The Many Faces of Popular Culture and Contemporary Processes: Questioning Identity, Humanity and Culture through Japanese Anime

Mateja Kovacic
mateja@life.hkbu.edu.hk

Abstract

In the highly globalized world we live in, popular culture bears a very distinctive role: it becomes a global medium for borderless questioning of ourselves and our identities as well as our humanity in an ever-transforming environment which requires us to be constantly "plugged in" in order to respond to challenges as best as we can. The vast array of cultural products we create and consume every day thus provide a relevant insight into problems that both researchers and audiences have to face within an informatised and technologised world.

Japanese anime is one of such cultural product: a locally produced cultural artifact that became a global phenomenon that transcends cultures and spaces. In its imageries we discover a wide range of themes that concern us today, ranging from bioethical issues, such as ecological crisis, posthumanism and loss of identity in a highly transforming world to the issues of traditionality and spirituality.

The author will demonstrate in what ways we can approach and study popular culture products in order to understand the anxieties and prevailing concerns of our cultures today, with emphasis on the identity and humanity, and their position in the contemporary high-tech world we live in. The author's intention is to point to popular culture as a significant (re)source for the fields of humanities and cultural studies, as well as for discussing human transformations and possible future outcomes of these transformations in a technoscientific world. A case study will be presented: Mamoru Oshii's Ghost in the Shell and Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence.

Keywords: bioethics, popular culture, Japanese anime, technology, Ghost in the Shell

Introduction

When I started this research around four years ago, I found myself in my usual daily mode, working on my laptop, writing one of the earliest papers related to this topic. My three-year old nephew who just entered the room, curious as he was, approached the laptop, peeking into the screen, trying to take a glimpse of what I was doing. At this point, he heard the buzzing sound coming from my laptop: a mere product of my laptop's microprocessors and electronics in its working mode. Without a second of delay, he turned to me amazed and said: "Auntie, he breathes!" As he was exclaiming this, he didn't take a second to choose words: it was an immediate reaction to what he just experienced, formulated within a world of a three-year old boy. I then explained to him that my laptop doesn't breathe, but his reaction and his words remained part of my memories and, as a form of inspiration and encouragement, also a part of my past and present research work. It is this boy's reaction that made me realize that children today are born and raised in a different kind of world: it is a world immersed in technology and science, a world of rapid change; many choices, doubts and dilemmas, and a world with less anchors which can provide them (and us, for that matter) with a sense of belonging; sense of home; identity and environment. This is the reason why I continue my research and don't doubt its usefulness in the contemporary world we all share today.

Although technological changes from a bioethical[1] and popular culture (Japanese animation in particular) perspective are the focus of this paper, I also use this opportunity to advocate the use of popular culture products in pedagogy and argue for its validity as a discussion area where social issues arising from the contemporary processes[2] may be brought forth and analyzed. I argue further in my paper that we are unable to deal with the world we constantly produce because we lack theoretical "machinery" for this kind of activity. We emphasize practice over theory, which marginalizes Humanities in present education and daily practices. Therefore, I see popular culture as an important (re)source for educators and cultural researches because it enables us to talk about the World, using popular culture products as valuable contemporary tools. In order to prove consistency, I focus on Japanese anime, choosing two films directed by Mamoru Oshii: *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence (*2004) which I find most inspiring as loci where bioethics, philosophy and popular culture come to the same terms most intensively of all Japanese anime.

I draw lines between Japanese animation, its global context, and contemporary issues which arise from imageries of one of the most popular anime authors: Mamoru Oshii. From a philosophical and bioethical perspective, I engage with issues of technology

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[1] It's not an easy task to define Bioethics, due to its many aspects and relation to Philosophy and Medicine. A leading Croatian ethicist and bioethicist, Ante Covic, defines Bioethics as "specific, relational and multiperspectival ethics", exploring further its development and extent in relation to Peter Snger's theory (2004, 9-35). Covic also defines Bioethics as "a pluriperspective area of interaction between various disciplines which provide anchors and criteria in questioning life or conditions and circumstances of its preservation" (11).

[2] By *contemporary processes*, I mean all processes emerged as products of the contemporary world and its modernization which began with Industrial Revolution. In particular: globalization, technologization, informatization, urbanization, commodification and all other processes given from interaction between biology, technology, informatics, politics, economy, medicine and mass media.

and biotechnology; posthumanism and ecology in relation to human identity, environment and culture.

Japanese Animation and its Global Popular Culture Context

The first book I referred to at the beginning of my research in Japanese animation (*anime* in short) was *Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke* (2001), written by Susan J. Napier. This book has been a valuable tool for me, and the one I always liked going back to. In the first chapter of the book, Napier poses a question referring to her own research: *Why anime*, not so much to provide a justification for her research; nor as much as to point to this global popular culture phenomenon as a relevant medium in addressing some of the issues I raise in this paper. Napier states:

"Anime is a popular cultural form that clearly builds on previous high cultural traditions. Not only does the medium show influences from such Japanese traditional arts as Kabuki and the woodblock print (originally popular culture phenomena themselves), but it also makes use of worldwide artistic traditions of twentieth-century cinema and photography. Finally, the issues it explores, often in surprisingly complex ways, are ones familiar to readers of contemporary "high culture'' literature (both inside and outside Japan) and viewers of contemporary art cinema. Anime texts entertain audiences around the world on the most basic level, but equally importantly, they also move and provoke viewers on other levels as well, stimulating audiences to work through certain contemporary issues in ways that older art forms cannot. Moreover, precisely because of their popular reach they affect a wider variety of audiences in more ways than some less accessible types of high cultural exchange have been able to do. In other words, anime clearly appears to be a cultural phenomenon worthy of being taken seriously, both sociologically and aesthetically." (Napier: 2001, 4).

She further continues thematizing the popularity of anime on a global scale, pointing to its *statelessness* and its background in *photocentric* Japanese culture as its core characteristics which make anime so widely accepted[3]. She is not the only one to draw attention to these characteristics. Tze-Yue G. Hu in her book *Frames of Anime* (2010) builds up a theory on anime as a local, but global *visual language* and communication, derived from rich high cultural product traditions.[4] This shows that

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[3] Napier explains the *statelessness* of anime: "But one of anime's most popular genres, science fiction, is the one that is far less likely to be culturally specific. (…) In fact, a number of Japanese commentators have chosen to describe anime with the word "*mukokuseki*", meaning "stateless" or essentially without a national identity. (…) Unlike the inherently more representational space of conventional live-action film, which generally has to convey already-existing objects within preexisting context, animated space has the potential to be context free, drawn wholly out of the animator's or artist's mind. It is thus a particularly apt candidate for participation in a transnational, stateless culture."(2001, 4).
Also, on *photocentric* property of Japanese culture: "Images from anime and its related medium of manga (graphic novels) are omnipresent throughout Japan. Japan is a country that is traditionally more pictocentric than the cultures of the West, as is exemplified in its use of characters or ideograms, and anime and manga fit easily into a contemporary culture of the visual (ibid. 7).
[4] Tze-Yue states: "Animation is a visual language and an act of communicating. Technically defined, it is a movement-based medium in which image is captured through the camera in order to create a series of alleged movements.(…) Other forms of traditional hand-manipulated images include the use of wood puppets, clay figures, and cut-out paper puppets. To animate is essentially to communicate, to

anime, as an internationalized media, is more than qualified to become a contemporary world agora, enriching global popular culture with opportunities for more philosophical dialogues.

As Irwin (one of the contributors to *Popular Culture and Philosophy* book series) points out: "we reach out to one another and discuss life, current events, politics, and religion through popular culture" (2007, 1). In that sense anime, with its odorless *operational mode* makes a perfect case-study.[5]

A Very Short Overview of Rise of Anime

 Anime has been a global popular culture phenomenon for quite some time already: it has been labeled as new form of *soft power*, a term coined by Joseph Nye who focuses on cultural politics and a new kind of interaction between cultures emerging from globalization and the shift from military power to cultural power. Other scholars, such as Anne Allison, adopted his concept in their own research on cultural imperialism and cultural power:

"At work here is a new kind of global imagination, or new at least in the way it differs from an older model of Americanization. Joseph Nye has defined latter in terms of what he calls soft power, the "ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments."" (Allison 2006, 17)

At this point, the sudden shift from Western science fiction and envisioned images of futuristic worlds towards its Japanese "double" might seem a bit unusual, but if we observe anime as this new global cultural phenomenon and soft power that everybody is talking about, then it doesn't seem so extraordinary. If we are talking about popular culture, anime has a significant place in it and becomes as relevant for its contribution to the science fiction genre as any other non-Japanese and non-animated popular culture product. The extent and intensity of anime's contribution to global sci-fi film

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tell a story for oneself or others or for both, via a chain of manipulated and designed images." (2010, 13)

[5] According to Koichi Iwabuchi, who created the concept of *cultural odor*, "In a globalized world, for a non-Western cultural product to become successful, it must lose much of its original "cultural odor" so as to be promoted in the international market as a neutralized product to gain wider audience reception" (quoted in Lu: 2008, 175.). Lu further points out at the difficulty for any cultural product to completely lose its cultural specificity (that is, specific cultural "smell"), but anime does a good job by its representations of internationalized characters and universal themes (ibid.).
Amy Shirong Lu is one of the most elaborative authors to talk about anime in an international, global, context. She speaks of cultural politics behind anime's global success, consisting of *de-politicized internationalization*, *occidentalized internationalization* and *self-orientalized internationalization*, which, according to Lu, produced odorless and glocalised products for global consumption: "The three cultural politics of anime suggest that appropriation changes the cultural mix in many ways. A local product thus has the potential to go abroad and create, through unexpected cultural clashes, novel ways to think through issues of identity, exchange, and politics (…) Different from Western animation, anime has undergone a unique developmental trajectory that allows creative borrowing of various cultural and political elements to build up its stylistic properties and narrative framework along the way. This process is further complicated by the dynamics of the mobilization and circulation of anime products among international audiences who endow anime consumption with various cultural possibilities. As a result, anime is able to engage multiple cultural politics, whose interplay with its mixed signifiers results in an interesting postmodern landscape." (169-183).

does not come by surprise, as the genre is one prevailing in anime, along with fantasy and cyberpunk. [6]

Popular culture is now obviously recognized as *something powerful*, usually taken into consideration in terms of *cultural politics* and *economy* of popular culture. It has become a dialectical space producing opportunities for "cultural imperialism" and, according to scholars; the two struggling powers on the global cultural scene today are *Americanization* and *Japanization*. Though I will leave the discussion on cultural politics for another paper, I would like to highlight the word **power** here, but not in its political sense. The power I refer to is the power of popular culture to produce images, raise questions, and respond to the challenges of the contemporary world: to discuss and to explore. It is not a coincidence that there has been a series of books on *Popular Culture and Philosophy* published as a response to this new cultural "condition", with its first volume issued in 2000. The series is dedicated to dealing with philosophical aspects of popular culture and includes different authors in each volume: contributors who discuss about philosophical issues in a variety of popular culture products, ranging from *The Simpsons*, *Monty Python* and Quentin Tarantino to *Pink Floyd*, baseball, manga and anime.

One prevailing theme among writers in the *Anime and Philosophy* issue were cyberpunk and posthumanism, in which most authors referred to *Ghost in the Shell*, the same film that I refer to in my paper (for more information on the book series, please refer to the official website of the Open Court Publishing Company: http://www.opencourtbooks.com/categories/pcp.htm).

This paper is not focused on the *history* of anime, but I believe a (very) short overview would be in order, not only to provide a more complete picture of this phenomenon, but also to note that anime has quite a long history, evolving through a variety of cultural forms (both high and low), always responding to local changes and cultural needs. However, I must first say that, even though "high culture" and "low culture" are mentioned on couple occasions in the paper (usually by quoted authors), I do not agree with the distinction: especially not today when popular culture has widely taken over the global art scene. This is not to equate more traditional (cultural or art) forms with the contemporary ones, but to suggest that both cannot be valorized and dichotomized as in the past cultural studies, as was the case with Frankfurt school.[7] It might be my academic background in Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, that made me erase such etiquettes as "high" and "low" when it comes to *culture*, but even so, I do not think this dichotomy works anymore (if in reality ever did work).

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[6] *Cyberpunk* is a term coined out of two words: *cyber* (coming from the word *cybernetics*) and *punk* (implying its focus is on marginalized individuals, urbanized culture and distopic landscapes). In his book, Dani Cavallaro attributes the cyberpunk cultural movement to the writings of William Gibson and Bruce Sterling in the 1980s. As he poetically says: "In cyberpunk, the shiny hardness of metal, of sturdy and imposing machinery and of industrial technology at large (hardware) favored by traditional sci-fi cinema and literature gives way to the murky softness of junk-infested urban settings and of often undependable postindustrial technology (software)" (2006, 27)

[7] Frankfurt school, with its "Critical theory", strongly distinguished between pop or mass culture and high culture, seeing masses as rather ignorant consumers and criticizing the rising of mas - popular culture content.

If I was to argue against the dichotomy further in this paper, anime would probably be my joker card, as it is one of the best examples of being an offspring of both cultural dimensions.

Anime's history goes back to Japanese-style paintings, *yamato-e* in general, and *emakimono* or picture-scrolls in particular. It is further traced to *chinzō* or portrait painting, *ukiyo-e*, *kabuki*, *bunraku*, *nō*, *kyōgen*, picture-card storytelling and especially interesting *utshushi-e* or magic lanterns, with its most contemporary predecessor: *manga* or Japanese comics.[8] Why I find magic lantern shows especially interesting is because they were based on certain technologies imported from the West and were probably one of the first Japanese popular culture forms to bring two-dimensional inanimate objects into life, starting its internationalization and adoption of Western techniques. It also evokes some irony, as story-telling started being dependant on technology which I thematize in this paper. This irony rises from anime being dependant on technology and offering critical narratives on technology at the same time.

To continue with a more recent history, in 1917 the first locally made anime works began to appear, but what followed in the 1960s was a fascinating boom, with manga-artist Osamu Tezuka who would change the world of anime, both visually and narratively. Tezuka created one of the first internationally accepted anime, *Astro Boy* or *Tetsuwan Atomu* in 1963, thematizing the relationship between technology and human beings. Back then, one could still notice the positive attitude of anime artists and their audiences towards technology. After the economic crisis and growth of environmental problems in Japan, this attitude radically changed. This new view on technological development was probably best pictured in works of Hayao Miyazaki, who is also known as Mr. Environment for adopting a shintoistic[9] and ecological approach in his narratives.[10]

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[8] In her book, *Frames of Anime* (2010), Tze-Yue dedicates a whole section to exploring connection between magic lantern shows, anime and Japanese culture. She states: "In general, Japanese animation scholars, teachers and film historians acknowledge *utsushi-e* as Edo's form of anime (or simply called "Edo anime"), one of the pre-modern ancestors of today's Japanese anime." (43).
In *Frames of Anime,* she explores in depth the evolution of anime through earlier art forms and relates it to visualness as the specific feature of Japanese culture. While *yamato-e*, *emakimono*, *chinzō* and *ukiyo-e* are pictorial art forms, *bunraku*, *kabuki*, *nō* and *kyōgen* are Japanese traditional theatre (see chapters *Origins of the Japanese art of Animating*, 13-23, and *Continuity of Art Forms and Their Visualness*, 24-43).

[9] *Shintō* is an indigenous Japanese religion/philosophy (most authors agree it can't simply be referred to as religion or a form of spirituality only), whose followers worship *kami* deities. It is pantheistic and animistic, with a strong ecological aspect. Though "*kami"* stands for numerous *shintō* deities, it can also signify any kind of life force or energy that can reside in all things, live or dead. Due to this potential, environment; plants and animals need to be respected as they can also be messenger from gods. The most common and distinguishable feature of *shintō* are orange *torii*-gates which are put in front of temples and all places believed to be sacred grounds. *Shintō* also includes many festivals that reaffirm the relationship between people and nature.

[10] Miyazaki's narratives are well known for adopting *shintō* beliefs and values, especially in form of promoting respect towards nature and bringing forth ecological problems. He himself stated that there are more and more Japanese who abandon belief in *kami*-potential of all things, which he wishes to preserve in his animated works: "In my grandparents' time, it was believed that spirits [kami] existed everywhere – in trees, rivers, insects, wells, anything. My generation does not believe this, but I like the idea that we should all treasure everything because spirits might exist there, and we should treasure everything because there is a kind of life to everything." (Quoted from *Japan Times Weekly,* 9/28/02 In Boyd and Nishimura (2004))

Hayao Miyazaki was not the only one to speak about the changes brought on by technology, urbanization and "progress", and with Otomo Katsushiro's *Akira* (1988), and Miyazaki's own *Nausiccaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), the science fiction genre started to bloom. It is no wonder that it happened in Japan. The Japanese people experienced many of the atrocities of the *brave new world* and could now produce stories from their own experiences. Many of the animated works depicted dystopic worlds and post-apocalyptic futures which came to be after world wars or nuclear disasters. Posthumanism somehow "naturally" followed these narratives: and as posthuman scholar Rosi Braidotti puts it, "One needs to turn to 'minor', not to say marginal and hybrid genres, such as science fiction, horror and cyber punk, to find fitting cultural illustrations of the changes and transformations that are taking place in the forms of relations available in our post-human present. Low cultural genres, like science fiction, are mercifully free of grandiose pretensions – of the aesthetic or cognitive kind – and thus end up being a more accurate and honest depiction of contemporary culture than other, more self-consciously 'representational' genres." (2006, 203)

The most influential representative of the genre without doubt, is a cyberpunk creation by Mamoru Oshii; his masterpiece, *Ghost in the Shell* (1995).

Brave New Uncanny World & Ghost in the Shell

> *O, wonder!*
> *How many goodly creatures are there here!*
> *How beauteous mankind is! O brave new*
> *world,*
> *That has such people in't!*

--*Miranda, in W. Shakespeare's The Tempest, Act V, Scene I*

Somehow, it turned out that throughout my studies in popular culture and bioethics, the focus has always been on the essential changes in the world we inhabit and the way this feature of our world affects us. I have also been interested in the ways *we* affect the world, with an emphasis on ecology and technology, both producing the most visible large-scale changes among the rest of the areas that bioethics is concerned with. Following a statement made by Hans Jonas, that we have found ourselves in *an unknown land of collective practic*e, that is, in an *ethical vacuum*[11] because there are so many contemporary changes to our lives that we are unable to deal with properly. This paper leans on Hans Jonas' philosophy of technology in order to resonate my personal strong belief that we are *lost* in a sense

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 Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind (1984) for example, speaks of a world after a huge disaster which destroyed almost all living beings, and of struggle of Princess Nausicaä to revive life on the planet. Another example is the award-winning *Spirited Away* (2001) which speaks against capitalism and commodification and advocates for a more sensible and sensitive approach to our world and our lives, through a young pure-hearted girl Chihiro and her adventures in a *kami* bathhouse.

[11] Hans Jonas stated that Technoscience found itself in an *unknown land of collective practice*, thus producing a sort of *ethical vacuum* which is supposed to bring us to a no man's land in terms of ethical theory. Juric, one of the leading bioethics scholars in Croatia emphasizes Jonas' thought on this *ethical vacuum* being the very no man's land; a discrepancy between imagined absolute power that man gained thanks to technology, and man's absolute feeling of being disoriented in this man-made world (Jonas: 1990, 42-43 in Juric (2008, 9-10).

that the many contemporary processes, such as informatization, globalization, urbanization, commodification, technologization, etc. offer us plenty of answers to our everyday needs, but they also raise issues which we are unable or unwilling to deal with. Why are we *unable*? Because everything is happening too fast and we do not give ourselves the time to follow the process by reflecting on it. Why *unwilling*? Because the world's logics rely heavily on neo-liberal capitalism, and the narcissistic culture we share today does not allow "unnecessary" questioning.

Another issue I am concerned with rises directly from the unknowingness we have (or *knowledge we do not have*) about the world we inhabit. If the world has ever been anything familiar to us, and I believe to some extent it has been, then the world we inhabit today still may carry this familiar feeling, but actually be a very un-familiar place. It is transforming all over again, creating a chaotic image of our home that does not even represent our home all that much: our thoughts are directed towards universe, with our interests shifting from the Earth towards space. One consequence of this shift is the false premise of the Earth as being exploitable; a temporary station on our way to the stars. In that perspective, Kant's statement "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me"[12] (Quoted from Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) in Schönfeld: 2012) now bears slightly different implications.

Talking about the familiar in un-familiar, or un-familiar in familiar: of course it is derived from Freud's concept "unheimlich"[13], but in this paper it is not so much applied to notions of "the frightening, or what evokes fear and dread" (Freud, 1997, 123), as much as to losing one's grip in the world we know no more. Even though Freud had a slightly different definition of the concept on his mind, I believe I do not do him any injustice by expanding his definition. He himself implied that the uncanny is linked to the scientific, or to say lack of the scientific. As one aspect of the uncanny emerges from the uncertainty of science, then the term is very applicable to the present technoscientific world.

In his writing, Freud will argue that many people link the uncanny to death and afterlife, which is due to "the uncertainty of the scientific knowledge" (ibid. 148), as both death and the afterlife were and probably will remain unresolved by scientific knowledge. Freud says that we escape to the realm of uncanny and mysticism whenever we meet questions and problems to which our technoscience is unable to provide answers and solutions.

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[12] Kant would develop a metaphysics whose claims anticipate scientific discoveries, "and an ethics that culminated in the Categorical Imperative". His friends chose to put this quotation from the *Critique of Practical Reason* on his tombstone (Schönfeld, 2012).

[13] Freud analyzes the term "*unheimlich*" starting from its linguistic aspect, with focus on its etymology and various vocabulary definitions of the term. After doing so, he continues with his psychoanalytical analysis. Following the term's relation to *death, dead bodies, revenants, spirits and ghosts,* it almost evokes to be linked with scientific uncertainty and especially technological devices, such as automata, which will be further discussed in the paper. Also, going back to Jonas' *ethical vacuum*, the term 'uncanny' bears a different kind of contemporary significance as "It is not equally beyond doubt that the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, and so it commonly merges with what arouses fear in general." (1997, 123)

In today's technoscientific world, not many people would claim that we lack scientific knowledge, but quite the opposite: we produce so many wonderful things using all newly attained scientific knowledge, followed by a collective hallucination of absolute power over the world. However, the fact is that our knowledge still cannot, and perhaps never will, answer all of our questions (life, death, identity, humanity…). These questions have been evading scientific framing from the beginnings of philosophy. Now, when science has adopted these terms for its own use and definitions, we might feel more secure and less provisional about it, but the truth is that they not only remain unresolved but, due to new (bio)technologies, are even more ambiguous, and that is the reason why th*e uncanny* remains functional even today. Not only is it still functional, but it has acquired new modes of existing in the contemporary world. I claim this here to define the contemporary world as a space that is our home, but does not feel like it anymore. Or, it feels like home, but it changes so rapidly that we are simultaneously aware of our space of belonging and not fully recognizing it as familiar anymore. This is probably a more literal translation of the German word "unheimlich" that Freud uses, but still contains Freud's thought: only expanded to new modes of human existence.

I see it as ironic to some extent: that for Freud, the uncanny was linked to the mythical, superstitious and infantile, while for us it also includes all familiar-unfamiliar things that the *adult* world of science and technology creates. Still, Freud himself pointed to this aspect of the term's applicability, by analyzing E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story *The Sandman* (1816). The story actually has much in common with *Ghost in the Shell* and *Innocence*, but I will come back to it later.

I am far from being the only one in contemporary cultural studies who links the term with technology, informatics and globalization (exempting Freud who, as its creator, was the first). It has been popular before, with its reference to man-made organic, but mostly in-organic things. This usage is not new: it is just further expanded. This expansion however also links with the fact that humankind today creates and produces much more of organic and inorganic than ever before. The world is being manufactured in many new ways and the beings we create become omnipresent.

That is why I fuse this term with Aldous Huxley's 1931 novel *Brave New World*. In his popular novel, Huxley presents us a fictional world with certain technological developments – the kind that are no longer fictional today. A satirist, Huxley produced a parody which is not funny anymore. Our new world (if measured by quantity of the destruction of it, then it certainly *must* belong to us), is the *brave new world* Huxley is talking about. Maybe not because everything Huxley imagined has become true, but because it reflects to great extent Huxley's vision of the futuristic-present world we inhabit. Basically, I am suggesting that our *brave new world* has become a highly-developed unfamiliar home to us. This is not to say that we should denounce all our achievements or live more simple lives; it is to say that we must work harder to understand the world, to think about it and reflect on it more. Otherwise, we are becoming more estranged in our present home - if it is our home at all. Maybe we should consider ourselves as *guests* here and respect the space we inhabit more.

Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) is not a lone case making his (unintentional) sci-fi legacy in the fields of popular culture and bioethics: Herbert George Wells (1866-1946) was

his contemporary, while Jules Gabriel Verne (1828-1905) was their earliest predecessor. Their novels have been made into films and their visions of the (future) world remained a significant part of popular culture and a valuable resource for the science fiction authors who followed. It is interesting how many posthumanist and science fiction theorists forget about Verne, but in his time his novels were quite fantastical in presenting human achievements which were beyond imagination (and reason). In his time, his novels were quite posthuman already because they anticipated that humans would technologically evolve into species which can easily move in the water and through air. If posthumanism is about enhancing human abilities with the use of technology, then Verne deserves his place in the posthumanist theory. This is significant because it demonstrates that contemporary popular culture that thematizes technology and futuristic worlds is not something new. Jules Verne deserves to be given credit (though I did it only briefly) before moving on to two films which are the focus of the paper: *Ghost in the Shell* and *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*.

Ghost in the Shell

Ghost in the Shell (*Kôkaku kidôtai)* is an animated film made by Mamoru Oshii in 1995 and has been a topic of discussion ever since (not only has it been heavily discussed, but other works in the field were also strongly influenced by it, i.e. the revolutionary *Matrix* trilogy, made by the Wachowski brothers in 1999, intensively drew inspiration from it). From my own experience, I can say that the film can be seen tens of times without being fully explored; that is its depth and its power.

The plot is very simple: a full-cyborg with human brain, Major Motoko Kusanagi, is the female protagonist of the film. She works as a top operative for Public Section 9, an anti-crime government organization. Together with her team (cyborg Batou, almost-completely-human Togusa and Chief Aramaki being the most prominent), she fights global crime in the post-apocalyptic world of 2029, which is now dominated by Asia. Though the film is abundant with action and all sorts of (bio)technological gadgetry, the focus is on Kusanagi who is trying to identify herself in her uncanny environment. Her search for identity and self-defining intensifies as she crosses paths with the Puppet Master, an apparent ghost-hacker, but actually a life form *born in the sea of information*: evolving from Project 2501 to a self-conscious being.

What is special about this anime is the way it reflects on universal human struggles, and also questions the future of humanity in a highly-technologized world. The philosophical notions of selfhood, existential crisis, and the search for answers to ontological questions are set in a futuristic world which provides Oshii with a source for problematizing identity and humanity in the way it has always been as part of Philosophy, but also as a response to the contemporary world and its technological promises to humans and other possible life-forms. Oshii complicates the old, never-resolved issues of who we are by offering an answer to what we can become. This *becoming* is no longer a concept observed within the fields of nurture, pedagogy, education or didactics: it is now observed within the field of technoscience in general and biotechnology in particular. If we ever were uncertain about what we are, this uncertainty is now further expanded due to technoscientific changes through which we, together with our world are burdened with doubts and uncertainty. Science was meant to give us certainty, but it has only increased the feeling of unfamiliarity about the world and especially about ourselves. This post-war future of Oshii's focuses on

the feeling of unfamiliarity about ourselves through the character of Kusanagi. Even though it is the future that Oshii is depicting, the fact that we are being altered by technology to the extent that many scholars consider us post-human already remains and is further reaffirmed. N. Katherine Hayles and Donna Haraway are the most prominent figures of this kind of posthuman thought and they both argue that we indeed are posthuman already: cyborg is just a metaphor.

Posthumanist theory indeed deals with the coexistence of technology and humankind to a great extent: its alterations and post-human conditions in terms of the technological. It is about fusing the organic and inorganic; or even the prevailing inorganic in the new virtual and cyber realities. The cyborg Kusanagi is a creature of such a post-human world: a world where everyone can plug in and communicate almost telepathically or dive into other personae's ghosts; a world where the Puppet Master manipulates biotechnologically enhanced cyberbrains and everyone can become half-immortal by replacing their organic body parts with inorganic ones. But do androids dream of electric sheep? Yes, they do. Even though what we see in Oshii's masterpiece is fully imagined, the questions are real and relevant. Some of those questions were already raised in two of Oshii's forerunners: Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* in 1982 and the already mentioned William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, both cult cyberpunk-noir works.

At the end of the film, Kusanagi and the Puppet Master merge, creating a new life-form, non-dependant on the body and free to join the *vast and limitless Net*. This was the point when Donna Haraway's promise of creatures in a post-gender world became realized by anime. This is also the point when Cartesian mind-body dualism came back to life (if it ever was overcome in Western tradition in the first place). It is because the film evokes this dualism: first by replacing bodies and externalizing brains, that is to offer the possibility of switching inorganic bodies while human brains remain intact, and second: by offering a "happy ending" where the body is no longer needed and the mind can exist on its own as part of the Net.

We have have struggled with this dualism quite a lot in the past, for which Haraway anticipates a posthuman solution in her *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985). This dualism however did not only impact human beings: implications of such a philosophy extend to the Universe. René Descartes made a huge impact on Western philosophy and science with his well known mind-body dualism. To ancient Greeks, human beings belonged within the Whole together with nature (*physis*), while Descartes, instead of observing human beings as inclusive, decided to oppose human beings to nature. Further, by dividing the Whole into *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, he laid the foundations for the new natural sciences (Hösle, 1996, 40)[14] The division has had major consequences in the fields of natural sciences, which remain present - especially in terms of our relationship with the world we inhabit.

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[14] In his *Meditations* (1996) Descartes has clearly divided everything in existence into two matters: *res cogitans*-thinking matter and *res extensa*-non-thinking matter. While a man belongs into the first category, everything else: plants, animals, and nature included, belongs into the second category. If the latter category implies that all beings included are mere mechanisms and of lesser value, it is obvious what it means from the modern scientific perspective.

Another philosopher who contributed was Descartes' predecessor, Francis Bacon, who called for an exploration of nature as a servant that needs to be tamed.[15] However, as I mentioned earlier, the film *Ghost in the Shell* has a happy ending, seemingly resolving the raised issue of dualism by creating a new software-like life-form that does not need its hardware anymore.

Cyborgs and these disembodied life-forms might be promising a better future, but whether or not it resolves the problem that Cartesian dualism creates is yet to be seen.

Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence

Innocence (2004) follows up the *Ghost in the Shell* film, but with focus shifted away from *humanity* and directed towards biocentric ethics and non-human life forms. Oshii however, still refers to humanity, increasing the feeling of uncaniness by "playing" with all kinds of automata and their human doubles.[16]

Innocence takes place in 2032 and revolves around the main Public Section 9's team, Batou and Togusa. Major Motoko Kusanagi has disappeared into the Net but remains a Guardian Angel for Batou who, together with his new partner, investigates murders and suicides committed by gynoids produced by a company named Locus Solus. The gynoids, a kind of androids, were intended for sexual pleasure, but the producer "enriched" them with ghosts he dubbed from kidnapped children.

If popular culture, cultural research, literature, philosophy and technoscience ever met in one *nodal point*[17], to use Francois Lyotard's term, it was this film. This is most apparent in its use of citations which are so abundant that it is hard for viewers to follow the dialogue (even with excellent subtitles).

Steven T. Brown, author of one of the most elaborated articles on *Innocence* states: "I would argue that Oshii's use of citationality in *Ghost in the Shell 2* also serves a larger philosophical purpose in relation to ventriloquism of the puppet theater. Such citationality foregrounds not simply the ventriloquism of the director or screenplay

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[15] In his major work *The New Organon* which was part of his great project of *the Great Renewal*, supposed to modernize science, Francis Bacon writes: "Human knowledge and human power come to the same thing, because of ignorance of cause frustrates effect. For Nature is conquered only by obedience; and that which in thought is a cause, is like a rule in practice." (2000, 33)

[16] Steven T. Brown wrote an excellent article on this topic, which was published in *Mechademia* series. Brown links *the uncanny* to automata in *Innocence*, ranging from traditional Japanese puppets to such technological creatures as gynoids. He states: "The uncanny blurring of boundaries between the animate and the inanimate, the living and the dead, is clearly exemplified by puppet-like characters, but the uncanny is also evoked in scenes involving cyberbrain hacking and e-brain communication." (2008, 225). He then goes further to explore the uncanniness of these puppet-like characters, also categorizing the automata we encounter in the film. Brown cites Oshii on this: "*There are no human beings in* Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence. *The characters are all human-shaped dolls*." (ibid. 222) On another occasion, he writes: "Each instance of the uncanny that unfolds at Kim's mansion (the repetition of déjà vu, the blurring of boundaries between life and death, animate and inanimate, and the doppelgänger) evokes a feeling of unhomeliness in the home, a defamiliarization of the everyday that destabilizes our assumptions about what it means to be human in a posthuman world and how we are to relate to all the *ningyō* (dolls, puppets, automata, and androids) that inhabit the world with us." (234).

[17] "Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at "nodal points" of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be. Or better: one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass." (Lyotard: 1984)

writer but, more importantly, the ventriloquism of the flows of transnational cultural production, as has been discussed by numerous contemporary critical theorists. "Who speaks and acts?" asks philosopher Gilles Deleuze. "It is always a multiplicity, even within the person who speaks and acts." In short, the subject becomes a tissue of citations." (2008, 228)

Though *Innocence* also speaks of the relationship between humanity and technology; organic and inorganic; familiar and unfamiliar; human and non-human (but alive), I find it most interesting on three other interconnected levels.

The first level is the aforementioned intertextuality or citationality, as referred to by Brown. Second is the evocation for transhumanist ethics, that is biocentric ethics, and the third level is Donna Haraway's signature throughout the film (which made me *doubt* whether she co-authored it).

The second level is interesting because it further expands bioethical issues of a posthuman world and of the impacts of the development of (bio)technology on human and non-human lives.

Transhumanist and *biocentric* in the syntagm suggests that other life-forms besides humans should be taken into consideration. This especially becomes evident in the use of the word *biocentric*, coined from two terms: *bios* – which means life, and *centric* – in the center: defining ethics as a discipline which deals with all life-forms, as opposed to traditional anthropocentric ethics.

If we are to face the brave new uncanny world, then it is apparent that there is a whole bunch of issues we need to deal with. Imagining possible futures, just like Oshii does, provides great means to do just that. Besides, it is not only the future we are talking about, because we always reflect contemporaneity in the products we create and the futures we imagine. Visions always come from minds that are present here and now, so the visions may tell us more about our own struggles and reactions today than about future ones. In *Innocence*, for example, Oshii poses a problem of human relation to non-human life forms: not only gynoids and cyborgs, but also animals. So when we put all these new-imagined and old-existent life forms into one sphere, it is apparent that our task is to provide new kinds of ethics and orientation tools to redefine life which only seemingly still revolves around a man. This projection of a pre-Galilean and pre-Copernican self-centered/human-centered universe onto ethics requires revolution. Humanist and anthropocentric ethics no longer suffice.

Now we arrive to the third level: *Donna Haraway's level*.

Hawaray is likely the most famous cyber feminist author, whose *Cyborg Manifesto* remains the reference point for all authors engaging in posthumanist and particularly cyborg studies. Besides *Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway wrote another interesting work, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (2003)[18]

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[18] In her *Companion Species*, Haraway's goal is to show "1) how might an ethics and politics committed to the flourishing of significant otherness be learned from taking dog-human relationships seriously and 2) how might stories about dog-human worlds finally convince brain-damaged US Americans, and maybe other less historically challenged people, that history matters in naturecultures?

which might be even more interesting as a reference point to *Innocence* than the *Cyborg Manifesto*.

When one reads through her work and then watches *Innocence*, one cannot resist to draw a very distinctive parallel between the two authors. *Innocence* is concerned with dogs as much as it is concerned with people and automata. Oshii would even say that this film is about him and his dog.[19] With that in mind, Oshii and Haraway both speak about species closely related to humans, calling for new ethical consideration and re-definition of relationship between humans and animals (here, dogs). Oshii further adopts Haraway's concept of cyborg[20], its potential (post-genderness) and its characteristics (non-Innocence). Related to the latter, it is ironic (again) that Oshii names his film *Innocence*, when it is actually about the pursuit of human attempted re-production(s) of innocence (through dolls and other automata) which is always inscribed in animals and children, but which always eludes all human attempts. Oshii draws on Haraway's words when adopting the concept of *innocence*: "A cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden; it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualism without end…" (1991, 181)

This is not the only concept we find in both authors' works: Haraway also speaks of textualization,[21] mentioned earlier, which Oshii elaborates and applies in his story of innocence. In a way, Oshii uses his puppet-like characters' bodies and their language to embody and express the fact that we are always covered with layers of meanings, and that the postmodernist world we share is all constructed from inscribed texts and interpretations.

To conclude this short exposé on the account of the third level, I will draw the attention of the potential viewer to the character of coroner Haraway. This female cyborg character created by Oshii establishes the most apparent connection with Haraway's work, and is whom he grants her wish that she stated in the final sentence of her *Cyborg Manifesto*: "I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess."[22]

(…) The story here is mainly about dogs. Passionately engaged in these accounts, I hope to bring my readers into the kennel for life." (2003, 3)

[19] Dani Cavallaro explores the world of *Innocence* in his book *The Cinema of Mamoru Oshii* (2006), in which he brings the following statement made by the director: "Since people are all starting to lose part of or all of their 'bodies', they need to associate themselves with something else to identify themselves. It could be dogs like myself, or it could be cats or other animals. It does not need to be living things. It could be machines, cars, computers, cities, just about anything but yourself. That's how you find your lost 'bodies' … people are definitely losing their human forms. Animals have always stayed the same, and continue to do so in the years to come, but humans are always changing, and they need to change, with the development of technology. However, they should not fear the change or evolution, but rather accept it and learn to live with it… This movie is about me and my dog [Oshii 2004c]." (209).

[20] Haraway's cyborg is "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. (…) Contemporary science fiction and modern medicine is full of cyborgs." (1991, 150-151).

[21] In *Cyborg Manifesto* Haraway states: "Technological determination is only one ideological space opened up by the reconceptions of machine and organism as coded texts through which we engage in the play of writing and reading the world. 'Textualization' of everything in poststructuralist, postmodernist theory has been damned by Marxists and and socialist feminists for its utopian disregard for the lived relations of domination that ground the 'play' of arbitrary reading." (1991, 153)

[22] "Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of powerful infidel heteroglossia. It is an imagination of a feminist speaking in tongues to strike fear into the circuits of the supersavers of the new right. It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories,

Conclusion

At first glance, the fusion of Bioethics and Popular Culture might seem a bit odd, but hopefully this paper shows the validity for bioethical questioning of popular culture products and the use its analysis can have for humanists, cultural researchers and scholars engaged in bioethics. In this particular case, the focus is on Japanese animation (*Ghost in the Shell* and *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*), but the whole range of popular literature, film, art, and the rest of pop-culture artifacts can be used for the purpose.

The early science fiction novels of Jules Verne, Aldous Huxley and G. H. Wells prove this vividly. I did not want to go into cultural politics or analyze the global dialectics between *Americanization* and *Japanization*. For the purposes of this paper, I have fully dedicated the topic to dealing with rising bioethical issues in the contemporaneity of the world we live in – and what better way to do that than to use such mediums, which are (in)direct products of the contemporary environment and technological development! In this sense, the famous cyberpunk animated works of Mamoru Oshii can serve as both subject and object in this kind of bioethical questioning.

Ghost in the machine is an idea that has been haunting us for quite some time now, starting with Western Philosophy and Descartes' mind-body dualism. Today, this idea transforms due to the need to deal with techno-others and the radical human involvement in manufacturing and transforming the world.

Though bioethics deals mostly with ethical dilemmas arisen from technoscientific development (most visibly in the field of medicine), this multi-perspective discipline also deals with life itself: its conditions, transformations and conditions of preservation. One of the most recent bioethical concerns is certainly the impact of technology on (human) lives and the ways that technology shapes our world and our selfhood today. This impact becomes most apparent in the change of narratives and discourses we use when addressing the issue of living beings: *The human genome project* completed in 2003 proved that we have long been translated into codes and data: becoming objects which call for de-cyphering and further experimental uses. Our collective consciousness today rises from the hallucinated feeling of absolute power and the need to colonize every single corner of our universe, including our own genes.

Using popular culture narratives in the form of Mamoru Oshii's distinguished works, I have tried to point my *questioning* finger to some of these issues, and will hopefully trigger further interest among scholars coming from different disciplines.

As stated in the previous segments of the paper, our contemporary condition consists of radical and rapid transformations to which we do not have answers to and which we do not yet know how to deal with. The issues that are the focus here are by all means nothing new: ever since the first human felt marvel for the world (thus the

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relationships, space stories. Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess." (154).

beginning of Philosophy) such questions existed, but were framed with their own time's needs and possibilities.

We continue to reflect further, but we have to consider these questions in quite a different context, since technoscience offered some new answers and deepened old doubts. This is not a negative criticism against technology and science: it is a call for more cultural research, more reflections, and definitely more inclusion of marginalized Humanities into the contemporary world.

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