

From Folk Tales to Anime: Disappearance of the Feminine Body in Japanese Culture

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Abstract

Anime as a social and cultural phenomenon provides us an area of analysis for understanding sociocultural pressures and constructed gender roles of women. From folk tales to anime we can trace the narrative of the disappearance of the woman and the metamorphosing of the body. In fairy tale examples such as “Bush Warbler’s Home”, “Willow Wife” and “Snow Bride” analyzed in this paper, we see that the female characters going through metamorphosis are an example of Lacanian *La Femme* whom cannot be fully expressed in the realm of the language, *Le Symbolique*. They are in the field of *Le Reel* from the very beginning. If we look into the characters’ behavior, both in folk tales and *mahō shōjo* genre of anime, we see naive and benevolent type of characters. However, in the cyberpunk examples such as *Ghost in the Shell*, the narrative offers a different perspective to body while questioning identity in a post-gendered world. As *Ghost in the Shell* does away with passive female characters, the focus changes from the construct of gendered body to the construct of identity. Due to this shift, the body becomes *Unheimlich* (uncanny) and its disappearance ushers in a different kind of existence.

Keywords: Folk Tales, Anime, Mahō Shōjo, Cyberpunk, Gender, Psychoanalysis

Japanese animation, widely known as anime, is a cultural phenomenon with deep roots in Japanese cultural artifacts such as handscrolls, wooden

block prints, and *haiku* and *Kabuki*. Just as other media like cinema and theater, Japanese anime also has been nourished by the culture, mythology, legends and folk tales of its country of origin. Anime is a social phenomenon as well, due to being key to understanding modern Japanese interests and concerns shaped by both the modern and old cultural concepts. As an extremely popular mode of expression, it reaches different segments of society compared to various high cultural products, which renders it both sociologically and aesthetically, therefore it is a very important subject for the scholarship.¹ Moreover, analyzing the woman and gendered/post-gendered body from folk tales to anime can shine a light on the construction of gender in Japanese culture.

In folk tales there are many examples of women disappearing after metamorphosing into another body such as the supernatural –seen in tales about *yokai* (妖怪, ghost, phantom, strange apparition)–, animals –seen in animal-wife tales– or plants and trees. This narrative of the metamorphosing body continues in the contemporary *mahō shōjo* (魔法少女, magical girl) genre. Also, it is important to note that in the cyberpunk and *mecha* (メカ) anime, organic or mechanized cyborg bodies show us a different kind of metamorphosing feminine body, which will be examined in detail with the film *Ghost in the Shell*.

The narratives of disappearing women in the fairy tales and anime recall the Lacanian concept of “Woman does not exist” and “woman is a symptom of man”. Slavoj Žižek associates the idea of woman being the symptom of man with Otto Weininger’s definition of the ontological nothingness of “The Woman” as “a materialization, an embodiment of man’s sin: in herself, she doesn’t exist, which is why one need not fight her actively to get rid of her.”² It means that it is the male subject’s desire that allots ontological status upon the women and in the absence of that desire, woman disappears, turns to nothing. Žižek continues to explain, this time utilizing Lacan’s other concept: “Woman does not exist in herself, as a positive entity with full ontological consistency, but only as a symptom of

1 Susan J. Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, Second Edition, Revised edition (St. Martin’s Griffin, 2016), 4.

2 Slavoj Žižek, “Rossellini: Woman as Symptom of Man,” *October* 54 (1990): 21, <https://doi.org/10.2307/778667>.

man. Weininger was also quite outspoken about what was compromised, betrayed when man falls prey to a woman: the death-drive."³

In his last writings, Lacan's formulation of symptom evolved and was conceived as a signifying formation "which confers on the subject its very ontological consistency, enabling it to structure its basic, constitutive relationship towards enjoyment (*jouissance*)"⁴.⁵ This subsequent change in the formulation of the symptom reverses the relationship, as disintegration of the symptom would inevitably contribute to the disintegration of the subject itself. "In this sense, 'Woman is a symptom of man' means that man himself exists only through woman qua his symptom: his very ontological consistency depends on, is 'externalized' in, his symptom. In other words, man literally *ex-sists*: his entire being lies 'out there,' in woman."⁶

The Absence of "The Woman" in Japanese Fairy Tales: The Realm of the Lost and Enchanted

In Japanese tales, the disappearance of women occurs in different ways according to their magical nature. Therefore, three different kind of stories have been chosen for analysis. The first is a story from the *forbidden chamber* category and called "Bush Warbler's Home" (Uguisu no sato, うぐいすの里). In this story the disappearance is shown by metamorphosing into another living thing, an animal. The storyline is as follows:

A young woodcutter entered a forest where he encountered a magnificent mansion he had never seen or heard of before. Entering the mansion, he encountered a beautiful lady who told him to look over the mansion and then walked away quickly. While leaving, she forbade him to peek into the next room, of which he assured her. But once he was left alone, he violated the pledge and moved into the next room. Three pretty girls were sweeping the room, but they immediately disappeared when they saw the

3 Zizek, 21.

4 First developed in Lacan's Seminar "The Ethics of Psychoanalysis". Lacan made a concept of an opposition between *jouissance* and the pleasure principle and explained that "there is a *jouissance* beyond the pleasure principle" linked to the partial drive; a *jouissance* which compels the subject to constantly attempt to transgress the prohibitions imposed on his enjoyment, to go beyond the pleasure principle.

5 Zizek, "Rossellini," 21.

6 Zizek, 21.

woodcutter, slipping away quickly like birds. The woodcutter then investigated other rooms one by one and found that there were many treasures in them. The seventh room contained three tiny eggs and a bird's nest. He accidentally dropped the eggs while picking up. Three birds emerged from the eggs and flew away. Just then, the lady returned and accused the woodcutter of breaking his promise and thus causing her three daughters' deaths. She too flew away turning herself into a bush warbler, after which the young man found himself alone where he had found the mansion, but the mansion was no longer there.⁷

In the second story, "Willow Wife" (Aoyagi no hanashi, 青柳のはなし), the woman is a willow spirit, hence after the willow tree is cut down the woman disappears leaving no body behind. The storyline is as follows:

In a certain Japanese village, there grew a great willow-tree. Heitaro, a young farmer, lived quite near this tree, and he, more than any of his companions, had entered a deep communion with the imposing willow. One day an old man of the village came to Heitaro and explained to him that the villagers wanted to cut down the great willow-tree for timber. Heitaro was shocked, but somewhat recovered himself, and offered to give the old man some of his own trees. The old man accepted. One night while Heitaro sat under the great willow he suddenly saw a beautiful woman standing close beside him. They talked night after night and then he proposed to her. She accepted and said "Call me Higo (Willow) and ask no questions, for love of me. I have no father or mother, and some day you will understand." In due time they were blessed with a child. But when the news of the ex-emperor building a new temple came, villagers offered their willow tree. Heitaro argued against this, promising other trees instead, but it was all in vain. Heitaro went home and told his wife what happened. Crying in pain that night, Higo said that she was the soul of the willow tree, and that the townsmen were killing her at that moment; indeed, sounds came from the outside indicating that the tree was destroyed. When Heitaro looked back, his beloved wife had disappeared. Willow Wife had gone!⁸

7 Yoshihiko Ikegami, *The Empire of Signs: Semiotic Essays on Japanese Culture* (John Benjamins Publishing, 1991), 157.

8 F. Hadland Davis, *Myths and Legends of Japan*, Revised ed. edition (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), 177–80.

In the third story “Snow-Bride” (雪女, *yuki onna*), the female character is a *Yuki-Onna* (snow woman) meaning she is a *yokai*. In the end of the story she turns into fog and disappears. The storyline is as follows:

Mosaku and his apprentice Minokichi took shelter in a shed on a cold night. Minokichi woke up with snowflakes pouring onto his face and saw a woman leaning towards his master. She then froze Mosaku with her breath. She told him that she had intended to treat him as she had done the old man at his side but forbore on account of his youth and beauty. Threatening Minokichi with instant death if he dared to mention to anyone what he had seen, she suddenly vanished. When a year had passed, Minokichi met and married a beautiful girl named Yuki. Yuki and Minokichi had a beautiful marriage and lots of children. One night a paper lamp shining on Yuki’s face, Minokichi remembered the night his master died and told his wife what had transpired. His wife flung down her sewing and turned to him with a horrible smile on her face. She said that the woman he saw that night was herself, Yuki-Onna, and that Minokichi had violated his promise. For the sake of their sleeping children, she did not kill Minokichi, but if they had aught to complain of at his hands, she would kill him and then she turned into a white fog and disappeared into the chimney.⁹

There are many other examples of such fairy tales where a woman turns into an animal as in “Bush Warbler’s Home” or a *yokai* as in “Snow-Bride” or where, as in “Willow Wife”, the soul of a beloved creature embodies the female body. All these fairy tales meet on a common ground of disappearance of the female body. Psychologist Hayao Kawai explains this theme as follows: “In Japanese fairy tales, the fact that beautiful women just vanish or die, leaving a deep feeling of sorrow, symbolizes completeness in the aesthetic dimension. It is the beauty of completeness (...) the state of imperfection is more beautiful than the state of perfection.”¹⁰ She also adds that unlike Western examples, fairy tales like “Bush Warbler’s Home” draws our attention to a “nothingness” situation where nothing changes in the life of the man after the women disappeared.¹¹ In the light of Lacan’s concepts, this “nothingness” creates a gap in man’s life and reminds us of the *Jouissance*.

9 Davis, 150–51.

10 Hayao Kawai, *Dreams, Myths and Fairy Tales in Japan* (Daimon, 1995), 119–20.

11 Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle*, 186–87.

Moreover, in the “Willow Wife” example, even if we admit that Higo is dead, the fact that she does not even leave a body behind makes it difficult to accept her death. This situation creates a “nothingness” as in the “Bush Warbler’s Home” fairy tale, but this time the loss of a loved one leaves a sense of emptiness, too. With no remaining body, the concept of the sense of beauty coming from sorrow, as mentioned by Kawai Hayao, is manifest.

Furthermore, in the “Willow Wife” and “Snow-Bride” where a sexual intercourse happens before the disappearance, it is possible to see *objet petit a*, the unattainable object of desire in *La Femme* (The Woman). Žizek in his book *Looking Awry* examines this theme as “Ladies Who Vanish” in films and emphasizes the concept of “Woman does not exist” as the unattainable shadow of the Lacanian *La Femme*. “It is difficult not to recognize in this phantomlike figure the apparition of Woman, of the woman who could fill out the lack in man, the ideal partner with whom the sexual relationship would finally be possible, in short, The Woman who, according to Lacanian theory, precisely does not exist.”¹²

The disappearance of women in fairy tales emphasize Lacan’s concept that “Woman does not exist”. They are the unattainable objects of desire and the beauty of the tales come from this vanishing. However, we can say that the female characters actually exist in the threshold worlds, that is, they cannot fully reach the area of *Le Symbolique*. This situation also shows their bond with *Le Reel*, because in the end, these women who could not take sanctuary in the real world, have to return to their own “real”ities. In particular, Yuki making Minokichi promise not to tell anyone, shows that neither what happened that day nor Yuki herself as “The Woman” can fully enter the field of language, *Le Symbolique*. The interesting thing is what happens after Minokuchi tries to situate the *Le Reel* encounter, in the realm of *Le Symbolique*. Yuki disappears by turning into a white fog because Minokichi—who had unwittingly met with *Le Reel*—has tried to speak the unspeakable.

For many scholars the women in Japanese animal wife tales “represents a naive, mythical yet benevolent female figure from the otherworld who vainly tries to make an earthly man wealthier and happier.”¹³ This behavior is

12 Slavoj Žizek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, Reprint edition (Cambridge, Mass. u.a.: The MIT Press, 1992), chap. 2.

13 Fumihiko Kobayashi, “Is the Animal Woman a Meek or an Ambitious Figure in Japanese

also seen in the “Willow Wife” and “Snow-Bride” tales. They give their husbands children and a good marriage. Even though Yuki is a killer when she gets married, she is the talk of the town because of how good a wife she is.

This naive and benevolent type of behavior can be seen in anime, too, especially in the *mahō shōjo* genre. Though in *mahō shōjo* series we see a transforming / metamorphosing and not a disappearance scene, it is important to analyze the behavioral pattern to see the if it is a construction of “ideal women” or not.

Anime’s Construction of the Woman and the Feminine Body: The Magical Passive Woman

In the anime examples, the identity of the woman draws attention particularly due to the same typologies being utilized over and over again in certain narratives. The characters in the *mahō shōjo* genre have many of the personality traits of the disappearing women in folk tales. Although some of them possess demonic features like Yuki, naive and benevolent Japanese women who are submissive to men are in the majority.

The *mahō shōjo* genre, has provided a template of female ideals for young girls since the 1960s. There are two prevalent types of character in this genre. The first is the naive, not very clever type of teenage characters (*Sailor Moon*, *Mahō Shōjo Madoka Magica*). They are “pure” young girls, their sexuality is implied only at the time of magical change (Figure 1).



Figure 1. *Sailor Moon* Character Usagi’s Transformation Scene
Source: *Sailor Moon*, Dir. Junichi Sato, (1995, Section 23, 2002 DVD)

Folktales? An Examination of the Appeal of Japanese Animal-Wife Tales,” *Fabula* 51, no. 3–4 (2010): 240–41.

The girls of the second type, however, are noticeably older. These characters are mostly drawn with sexy bodies (*Oh My Goddess*, *Urusei Yatsura*). Although they are older, this type of anime characters also (Figure 2) possess the childish and naïve characteristics of the *shōjo* type. In magical girl animations, even though women can get overcome many difficult situations with their magical powers, they have no desire to have more power. Besides saving the world from evil forces, all they want is the love and attention of the male character they fall in love with. These fictional worlds create spaces where the man, who is usually “normal”, can perform his fantasies. Especially in examples such as *Oh My Goddess*, *Urusei Yatsura*, passive women and family fiction are problematized through the main female characters, while the fantasy worlds created by men over the “object of desire” (Lacan’s *The Woman*) are criticized.



Figure 2. *Urusei Yatsura*, Main Character Lum

Source: *Urusei Yatsura*, Dir. Iku Suzuki (1982, ANIMEIGO, 2001 DVD)

Susan Napier argues that “Popular youth-oriented anime series such as the 1980s *Cutey Honey* and the 1990s *Sailor Moon* show images of powerful young women (albeit highly sexualized in the case of *Cutey Honey*) that anticipate genuine, although small, changes in women’s empowerment over the last two decades and certainly suggest alternatives to the notion of Japanese women as passive and domesticated.”¹⁴ Kotani Mari examines a quite different kind of series in this genre, *Revolutionary Girl Utena*.
 14 Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle*, 33.

For her this series “makes a mockery of conventional gender roles and narratives. It makes fun of the heroic heterosexuality and monogamy of traditional fairy tales such as Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, or Cinderella.”¹⁵ In the light of these arguments, metamorphosis or magical transformation is identified as “a common device that changes the female protagonist from a mediocre girl to a cute warrior, as an identity transcendence that undermines fixed traditional gender roles.”¹⁶ However, Saito Minako points out that television shows for children promote established gender roles existing in Japanese culture, thereby encouraging girls to become a good daughter at home and a good worker at the office. She suggests that the female heroine of the genre of magical girls reconfirms the traditions of femininity, which encourages girls to see marriage and family life as a worthy goal after they have passed the adolescent phase.¹⁷ On the other hand Saito Kumiko draws attention to the different eras of this genre. In the 80s the transformation scenes mostly occur by changing the childish body to a more adult version, therefore gaining “empowerment by growth”. However, in the 90s “magical girls maximize their power by simply being themselves—cute and carefree students”. As seen in the *Sailor Moon* or *Madoka Magica*, after the female characters’ transformation the magical power is visualized with cute uniforms like frilly skirts and ribbons. On the other hand, enemies are mostly shown with thick makeup and sexy clothes.¹⁸

Another *shōjo* type, which again utilizes magical girls but a different kind of submission to the male, is seen in *hentai*, which is the erotic sort of anime. In these kinds of magical *shōjo* series, the magical power of women is based upon the womb. In many examples such as *La Blue Girl* and *Cutey Honey*, the womb must be controlled in order to establish power over women. However, in these fantasy worlds, men who can rule over women often have monstrous bodies or magical powers. Male characters

15 Mari Kotani, “Metamorphosis of the Japanese Girl: The Girl, the Hyper-Girl, and the Battling Beauty,” *Mechademia* 1, no. 1 (2006): 165, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mec.0.0090>.

16 Kumiko Saito, “Magic, Shōjo, and Metamorphosis: Magical Girl Anime and the Challenges of Changing Gender Identities in Japanese Society,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73, no. 1 (February 2014): 145, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911813001708>.

17 Saito, 145.

18 Saito, 158.

with more “normal” bodies are mostly seen as childish and voyeuristic. In these examples the female characters are again the very beings of the unattainable shadow of “La Femme”, therefore the “normal” man can only watch them from afar.

Looking beyond the *mahō shōjo* genre to find characters that have transformed and therefore lost their bodies but survived after “the disappearance of the body”, we see examples such as *Ghost in the Shell* (Koukaku Kidoutai, 攻殻機動隊) or *Serial Experiments: Lain* (シリアルエクスペリメンツレイン) which are focused on a consciousness in the internet possessing a distinct identity construct. Submission or passive behavior is not seen in the women of such narratives, it is the identity construct that is important. Especially in the case of *Ghost in the Shell*, the identity problem comes to the fore and causes the technological body to become *Unheimlich* (uncanny). This process begins with questioning of the *Heimlich* body, then after the body is knitted and finally broken, consciousness is brought to the net.

The Kusanagi character we see in *Ghost in the Shell* is adorned with phallic images because she is an assassin working for the government. The nudity in many fighting scenes imposes a feminine sexuality on Kusanagi. But Kusanagi, the assembly / birth of the technological body of whom we see in the opening of the anime, “is a creature of a post-gender world”, as Donna J. Haraway put it.¹⁹

The Cyborg Disappearing in the Net, Terminal Identity and the Uncanniness of the Body – *Ghost in the Shell*

Ghost in the Shell takes on the theme of the construction of identity born of the duality of the mechanized body and the soul, and addresses the questions about immortality raised by philosophers from the point of view of the cyberpunk genre.

The story, which takes place in a Hong Kong-like metropolis in 2029, narrates events that befall Kusanagi and Batou, agents employed in a part of the government called Section 9. The team is working on catching the Puppet Master, who hacks the “ghosts” of people in this world where said ghost / consciousness can be uploaded into the desired body / shell. After

¹⁹ Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge, 1991), 150.

they hear about the secret Project 2501, they learn that the Puppet Master is a living and thinking entity born of the sea of information, that is, a shell-less consciousness in the vastness of the net. For Kusanagi, who raises questions on the nature of being an individual and a human throughout the film, Puppet Master is a brand-new identity example and therefore brings about new questions. Kusanagi, on her encounter with the Puppet Master at the end of the movie, uses this chance to tie her consciousness to the Puppet Master, at last fully knowing where to find the answers to the questions in her mind.

Although cyberpunk's idea of the technological body has a certain similarity to *Frankenstein*, it can be traced back even further. In the eighteenth century, Julien Offray de La Mettrie, who follows the materialist philosophy *ecole*, in his book *L'homme Machine* (Man a Machine) built on Descartes' view that animals are simple machines and asserted that the body may be the only truth as a machine, and nothing spiritual is possible. 100 years before La Mettrie, Hobbes, the author of *The Leviathan* and *De Corpore*, had similar ideas about the machine body, however unlike La Mettrie, he accepted the existence of God.²⁰ As for what constituted the differences in character and body inside the similarly working "machines", it was the Humors, the then long-standing idea of medicine and philosophy.²¹ To La Mettrie the soul is an empty word and all its features are explained by the functioning of the body and the brain in a proper organization.²² In this sense, the soul is actually this organization and the enlightened machine itself. According to La Mettrie, the functioning of man is under the control of the Humors. However, thanks to advances in medical science it has been revealed that the situation is quite different and much more complicated. And still, with a whole new outlook on the workings of the human body, do not cyberpunk's androids with memories and cyborgs with organic body parts precisely confirm La Mettrie's "body as a machine" idea? So, in this case, where does the soul and identity begin and where does the machine end?

20 Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *Man a Machine* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1912) 165-167.

21 La Mettrie, 90.

22 La Mettrie, 128.

“The Machine Stops”, a story written by E. M. Forster in 1909, can be given as a pioneering example of living dependent on / addicted to a net or a machine. *Ghost in the Shell* is not the first example with characters whose consciousness is loaded elsewhere, either: This is an idea that has been covered much, especially in the science fiction literature since the 1950s. Taking into account Neuroscientists’ belief that they can achieve this in the future by uploading the brain elsewhere and speculating further on the materialistic perspective of La Mettrie, in which his organization creating the identity of the machine can presumably be likewise loaded into another environment... Is the new entity, then, the same as the old person? The Dixie Flatline character in William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* has lost its chance to change because it is loaded into ROM (Read-only memory, a memory module that cannot be overwritten). In this case, how is Dixie Flatline different from the 2001: A Space Odyssey’s H.A.L. 9000 which is a software from the beginning? Do we get to the identity structure that Scott Bukatman calls “Terminal Identity”, in which the “subject” disappears but a new “subjectivity” is constructed in the computer or television screen?²³

In *Ghost in the Shell* the character Kusanagi steps into this identity problematic by merging with the Puppet Master. The ongoing identity discussions are emphasized with birth scenes which the film particularly focuses on, therefore making the milestones of Kusanagi’s questioning even more evident. At the opening of the film (Figure 3), we see the joining of the body parts and application of the skin on top. The birth of the technological body takes place in a fluid reminiscent of the amniotic fluid and in the end we see Kusanagi in a fetal position. This sequence, which depicts coming to the world with a body that will not grow old, is visually and thematically connected to another we encounter in the middle of the movie, the ocean sequence that emphasizes Kusanagi’s own identity dilemma.

23 Susan J. Napier, “When the Machines Stop Fantasy, Reality, and Terminal Identity in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Serial Experiments: Lain*” *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams Japanese Science Fiction From Origins to Anime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) 102



Figure 3. *Ghost in the Shell*, The Birth of the Technological Body of Kusanagi
Source: *Ghost in the Shell*, Dir. Mamoru Oshii



Figure 4. *Ghost in the Shell*, Kusanagi in the Ocean Sequence
Source: *Ghost in the Shell*, Dir. Mamoru Oshii

The ocean sequence in which Kusanagi rises towards herself signifies “bringing together the identity which in the subgenre of cyberpunk has been torn asunder by the usual separation of soul and body, as well as reaching the “other self” inside her [...] reaching the Puppet Master.”²⁴ The director focuses on the water element especially throughout the film. The reflection of Kusanagi, highlighted by the water element, reminds us of the importance of the mirror in Japanese mythology. The mirror is a sacred object in the Japanese tradition. There are two proverbs on the mirror in Japanese mythology. The first is, “if the mirror is dim the soul

24 Kutlukhan Kutlu, “Ghost in the Shell Anime Kabuğunu Kıryor,” *Sinema* 2011-10 (2011): 83.

is unclean"; another one is that "as the sword is the soul of a samurai, so is the mirror the soul of a woman".²⁵ Therefore, the film uses reflection to call Kusanagi to merge with "the other", in a sense, with Kusanagi's ghost / soul.

Towards the end of the film, the sequence of the "merging with the Puppet Master" starts with when she jumps/falls from a helicopter to a building like the Crystal Palace, which is considered one of the important buildings of early modernism. It can be thought that this jump/fall is also theologically written into the subtext. The important thing is that the body begins to break down in this sequence. The sequence in question shows that Kusanagi must give up her own body before joining with Puppet Master's previously torn temporary body. In this last sequence of birth and fall in the film, the body increasingly becomes uncanny. Just as *Heimlich* "becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*",²⁶ the body which has to be hidden and therefore *Heimlich* has been torn apart. It can no longer hold the soul and thus becomes *unheimlich*. Director reminds us of the technological body which at the beginning of the film was shown in detail. Even though he did not hide the knowledge of the technological body from us, throughout the film he made us forget it, therefore he produced, as E. Jentsch put it, the "uncanny effects through story-telling" by leaving "the reader wondering whether a particular figure is a real person or an automaton".²⁷ As seen in Figure 5, Batou trying to hide the *unheimlich* through covering Kusanagi and hiding her body is no longer sufficient. However, the uncanniness of the body is not limited to this, the fact that Kusanagi is looking through the eyes of the Puppet Master and Puppet Master speaks with a male voice through Kusanagi's body makes situation even more complicated.

25 Juliet Piggott, *Japanese Mythology* (New York: The Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited, 1975) 46.

26 Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, ed. Adam Phillips, trans. David McIlintock (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 134.

27 Freud, 135.

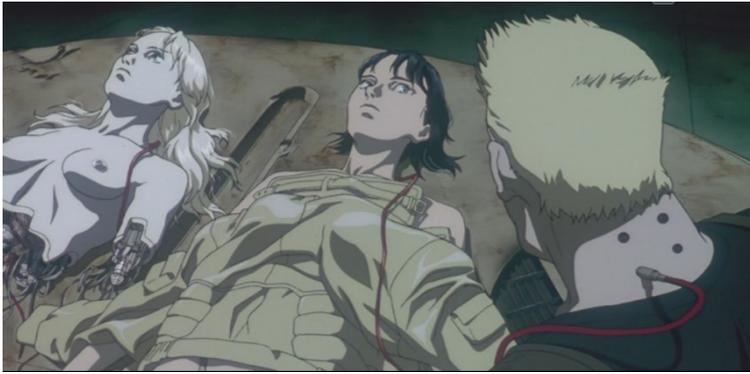


Figure 5. The Merging of Puppet Master and Kusanagi
Source: *Ghost in the Shell*, Dir. Mamoru Oshii

As a result of the Puppet Master and Kusanagi becoming “the other” of each other throughout the movie, the identity begins to “be duplicated, divided and interchanged.”²⁸ The soul, which is the basis of Otto Rank’s “double” theme is an “energetic denial of the power of death”, with the “immortal” soul serving as the first “double”²⁹ of the body - in this case the Puppet Master being the soul and Kusanagi the body. With this merge, the director says that the path to immortality, a transcendent existence and the self to reach Nirvana goes through the “net”. This transcendence is also hidden in the mirror element of Japanese mythology. The Sun Goddess, Amaterasu (天照大神, Amaterasu-ōmikami) leaves the earth in the dark when she retires into a cave because of the Storm God Susano. Other gods and goddesses encourage one god to start dancing in front of the cave to get her out. Because of curiosity, Amaterasu looks out of the cave and sees her reflection in the mirror which other gods hang on a tree. After seeing her reflection, she goes out, unites with other gods, and light returns to earth. The first mirror is also assumed to be the mirror in this story.³⁰ The traces of this mythological story –which we can associate with the ocean scene– also show itself in the music of the film. The soundtrack of the movie which in the lyrics call the gods to dance can be seen as com-

28 Freud, 142.

29 Freud, 142.

30 Juliet Piggott, *Japanese Mythology*, 15.

plementary to the director calling out Kusanagi, who was lost in her own cave, by using Puppet Master.

Kusanagi going out of her now uncanny body and merging with the Puppet Master, and in a sense, disappearing into the net, both provides an end to the questioning of identity and attributes a sense of divinity to the consciousness, just as in Amaterasu merging with other gods.

Does Disappearing Mean to Die or to Have an Another Existence?

The disappearance of female characters in fairy tales shows that they cannot be fully expressed in the realm of the language, *Le Symbolique* and that *La Femme* is actually in the field of *Le Reel* from the very beginning. Another common point of the stories is that they reveal the idea of the “Woman does not exist”, which is created in men’s life. What Kawai Hayao wants to explain with the “sense of beauty of sorrow” comes from the necessity of the man to feel the inevitable insufficiency of the absence of *La Femme*.

However, in *Ghost in the Shell*, the body is completely rejected, and the individual provides its subjectivity in another environment. This disappearance does not echo the “Woman does not exist” narrative of the fairy tales. At the end of the movie, Kusanagi’s new body is a little doll-like girl’s body collected by Batou, however in the manga where the story originated, a male body is used instead. No matter what type of body is chosen, it will be Kusanagi in that body. Because the technological body is the work of a post-gender era in its structure. The important thing is the subjectivity and not the body. For this reason, the body has become increasingly uncanny and left behind. Creation of “terminal identity” was only possible by combining with “the other”. Although this new existence has a divine dimension, it has been realized by the possibilities of technology and it catches immortality in the path of mind. The question that can be asked at this point is why, even though the technological body is already immortal, the net is preferred. Although in tackling the problematics of identity the necessity to gain a body-free state through another existence is one answer found in this article... it is most definitely not the sole one.

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