

Toshiya Ueno**(.jp)****JAPANIMATION AND TECHNO-ORIENTALISM****Japan as the Sub-Empire of Signs**

The word Japanimation is neologism that is made by two words, Japan+animation. Now, Japanimation is seen in whole world. And people outside Japan are interested in the Japanese subculture including Manga and Japanimation, etc. If people once asked "What is ZEN?", then now people asks "What is Otaku?". But I'm very skeptical about this condition. This phenomena is absolutely the effect of globalization, information capitalism. Under the Fordist economic system of the past, globalization meant nothing more than "Americanization," and media and entertainment were supplied by Disney animations. However, we must now consider seriously the fact that the post-Fordist social environment of globalization will include Japanimation and ponder its meaning. In other words, the strategy of this cultural movement is the effect of the Sub-imperialism. According to Kuan-Hsing Chen, the sub-empire is secondary dependent empire which has hegemony much more in culture and economy than military system. And this new version of imperialism uses sub-culture in general. By analyzing a Japanimation film, I would like to illustrate and criticize Japan as the sub-empire of signs.

The "GHOST IN THE SHELL"

The film "GHOST IN THE SHELL" is set in the world of A'029. This near future is not so information-based that nations or ethnicities have vanished, although networks of many enterprises have covered the planet, electrons or light running through them. In this world, East Asia is a huge corporate zone dominated by multinational economic and information operations. In this world, the lives of human beings are intertwined with advanced technologies. It is a world of cybernetics and sophisticated electronic information networks, where the border between people and machines sometimes becomes blurred or invisible. For some people, reality is only virtual. Many humans in this world become cyborgs, a complex of man and machine. Except for the kernel of their brain, some people in this age already have substituted a cybernetic, prosthetic body for their own body. The main character of the film, a woman named Motoko Kusanagi, is the leader of the "Shell Squad", Section 9 of the Department of the Interior, which has been formed by the government to combat cyber crimes and political terrorisms in the information society. Through the net, crimes have become more sophisticated and more violent. The story of the film is about a conflict and conspiracy among some departments and agents in the government. The events are concerned with a strange hacker who has the code name "Puppet Master". This unidentified super hacker started out as a computer virus manufactured by the Foreign Ministry. The "Puppet Master" can take over human beings to further his own purposes by using what is called "ghost hacking". Even though a human in this world may almost have changed its own body into a machine, it still can remain human in so far as it has its own "ghost". Ghost is a sort of spirit, not mind in general. It is indeed unconsciousness itself, but is also memory, which can help found people's identities. "Puppet Master" says "memory can not be defined, but it defines mankind." As if it were the water in cup, the identity of a human needs a form or shell at the same time that it needs "ghost". We can't distinguish between shell and ghost in human beings. But the problem isn't about the traditional philosophical dichotomy between mind and body. Rather we come face with the very basic

question in SF: Is cyborg the human or the machine? What is self or identity for cyborg ma(chi)n(e)? The "Shell Squad" team as an organization tries to chase and catch the "Puppet Master" while Major Motoko Kusanagi tries personally to respond to that basic question. For sometimes Motoko is skeptical about her identity and whether she has "ghost". Because her body is almost a machine, she is caught in a paranoia according to which she was made as an android and provided with a virtual self and an artificial "ghost". In fact, some people arrested by the "Shell Squad" as the "Puppet Master" have turned out to be just only agents who were given fictitious personality by cyber brain hacking. They were "puppets without ghost" and they have only illusional image and memory and self identity. These problems are closely concerned with the micro politics of identity including opposition and segmentation between class, gender, ethnicity and "race". It can be said that human and cyborg belong to different tribes and "race" each other. This context recalls the problematic of "cyborg politics" presented by Donna Haraway. Broadly speaking, the question here, is the self a mind or a spirit or does the self consist of a suit, a shell, prosthetic technologies? Does the vested shell or suit incorporate the body and become the self itself, or doesn't it? So as audience of this film, we share the same question with Major Motoko: the problem of the "shellfishness of selfishness" and the question of "Who am I?" The "Puppet Master" has appeared to the "Shell Squad" and (for perhaps he) speaks through a cyber body without ghost. It seems that he allows himself to be caught. He affirms, "I'm not an AI. I'm a living, thinking entity who was created in the sea of information." It is easy to see here the problem of Artificial Life (AL). For natural life DNA is nothing more than a program designed to preserve itself. And then life, when organized into species, relies on genes to be its memory system. Conversely the computer and cyber technologies are the extension (explosion) of human memory. Some programs can function independently from human will and so gain autonomy. If these processes become more complicated and sophisticated, then certain programs or algorithms are going to become more similar to life itself. Of course it is very different from the life in nature, but at least we can see and define some information program as Artificial Life (AL). In this sense, the "Puppet Master" as AL uses "meme" and cultural genes to control many humans and systems. It has "ghost".

Informational capitalism and Techno-Orientalism

Manuel De Landa has already remarked that interest in AL came out of reflexion on the failure of the AI paradigm. He has always stressed the shift from a top down approach to a bottom up approach, for the latter depends upon emergent and autonomous processes in information science. In general, Artificial Life experiments include the design of a simple copy of an individual animal, which must have the equivalent of a set of genetic instruction that are used to create its offspring as well as being transmitted to that offspring. DeLanda says....

"This transmission must also be 'imperfect', so that variation can be generated.—The exercise will be considered successful if novel properties, unimaginable by the designer, emerge spontaneously." ———
"Virtual Environments and the emergence of synthetic reason" If AL truly were more than a simple program and could become life, it would send some information to its own offspring by "imperfect transmission". The behavior and intention of the "Puppet Master" in this film is based on this logic. Thus in the end of this film, the

"Puppet Master" proposes to Motoko to merge with each other. By this unification he would be able to get death, as in real life, while Motoko could generate varied offspring into the net. One probably could say that we have already known "Puppet Master" in our ordinary lives. In fact it is possible to find invisible manipulators in the market and the financial system. The market and capital increasingly are becoming dependent on emergent processes and non-linear logic. "Emergence" here means the sudden change of some states in any system or a haphazard phenomenon relying on a radical contingency. In the paradigm of AL, this emergence and bottom-up decision making in a system are very important. This is why we can consider the work of huge capitalist corporations and the complicated virtual financial system from the point of view of Artificial Life (or Artificial Market). There is nothing like the "invisible hand of God", but there are some invisible hands of "Puppet Masters". Of course this is just an anonymous process, but at least one can say that the "Puppet Master" is an allegory of information capitalism. DeLanda presents a similar point of view about the market. ("Markets and Antimarkets in the world economy", in *Tecno Science and Cyber Culture*, Routledge 1996) Any replicating system that produces variable copies of itself, in order to get new evolving forms, has to need "the divergent manifestation of the antimarket". The market for capitalism has always already consisted of self-organized, decentralized structures. And it has always also been an "antimarket". The antimarket is an aspect of the non-linear process of the market itself.

To analyse this film further, I would go back to the issue of "Japanimation" itself. Why is this kind of animation so highly developed in Japan? I think that one reason has to do with the gaze of Western people toward Japanese culture. And the problem is also about Orientalism. For example in 70's when the German techno-pop band "Kraftwerk" used android machine-like gestures in their live shows, they took the gestures of Japanese businessmen in Europe as their model. It shouldn't be surprising that they were interested in robot-like bowing and expressionless laughter. David Morley and Kevin Rovins have argued, in their influential book *The Space of Identity*, that "Western stereotypes of the Japanese hold them to be sub-human, as if they have no feeling, no emotion, no humanity" ("Techno-Orientalism Japan Panic", in *The Space of Identity*, Routledge, 1995). These impressions come from the high development of Japanese technologies. They are a phenomenon of "Techno-Orientalism". The basis of Orientalism and xenophobia is the subordination of others in various areas of the world through a sort of "mirror of cultural conceit". A host of stereotypes appeared when binary oppositions—culture and savage, modern and pre-modern, and so on—were projected on to the geographic positions of Western and non-Western. The Orient exists in so far as the West needs it, because it brings the project of the West into focus. Naoki Sakai says on this point:

"The Orient does not connote any internal commonality among the names subsumed under it, it ranges from region in the Middle East to those in the Far East. One

can hardly find anything religious, linguistic or cultural that is common among these varied areas. The Orient is neither a cultural, religious or linguistic unity. The principle of its identity lies outside itself: what endows it with some vague sense of unity is the Orient is that which is excluded and objectified by the West, in the service of its historical progress. From the outset the orient is a shadow of the West."

If the Orient was invented by the West, then the Techno-Orient also was invented by the world of information capitalism. In "Techno-Orientalism", Japan not only is located geographically, but also is projected chronologically. Jean Baudrillard once called Japan a satellite in orbit. Now Japan has been located in the future of technology. Morley and Rovins say,

"If the future is technological, and if technology has become 'Japanised', then the syllogism would suggest that the future is now Japanese too. The postmodern era will be the Pacific era. Japan is the future, and it is a future that seems to be transcending and displacing Western modernity."

Japanimation is defined by the stereotype of Japan as such an image of the future. The West is seduced and attracted by the model on the one hand, while on the other hand the model of Japan is looked down upon rather than envied by the West. Furthermore this complex about Japan seems to contain a psycho-mechanism similar to anti-semitism. As is well known, Japanese capitalism is highly developed and has become very powerful in many areas such as the US, the EU and Asia. Techno-Orientalism works there as a manipulator of the complex about Japan, in which Japan is the object of transference of the envy and contempt from other cultures and nations. So now, a role resembling that of the Jew is being played more and more by the Japanese. Of course it is vain to link the Jew and the Japanese actually and essentially. Rather the Jews and the Japanese function as the effective figures of the information capitalism.

The Japanoid Automaton

I think that the stereotype of the Japanese, which I would like to call "Japanoid" for not actually Japanese, exists neither inside nor outside Japan. This image functions as the surface or rather the interface controlling the relation between Japan and the other. Techno-Orientalism is a kind of mirror stage or an image machine whose effect influences Japanese as well as other people. This mirror in fact is a semi-transparent or two-way mirror. It is through this mirror stage and its cultural apparatus that Western or other people misunderstand and fail to recognize an always, illusory Japanese culture, but it also is the mechanism through which Japanese misunderstand themselves. Different from the Lacanian mirror stage, a complete solution for this structure of disavowal, through which a "real" Japan could be properly recognized, is impossible. It is interesting that in the film "GHOST IN THE SHELL", the metaphor of the mirror is very used often in a particular way. In particular, the "Puppet Master" has whispered a passage to from the Bible to Motoko when he has tried to approach her through cyber hacking. In the end of the film, the "Puppet Master" says to Motoko—"We resemble each other's essence, mirror images of one another's psyche." And after she merges with the "Puppet Master", Motoko cites the Bible as follows—

"What we see now is like a dim image in a

mirror-. Then we shall see face to face
When I was child, my speech, feelings and
thinking were all those of a child. Now
that I am a man, I have no more use for
childish ways."

There are two mirror stages in this context of Techno-Orientalism. One is about the encounter between the human and the machine, the human and the net. And another is about the relation between Japan and others (Western, other Asian, etc.). These two mirror images constitute the "Japanoid" as object of envy and hate. I have already mentioned that the Japanese have often been laughed at because of their "automatic" robot-like gesture. Of course as Freud has observed there is very close relationship between automatic action and humor and laughing. But here one should be thinking about why androids or robots are ridiculed and why the person laughed at becomes like an android. Rey Chow has an interesting analysis of this point.

"In Chaplin's assembly line worker, visibility works toward an automatization of an oppressed figure whose bodily movements become excessive and comical. Being "automatized" means being subjected to social exploitation whose origins are beyond one's individual grasp, but it also means becoming a spectacle whose 'aesthetic' power increases with one's increasing awkwardness and helplessness."
"Postmodern Automatons" in *Writing Diaspora*, Rey Chow, Indiana University Press, 1993

To affirm the culture and the industry of the modern world is to summon the "automated other" by introducing the rhythm of technology and machine of each age into ordinary life. As far as workers, women, the ethnic other experience a radical change in work conditions because of high technology, the image of the automated doll is imposed on them. This image also is imposed on the nation people who overadapt to the mutation of technological conditions. Needless to say the Japanese is being seen as the "automated other".
Japanimation, which organizes the image of automatization and animation (giving it a life form), constructs and presents a "Japan" as an "automaton culture" and as the "Japanoid" in "Postmodern Times". It is worth returning to the "Puppet Master" in this film, because the "Puppet Master" reminds us of the control of the "automaton". The one controlled doesn't think he is a puppet, but in fact he behaves as a puppet controlled by a master. It is the same with the relation of an ideology in general to human being. Motoko, as a woman cyborg, thinks of herself as an "animated automaton". In order to supplement her void (as cyborg, as woman, as minority... etc.), she agrees to the proposal to merge with the "Puppet Master". She as a minority would abandon her "ghost" to a huge system and net. In turn the "Puppet Master" as system would get death and a so-called life cycle. Rey Chow has already defined the strategy of the cyborg feminist as rejecting the binary opposition of masculine-human-subject-versus-feminised-automaton. Chow argues that, this strategy "retains the notion of the automaton—the mechanical doll—but changes its fate by giving it life with another look. This is the look of the feminist critic. Does her power of animation take us back to the language of God, a superior being who bestows life upon an inferior?" Chow asks. This is the task of the cyborg as half machine, half animal and transgressive being. Conversely, when a subject takes up that tactics of transgression, it becomes like a cyborg unconsciously. So for the cyborg feminist, this strategy should be extended further than "animating the oppressed minority". Cyborg feminists have to make the automatized and animated situation of their

own voices the conscious point of departure in their intervention. By abandoning and sacrificing her own identity and ghost to the "Puppet Master", Motoko takes up the strategy of cyborg feminism. The "Japanoid Automaton" could be rejected in this way, but this rejection and resistance has always broken down in Japanese subculture. The a-national (non-national) culture of Japan and Japanese (Japanoid) are "animated and automatized" as being non-Western and non-Asian. In this cultural climate, a Japan imaginarily separated from both West and East is reproduced again and again in the political unconscious of Japanimation (subculture). Though Japanimation has often emphasized the landscape of Asia and Japan in the near-future, it is the operation of forgetting and concealing the real situation of Asia and Japan. In certain sense, Japanimation is an ideological apparatus at the same time that it is also—virtually?—an armament of criticism. Why do Asian landscapes excite the cyberpunk imagination? Certainly it would be possible to reduce the problem to the influence of the film "Blade Runner". But it should be considered that Japanimation has illustrated the mutation of global capitalism itself by appropriating the illusion of Asia or Japan. By choosing Hong-Kong as the setting of this film, and trying to visualize the information net and capitalism, the director of this film, Oshii Mamoru, unconsciously tried to criticize the sub-imperialism of Japan (and other Asian nations).

Japanimation is traveling through the cultural diaspora into the world, and is translated, communicated, and misunderstood. It should be cited the passage from Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto". "There is no way to read the following list from a standpoint of 'identification', of a unitary self. The issue is dispersion. The task is to survive in the diaspora." If the image of shell and suit in cyborg has been moving, it is not vain to discover the "automated other" in various expressions and in global information capitalism itself. It is another way to "animate" the other and the minority.