

Cybernetic Immunology

In the traditions of 'Western' science and politics--the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other - the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination. This chapter is an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction. (Haraway 150)

Cartesian circularities of self-identitcal participants in a phallocratic order and ripples in a huge urban puddle renamed 'lake' from a fallen body, the machines may have already won. We know it was they who scorched the sky. Oshii Mamoru's anime, turned American 1995 "Japanimation" classic, plays cyborg science fiction with flashing lights, outbursts of violence, and a plot fit for cyborgs to understand in a political world of simulations transferred without effluvia directly by air-port cybernetworking into unannounced awareness in each celluloid thin character, and on their demihuman coworker's early 90's military computer monitors. The narrative tries to entangle itself so thoroughly in a political rationality of an omnipresent culture of technicism devoid of scientific explanation on every green, glowing, digitally exported, and unrefined urban street corner that its revealing of the "real" puppetmaster/super-villain (a tool of someone still further up, "our heroes" presume) begs a sigh about technology coming to master itself without a care in the world for humanist restraint, much like the mostly good natured civilians who, it seems, don't really mind an almost comically violent thug police presence that tears through their markets, melons, and minds chasing charlatans only it can see armed with overpowered bullets in outdated guns without any of the pleasant trappings of the polite police forces we imagine secure our very ability to sit in front of a glowing screen with electrically replicated pitches and decibels projected into right-angled chambers of passivity, and reflected in photons and waves to our media outlets - the doors of techno-perception. Calling *Ghost* "a film

about” already misses that it is a film *to* as well. Mistaking cause for consequence, watching animated science fiction as a useful depiction of theory applying to a fiction, or as a lie with equal currency to the simulacra we take as our power breakfast, packaged lunch, or TV dinner (“reality”), tries hard to represent a lost presence whose trace resides in just that kind of representative theorization that such accounts instantiate. Yet avoiding this is already to take it as a question of what has been done, not what is being done or might become. In this context, *Ghost in the Shell* can be taken as a film about the abscesses of a body of integrated circuitry of gender, technology, and power - specifically in the film’s first minute and a half.

An abscess is, in the American Heritage year 2000 edition, a dictionary to represent language as produced by a communal ‘shared grounding’, “a localized collection of pus ... surrounded by an inflamed area”. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth - but before that there was “God”, the word before space and place. In *Ghost* there first comes word. White letters revealed or born into the darkness of a black formless space - word in denial of the nothing - proclaim that “IN THE NEAR FUTURE - CORPORATE NETWORKS REACH OUT TO THE STARS, ELECTRONS AND LIGHT FLOW THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSE.” The body of this space, a global organicism of corporate networks reaching, with subatomic flows to the stars of its own imagination issues forth from white letters warming to glow in a screen devoid of movie. Yet this space is immediately recast as its own sanitation system, its own assurance of isolation, destruction, and elimination: “THE ADVANCE OF COMPUTERIZATION, HOWEVER, HAS NOT YET WIPED OUT NATIONS AND ETHNIC GROUPS.” The space/body sets its boundaries at the stars in its own terms, and the boundaries of its terms outside of it with reliance on simultaneous scientifically activated subject positions of audience ready to contextualize, and even that within the terms of electron, universe, and

network, while the audience must also suffer the pastoral signifiers of stars, reaches, and flows. Immediately the traditions of “Western” science and politics have achieved an advancement (“in the near future” “of computerization”) that fails to ‘wipe out’ what comes with it as its germ, its special kind of dirtiness endemic to its texture, just as oil cannot be polluted by foul waters. This infectant must be dealt with by the immunosecurity system of Section 9 in the film’s later narrative space, but here perhaps referenced by the digital urban cityscape.

Issues of corruption appear in the film’s first lone speech, and the production of pus is already put underway. From the body without gender inscribed in loud terms perched atop a sky scraper, a “3d space” metaphor suggests, vision can be relayed directly to the screen. We see her in dark glasses, then see through the floor her head points towards to the green glowing horizontal shades she looks *for*. Yet, is this the vision she sees? Given that, the narrative insists, she is cybernetic, another machine interfacing with a data flow, why would we believe that her vision is “really” based on color, light, texture, and so on, when it could be of 0’s and 1’s? Already, the unmediated viewpoint of the audience, in reference to plot and image, becomes filled with a mess from reaction to the interference in perfect relay of visibility. Because we don’t know what she is seeing, we worry that maybe we are being duped into an idea of what she has seen - just as the image of the city (“Camelot!” “it’s just a model”) can also not be the “truth” of the digital (01110110001) building of buildings. Beyond this abscess lies that of T-cells attacking the microbial menace of a corruption within the urbanscape. Striated globs of green, later played by ‘men’ in suits (but here male voices on a Rorschach of early 90’s computer green), debate how best to cover the nation-state’s tracks - eliminating the bugs of its production of measured destruction. The controversy is only over whether this is a ‘bug’, or a self-organizing life force. The former, a microbe to be destroyed, is not so different from the latter,

the same microbe with a plea for life made in the logic as that of the immune system that seeks to destroy it: it has a claim to living because it is like us, the logic of “animal rights”. It need not, like the teeming masses of a fragmented and mediated sewer city in which the narrative is set and motion often framed, be policed because it can police itself - “Bull” Connor says his work here is done. But this perfection is marred again. Its perfection is unknown. Technological control has *not* gone, a glitch able to order its own rules and micromanage without restraints is still chased, indeed its failures are the topic of the film narrative. The police have *not* left, even as they control the space, control the sky, control the roof, a perfection of the usual terms of police presence, and yet it remains: a panopticon that’s actually paying attention to every cell, a flow of lymphocytes beaching themselves on mined shores and then atop one another.

There is abscess in the way of abscess, a mess of resistance to new organic wholes, and yet it is just this sort of smooth, smoldering communication-as-perfected presentation that Haraway wants to reject - demanding a technologized body with a politics of interference in the networks of communication. Enough white blood cells attacking microbes without a route of escape ensures pus, bulging and perhaps the appearance of disease to someone outside the body, but an acceptable zone of disaster, waiting to be ferried away or for a violent exocytosis from the prison/cell of its body, to be born again as mess outside, unfaithful cybernetic child problematics.

Beyond the viewing of the film and political thriller of an anime narrative, abscess haunts the film’s opening moment in questions of gender/power. First there is the cityscape/cityspace, a space of the urban, fundamentally spherical, with flat numbers in fat space floating, rising, blinking and falling according to a gravity of constant velocity. Gendered voices cross cut and cross index, referring to one another’s language, spoken in the operator’s tone of urgent form and

relaxed content, in the dominator's tongue of efficiency and response, or order and action, in cynical directness, repetition for clarity and bodiless noise.

the occupation of the name is that by which one is, quite without a choice, situated within discourse. This "I", which is produced through the accumulation and convergence of such "calls", cannot extract itself from the historicity of that chain or raise itself up and confront that chain as if it were an object opposed to me, which is not me, but only what others have made of me; for that estrangement or division produced by the mesh of interpellating calls and the "I" who is its site is not only violation, but enabling as well, what Gayatri Spivak refers to as "an enabling violation". (Butler 122)

Yet in this case, there are but voices, no bodies that might matter, because this is film, its own particularity of discourses. Gender is again in abscess, in just the same way, with the falling camera / rising skyline bringing into image a body with short black hair, wearing a turquoise coat and dark glasses, with an exposed light-skinned-leg jestingly covered with black strap and futuristic greaves. At the moment the 'integrated circuit' Haraway revels in, offers a body-not-yet-gendered. Crosscutting clues for gender decoding occur, with possibilities for cyborg-hybridity in an ungendered or alternatively gendered subjectivity. It appears as problem/solution in immediate immunological conflict within a body of integrated circuitry, we are to suppose - yet it is again *abscess* not organicism the 'network' of physical/natural supposes to "describe reality" with. Simultaneous, nonconflicting, unextrapolated, machine/power monologues audialize the buzzing ether of the ant farm of a green globe simplified and detailed, as if on a screen with limited polygon counts, mirroring the waves of human-vocal-static the rooftop gargyle must sort through as the wind blows 'her' short black hair in gentle gusts, a trivial motion defining her foundational solidity, plugged in with the base of her neck to the tenuities of searchable chatter, interrupted quickly with commands from base - the unwritten body has heard enough and has been hailed, made an "I".

Abscess is not deconstruction, but its wreckage recontextualized in a model bottle body, full of fluid with particular possibilities for its future. Donna Haraway's manifesto takes itself in a particular mode with deconstruction:

This is not just literary deconstruction, but liminal transformation. Every, story that begins with original innocence and privileges the return to wholeness imagines the drama of life to be individuation, separation, the birth of the self, the tragedy of autonomy, the fall into writing, alienation; that is, war, tempered by imaginary respite in the bosom of the Other. These plots are ruled by a reproductive politics --rebirth without flaw, perfection, abstraction. ... But there is another route to having less at stake in masculine autonomy, a route that does not pass through Woman, Primitive, Zero, the Mirror Stage and its imaginary. It passes through women and other present-tense, illegitimate cyborgs, not of Woman born, who refuse the ideological resources of victimization so as to have a real life. These cyborgs are the people who refuse to disappear on cue, no matter how many times a 'western' commentator remarks on the sad passing of another primitive, another organic group done in by 'Western' technology, by writing. (Haraway 177)

Transformation of the boundaries it may be, but what is left aside is contending biological metonymies which have come to represent/replace some cheerful organic or philosophical subject rooted in knowability, reason, even language. Haraway's argument grapples with a conception of a science/culture that has undone distinctions between physical/natural, human/animal, and organism/machine. Yet, in *Ghost*, it is not that these transformations, of "fact" or "interpretation", do not occur or do not matter, but that they occur within a body/space, a space that is a kind of body, a space for bodies, and the space within bodies, and may become or dissolve abscess. The pus of immunosecutiety versus destroyed pathogen moves down the blood flow, exits out the skin, or sits where it is. These are not necessarily the only possible options for the collisions that comprise abscesses, but they are some of its forms. For the cybernetic fable to unfold in Haraway's terms, the appropriation of prostheses that she describes as inevitable yet expandable must go itself smoothly, without immunological rejection of the transplant. For Butler's mythology of the subject-called-into-being, there must be a body of speech, a flowing of discourses, yet it is even here that I locate the possibility of abscess.

The commonality in theory of Butler and Haraway in question here versus movie would go something like this: World is part constituted as glowing green digital, but also as dark shapes of technarchitecture, voices come from many places, they are cyborg, they might be human or machine, you can't tell and trying to discern the difference would be organic wholeness, an assimilatory mode that taxonomizes and demands "unity-through-domination" (Haraway 157). The cyborg listens in on the discussion of cleansing below and hears that even their projects of wholeness are faltering with unanticipated machine feedback. Gender is burning to cyborg meaninglessness, power is indiscernible, dislocated, and torn out of its sockets, technology is culture is technology. The integrated circuitries have us. Thus we are made strong in ways we don't want, and weak in ways we might. Let us capitulate/capitalize on our chains to make changes in or against our abusive fatherland.

In response, I've played that *Ghost in The Shell*'s opening could be more about abscess in the circuitry of gender/power/technology. The opening text is an example: space is produced in denial of formlessness, resolves itself with contradiction in response to its tear, forming abscess that goes unresolved and refuses not only either the drive for progress it describes or its failure, but also a circuitry that has come to terms with this disaster. Or, to the extent it has come to terms with it, that is by abscession. Twice buzzing voices, twice ungendered bodies, twice digital image translations, twice perfections of power - each time abscessed. Technology, gender, and power in *Ghost* are abscessing and obsessing about themselves, and each other. Haraway writes that "modern production is a dream of cyborg colonization work" (Haraway 150), but both the production and the cyborg colonization are pocked, infected, and under abraisure. What if, instead of imagining selves as cyborg revolutionaries, Marxist feminist contradictory nomads, we imagine the selves in relation to *Ghost* as scarred, hurt, and containing

pus - inhibited from all the power lifting and gun toting reindeer games such “cyborg” representations of subjectivity traditionally engage in. These abscesses in the film’s opening riddle not only possibilities of subjectivities for positive agencies, but also more importantly the circuitry of those supposedly preexisting causes that drive and provide justifying maps for these intellectual moves. These are abscesses of the bodies within which we are told we reside that do not foreclose, or function in a logic of ‘sense’ and ‘motive’, but perform in an alternative production of space underwritten by programming fluid and foul water, contaminated and contaminating, life threatening and pubescent, thus quite the opposite of immunodeficient: over-productive of unchecked contradictory excess surrounded by inflamed tissue, yet perfectly still capable of pointlessly being popped.