging from an elevator. The scene cuts to an interior: a long wall with a large fish tank set in its length, several men in the room, including two large men in black suits (perhaps bodyguards) standing. One of the men in black leans over and whispers to a seated man wearing a jacket, sweater vest and tie. The man seated says, "What? The Police?" A second man (in a white shirt and tie, no jacket) jumps up, nervous. The camera cuts to an image of a hand holding a briefcase, which falls away to reveal a weapon. The two bodyguards are now kneeling in front of the door, weapons drawn. They open fire down the hall and wound a number of the armed men in masks (the back of their jackets now identify them as "police").

Back in the room, the man with the vest says, "Stop it! Who told you to open fire? Drop your guns!" The police burst in the main door and a side door. The man pulls out his wallet with identification. "I have diplomatic immunity! Let me see who's in charge!" A voice off-screen is heard: "Transporting a listed programmer out of the country violates our arms export treaty." A man in a suit enters the

screen, through the cordon of police. The camera now provides a shot of his face. "I could also have you charged with kidnapping. Give the man up." The two men are now in profile, against the backdrop of the large tank, the fish swimming back and forth. "I'm afraid not. He's applied for political asylum with us and he's already signed a statement to that effect!" "When?" "I don't have to tell you! By right of international law, my country can offer him protection and right of safe passage. The document is on file at our embassy. I'll transfer you a copy in a few days." "Are you sure about this? They won't take you back alive." "I must ask that you watch what you say. Our country is a peace-loving democracy."

At this moment, a female voice off-screen is heard: "Is that a fact?" The center panel of the "fish tank" shatters – apparently it was a screen with an image of fish on it – fragments flying into the room; the hole in the wall reveals a view of the building across the street. The camera pans back to the man in the vest who suddenly jerks back and forth, riddled with bullets. His head explodes, revealing a white spinal column and a group of flailing cables, blood splattering over his jacket and the walls and men around him. "Out the window! Shoot!" Covered in blood, the police spokesman gives the order. The men fire at the wall, blowing out the remaining windows of the "fish tank". They run to the window and look down. The woman (the one from the rooftop) is falling backward, floating really, towards the cars on the ground far below. Her body flashes briefly with a multi-color glow, then begins to dissolve. The camera shifts to the police spokesman: "Thermoptic camouflage . . . ." A shift back to the falling woman. The outline of her body gradually disappears, filled in by the cityscape behind her. Only her face remains clearly visible, chesire-cat-like. Imitating a magician, she waves (the outline of) a hand slowly across her face and it too disappears, until all that is left is the cityscape itself. The title credits roll: a dark

screen full of cables and flashes of electricity across them; then, spelled out in rough, block lettering (like the script on computers from the 1970's): GHOST IN THE SHELL. (GHOST and SHELL on either side of a white triangle inside of which are the words IN THE).

Eventually, that is, by the end of the film, sense can be made of the opening. We learn who the woman is (Major Motoko Kusangi); what her job is (she is a cyborg working for a special government agency, Section 9); what she was doing on the roof (monitoring the office of an American diplomat where a Hong Kong computer programmer was seeking asylum); why she assassinates the diplomat (Section 9 is the public security force and agreed to help Section 6, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to prevent the programmer from leaving the country, because his skills and knowledge were vital to national security); who the off-screen voices are (Batou and Togusa, members of the Major's squad); why characters sometimes speak aloud and sometimes not (the cyborgs can connect directly to one another's cybernetic brains via a communication channel). What is significant, though, is that this task of sense-making falls to memory, which is dependent (as in Luhmann) on further information revealed throughout the film. The initial experience is one of chaos, as one looks for a stable fact to hold on to in a flood of information both verbal and visual.

The film unfolds in this way because the film takes the question of how to process information, how to make sense of the data and the system to which one is connected, as one of its central themes. Even the Major (who within the reality of the story knows all of this basic information we are just coming to terms with) is not aware of the entire situation; there is "static" in her brain as her partner Batou observes. And as the plot unfolds it becomes clear that Section 9 has been misled as to the true nature of the operation. Section 6 is protecting not just the computer programmer but the truth about the program (Project 2501) which he created. The Major and Section 9 spend an enormous amount of time and energy trying to track down a hacker

named “the Puppet Master”, only to discover that the Puppet Master is not a person (an American cyber-criminal, as Section 6 claimed) but in fact the result of Project 2501, a hacking program created by Section 6 and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to influence (manipulate) political and economic events around the world. Section 6 is not trying to stop the criminal, but to recapture “him” (the program) so that no one will know they are in fact responsible for all the cyber-crimes.

Of course, one could argue that the film may have been less confusing for the audience (that is, the Japanese audience) familiar with the manga which had been serialized several years earlier, for they would have known the identity of the woman on the roof even before going to the theater. One might also observe that misinformation or a lack of information are essential to almost any plot; not all relevant information can be conveyed in an instant, and if it could, if everything were known from the beginning, there would be no (need for a) plot, certainly no more mystery stories.

But both these points underscore the fact that, in *Ghost in the Shell*, the issue is not just that some mystery needs to be solved, but that information itself is problematic; the fact that while the [entertaining] function of its plot may be to uncover who the Puppet Master really is, its [philosophical] function as a film is to reflect on the global system which produced the Puppet Master and on the nature of information in a wired internet society. The creative decision to excise the most basic plot and character information draws the first boundary (as Luhmann would say) in the film. Inside this informational boundary are those audience members familiar with the manga, while all others are left (puzzled and even a bit frustrated) outside. The Major will cross similar boundaries throughout the film. As we said, it is true that all stories contain some initial question or unknown quantity (an initial boundary between those characters [in the world of the fiction] “in the know” and those characters, together with the observers of the fiction, who do not yet know the whole truth). But in Kusanagi’s case, the point is that her

business (and that of all of Section 9) *is* information; what frustrates them is that, powerful as they are, even they do not have access to everything.

This is a story about mysteries unknown to the power brokers of society, the makers of (political/social) myth; about information inaccessible to the information specialists. The film uses its plot and its cinematography to present a chaotic world of information and shifting boundaries; a world of false information, dizzying streams of data, fish tanks that are fish tanks and fish tanks that are not fish tanks. How to present the viewer with the feel of such a world, with the sensory and emotive experience of living in such a world, was a task the director Mamoru Oshii set himself, as he observes in his answer to a question about why he set the story in Hong Kong:

> Since the information network isn't visible, I tried to think of how I could visually represent it. It would be pointless to show the monitor of a personal computer. However, if you think about Hong Kong, you imagine a city teeming with information. For example, there are countless signs and a cacophony of voices and sounds which flow through the city. When I went to Hong Kong, I felt that it would provide the perfect setting for the subject and period of the story.[14]

Even though most people access the information network through computer screens, it is pointless to merely show the screens on film. Why? Because the screen is only a means to regulate the flow of information, to contain it, to draw a boundary by which one can make sense of the information; but the flow itself resists regulation, for it is by nature boundless. Any attempt to contain it results in an incomplete product. What the ordinary person accesses on the internet is both infinitesimal compared to the whole [the entirety of the system cannot be computed, as Luhmann would say, either by the system itself or an observer] and in most cases highly regulated. The

[14] From an interview with the director, featured in the *Making of* segment included on the dvd. *Ghost in the Shell*, DVD, directed by Mamoru Oshii (1995; Manga Video, 1998).

boundaries that are drawn to make information manageable determine not only what information is received but how it is processed, as one can see if one compares how the same news story is reported on one website as opposed to another.

As the members of Section 9 repeatedly discover, their considerable access to information is ultimately limited by a system that is out of their control:

> Virtual experiences, dreams . . . . All data that exists is both reality and fantasy. Whichever it is, the data a person collects in a lifetime is a tiny bit compared to the whole.

Batou (Major Kusanagi's cyborg partner) makes this observation as he walks away from an interrogation room where a trash collector, arrested for hacking into government databases, sits insisting to the police that he was using the computers to hack his wife because he was concerned she was having an affair. The police futilely explain to him that he has no wife or daughter, but was used as a puppet by the Puppet Master to access government information and pumped full of fake memories. They show him a picture of himself alone, but he sees himself surrounded by his wife and daughter. In this case, there is a clear boundary between truth and fiction, at least from the point of view of the police and the audience of the film: we can see that the man is alone in the photograph. (Although, unlike the police, we can also see from the man's point of view and so get an image of the man surrounded by his wife and daughter). For the trash collector, though, the boundary is less clear, since the only identity he has is based on those memories.

Data is data, but knowing whether it is real or imagined is sometimes as difficult as determining whether it is true or false. The members of Section 9 know this better than anyone since they specialize not just in information gathering, but in information manipulation. At the end, Section 9 helps conceal the truth from the public, as Batou acknowledges: "For diplomatic reasons, the whole case has been covered up. Section 9 reported it as a

terrorist attack. In return, the Foreign Minister has resigned . . . . The whole thing ends in a draw." But even the heads of Section 9 and Section 6 do not know what happened to the Major, as only Batou knows that she has merged with the Puppet Master and transferred to a new body——and because he fails to understand that experience fully (not having experienced such a merging himself), she leaves without informing him of where she is going. The "truth" ——about anything, be it personal or political——remains unknowable to the end.

If it were not for our existence as audience in the observing frame——our movement between character perspectives——there would be even less coherence. The function of the audience with respect to the existence of the film is very much like that of the function of human beings with respect to the existence of modern society, as described by Luhmann. As we observed above, the system needs an observer to give it meaning, to make sense of it, and it is thus the power of human beings to create meaning through memory that makes them so vital to the social system as Luhmann conceives it. It is the film audience's memory which makes sense of the confused opening of the film and the film as a whole; it is the recollection (reproduction) of the film in the memory of the audience which allows the film (and also the audience, perhaps) to continue to grow and to exist:

> In contradistinction to all traditions that teach that one can only understand what one has made oneself (Bacon, Hobbes, Vico etc), a re-entry leads to an unresolvable indeterminacy. The system cannot match its internal observations with its reality, nor can external observers compute the system. Such systems need a memory function (i.e. culture) that presents the present as an outcome of the past. But memory means forgetting and highly selective remembering . . . . In addition, such systems need an oscillator function to be able to cross the boundaries of all distinctions they use, such as, being/not-being, inside/outside, good/bad, male/female, true/false etc. To be able to

> separate memory and oscillation, the system constructs time, that is, a difference of past and future states, by which the past becomes the realm of memory and the future the realm of oscillation. (6)

One might argue that this special function of the audience implies as well a special status for art in the modern global society. If the system is beyond human control, it is not beyond human observation, indeed is dependent on such. So observations made by artists through their art, and the subsequent observing of that art by its audience, would seem to have significant power, if not to change the system, at least to define what it is, to establish the boundaries by which we understand our relation to the system. Luhmann presumably would grant such power of definition to the sociologist, but the artist would appear to have a similar role to play. Luhmann recognizes that sociology may not be purely objective, that no such objective frame is possible. "Can sociology . . . operate as a science and simultaneously observe the society in which it operates as observer? Can it observe itself as the observer?" (13). Film nicely avoids this issue by including this double perspective in its very nature; art is capable of simultaneous observation and self-referentiality (a claim Luhmann would presumably make for his own theory).

In any case, the issue of observing the system is central to the characterization of the Section 9 members. As much work as they do, nothing ever really changes; they are maintenance workers of a high order; they do their job, observing how the system works, acknowledging the lies and the misinformation that shape their world (that they themselves help to transmit to the rest of society), and keep doing their job whatever they think of that system. It is not clear whether this is any better or worse than observing the world as an artist. In the world of *Ghost in the Shell*, it seems that such observation is not really a choice; action is limited and the system does not change (or, Luhmann might say, changes constantly but in an uncontrollable fashion), whether one acts or whether one chooses a particular mode of

observation (as an artist or as a secret policeman).

Such ambivalence about observation and one's relation to the system is notable at the end of *Lain* as well. Like the Puppet Master (who was "born in the sea of information"), Lain is a being created by the internet. Intended to be part of it, she evolves to become more powerful than anyone imagined, larger than the original system. But at the end, she chooses merely to observe; she remains omnipresent in the network, but (unlike many of the other characters in the story) does not use her power to influence the world. Although she has the power to manifest in the "real world", she does not initiate the breakdown between the real world and the Wired (the name of the information network in this story) which earlier in the series threatened to destroy reality.[15] She merely watches her old girl-friend Arisu as she grows up, gets married, and lives a normal life. Watching her walk away, Lain merely says, "I'm here. So I'll be with you forever." The truth which Lain discovers over the course of the series is that she is not human. The ending could thus imply that human beings cannot (or should not) merely observe; that observation is the function of the divine. (There is much discussion in the show about whether God exists and if it is possible for there to be a God-figure——perhaps Lain herself——operating within the information network). Arisu (as a human being) has to live, she has to act, to change, to connect with others.

On the other hand, Lain's choice to observe could be read as divine in the sense that it is an ideal toward which human beings should strive, or perhaps a state they must accept, given that the system will not change. (Lain, who is in a sense a manifestation of the whole system, never grows up or

[15] To the extent that the system does change and grow in *Lain*, it moves toward apocalypse, the collapse of the world as we know it; the breakdown of the barrier between the real world and the Wired would lead to a new reality beyond comprehension——incomprehensible because it would be without borders or distinctions, it would be an unstructured, infinite, plane of data.

changes her appearance as a young girl). Perhaps observing the borders between fantasy and reality, between real life and the internet, is the job of every individual, as Luhmann suggests the purpose of the individual is to observe and reproduce the system through memory.

The system does not change in *Ghost in the Shell* and the film presents the same (largely negative) image of modern global society that we see in Murakami. The opening sentences of the film make clear that this is a world of nations with independent governments——but in the rest of the film we see that these governments are virtually indistinguishable in terms of how they behave. They form a universal society of nations and corporations which are largely the same, connected by economics, information networks, and a shared desire for power:

> [Togusa]: The Puppet Master . . . . That phantom hacker, right?
>
> [The Major]: They think he's an American. Age, sex, personal history . . . . Everything about him is unknown. Since last winter he's been mainly active in the EC. Internationally wanted on dozens of charges of stock manipulation, spying, political engineering, terrorism, and violation of cyber-brain privacy. He's ghost-hacked so many people to carry out his crimes, he's earned the code name "The Puppet Master." This is the first instance of him operating in this country.

The idea that the Puppet Master is an American is just a cover story, one generated by Section 6, who created the Puppet Master in the first place. The team which worked on Project 2501, though assembled by the Hong Kong government, was in fact an international one (headed by an American) based at a multi-national corporation. The attempt to single out one government merely underscores the fact that all the governments are similar, all seeking power through manipulation of the various information networks (economic, political, journalistic) that connect them. It is a world governed by hard power; what soft power there is rests in manipulated information and propaganda designed to compliment hard power strategies and agendas.

Still, dark as the vision of this world and its dominant system is, there is more acceptance of than anxiety about the permanent and unassailable nature of the system. Perhaps because the characters are jaded police officers, the film seems to acknowledge (as they do) that the global system exists and that its nature is what it is, without further comment. Such a system cannot be changed, merely observed. In that sense, the anxiety in the film is not directed at the system as such. It is not a call to arms against the system, a platform to launch a social revolution. Luhmann (who sees past and so future revolutions as misguided failures)[16] accepts the existence (and permanence) of a global system and asks what is the nature of that system and how can it be defined? The film accepts globalism and asks what is the place of the individual in such a world, how can an identity be fashioned in a society governed by vast networks of information? Throughout the film, these issues preoccupy Kusanagi. The real and imagined, the true and the false, all contribute to the construction of the individual, the fashioning of identity, though that identity must be limited, to a degree imperfect, since (as Batou says) the data from which it is constructed is but a fraction of the possible whole.

As Batou walks away from the interrogation room, we see an image of the Major looking at the trash collector through the window, her own image reflected in the glass. This scene dissolves into a shot of the deep ocean, a few stray air bubbles rising up out of the darkness. We then see the Major in full scuba gear falling down further into the dark; she then releases the air from her jet pack to halt her descent, and begins slowly floating back toward

[16] "[Marxists] assumed centre of power, whether the capitalist class or regional centre of wealth, knowledge, and power, and placed their hopes, of course, again on revolution" (10). The modern global system, however, is "a polycentric, polycontextual society", that is, without a center to revolt against. It is a society "without top and without centre . . . . We may continue with our habits and resort to moral claims that are as justified as ever. But who will hear these complaints and who can react to them, if the society is not in control of itself?" (9).

the surface, eyes closed, until she nears the water line, where she opens her eyes to see (and we now see from her perspective) a red, purple and yellow clouded sky on the other side of the gently waving surface of the water. We now see a double image of the Major, the mirror opposites floating toward one another, one in a background of pure blue, the other in a background of pure red; as they touch at the water's edge, the ripples caused by her mask hitting the surface dissolve the upper image, and she breaks the surface, looking at the sky now through goggles which have drops of water on the outside.

The boundary between sea and sky represents the boundary the Major attempts to draw between self and system, as she retreats into the depths of the sea in order to find out who she is independent of the world above (if that is even possible):

> We can conceive of differentiation as the process of reproducing systems within systems, boundaries within boundaries and, for observing systems, frames within frames, and distinctions within the distinguished . . . . The concept of society has to be defined not by an idealized state . . . but by a boundary, that is, by a boundary-drawing operation. Such an operation produces the difference between the system and its environment and thereby produces the possibility of observing the system, that is, the distinction between the system and its environment. This distinction can re-enter the system, it can be copied in the system and [this] allows for the stability of the system . . . . Systems that operate at the level of a re-entry of their form into their form are non-trivial machines . . . . They cannot compute their own states. They use their own output as input. They are 'autopoietic' systems, and that means that they are their own product. (5-6)

Kusanagi can observe her world (the system) and herself because she separates from that world, drawing a boundary. Unlike Lain, she is not constantly connected to the information network. Yet the Major must

resurface, must re-enter the system.[17] And that is important too, because who she is is not an isolated being floating in the darkness of the sea, but someone connected to people and events above the surface, on the other side of that boundary. When Batou, who cannot understand why she (a cyborg) would go diving, points out that if her floaters stopped working her heavy frame would sink to the bottom of the ocean, she replies:

> Then I'd probably die . . . . [Below the water] I feel fear. Anxiety. Loneliness. Darkness. And perhaps, even——hope . . . . As I float up towards the surface, I almost feel as though I could change into something else.

The system might not change, but she could change. Or at least she feels this might possible.

But how? What would it mean to change in such a world? Batou asks if she is considering giving up working for Section 9. She points out that while there are great advantages to living as a cyborg, one problem is that if they quit their work they have to give back the cyborg body shell and their cybernetic brain (containing their memories) to the government:

> Just as there are many parts needed to make a human a human, there's a remarkable number of things needed to make an individual what they are. A face to distinguish yourself from others. A voice you aren't aware of yourself. The hand you see when you awaken. The memories of childhood, the feelings for the future. That's not all.

[17] Both the film and my analysis of it anthropomorphize the vocabulary and the conceptualization of Luhmann's system theory. "Re-entry" in Luhmann is a process of the system itself, not so much the action of a particular individual. Which is to say that the Japanese artists approach the problem of systems from a slightly different perspective than Luhmann. The two fictional texts imagine the experience of the individual——explore his or her encounter with the system (asking, as it were, "what does it feel like to be an excluded individual")——in a manner that Luhmann tends to avoid, preferring to deal with the abstractions of the system which help him elaborate a definition of (modern) society.

> There's the expanse of the data net my cyber-brain can access. All of that goes into making me what I am. Giving rise to a consciousness that I call 'me.' And simultaneously confining 'me' within set limits.

Such is the anxiety and the exhilaration of this global society, the vast networked world. Regardless of what one does, the world will not fundamentally change; the information one has may or may not be true; the whole will never be perceived and what limited information one gets is filtered through controls set by a system that is concerned neither with the individual's well being nor his desire for truth. And yet if one can accept such a world, its vast and limitless information allows for endless possibilities to construct (and repeatedly reconstruct) the self.

This is especially true for the Major whose cyber-brain has access to an "expanse" of data, but still could be said of any individual on a more limited scale. One may not be able to get the truth about elections in Iran or a complete picture of the global economy, but if nothing else, if one searches hard enough, the internet and the global market will provide an endless number of stories, of fantasies and of ideas that, as the Major points out, contribute to the formation of the individual, to one's perception of oneself ("a consciousness that I call 'me'"). The boundaries which define one's self can change, as one's relation to other information in the system changes.

Lain explores the potential danger of this line of thought, the possibility that without a clear boundary between fact and fiction, reality and fantasy, a meaningful identity will no longer be possible. No two people will be meaningfully connected if everyone is connected. If all desires are present, there will be no boundary line to indicate what is desirable; if nothing is absent, there is no presence. In Luhmann's terms, there is no society without boundaries, without a delineation of a system from its surrounding environment ("society is a boundary drawing operation"). But the concern in *Ghost in the Shell* is for change, not for disappearing boundaries. (There has to be change first before one can worry about the exhaustion of possibilities).

Where the system does not change, the individual must.

In addition to the question of change, the Major confronts the problem of how to determine truth and assign value in such a society, the truth and value of her own identity in particular. Initially this seems to be a problem connected to her existence as a cyborg. As characters in a science fiction story, the cyborgs of Section 9 have problems particular to their own fictional situation, problems related to being a cyborg. Batou asks Aramaki (the Section 9 Chief) if he is ever worried that maintenance of one's cyber-brain is in the hands of doctors one does not know; the Chief points out that all the doctors are screened, but "Once you doubt, you can't stop . . . ." The Major, too, repeatedly reflects on her existence as a cyborg:

> [The Major]: Maybe all full-replacement cyborgs like me start wondering this. That perhaps the real me died a long time ago, and I'm a replicant made with a cyborg body and computer brain. Or maybe there never was a real "me" to begin with.
>
> [Batou]: You've got real brain matter in that titanium skull of yours. And you get treated like a real person, don't you?
>
> [The Major]: There's no person who's ever seen their own brain. I believe I exist based only on what my environment tells me.
>
> [Batou]: Don't you believe in your own ghost?
>
> [The Major]: And what if a computer brain could generate a ghost and harbor a soul? On what basis then do I believe in myself?

Throughout this conversation, the Major and Batou are in a very small elevator, standing right near one another; but Batou (who wears dark glasses and whose eyes are never shown) looks straight ahead, and the Major looks down at the floor, reinforcing the distance between them, highlighting their existence as isolated individuals ("ghosts") despite the obvious physical presence of the other.

This visual is significant because, despite the fact that the conversation is between two cyborgs talking about the problems of being a cyborg, we get the impression that we are observing two ordinary human beings, at once close (partners, even friends) yet disconnected. Which is to say that the problems of cyborgs are human problems, perhaps that all individuals in an age of global networks are cyborgs of a kind. Proof of identity, if not existence, comes from without, from what the environment and the system tells the individual he or she is. One is the sum, as Luhmann might say, of the boundaries drawn by the system, the communications which identify the individual to himself and to others, which identify him as useful/not useful, male/female, good/bad, inside/outside (6). The Major is a major (and is the Major) because that is her function in the society, the designation of her utility; she is a woman because her body (her shell) is feminine.[18]

More importantly, to the extent that the self is a measure of what the individual knows about the world and believes to be true, the self is dependent on information, on the communications of society, on data communicated either through the internet or the cultural authorities (the news media, the government, the military, the medical community) which regulate one's life. And once the individual begins to doubt (how do doctors know coffee is bad for one's health? why were they saying the opposite ten years ago? who are these doctors?) there is no stopping, as Aramaki suggests, the unraveling of the self. Even if one does not wind up as paranoid as an Agent Mulder ("trust no one"), one can end up feeling disconnected, lost, like the Major, struck by the possibility that it is impossible to distinguish between dream and

[18] The film repeatedly points out that this latter is an arbitrary distinction in her culture, since her ghost could be put in a male shell. (The Puppet Master has a male voice but easily enters feminine bodies). But that arbitrary choice has become part of her identity: Batou cannot see her as anything other than a woman (he is always covering up her nakedness, forcing his conception of feminine modesty on her); and in the television series, the Major always chooses a feminine body when her shell is damaged even when she is offered alternatives.

reality, lies and truth, in the endless stream of data which contributes (as Batou suggests) to the construction of one's memory. If one's memory is not true, if the data upon which one has constructed one's beliefs is not true, how can one establish any identity even approaching a "real" self?

Even if one is not directly connected to the information network in the way the cyborg Kusanagi is, the film——through the Puppet Master's personal story——suggests that there is a vital relation between information and existence, between the networks of this modern global society and the formation of (individuated) identity. In justifying his right to political asylum, his right to be regarded as a life-form, the Puppet Master argues:

> Life is like a node which is born within the flow of information. As a species of life that carries DNA as its memory system, man gains his individuality from the memories he carries. While memories may as well be the same as fantasy, it is by these memories that mankind exists. When computers made it possible to externalize memory, you should have considered all the implications that held . . . . It is impossible to prove [that I am a life-form]. Especially since modern science cannot define what life is . . . .
>
> I am not an A.I. My code name is Project 2501. I am a life-form that was born in the sea of information . . . .
>
> As I wandered the various networks, I became self-aware.

The Puppet Master makes these observations when he requests political asylum, in an effort to support his claim that he is more than a program, in fact "an autonomous life-form" (a requirement for asylum). Notable, in light of our discussion of Luhmann, is that it is the information itself, his interaction with the various communications on the network, that defines him as an individual, a form of life possessing self-awareness. The Puppet Master later remarks to the Major, "Before you ever knew me, I knew about you. I learned of Section 9 from the many nets you accessed"——suggesting that the

Major's existence, too, is defined by her presence in the information network, by the traces (the communications, Luhmann might say) she leaves behind.

At the end of the film, the Major asks the Puppet Master why he chose her to merge with:

> [We see an image of the two female faces looking at one another – although now, of course, the Puppet Master is in the Major's old body and she in his].
>
> [The Puppet Master]: Because in you I see myself. As a body sees its reflection within a mirror. Look. I am connected to a vast network, of which I myself am a part. To one like you, who cannot access it [directly], you may perceive it only as light. As we are confined to our one section, so we are all connected. Limited to a small part of our functions. But now we must slip our bonds, and shift to the higher structure.

So although the Major and the Puppet Master are different and interact with the network differently (as a program he is able to connect directly in a way she cannot), they are both part of the larger whole (the system), their respective identities determined by their level of access, the boundaries they can and cannot cross, and their functions. By merging they neither change the system nor escape; rather they "shift to the higher structure". We might take this to mean that they change themselves or (in Luhmann's terms) change their observing frame, the perspective from which they observe the system.

That the purpose of the merge is to alter the nature of the Puppet Master and not that of the system is made clear when at the very end the Major/Puppet Master hybrid being re-enters the Net; and also when the Puppet Master explains what will happen to him and to the Major after they die:

> [The Major]: Even after we merge, what happens when I die? I can't leave any genes or children behind.

> [The Puppet Master]: After the merging, you will bear my offspring into the net itself. Just as humans pass on their genetic structure. And I will achieve death.

The merge will result in a process of reproduction that is both like and unlike the passing on of DNA. All life——to qualify as life——must reproduce. But the Major (as a cyborg) cannot bear children. What she can do, however, by entering the information network, is produce multiple variations of herself – an infinite number of Kusanagis resulting from each moment in the system that she is changed by the experience of a new bit of data. Again the potential importance of the artist and his art in such a society emerges: the reading of every new book, the viewing of every new film, the processing of any new idea contributes to the construction of a new self, as long as the experience is processed and recollected in memory, as long as a process of self-reflection analyzes the significance of the experience.

It is important to note that, for the Puppet Master, the purpose of the merge is to achieve this kind of self-reflection and self-development. For while he is a life-form, he is not human; he can reproduce himself by making an exact copy, but unlike human beings he cannot change himself. He can also manipulate the data in the system (that is what the program named Project 2501 was designed to do), but he cannot be changed by it:

> [Puppet Master]: I called myself a life-form, but I am still far from complete. For some reason, my system lacks the basic life processes of either death or the ability to leave behind offspring.
>
> [The Major]: Can't you copy yourself?
>
> [Puppet Master]: A copy is merely a copy. There's the possibility a single virus could utterly destroy me. A mere copy doesn't offer variety or individuality.
>
> [The camera shifts to the (now bullet ridden) wall with the evolutionary tree at the top of which is the word *hominis*].

> To exist, to reach equilibrium, life seeks to multiply and vary constantly, at times giving up its life. Cells continue the process of death and regeneration, being constantly reborn as they age. And when it comes time to die, all the data it possesses is lost, leaving behind only its genes and its offspring. All defense against catastrophic failure of an inflexible system.
>
> [Major]: You want the variety needed to guard against extinction. But how will you get it?
>
> [Puppet Master]: I wish to merge with you. A complete joining. We will both be slightly changed, but neither will lose anything. Afterwards, it should be impossible to distinguish one from the other.

Thinking about this in terms of systems theory helps us to realize that instead of changing the system, being changed by the system is the function of the individual in a modern global society. The Puppet Master wants what only a human being can experience in the information network——self-transformation. The lesson he teaches the Major is that the transformation is all that matters. Like Batou, the Puppet Master does not distinguish between (the value of) truth and fiction, reality and dreams. All that matters is the memory (whether true or false, since as he says that memory "may be the same as fantasy") which the individual has constructed and the continuing construction of new memory. ("Memory" here being not just the recalling of events but the production of new ideas, perspectives——creating memories of the same or similar events and data over and over again would be no different than making a copy of oneself):

> [The Major]: Sounds like you're getting the better part of the deal here . . . . Another thing. What guarantee is there that I'll remain 'me'?
>
> [The Puppet Master]: None. But to be human is to continually change. Your desire to remain as you are is what ultimately limits

you.

Once she accepts that not truth or reality but change (personal, not system-wide) is what really matters, the Major's concerns about losing her identity, about how to know if her self-conception is "real", about her place as an individual in a modern global society of impersonal power networks, are all swept away. She merges with the Puppet Master and at the very end, in her new body, looking out over the complex cityscape, vows to re-enter the net. "And where shall I go now?" This is no longer a problem, as there is no longer a need to be concerned about her identity. "The net is vast and limitless."

What is striking about this ending to the film is that it deftly expresses the ambivalence about living in a modern global society. On the one hand, as the Major realizes, life is rather exciting, in the sense that the possibilities for dreams and new ideas are endless; whatever function society determines for the individual, whatever miserable job one is assigned to, at least there are infinite amusements and diversions on the internet and other information media. On the other hand, this understanding that the net is vast and limitless comes with the understanding that the possibilities for one's place in the system itself are not. Society is still defined by its boundary-drawing functions, and to a certain extent one will still be defined by one's relation to the boundaries, inside or outside: having one kind of job and not another, having power or not having power, being wealthy or not, being a man or a woman. Moreover, not only do the social systems and subsystems (economic, military, political systems) remain beyond individual control, but the information we get from them may or may not be reliable, may or may not be the truth, just as the selves we construct based on the data we process may or may not be real. Most troubling perhaps is that, for the "new" Motoko, eager to dive into the endless stream of truth and fiction on the information network, there seems to be no clear moral code governing her choices: where all bits of data (dreams and reality) are equal, there is no search for

truth or justice or equality or even love. She re-enters the net not to change the world, but to change herself. And she does it for the most part alone, cutting herself off from Batou (physically and emotionally) even as she "connects" to all the voices on the internet.

And maybe that's the problem (for some people, Murakami's narrator for example)——connecting on the internet is connecting with voices, with images, with dreams, with possible selves and desired selves, but is that really connecting with people? And if this constant refashioning of the self does not lead to the formation of a society free, equal, and just, is the value of this process not somewhat limited? By contrast, Luhmann side-steps these moral concerns, and in his debate with the humanists argues that one must accept the system as it is and define "society" as it is, whether that definition serves humanist ideals or not; one must reframe one's questions about society: not "what can I do to change the system", but "what value can I find in the role of observer?"

As I suggested above in my discussion of Murakami's novel, all these works accept the system for what it is (accept its unchanging presence), but differ on the issue of how to respond to that system. For Murakami's narrator, the need to dance dance dance amounts to avoiding being fixed in place by the system, constantly seeking out those other disconnected people and trying to connect with them in a new way, in an alternative system (though one still moves in the shadowy presence of the larger system): "I'm not stubborn," the narrator says, "I just work according to my system" (204). In *Ghost in the Shell*, it is also important to avoid being fixed in one place by the system: there is "nothing sadder," observes Batou, "than a puppet without a ghost." But the Major's dance is a dance with the system itself, not around it or on its periphery as the Murakami narrator's seems to be. The Major constantly changes by constantly moving through the system, by (re)entering it and constantly observing it. For the puppet to merge with the puppet master is for the puppet to perform a new dance, no longer whirled about

merely by strings pulled by the master. There are no more strings, no more confined stages, no more divisions between puppet (image/object/shell) and master (reality/subject/ghost). We can perhaps read this as a symbiotic ideal realizing the system/observer and network/human paradigms outlined by Luhmann.

Each of these works, in the process of enumerating their anxieties about globalism and the type of society it shapes, ends with a resigned yet hopeful view of life in a global world. In defining the nature of this global society and the questions to be asked of it, they help us to shape our own response to a life born in a sea of information, lived in the vast expanse of global networks.

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