

English 345: Cine/Technology

Napier Reading Guide

Article Citation

Napier, Susan. "Doll Parts: Technology and the Body in *Ghost in the Shell*." *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. New York: Palgrave Press, 2001. 103-116.

Article Guide

Napier begins with quotations from theorists Donna Haraway on the cyborg, musician Courtney Love on constructed identity, and novelist and critic Arthur Koestler on the interconnectedness of organic, spiritual, and mechanical. She does so to introduce issues integral to her analysis of *Ghost in the Shell*. Because her essay represents a book chapter rather than a discrete article, she draws connections between *Ghost in the Shell* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, the text discussed in the previous chapter. Although she sees both as *mecha* anime, a genre concerned with "a quest to contain the body . . . in the form of some kind of technological fusion . . . of ambiguous value" (86), she argues that *Ghost in the Shell* "raises the possibility of technology's positive potential, not only in terms of the physical and mental augmentation offered by the cyborg but also in terms of the possibility of spiritual development offered by an artificial intelligence known as the Puppet Master" (105/packet page 138). Consider whether you agree with her overall argument as you read the chapter, and pay attention to the following issues and questions:

- **104-105/packet page 138:** Underline passages where Napier lists issues explored by *Ghost in the Shell*. Why is the film unique in her opinion?
- 105/Packet page 138: Make a note regarding how the film echoes *Blade Runner* and the cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer*. Why does she call *Ghost* a "cyberpunk-noir film"?
- **105-106/packet pages 138-139:** Napier links the elegiac, lyrical tone of the film to a "female sensibility." What scenes and motifs provide examples of this tone? Do you agree with Napier's statement about the film's "female sensibility"?
- **106-107/packet page 139:** Napier analyzes Kusanagi through Donna Haraway's writing on the cyborg. Haraway views "the cyborg as a creature without human limitations" (105). According to Napier, which scenes and characteristics show Kusanagi as a Haraway-style cyborg? In what sense doesn't Kusanagi fit into Haraway's framework?
- **107-111/packet pages 139-141:** Napier contends that a quest for Kusanagi's spiritual identity drives the film. However, "it is Kusanagi's cyborg body rather than her mind that becomes the vehicle for this quest" (107). Why do issues of spirit get explored via the body in *Ghost in the Shell*?
 - **108/packet page 140:** According to Napier, we see the relationship between body, technology, and spirit play out over a series of "falls": Kusanagi's fall from the building in the opening scene, her physical dive into water, and her figurative "dive" into the Puppet Master. She discusses the first fall and its association with Kusanagi's "birth" on

- 108-109/packet page 140.** Underline the passages where Napier makes arguments about how the fall represents Kusanagi's body and mind. Do you agree that our "first reaction to Kusanagi's fall is one of unease" (109)? What does Napier say about how the cable that breaks Kusanagi's fall connects her to "Puppet Mastery" (109)?
- **109-110/packet pages 140-141:** Napier turns to an analysis of Kusanagi's second fall. What narrative event takes place before this fall? How does Kusanagi's dive represent a search for identity? Why, according to Napier, does the film employ a quotation from I Corinthians in this scene?
 - **110-111/packet page 141:** Napier examines the final fall, arguing that it offers Kusanagi "some fuller image of herself, one that may go beyond her lonely individuality" (110). What does Napier say about the way Kusanagi's merging with the Puppet Master "questions the notion of body and identity in a variety of vivid and disturbing ways" (110)? How are the boundaries of Kusanagi's mind and body transgressed?
- **111-112/packet pages 141-142:** Napier discusses a crucial difference between the film and the manga (comic book) that inspired it. In the film, Batou gives Kusanagi a female body, while she receives a male body in the manga. The use of a female body perhaps underscores Kusanagi's feminine vulnerability (make notes on the ways in which it does so). However, Napier argues that it instead highlights the vulnerability of all bodies. Do you agree with her? Why or why not?
 - **112-114/packet pages 142-143:** The chapter examines the spiritual and religious implications of Kusanagi's "final embrace of a technological world," an act which implies transcendence (112). She compares the "falling" Kusanagi to the "fallen angel" replicants of *Blade Runner*. What questions do these films' "fallen" cyborgs raise about the nature of humanity in the contemporary era? How do Kusanagi's hunts for both the Puppet Master and her ghost—her humanity or soul—come together in the film's conclusion? How are Kusanagi's goals and those of *Blade Runner's* replicants different? Underline Napier's argument about the replicants' fall into humanness and Kusanagi's fall out of it. Also make notes on the various religious traditions she sees the film drawing upon.
 - **114/packet page 143:** Napier contrasts the positivism associated with the merging of technology and the soul in *Ghost in the Shell* with American films' "privileg[ing of] a kind of individual humanism as a last resort against the encroaching forces of technology and capitalism" (114). Note that she quotes J.P. Telotte's contention that *Blade Runner* (and *The Terminator*, as we saw in his article on the film) reasserts the existence of "the private self." Why does Napier think the Japanese and American films differ?
 - **114-116/packet pages 143-144:** Napier concludes by relating *Ghost in the Shell* to the larger body of anime she has discussed in her book (*Ranma 1/2*, *Akira*, *Evangelion*). She differentiates the film's lyrical approach to its subject matter, its "remarkably feminine" world, from these other texts. However, the films share a discomfort with the body and suggest that "identity in anime, even in the most basic form of the body, cannot be taken for granted" (116). In her concluding argument on *Ghost in the Shell* Napier states, "Whatever image Kusanagi finally finds through the mirror, it is surely one that will question not only the fixed categories of the machine and the soul but also the basic notion of what it is to be 'normal' at the end of the twentieth century" (114). Do you agree with her conclusion? Why or why not?