

BECOMING CYBORG, BECOMING MYTH: EMBRACING THE CULTURAL
IMAGINARY AS A CRITICAL SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TOOL

by

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(Under the Direction of Ronald Bogue)

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the inherent link between the sociopolitics of “identity” construction and the realm of the “cultural imaginary,” as represented by “cultural” constructions such as myth and literature. This “link” is shown to be a paradoxical cycle of mutual validation in which myth is used as a vital tool in the construction of oppressive social hierarchies, while these same hierarchies decide the cultural definition of “myth.” Using a critical analysis of several books and films and supported by several key works of theory, the thesis then deconstructs the functioning of this cycle: the definition of a “dominant identity” requires clear borders between that identity and the “other” or “abject” of the social hierarchy, a definition necessarily found in cultural myth. Finally, the “hybrid” or “cyborg” myth is proposed as the only viable alternative for breaking this oppressive cycle of dualistic, “subject-abject” identity construction within contemporary society.

INDEX WORDS: Identity construction, Identity border, Subject-abject, Dualisms, Cyborg, Android, Myth, Hybrid myth, Cyborg myth, Cultural imaginary, Dominant subject, Dominant identity, Oppressive hierarchy, Neoliberal, Feminist, Becoming, Abject identity, Abject-animal, Patriarchal, Rhizome, Social reality, Lived experience, Polylogue, Polyvocal, Maschinenmensch, Canon, National identity, Deterritorialization, Body without organs

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DEDICATION

To my father, Dr. Kent Simons: Thanks for sharing the finer things in life. This thesis wouldn't exist without *Xena*, *Star Trek*, *My First Dictionary*, and you.

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INTRODUCTION

BECOMING CYBORG, BECOMING MYTH: EMBRACING THE CULTURAL IMAGINARY AS A CRITICAL SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TOOL

Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility. (Haraway 149)

How do we become cyborg? And how can we become myth?

Perhaps these questions seem ironic. Well, that's a good start: there is nothing more ironic than a cyborg. (If these questions seem *moronic*, then we're probably in trouble.) Indeed, irony and a sense of humor are going to be quite valuable when we *finally* face the "social reality" that

Certain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of colour, nature, workers, animals—in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self. (Haraway 177)

It sounds like a bleak diagnosis, I know. Unfortunately, I have more bad news: our myths are lying to us. Or rather—they are keeping us from achieving a true "imaginative apprehension" of

our own oppression. The myths of our cultural imaginary tell us just what this mysterious “self” wants us to hear—no more and no less. And “who” is the self? Essentially,

The self is the One who is not dominated, who knows that by service of the other. [...] To be One is to be autonomous, to be powerful, to be God [...] yet to be other is to be multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial. (Haraway 177)

So, in other words, it’s always good to be the God-King—but clearly, we can’t all be One. For the rest of us “others,” these dualisms of “service” don’t sound very healthy.

Fortunately, I have a prescription for that.

The purpose of this thesis is, ultimately, to create a movement towards “liberation.” However, in order to accomplish such a momentous momentum, I will first have to “construct a consciousness” (Haraway 149) that such a movement is even necessary. The oppressive nature of our contemporary social hierarchy *should* seem obvious, but the “unhealthy” lived experience of countless “object” others proves otherwise. My analysis of the “cultural imaginary”—as observed from five different angles—actually shows that there are very real, very powerful forces at work which maintain these systems of domination within our daily lives—and even within our own imaginations. In order to effectively “cure” oppressive systemic dualisms, we must first learn to perceive these “imaginary” myths as tools. Then we must learn how to use them.

Although many ideas clearly overlap between chapters, I would roughly divide the thesis into two distinct parts. The first section, chapters one (“The Myths I want to Become”) and two (“The Honor of the Sacred Sheep”), generally outlines the definition of a “hybrid myth” and explains why such a concept is necessary. The second section—chapters three (“Android vs. Cyborg”), four (“A Pack of Cyborgs”), and five (“The Warrior Cyborg and the Canon”)—

focuses on developing the potential use of a specific “type” of hybrid myth: the “cyborg myth.” Additionally, the overall flow of my discussion is to move from “diagnosis,” through “prognosis,” to a final specific “prescription.” While all of the chapters also individually move through this progression to some extent, these smaller cycles are meant to augment different facets of the greater movement.

The first chapter therefore establishes the primary basis for this overall “diagnosis,” while simultaneously examining one example of a possible “cure.” In this chapter, I make extensive use of several other “social” theorists (including Gloria Anzaldúa, Leslie Bow, and David Leiwei Li, among others) and works of literary criticism in order to describe the contemporary situation of the “cultural imaginary” in some detail. After laying the groundwork for a more detailed analysis, I then focus on Japanese Canadian author Hiromi Goto’s 2001 novel *The Kappa Child* as an example of a work from the contemporary “cultural imaginary”—a work that may be considered a “hybrid myth.” During this analysis, Chapter One introduces most of the critical ideas—and most of the key terms—that will recur throughout the following chapters.

My first task in this chapter is to examine and define the inherent link between the sociopolitics of “identity” construction (particularly at the “national” level) and the realm of the “cultural imaginary.” Essentially, the cultural imaginary consists of all constructions, such as myth and literature, that define the cultural “identity” of a society. David Leiwei Li identifies this realm of the imaginary as being a fundamental tool used in the construction of a “national identity.” “A nation,” Li describes, “is composed of both the institutional and the imaginary, the political that regulates the juridical and territorial boundaries, and the cultural that defines origins and continuities, affiliations and belongings” (7). These two elements—the “political” and the “cultural”—are therefore mutually and simultaneously engaged in the constant work of defining

and maintaining such boundaries and divisions of both the “nation” and the “national identity,” even as the reality of the “geographical” national makeup constantly shifts and alters. The two approaches cannot be separated either from the nation they define or from each other.

I then argue that the “cultural imaginary,” as propagated through mainstream outlets such as education and popular media, is therefore undeniably a crucial tool in this “identity construction.” As Li points out, “mass media and systems of education” are critical “apparatuses of social and cultural reproduction,” and, as such, must necessarily be designed to recreate and “teach” the boundaries that mark the national “self” from the other (Li 6). I further argue that, due to the increasing dominance of the neoliberal, capitalist economic model within American society (and therefore, global society), the definition of the “national subject” (or “dominant national identity”) has *increasingly* moved from the realm of the “institutional” to the realm of the “imaginary.” This shift makes examining both the function and composition of the “cultural imaginary”—as a political *and* social tool—a vital line of inquiry, one that has been critically undervalued.

Additionally, I show that this system of “national identity” definition is deeply problematic because such political/legal and cultural boundaries must also *necessarily* make explicit what is *not* considered “national.” Thus, beyond a simple defining of the “not-self,” or alien, the “‘subject’ also needs to separate itself from [...] the ‘abject’” (Li 6). This separation between “subject” and “abject” is inherently a process of creating a power hierarchy, one that privileges the “self” (the subject) as an acting agent and relegates the “not-self” (the abject) to an inferior existence of being merely acted upon. The dominant national identity—as defined by both political and cultural categories—is always the “subject” of a society, the group that holds the greatest “power.” Any identity-category or identity-group that is *not* considered to be part of

this “dominant national identity” becomes the “abject” of a society, and is continually and fundamentally oppressed by the subject.

However, in order to exist as a subject, even a “minority” group must have its own internal abject. This abject is created through the definition of a “subordinate subject” within the group, a subject with its own strict boundaries of identity. Thus, the line of the “abject” is continually pushed further and further from the *most-dominant* national “subject” identity—for our purposes as dictated by *The Kappa Child*, best described as white, male, and “straight”—creating an abundance of subordinate “subjects” in its wake. These subordinate subjects are then forced to compete against each other, due to the very nature of the hierarchy of unequal divisions—a hierarchy without which these groups would not even exist. In order for a border to exist, something must be on *both* sides of the border.

Thus, another key focus of this chapter is an exploration of the very nature of “border,” or “boundary,” and its impact on identity construction and maintenance. One of the primary texts for my argument here is Gloria Anzaldúa’s groundbreaking and essential text, *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Using her fundamental term “mestiza,” Anzaldúa poignantly describes the situation of such cultural “border” conflicts on the personal level, saying, “the mestiza faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a darkskinned mother listen to? [...] We get multiple, often opposing messages” (100). These cultural “messages,” I argue, are largely and *fundamentally* composed of myths and stories. These stories are explicitly used as tools to construct and strictly police the “borders” of individual and group identities—not only from an external perspective, but also within these identity-groups themselves. For individual members who seemingly find themselves within multiple “groups,” this policing of “multiple, often opposing” identities can have a devastating effect.

I therefore use Leslie Bow's similar claim about these "internal conflicts" in *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion: Feminism, Sexual Politics, Asian American Women's Literature* in order to elaborate further on what it means to challenge these internal divisions. Bow suggests that because a "minority" identity-group (like all abject groups) is still actively engaged in the process of creating national identity through self-definition, any attempt to subvert or question the borders of the *dominant* "minority" identity (or subordinate-subject) becomes couched in the terms of "betrayal." Bow defines such "betrayal" as "a breach of trust [whose] threat lies precisely in its rupturing the invisible cohesion of community" (Bow 3). Because the borders of a national subject-identity can only be defined by strictly separating from further subordinate abject-identities, "political loyalties are positioned as mutually exclusive; their multiplicity renders them suspect" (Bow 13). I extend this observation to apply to *any* attempt to violate or question an "identity-border": such betrayals are the essence of the hybrid myth.

Thus, while the conception and construction of "identity-borders" is perhaps most explicitly covered in this first chapter (and by *Borderlands/La Frontera*), the "possibilities" of "betraying" or violating those borders show up in several of the other chapters, in my examination of the cultural imaginary. Neither are Anzaldúa and Bow the only critical theorists to address this idea: Donna Haraway also stresses the importance of "crossing" these borders in her "Cyborg Manifesto," a work that is indispensable to the second "part" of this thesis. Echoes of Anzaldúa's discussion can (and should) be found within Haraway's analysis of "Western" dualisms of subject-abject identity:

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 production 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. (Haraway 150)

Haraway further asserts that the “betrayal” of these boundaries has already—and irreversibly—begun within our own lived experience of “social reality.” She therefore identifies “three crucial boundary breakdowns” (151) that are of particular relevance to the hybrid, “cyborg” myth: human and animal, human-animal and machine, and physical and non-physical. All three of these “boundary breakdowns” are covered within this thesis—beginning with “The Myths I want to Become”—from several slightly different (and sometimes overlapping) angles of perspective. A “betrayal” of any one of these borders (or, even better, all at once) signals the emergence of the cyborg: a “multiplicity” of betrayal is also characteristic of the “ironic” hybrid/cyborg myth.

However, I suggest that the greatest irony inherent in the concept of “betrayal” is that “the language of betrayal signals the artifice of naturalized racial, ethnic, or national belonging [and] becomes a potent *rhetorical* figuration deployed to signal how affiliations are formed and then consolidated” (Bow 11). In other words, to acknowledge that “betrayal”—the interpenetration of identity borders—is even *possible* already robs the subject of its power to claim that such divisions are essentially inherent within the group. Such an admission further “reveals how mechanisms of affiliation are constituted” and opens the door for a critical and literary theory that “analyzes the stakes of [these mechanisms’] maintenance, particularly for women who transgress borders drawn by multiple loyalties” (Bow 3). Therefore, even through border-crossing “rhetorical” approaches to scholarship (as well as in works of literature and film), “‘betrayal’ can constitute subversion of another kind, a subversion of repressive authority that depends on upholding strict borders between groups and individual” (Bow 3). However, I further argue that such critical approaches must *also* essentially undermine the authority of the contemporary literary culture that allows literature to do the work of the dominant subject and

that actively and passively uses the “imaginary” as a valid means of production of identity borders. This “undermining” entails a fundamental questioning of the borders themselves and how they are defined. More significantly, this new approach also requires an examination and challenge of existing literature—in other words, a betrayal of the current imaginary.

Becoming a “betrayer” and violating the boundaries of national identity through *transnational* critical and literary approaches is one way of achieving this goal. Such an act is one powerful way to critically address the realm of the imaginary. However, even a transnational approach to analyzing the “imaginary” construction of identity borders can still fall into the dangerous trap of dividing subordinate groups into a secondary hierarchy. Only through a *fusion* of these multiple and “conflicting” identities within our cultural imaginary—a fusion that can only be achieved through a critical process that involves analyzing the myths on both “sides” of the subject-object nationality divide—can we create a “hybrid” identity that is capable of challenging these subject-object dualistic borders. By integrating the “object” of myth and culture into the subject-myth, we can hope to alter the hierarchies of “oppressive” national identity. (Although this integration must, at least for now, still insist on some difference as a concession to the very real and unequal contemporary “lived experience” of minorities.) However, only by concomitantly doing the reverse—accepting some parts of the dominant subject-culture into the object—can we achieve true balance.

Therefore, using Goto’s *The Kappa Child* as an example, I assert that while it *is* critically important to identify, examine, and eventually address the uneven and artificial divisions embedded within our inherited myths and stories, true change cannot come from these acts alone. Rather, our way of thinking about borders must eventually be re-defined completely—especially considering our position as politically “real” persons acting within a nation/state. Simply altering

the boundaries of a specified identity through a critique of its definitions does nothing to challenge the *concept* of borders themselves—in fact, alteration actually serves to support the continued existence of borders. Without a crucial shift of thought, all “action” taken to rectify the unequal nature of identity-borders will merely be a “reaction” against an idea of an “othered” identity group—a struggle that applies equally to both “sides” of the border. As Anzaldúa asserts:

All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against. [...] At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite blank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once. (100)

However, even Anzaldúa concedes that this final goal cannot and should not preclude a political, activist critique of the oppressive elements of current dualities, “on our way.” Thus, I also assert that aggressively challenging the “authenticity” of well-established Canadian and American “stories” of identity and highlighting these stories’ detrimental effects on “minorities” (both people as individuals and culture as a group) is only one critical part of seizing the “cultural imaginary” from the dominant identity. The strict boundaries of “otherness” within a nation/state cannot be dissolved without thoroughly mixing—and constantly changing—the myths and stories of different cultural “sources,” rather than maintaining a “pure” division among such cultural sources. I further argue that Goto’s “literary” approach is not only a crucial political strategy, but is also the most effective political strategy for contemporary America (both United States and Canada), given the current system of neoliberal, oppressive identity-construction.

However, I also stress in this opening chapter that “divisions” of identity cannot and should not be broken into separate parts for study in criticism. Such divisions ultimately undermine this new, “hybrid” myth and risk reproducing damaging, hierarchical relationships

between and amongst these different “identity-groups” (including race, gender, and sexuality). Haraway also addresses this issue in her approach to the “cyborg myth,” asserting that, “Race, gender, and capital require a cyborg theory of wholes and parts. There is no drive in cyborgs to produce total theory, but there is an intimate experience of boundaries, their construction and deconstruction” (181). She also emphasizes both the necessity and the *possibility* of attacking subject-object identity-borders from a number of different “categories” of distinction, insisting that “it is the *simultaneity* of breakdowns that cracks the matrices of domination and opens geometric possibilities” (174). Therefore, I attempt—both in this first chapter and in the following chapters—to keep the main identity “constructs” of my discussion as organically-linked as possible. Similarly, the slightly different focus of each chapter also (hopefully) provides a certain “polyvocality” (Haraway 160) to my approach of the “hybrid myth” and to the “possibility” of embracing the cultural imaginary.

Finally, the most important argument in “The Myths I Want to Become” is my assertion that the “link” between identity construction and the cultural imaginary (specifically myth) is a paradoxical cycle of *mutual* validation, in which myth is used as a vital tool in the construction of oppressive social hierarchies while these same hierarchies decide the cultural definition of “myth.” To further deconstruct this cycle: the definition of a “dominant identity” *requires* clear borders between that identity and the “other” or “object” of the social hierarchy, a definition which is *necessarily* found in cultural myth. The cultural imaginary of our contemporary society is therefore a powerful tool for building the very structures of “social reality,” a tool that unquestionably belongs to the (oppressive) dominant subject. This argument is significant partly because I continue to discuss this interdependent relationship—between the subject-object hierarchy of society and the myths of the cultural imaginary—in *all* of the following chapters of

this thesis. But more importantly, a true “consciousness” of the nature of this paradoxical cycle is crucial to understanding why we must first “apprehend” the use of the cultural imaginary as a tool, and then seize it—using the hybrid myth. The “hybrid” or “cyborg” myth is the *only* viable alternative for breaking this oppressive cycle of dualistic, “subject-object” identity construction within contemporary society.

As may be inferred from the subheading (“Contemporary American ‘national identity’ and the hybrid myth”), this first chapter does focus primarily on the detailed analysis of a *particular* “cultural imaginary” and its specific political conditions. However, the fundamental “illness” of the American/Canadian cultural imaginary can be found in any society that possesses (and is possessed by) a “dominant cultural identity.” This is not only the case as a universal rule, but is also as a tangible effect of America’s increasing presence as “dominant identity” on the global, transnational scale.

The second chapter, “The Honor of the Sacred Sheep,” therefore effectively illustrates this illness as an unavoidable product of *any* society that is built on a subject-object hierarchy. (Which is, essentially, nearly *every* society.) The focus of this chapter is primarily a literary analysis of Dani Kouyaté’s film *Sia, the Dream of the Python* (2001). Filmed primarily in Burkina Faso, this West African film is both a satirical re-telling and a withering critique of the foundational myth of the Wagadou people. I use a specific metaphor within this film—the comparison of nearly all human characters in the society to various animals—as an opportunity to further elaborate on the oppressive nature of the subject-object hierarchy and its effects both on the people as individuals and on the cultural imaginary as a social construction.

Kouyaté’s film, adapted from a play by Moussa Diagana, is a blistering commentary on the corrupting nature of power and on the deliberate use of myths by the dominant “subject” to

abuse the abject of a society. Kouyaté’s use of “animal metaphor” within the film is meant to illuminate the inherent degradation within such a system. However, *Sia* ultimately places blame not only on the “dominant” subject for perpetuating this denigration, but also on the “abject” members of society for accepting their own “dehumanization.” The film asserts that any human’s choice to follow blindly the dictates of a ruling “subject” (or the “cultural” belief system that supports that subject) makes that person “animal-like” at best, and less than human—an “actual” animal in the eyes of the dominant subject—at worst. These “abject” citizens of the society are compared not only to “domesticated” animals (such as thoroughbred horses), but also to “sacrificial” animals such as sheep. (Hence the ironic “Honor of the Sacred Sheep.”)

It is important to note, however, that this comparison of humans to “abject-animals” within the film (and, thus, my analysis of this metaphor) is essentially based on the values *internal* to this society and on the oppressive system of dualisms that the subject-abject system supports. Within this society, these animals are already considered to be the “abject-other,” a boundary of comparison between the powerful “self” and the impotent “not-self.” Once again, Haraway’s “three crucial boundary breakdowns” (151)—human and animal, human-animal and machine, and physical and non-physical—come into play. It is significant that *Sia* displays two of these three breakdowns (human/animal and physical/non-physical). In terms of the “hybrid myth,” Haraway asserts that “the cyborg appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed” (152). So even while Kouyaté uses a “negative” comparison to the abject-animal as a “tool” to illuminate the oppressive nature of this hierarchy, such a metaphor simultaneously and inherently “transgresses” the animal/human boundary—therefore rhetorically “betraying” the very concept of such borders.

In addition, I show how Kouyaté *also* uses an overall “negative” comparison to violate the sanctity of the dominant subject’s identity, showing how easy it really is to pass from the category of “subject” into the “abject.” Kouyaté makes it clear that the borders between the two identities are not as impenetrable as myths and other cultural constructs would make them seem—which is, of course, their primary function. What matters, however, is that as long as the division between the two categories exists, denigration must necessarily exist within the society. Ultimately, *Sia* shows that this structure denigrates not only by convincing the “abject” to relinquish their own free will, rationality, and human rights, but also by forcing the “subject” to become less than human in order to maintain the system.

Through his re-telling of an “actual” story, Kouyaté is also clearly criticizing the “source” myth: just as within the narrative of the film, the myth of the Python-God is used as a crucial tool for the “real” Wagadou society to define its identity. (This criticism is also accomplished by Kouyaté’s borrowing the “language” and the structure of a traditional legend in order to turn it upon itself.) And in both cases (the film and the “lived experience” of the myth), it is clearly and specifically the interest of the *dominant subject* to control the borders of this identity, in order to maintain the oppressive hierarchy that gives the subject power over the abject. Thus, Kouyaté’s final assertion is not only that *any* myth can (and perhaps must) be used in the cycle of subject-abject hierarchy maintenance, but that we—the audience—are already willing participants in that cycle, through our belief in our own “cultural myths.” I contend that *Sia* therefore lays out the paradoxical nature of this cycle within the cultural imaginary—as originally described in Chapter One—quite lucidly: myth justifies and defines the “heroes,” and the “heroes” simultaneously create and define the myth.

The third chapter, “Android vs. Cyborg,” introduces the “cyborg” into my discussion of the cultural imaginary. Somewhat ironically, I focus in this chapter on defining the “hybrid” cyborg against what is *not*: a statically- and dualistically-determined android. To fully illustrate the radical difference between the two concepts, I analyze the image of the android *Maschinenmensch* as the dominant metaphor in Fritz Lang’s 1927 film, *Metropolis*. This chapter also introduces Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto,” a vital work of theory that I continue to use extensively throughout the final three chapters of this thesis. “Android vs. Cyborg” also marks a shift of emphasis, in order to more directly include the thus-far neglected “human-animal and Machine” (151) boundary breakdown that Haraway describes. This emphasis will be continued in the following chapter, “A Pack of Cyborgs.”

In this third chapter, I argue that the central image of the inhuman android—a false bridge between man and machine—is key to understanding the destructive system of subject-object dualities that structures *Metropolis* and that it continues, even today, to dominate the artistic discourse between technology and society, machine and “human.” I argue that it is *critically* important to note that, despite its temporary appearance as a human, Lang’s *Maschinenmensch* is an *android* (more specifically, a “gynoid,” or female android): it is a pure automaton. The *Maschinenmensch* has no “mind” of its own, nor anything even vaguely resembling a “human” nature. In fact, despite its deceptive name, the *Maschinenmensch* (literally “machine man/person”) itself has nothing to do with humanity—other than the circumstances of its creation. In actual construction, this android is all “Maschine” and no “Mensch.” Yet an android is only *one* type of cybernetic “model” among many from which Lang could have chosen.

Therefore, I argue that instead of an android, a more accurate model of the *Maschinenmensch* would have been a *cyborg*, which is a real “hybrid of machine and organism” (Haraway 149). However, Lang’s decision to make the *Maschinenmensch* a “pure” machine, which does not engage in any real blending with humanity, actually highlights the social fear in *Metropolis* of both technology itself and of any possible changes to the (oppressive, subject-
object) social structure that technology might represent. If, as Donna Haraway suggests in her *Cyborg Manifesto*, “cyborg imagery can suggest a way *out* of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves,” then the android imagery of *Metropolis* seeks to *strengthen* those very dualisms (Haraway 181).

In “Android vs. Cyborg,” I first establish a clear definition of this “cyborg” or “cyborg-image,” one which will be later referenced in the following chapters. Following in Haraway’s footsteps, I claim that the “cyborg” is not only a product of our fiction, but is also a reality of any society that employs “technology”—especially as our technology increasing pervades our everyday lives and even our literal bodies. “The cyborg,” she says, “is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation” (149). Thus, the cyborg exists in both realms (imagination and reality), which means that it has the ability to move constantly from one to the other, influencing both simultaneously. (Unlike the android, which is purely an object-construction.)

Such a “dual” approach is vital to undoing the paradoxical cycle that I have described between “imagination” and the power hierarchies of society, a cycle in which *one* is constantly validating the *other*. In this capacity, the cyborg-as-artistic-image therefore has the potential to challenge many different historical systems of belief present in the “real” world, as well as the categorical distinctions and identity “borders” that these systems are based on. I argue that it is

precisely the fear of such “uncertain” borders that drove Lang to choose the figure of the android to dominate *Metropolis*. This same fear drives other directors and writers to follow Lang’s pattern, even in contemporary films. Unfortunately, this choice of the “android-image” precludes the power of real “mediation,” not only in the artistic world of *Metropolis*, but also—more significantly—in our actual society.

But “mediation” *is* embodied in the hybrid cyborg, which offers the only real possibility of changing, or even erasing, these borders. Chapter Four, “A Pack of Cyborgs,” further analyzes the “possibility” of the cyborg-image, using Park Chan-Wook’s *I’m a Cyborg, But That’s OK* as a unique example of *true* cyborg myth in post-*Metropolis* cinema. In this chapter, I argue that the few sincere “cyborgs” in film and literature are mainly constrained within a “science fiction” context—trapped in a dialogue of aliens, robots, and far-future adventures—that most of society deems irrelevant to “real” life, even while its members live out their *own* cyborg existence.

I believe that *I’m a Cyborg, But That’s OK* is an excellent example of the hybrid/cyborg within our contemporary “cultural imaginary” for two reasons: it has the “guts” to tackle a *real* 21st-century cyborg within its myth, and it has the power to place that cyborg in an unmistakably contemporary context. Park’s cyborg, Young-Goon, not only fits Donna Haraway’s description of an imaginary “cyborg myth,” but she is also “programmed” with a real capacity to alter our own “social reality.” Her “possibility” not only lies within the significance of the cyborg-image for our current world, but also is made manifest through a Deleuzian/Guattarian “becoming-cyborg” which is crucial to the film: a “becoming” that is experienced not only by the characters of the film, but also by the audience ourselves.

Therefore, in “A Pack of Cyborgs” I also inevitably examine how Haraway’s conceptualization of the cyborg resonates with several of Deleuze and Guattari’s key ideas from

A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. (This text is also the inspiration for the chapter's title.) The Deleuzian/Guattarian concepts of primary relevance (to both Haraway's cyborg and Park's film) are those of "rhizome," "multiplicities," "becoming," "the Body without Organs," "deterritorialization/reterritorialization," and "the line of flight." *All* of these concepts are essentially opposed to the traditionally dualistic, subject-object structures of Western thought and reality, structures that the cyborg seeks to destroy through its very existence.

In an argument similar to those offered in the first three chapters, I use Deleuze/Guattari to propose that the binary tree-organization of "connections" is a false one, and thus should be dismissed—not only because it is an inaccurate system of representation, but also because it actively cultivates the kind of subject-object domination in "social reality" that Haraway also describes. ("There is always something genealogical about a tree," they assert. "It is not a method for the people" [Deleuze and Guattari 8]. Haraway likewise says that "History and polyvocality disappear into political taxonomies that try to establish genealogies" [160].) Any system that seeks to destroy this domination *must* utilize the rhizome, with its unorganized "principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order" (Deleuze and Guattari 7).

However, much as Anzaldúa argues for the fundamental destruction of borders "on our way to a new consciousness" (100) in order to destroy "reactionary" behavior, I assert in "A Pack of Cyborgs" that simply switching from an arborescent model of organization to a rhizomatic model is only *one* part of destroying these binary systems of oppression. We must also come to see ourselves, our own existence, as defiant of the "unity" of the Western arborescence. Like the cyborg-image, we must embrace the ironies and partialities of our

identities: we must seek what Deleuze and Guattari call “multiplicity.” Just as with Anzaldúa’s vision of the non-hierarchical “hybrid” identity, when thinking about multiple identities (such as the cyborg-hybrids between animal and man, or machine and man) we must *actively* fight the trend to allow these identities to arborify or Unify. This is true in both the realm of the imaginary (myth and literature) and in social reality. Thus, true multiplicities do not want to be constrained—they are never satisfied to fill only certain “dimensions.” Neither should cyborgs be. In contrast, an android can (in some ways) be multiple—but the android-image can never be a multiplicity. Multiplicities are always trying to escape themselves, to further their own “line of flight.” This is achieved by following “distinct but entangled lines,” which are “lines of flight or of deterritorialization, becoming-wolf, becoming-inhuman, deterritorialized intensities: that is what a multiplicity is” (Deleuze and Guattari 32). Cyborgs must do the same.

Therefore, this idea of “becoming” is the last crucial concept for understanding the “assemblage” of true cyborgs (both in “A Pack of Cyborgs” and in the overall argument of this thesis). Any real discussion of a rhizomatic cyborg (which is the only real kind of cyborg) must necessarily include a becoming-cyborg. The arborescent systems that constrain Western thought and reality—a “reality” that continues to spread and thrive with the contemporary influence of “globalization”—can only be completely “destroyed” through a *constant* deterritorialization of those dualisms, a deterritorialization that never allows the binary system to reform for any meaningful period of time. In a rhizomatic cultural imaginary, the world of the hybrid/cyborg myth,

One should expect control strategies to concentrate on boundary conditions and interfaces, on rates of flow across boundaries—and not on the integrity of natural objects. [...] No objects, spaces, or bodies are sacred in themselves; any component can be interfaced with any other [...] The dichotomies between mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine, public and private, nature

and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized are all in question ideologically. (Haraway 163)

This constant “deterritorialization” of cyborg-boundaries occurs precisely because “what is at question in the rhizome is [...] totally different from the arborescent relation: all manner of ‘becomings’” (Deleuze and Guattari 21). Androids cannot “become,” they do not enter becomings, they will never be rhizomatic. But cyborgs can—and we must. This is the role of the cyborg-image.

When used in fiction and “critical theory”—as well as social reality—the cyborg can be “one important route for reconstructing socialist-feminist politics,” precisely because of its ability to address the “social relations of science and technology, including crucially the systems of myth and meanings structuring our imaginations” (Haraway 163). Deleuze and Guattari also recognize this ability of literature, but posit that “the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work” (Deleuze and Guattari 4). Therefore, I suggest that in order to begin to deconstruct these dualisms, we must first begin to recognize the “rhizomes” and “multiplicities” within ourselves—a goal that the literary machine (or cultural imaginary) can help us to fulfill. Just as “a woman has to become-woman, but in a becoming-woman of all man,” we 21st-century cyborgs must enter into a becoming-cyborg in order to affect a change in all humans (Deleuze and Guattari 292).

Finally, I argue that, as a rare example in the literary discourse on cyborgs, *I’m a Cyborg, But That’s OK* offers a clear and conscious entry point into this becoming, a way for the literary machine to consciously interact with other machines. Thus, in Young-Goon (and all of her related assemblages and multiplicities), Chan-Wook Park has finally given us a new model to challenge the obsolete android. Park does so by taking us through, and into, Young-Goon’s

becoming-cyborg in his film. Through its ties to our own, recognizable, 21st-century social reality, *I'm a Cyborg, But That's OK* establishes itself as a film whose “relevance” cannot be dismissed: our shared becoming-cyborg-pack cannot be ignored. The importance of the cyborg-image in film and literature cannot be understated because

cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other. The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities. (Haraway 175)

Thus, the dominance of the android-image must be destroyed if we 21st-century cyborgs are ever to seize those tools: we must “write the rhizome” (Deleuze and Guattari 10) in order to overcome “her” dualisms.

The final chapter (“The Warrior Cyborg and The Canon”) therefore focuses again on identifying the crucial need to achieve this “multiplicity or “polyvocality” within our cultural imaginary, in order to defeat the subject-object cycle of oppression. In this chapter, I specifically identify (with some help from theorist Griselda Pollock) the “literary canon” as a powerful stronghold for maintaining these oppressive hierarchies within our “social reality.” More importantly, I also strongly emphasize the “possibility” of using the hybrid/cyborg myth as a “socially real” tool in the struggle against this oppressive canon, a tool that *can* be seized from the dominant identity and used by the “warrior cyborg.”

In this final chapter, I also extend the boundaries of the “cyborg-image” beyond a more literal representation (such as Young-Goon from *I'm a Cyborg, But That's OK*) into any representation that “accurately” reflects the hybrid nature of our transnational “social reality”—a representation that fundamentally challenges the Western subject-object hierarchy of dualisms. In “The Warrior Cyborg and the Canon,” I explore this “possibility” specifically in relation to the

“reassembled” myths found in the television program *Xena: Warrior Princess*. Therefore, while Xena (the character) may not initially seem to be anything like a cyborg, I believe that the program itself clearly fits Haraway’s definition of the cyborg and is “an ironic political myth faithful to feminism” that is “about humour and serious play” and that, through its betrayal of the canon, is “a rhetorical strategy and a political method” in its own right (Haraway 149).

Although the definition of “canon” has expanded in our contemporary society beyond more than the purely religious, or even “written,” context of its original definition, I assert that the “legitimizing” nature of the canon—intended for a specific category of political and cultural power—remains the same. In our contemporary society, the “canon” of the neoliberal dominant identity includes any—and all—stories, narratives, and “myths” of the established “cultural imaginary.” The dominant “cultural and political identity” of European/White men still determines the “officially accepted list” of myths and writings that society (both Western and, increasingly, the “globalized” transnational society) is “constrained to look at, read, and study in schools and universities” (Pollock 499).

The paradoxical cycle of myth, which is covered in several of the previous chapters, therefore clearly also applies to the structure of canon-formation: if the purpose of the canon is to legitimate the privileged position of one specific identity-group, then these myths of the canon must, by their very nature, also legitimate the oppression of other social groups in order to create a dichotomy—the subject-object divide. For the “Western” world, this canon has (just like the “dominant” American national identity) undeniably been constructed by “white” European, (mostly “straight”) male thinkers and artists. Pollock suggests that the consequence of women and non-Europeans being “left out of the records and ignored as a part of the cultural heritage” is that the canon “becomes an increasingly impoverished and impoverishing filter for the totality of

cultural possibilities generation after generation” (Pollock 500). Thus, that very same filter prohibits new “abject-voices” from meaningfully contributing to or “reconstructing” the canon. Such a canon also actively inhibits the very imagination needed to generate new cultural possibilities and combinations between cultures and identities.

I argue that it is, therefore, no coincidence that *Xena: Warrior Princess* most clearly draws from the canonically “classical” myths above all others. However, it is critically important that *Xena*’s use of these myths is *not* a blind reproduction of the canon. While *Xena* does draw extensively from the “classical” Grecian-Roman mythology, the show also pulls elements from many other nation/cultures’ “canonical” literary, historical, and cultural sources. Moreover, *Xena* does not make *any* real attempt to unify these sources into either a “conventional” timeline or plotline. In fact, I contend that the show often overtly does the opposite: *Xena* intentionally mixes “source material” from various time periods, cultures, and literary works with a (relatively) contemporary outlook and political sentiment, in order to create combinations that would be impossible for any traditional canon to accept.

Yet, true to the nature of a hybrid/cyborg myth, it is precisely these “impossible,” reassembled myths that the show *does* expect its audience to accept. Additionally, I assert that the intent of the program is not to do a “contemporary” reading of the canonical myths. Instead, these reassembled myths demand acceptance on their own, hybrid terms. The *Xena* myths are not purely meant to be illuminating “commentary” on the previously established (oppressive) canon, but rather are, according to Haraway’s definition of irony, an ironic supplantation of that canon. These “betrayals” of the canon are not constantly explained away or watered down by “revealing” or relating the “true” story of the canon within the *Xena* myth. Ultimately, the

reassembled myth of *Xena* neither asks nor *expects* its audience to be familiar with the “sourced” myths outside of what, exactly, is presented on the show.

Building on the assertion of earlier chapters that the cyborg is not only a product of our fiction, but also a reality of “lived experience” within any society that employs “technology,” I posit that the “warrior” possibility of the cyborg is precisely that the cyborg exists in *both* the “cultural imaginary” and in “social reality.” Thus, the cyborg can be both “story” *and* “person,” both a new myth *and* its intended audience: for the literary canon, the “reassembled” myth of the cyborg has the power to become the “retrospectively legitimating backbone of a cultural and political identity” (Pollock 499) that challenges the nature of “canon” itself. The very fact that a *woman* (a warrior “cyborg,” in fact) is given the authority to determine the “officially accepted” text of the canon on *Xena* is, in itself, a political move that shakes the canon as it currently stands.

This single example of rhetorical “betrayal,” I argue, has the power to open the canon to *all* other previously “voiceless” voices of those outside the culturally dominant identity—namely, the currently oppressed and underprivileged abject-classes of our cyborg, transnational social reality. This “opening” to multiple identity-groups is also the possibility of building a rhizome within the cultural imaginary, of becoming pack-cyborg. In fact, Pollock further asserts (again, as does Anzaldúa) that the desired goal of challenging or supplanting the canon is not simply to continue reacting within a dualistic structure to the ideas of the privileged and the oppressed, but rather to encourage a *variety* of voices, similar to the nature of the hybrid, “polyvocal” cyborg identity that Haraway describes. “Instead” of privileging a new dominant identity, Pollock asserts, “we need a *polylogue*” (Pollock 501).

I choose to end this thesis with “The Warrior Cyborg” because, ultimately, the possible introduction into the literary canon of new, “reassembled” myths such as *Xena* positions this myth as a possible tool with which we might actively shape and change social and political thought. The concept of the ironic, reassembled myth allows *Xena: Warrior Princess* to challenge “real” and oppressive social structures that are essentially encoded in the myths of the historical Western canon. I believe that this television program—even as a product of “mass media” within the *current* subject-object cultural imaginary—offers us 21st-century cyborgs an “imaginative apprehension” of both our own oppression and of the very real possibility of “liberation” (Haraway 163). This is ultimately my “final prescription” for “curing” the systemic oppression of our subject-object society: the politically-conscious construction of a reassembled myth, one that challenges the canon as a system that frames imaginative thought, *can* be a tool for “feminist theory and practice,” as Haraway describes. However, this kind of change must come about not only through the reassembled myth as a cyborg itself, but also through the cyborg *audience* that this hybrid myth is intended for. (That’s us, folks.) This audience must, therefore, *also* necessarily be composed of a “postmodern collective and personal self” (Haraway 163) which is able both to work within paradox and to accept the irony and contradiction of “multiplicity.”

This hybrid, cyborg audience will in turn continue to provide the polylogue of voices needed to maintain the cyborg myth. As Haraway points out, “The boundary is permeable between tool and myth, instrument and concept, historical systems of social relations and historical anatomies of possible bodies, including objects of knowledge. Indeed, myth and tool mutually constitute each other” (Haraway 164). Therefore, if the “cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people

might explore as one part of needed political work” (Haraway 154), then works like *Xena*, with its canonically impossible “mythic” combinations, could be used similarly as a powerful political tool. In order to truly change the “social reality” of our contemporary, subject-abject society we must supplant the “cultural imaginary” of the oppressive canon *with* the cyborg myth—and *using* the cyborg myth as our tool. But we must do it *together*, in polyvocal betrayal of all the borders between us: “By the [early twenty-first] century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs” (Haraway 150).

So, ironically, appropriately, I end at the beginning:

How do we become cyborg? And how can we become myth?

CHAPTER 1

“THE MYTHS I WANT TO BECOME”:

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN “NATIONAL IDENTITY” AND THE HYBRID MYTH

*I wondered about Dad’s story. Was the human a
girl or a boy? What about the kappa? Did Dad
make up the story or did someone tell him?*

(Goto 48)

These questions, ostensibly posed during a childhood flashback, echo throughout Hiromi Goto’s eclectic novel *The Kappa Child*. Goto’s reworking of the Japanese myth of the kappa, set amongst the struggles of an immigrant family in the dustbowl of Alberta, deeply interrogates the “ownership” of such stories themselves. What role does an individual play in the construction of such myths? Who decides which information is important to the story, and what about that which is excluded? Who is allowed to alter the treasured myths of a “people?” And finally: do we make our stories or do our stories make us?

Goto’s depiction of the immigrant family as cultural outsiders and racial minority within the Canadian landscape implies that more is at stake in these questions than only one family’s bedtime stories. The book also fundamentally raises questions about how “cultural” or “ethnic” myth and stories can contribute to the formation and perpetuation of constructed political/social “persons,” personhoods, and (often unequal) divisions such as race, gender, and sexuality within a single “nation.” Furthermore, Goto’s use of and play with the concepts of myth and story in

The Kappa Child are designed precisely to highlight and interrogate these very divisions within the “real” world of society.

Placed into an uncomfortable balance between the culture of her parents (who spend most of their lives looking backward, to their Japanese memories and myths of the past) and that of “standard” Canadian identity, the narrator of *The Kappa Child* struggles to live up to both visions of “cultural” stories (Canadian/American/European and Japanese/Asian) that she has been given since childhood. This (multi)cultural conflict, as enacted on the level of the individual psyche, has now been well-documented by many authors and theorists. However, only a few theorists have critically examined the role of this collision of multiple identity-groups as an active and oppressive social construction—a construction which is inherently found in literature—and as an entire cultural system that powerfully merges political “national identity” with the seemingly “personal” conflict of cultural “inheritance.” One of the most significant of such examinations for my argument here is Gloria Anzaldúa’s groundbreaking and essential text, *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

Using her fundamental term “mestiza,” Anzaldúa poignantly describes the situation of such cultural conflicts on the personal level, saying, “the mestiza faces the dilemma of the mixed breed: which collectivity does the daughter of a darkskinned mother listen to? [...] We get multiple, often opposing messages” (100). (Notably, in this quote, the mestiza’s conflict is also clearly a gendered conflict.) These cultural “messages,” I argue, are largely and *fundamentally* composed of myths and stories. These stories are explicitly used as tools to construct and strictly police the “borders” of individual and group identities—not only from an external perspective, but also within these identity-groups themselves. For individual members who seemingly find

themselves within multiple “groups,” this policing of “multiple, often opposing” identities can have a devastating effect.

Thus, the narrator of *The Kappa Child* ultimately realizes that by attempting to adhere to both cultural legacies, separately, she has failed to understand her own identity. She has essentially erased her own identity (even being unnamed in the book) because she could never successfully be any *one* of the falsely-divided identities presented to her in these inherited stories and myths. Not until the narrator embraces a hybrid identity which metamorphoses these myths from their historically “pure” form—a hybridity which is similar in many ways to Anzaldúa’s conception of a “mestiza consciousness”—can she begin to heal her own childhood wounds and to build a symbolic “new” life.

Meanwhile, Goto consistently undermines the narrator’s supposed lack of identity by drawing from an extremely diverse, but often “contemporized,” multitude of mythic/story references throughout the actual text of the novel. This rich and vibrant metaphorical world of the authorial “voice” is starkly contrasted with the initial apparent void of the narrator’s imagination. Although the narrator easily perceives the oppressive borders of the myths she has inherited (from both the dominant culture *and* the “minority” culture), she struggles to realize the possibility for growth and expansion which lies in the “borderlands” between these stories. Goto’s authorial voice of possibility and hybridity only finally begins to line up with the narrator’s perspective near the very end of the novel.

The Kappa Child thus suggests that while it is critically important to identify, examine, and eventually address the uneven and artificial divisions embedded within our inherited myths and stories, true change cannot come from these acts alone. Rather, our way of thinking about borders must eventually be re-defined completely—especially considering our position as

politically “real” persons acting within a nation/state. Simply altering the boundaries of a specified identity through a critique of its definitions does nothing to challenge the concept of borders themselves—in fact, alteration actually serves to support the continued existence of borders. Without a crucial shift of thought, all “action” taken to rectify the unequal nature of identity-borders will merely be a “reaction” against an idea of an “othered” identity group—a struggle which applies equally to both “sides” of the border. As Anzaldúa asserts:

All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against. [...] At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite blank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once. (100)

However, even Anzaldúa concedes that this final goal cannot and should not preclude a political, activist critique of the oppressive elements of current dualities, “on our way.” (This is also mirrored in her chapter title, “La Conciencia de la Mestiza: *Towards a New Consciousness.*”) Thus, aggressively challenging the “authenticity” of well-established Canadian and American “stories” of identity and highlighting these stories’ detrimental effects on “minorities” (both people as individuals and culture as a group) is only one critical part of Goto’s political task. Goto must also simultaneously assert that the strict boundaries of “otherness” within a nation/state cannot be dissolved without thoroughly mixing and constantly changing the myths and stories of different cultural “sources,” rather than maintaining a “pure” division among such cultural sources. I argue that Goto’s “literary” approach is not only a crucial political strategy, but is also the most effective political strategy for contemporary America (both United States and Canada), given the current system of neoliberal, oppressive identity-construction.

Since Goto is primarily (though not certainly only) concerned with the issues of gender, sexuality, and racial identity as a Japanese Canadian in *The Kappa Child*, I will be focusing here

on those divisions. However, since it is vital to both the argument of Goto's book and to my own thesis, I must also attempt to highlight how these three "divisions" of identity cannot and should not be broken into separate parts for study in criticism. Using the guidance of previous scholarship and critical theory, I will argue that such divisions ultimately undermine this new, "hybrid" myth and risk reproducing damaging, hierarchical relationships between and amongst these "groups" (race, gender, sexuality). Therefore, I attempt to deal in my discussion here with these three main identity "constructs" by keeping them as organically-linked as possible. Finally, I will explore how Goto's novel represents an example of this kind of "hybrid" thinking, as well as presenting a model for deconstructing and reconstructing the identity-borders of both contemporary American and Canadian society.

My first task, however, is to lay out a framework for my discussion of "nationality," particularly as it relates to the construction *of and by* "minority literature." In doing so, I must also expose an obvious "elephant in the room": Canada is not the United States. Although most of my argument will be based upon the work of critics discussing *Asian American* and *American* literature (their own use of the terms), referring explicitly to the literature and politics of the United States, I believe that many of the observations made by these authors may be extended to include several trends within Asian Canadian literature. However, I do extend the caveat that the two "cultures" should not be entirely conflated.

I offer two primary justifications for my own extension of United States culture into Canadian literature. Firstly, many of the political conditions and legislation regarding Asian immigrants have followed similar paths in the history of these two nations (a point which I will return to later). In her essay "Water Birth: Domestic Violence and Monstrosity in Hiromi Goto's *The Kappa Child*," Nancy Kang makes a similar claim, saying that "this [literary and cultural]

interchange is possible because of the historical parallels between Canada and the U.S.” including, among others, “racist exclusion laws” (29). Kang does caution, however, against completely overlooking the differences between the two cultures in the pursuit of commonalities. Kang further asserts that “a discrete Canadian aesthetics also demands both attention and definition” (29). However, such a “Canadian” aesthetic may still be influenced by the literary tradition of the United States.

Such “influence” is clearly evident in *The Kappa Child*, prompting my second point of justification for the “extension” of United States literary culture: Goto herself invites such conflation within the novel. One of the central “myths” of *The Kappa Child* is Laura Ingalls Wilder’s semi-autobiographical book *Little House on the Prairie*, an unequivocally “United States” text. Wilder’s book crucially informs not only the perspective of Goto’s narrator, but even the structure and themes of the text itself. While Goto’s use of *Little House on the Prairie* may partly be a conscious criticism of the influence—or even outright domination—of United States culture in Canadian literature and thought, such a critical intention itself speaks volumes about the connection between the two nations.

Yet such issues of distinction naturally lead us to eventually question, “what *does* make a nation?” What makes an individual a Canadian or American, as opposed to anything else—including “alien”? What are the “borders” and where—and how—are they constructed?

For the (fairly limited) purposes of my argument in this essay, one significant and deceptively simple answer to these questions can be found in David Leiwei Li’s *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent*. “A nation,” Li describes, “is composed of both the institutional and the imaginary, the political that regulates the juridical and territorial boundaries, and the cultural that defines origins and continuities, affiliations and

belongings” (7). These two elements—the “political” and the “cultural”—are mutually and simultaneously engaged in the constant work of defining and maintaining such boundaries and divisions, even as the reality of the “geographical” national makeup constantly shifts and alters. The two approaches cannot be separated either from the nation they define or from each other. More importantly, however, these political/legal and cultural boundaries must also *necessarily* construct the idea of national personhood and identity by making explicit what is *not* considered “national.” As Li explains, “the emergence of the ‘self’ depends on the constitution of the ‘not-self’” in order to justify and validate the “self’s” very existence (6). This process simultaneously takes place both on the level of an individual’s “self” and on the scale of the national “identity.”

Furthermore, beyond a simple defining of the “not-self,” the “subject” also needs to separate itself from [...] the ‘abject’” (Li 6). This separation between “subject” and “abject” is a process of creating a power hierarchy, one which privileges the “self” (the subject) as an acting agent and relegates the abject to an inferior existence of being merely acted upon. A subject necessarily sees itself as having power over the abject through this separation—just as the term “acting agent” implies—and exists in an entirely different “classification” from its abject. Yet, in terms of the nation/state, the abject also must continue to exist within the borders of the “nation,” even as the subject necessarily struggles to remove it: the abject can *never* be completely destroyed as long as the subject desires to exist. The borders of the subject can only be defined by the presence of an abject. Therefore, the subject’s process of “separating” or “distancing” the abject must continue indefinitely, in prolonged and ever-changing struggles.

Because the subject is “formed” through its abject, we can reveal the shape of national identity or “belonging” by examining what is considered “alien.” While the contemporary, American neoliberal national subject claims to be universal, the divisions of what is “abject”

from it, in fact, seem to be nearly infinite.¹ Recent criticism and theory of minority literature—including Asian American literature—has turned a more discerning eye to this process of differentiation, developing what Leslie Bow describes as a “scholarship concerned with difference as a constitutive element in national construction, the ways in which American homogeneity depend on the projection of internal difference” (19). In *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion: Feminism, Sexual Politics, Asian American Women’s Literature*, Bow elucidates how these divisions of the “abject” cut across minority lines, continuing to act in the formation of perceived “homogeneity,” even *within* these groups, through the exact same method of “projection of internal difference.” In order to exist as a subject, even a “minority” group must have its own internal abject. Thus, the line of the “abject” is continually pushed further and further from the most-dominant national “subject” identity—for our purposes as dictated by *The Kappa Child*, best described as white, male, and “straight”²—creating an abundance of subordinate “subjects” in its wake. These subordinate subjects are then forced to compete against each other, due to the very nature of the hierarchy of unequal divisions—a hierarchy without which these groups would not even exist. In order for a border to exist, something must be on *both* sides of the border.

The “abject” status of these minorities as *political* or *legal* identity-groups—that is, “identities” which are defined by law or by other explicitly political actions—within America has been documented by many other theorists and historians. While this work may still be

¹ The idea of the “neoliberal” approach to national identity construction, as used here, can perhaps best be found in Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s critical text, *Racial Formations in the United States*, although many other scholars have elaborated on this idea.

² I use the term “straight” over “heterosexual” because the implications of “heterosexual” are more specifically defined than I would like. By using “sexuality” as a class, I refer not only to sexual orientation as defined by homo- vs. heterosexual, but also to any use of or identification with a sexuality which is considered non-normative. The kind of sexuality depicted by several of the characters in *The Kappa Child* is often referred to as “queer,” and “straight” seems a more applicable antithesis to that category than “heterosexual.” However, by using the quotations I am acknowledging problems inherent in the term “straight.”

(unfortunately) rather new and is certainly still far from exhausted, many excellent examinations of the relationship between political/legal actions and national “identity” have finally begun to emerge in the last few decades—including among scholars of Asian American Studies and Asian American Literature. This kind of examination deals primarily with what David Li refers to as the “institutional” aspect of national identity (inasmuch as it *can* be separated from the “imaginary”). However, I argue that there are still many aspects of the nature of “imaginary” boundaries which have yet to be critically explored and carefully examined—including the forms of myths and stories which contribute to the construction of these boundaries. Furthermore, this kind of scholarship is not only equally important as “institutional” studies to the understanding of “national” identity, but, due to the nature of our contemporary nation-state itself, is actually a field of *more* relevance and urgency.

Therefore, I will only mention a few historical issues of the “politically constructed” national identity which seem particularly relevant to the conceptualization of a shared experience between Asian Americans in the United States and Asian Canadians. My ultimate objective in discussing this “institutional” perspective is not simply to show that the two groups can potentially possess a sense of shared *history*, but rather, to indicate that this shared history has placed them into a common space in the *contemporary* world of the “neoliberal” societies of both the United States and Canada.

The most significant—and most obvious—connection of institutional border-construction between the two nations is a similar history of immigration laws and practices.³ Following the

³ Details sourced from the online versions of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* and *The Canadian Encyclopedia*: “Chinese Exclusion Act.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. 15 July 2012. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/112517/Chinese-Exclusion-Act>>

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“public” agitation against increasing numbers of Chinese Immigrants entering the United States through the newly-settled west coast, a number of state and federal laws were passed in the mid- to late-nineteenth century (including the Page Act of 1875 and the Burlingame Treaty of 1868), leading to the eventual passing of the “Chinese Exclusion Act.” This act, signed by Chester A. Arthur on May 6, 1882, followed revisions made in 1880 to the Burlingame Treaty and allowed the U.S. to suspend Chinese immigration nearly completely. In a similar—and clearly influenced—move, Canada passed the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885, which placed a head tax on all Chinese immigrants coming to Canada, forcing them to pay a fifty-dollar fee before entering the country—a nearly impossible fee for such groups at the time and which was then progressively raised over several years. Likewise, the United States later passed the Immigration Act of 1924—which restricted immigration even further, excluding all classes of Chinese immigrants and extending restrictions to other Asian immigrant groups—only a year after Canada passed a final version of its own Chinese Immigration Act in 1923. Canada’s 1923 Act also banned nearly all categories of Chinese immigrants, although this document was perhaps slightly less specific about other Asian nationalities than its American “twin” of the same time period.

The Immigration Act of 1924 was eventually “repealed” in the United States by the Magnuson Act (also known as the Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act of 1943), which allowed Chinese immigration to resume—though with a strict quota still in place. Large-scale Chinese (and Asian) immigration would not return to the United States until the passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965—a landmark act, which, in accordance with its name, became a fundamental turning point for conceptions of “nation” within the United States. Once

again, Canada passed a similar Act in 1947 (the Canadian Citizenship Act of 1946). And, similar to the United States, Chinese/Asian immigration to Canada did not significantly increase until after further immigration reforms in 1967, leading eventually to the passage of Canada's Immigration Act of 1976.

For my argument here, the most significant part of this (very) broad historical overview is actually the similar move by both nations to "liberalize" their immigration and national policy during a similar time period in the mid-twentieth century. The fact that both the United States and Canada (after such similar histories of "institutional" exclusion) turned at approximately the same time to a more "liberal" approach to national identity implies that similar changes in political and social conditions must have arisen within both countries at approximately the same time. Indeed, the "progressive" reforms in both countries during the late 1960s both marked and reflected an important shift in the *manner* of the perception defining between the national "self" and "other." David Li describes this "shift" within the U.S. in detail, asserting that

Since the end of World War II and the replacement of Asian exclusion legislation with the landmark Immigration Reform Act, we have witnessed the increasing availability of late/transnational capitalist structures [...] The fundamental shift in the mode of capital is directly responsible at once for the changes of citizenship and civil rights laws in the United States and for the onset of neo-orientalism in what I label period II, "Asian abjection." (5)

In addition to being a fundamentally economic model of definition (as opposed to a political one), these "late/transnational capitalist structures" also necessitate a more cultural or "imaginary" perspective of identity construction. Essentially, this shift away from the "institutional" practices of Asian exclusion both *causes* and *is caused by* the need for the nation-state to find new modes for the abjection of the "other" as it pursues a "new" economic and political agenda. Without as many (internal) "legal" borders to turn to, the definition of

American national identity since the 1960s has increasingly turned to the “imaginary” side of the process. Li further elaborates on this process, by which

In period II the regulatory function of the law in defining citizens and aliens is increasingly subsumed by mass media and public education. As apparatuses of social and cultural reproduction, mass media and systems of education continue to secure the common sense of Asians as aliens, thus precluding their sense of national entitlement and inhibiting their American actualization. (6)

Therefore, despite the change in legal/political practices, divisive identity construction within America did not *actually* disappear after the legal boundaries between “citizens” and “aliens” began to “disappear”—the process simply found another “face.” Furthermore, because of this essential shift *away* from “institutional” methods, the use of the “imaginary” to guard national identity has only become more imperative with time.

In *Reconstituting Americans: Liberal Multiculturalism and Identity Difference in Post-1960s Literature*, Megan Obourn also affirms that culture has become the dominant mode of identity construction within the United States and argues that literature has become one of the primary sites of this struggle. “Since the civil rights and other new social movements of the mid-to late twentieth century,” she asserts, “modes of US citizenship have shifted to incorporate a politicized understanding of social identities” (Obourn 1). Additionally, I suggest that Canadian identities have also undergone a similar process, as evidenced by the similar move to a more “liberal” political model of identity during the same time period as the shift within the United States. Thus, when Obourn deftly analyzes the importance of this shift of “politics” to the cultural/social domain for American *literary* scholars by utilizing Jacques Rancière’s assertion that “politics has to do with what kinds of representation can meaningfully function within a society” (10), I further contend that we can and should include aspects of a shared Canadian “political” aesthetic.

Literature is undeniably one such source and location of these “representations” in both nations. However, we must also remember that “politics is also where what counts as representation can be challenged, where what registers aesthetically shifts and thus changes the order of the visible and sayable” (Obourn 10). Thus, these aesthetics of “what counts” (including qualities of national identity) can be both reflected *by* and changed *through* literary endeavors. Literature is an important tool for examining the roles and ways in which identity divisions become manifest. However, literature can also be used as an aesthetic tool in its own right, as a way to consciously re-frame a reader’s way of observing these identity divisions:

Literature, claims Althusser, is not true art if it simply claims to directly represent through identity with or knowledge of the real. Rather art maintains a relation of difference, which gives us access to a “conceptual knowledge of the complex mechanisms which eventually produce [...] ‘lived experience.’” (Obourn 13)

It is precisely in cultural productions, such as literature, that such “complex mechanisms” increasingly do their work to produce the oppressive social conditions which “minorities” (or the abject) encounter as “lived experience.”

Although there are many ways in which cultural identity becomes “materially condensed,”⁴ literature is certainly among the most institutionalized methods within the nation. As Li points out, “mass media and systems of education” are critical “apparatuses of social and cultural reproduction,” and, as such, must necessarily be designed to recreate and “teach” the boundaries which mark the national “self” from the other (Li 6). The three most relevant “cultural” divisions for this essay—race, gender, and sexuality/sexual orientation—can still clearly be seen in conflict in both American and Canadian society, even after the landmark social

⁴ To borrow from Nicos Ar Poulantzas, and his theories on the State’s relationship to identity and class. His description of “material condensation” and the related concepts can best be found either in his *State, Power, Socialism*. (New Left Books, 1978) or in the recent collection *The Poulantzas Reader: Marxism, Law and the State* (ed. J. Martin. Verso, 2008).

rights movements of the 1960s and 70s. Therefore, major identity divisions such as race, gender, and sexuality must all be present within the “dominant” literary culture. Rachel Lee also insists that “cultural artifacts are never divorced from the way they are received—or made to mean—in accordance with the dominant ideologies of the time” (viii) in her book, *The Americas of Asian American Literature*. In terms of the “aesthetics” of literature, the more acceptable a “representation” of societal divisions is to the ideology of the dominant neoliberal subject, then the more cultural acceptance that representation will enjoy—thus reaffirming its importance and its difference from the abject. Because the continued conception of the dominant subject depends *precisely* on a narrative of difference between the subject and abject, any “representation” which perpetuates difference is useful in supporting the most-dominant subject—regardless of whether that representation is ostensibly coming from the position of the subject *or* of the abject. Thus, the post-1960s face of “imaginary” and “cultural” border construction not only *allows* for the literary representation of its internal abject groups, but actually increasingly *demand*s such representation. “We are now not so much at a loss for officially sanctioned narratives of minority America and Americans,” Obourn warns of American literature, “as we are at risk of creating celebratory but inflexible social narratives of racial, gender, ethnic, and sexual identity” (15). Inflexible and “officially sanctioned” categories of race, gender, and sexual identity are of critical importance to the maintenance of the dominant national identity (white, male, “straight”), which needs the abject to affirm its own superior position over subordinate groups.

However, the abject is also an infinitely receding horizon within subordinate groups. The subject of each subordinate group still desires to separate itself from its own internal abject: these internal divisions also depend on hierarchies of their own. Naturally, then, the conflicts between divisions not only are a key tool in “dominant” literature, but also are reflected in the literature of

any “subordinate” group, whose attempt to claim their own “national” identity must also be based on a definition of the self against the other. Therefore “minority” literature also becomes a site in which literary criticism may reveal and examine these power hierarchies both between and amongst different minority groups. As may be surmised from my discussion of “institutional” nationality in the form of immigration regulation, race often becomes the largest and most dominant “sub-group” of American cultural/national discourse, especially among those groups perceived as “immigrants” (such as Asian Americans). It is crucially important to note, however, that this is a hierarchy which is imposed *both* externally (that is, by the most-dominant subject) and internally (to sub-divide from the internal abject).

Patti Duncan eloquently describes this dual process of being divided and of self-division in *Tell This Silence: Asian American Women Writers and the Politics of Speech*. She first describes the external projection of the dominant Asian American minority-subject by the most-dominant subject:

People of mixed heritage fail to live up to the standard image implied by the term “Asian American.” In fact, according to Lisa Lowe, anyone who is not male, heterosexual, middle-class, of East Asian descent, and English-Speaking, does not qualify as “Asian American” in the sense that the term is often coded. Similarly, Elaine H. Kim writes that historically, there have not been many ways to *be* Asian American. (Duncan 6)

As a response to this external pressure by the dominant-subject, this specific perception of the Asian American subject (male, heterosexual, middle-class, of East Asian descent, and English-Speaking) is also simultaneously generated and perpetuated within the “Asian American” community. Duncan rightfully points out that, despite essentialist arguments from both external *and* internal groups about the “inalienable” properties of race, “race is shaped and transformed by both institutional, systemic forces and cultural, ideological tools. Indeed, racial formation

occurs at multiple levels, including the macro level [...] and the micro level of everyday experience” (64). She adds that, “furthermore, race structures and is structured by other social categories, including gender, class, and sexuality” (Duncan 66), and thus race cannot be isolated from those categories. Yet within the Asian American community, she argues, the perception persists that race is not only a somehow inherent and essential category of identity, but that race is in fact the *most* primary and dominant of national identity categories—above any (and all) other “social categories.”

Leslie Bow makes a similar claim in *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion: Feminism, Sexual Politics, Asian American Women’s Literature*, but elaborates further on what it means to challenge these internal divisions. Bow suggests that because the Asian American “community” (like all subordinate groups) is actively engaged in the process of creating national identity through self-definition, any attempt to subvert or question the borders of the dominant “Asian American” identity (as Duncan describes it above) becomes couched in the terms of “betrayal.” Bow defines such “betrayal” as “a breach of trust [whose] threat lies precisely in its rupturing the invisible cohesion of community” (Bow 3). Because the borders of a national subject-identity can only be defined by strictly separating from further subordinate abject-identities, “political loyalties are positioned as mutually exclusive; their multiplicity renders them suspect” (Bow 13). Bow argues that the greatest irony inherent in the concept of “betrayal” is that “the language of betrayal signals the artifice of naturalized racial, ethnic, or national belonging [and] becomes a potent *rhetorical* figuration deployed to signal how affiliations are formed and then consolidated” (Bow 11). In other words, to acknowledge that “betrayal”—the interpenetration of identity borders—is even *possible* already robs the subject of its power to claim that such divisions are essentially inherent within the group. Such an admission further “reveals how

mechanisms of affiliation are constituted” and opens the door for a critical and literary theory which “analyzes the stakes of [these mechanisms’] maintenance, particularly for women who transgress borders drawn by multiple loyalties” (Bow 3).

Furthermore, through such border-crossing scholarship (and literature), “‘betrayal’ can constitute subversion of another kind, a subversion of repressive authority that depends on upholding strict borders between groups and individual” (Bow 3). The maintenance of race as the dominant “identity” among those with multiple and interlocking subordinate identities is often couched in terms of political activism and political rights issues. Thus, many individuals within the minority group (often of the dominant sub-subject, though not always) insist that the racial group *necessarily* requires unity in order to gain any ground against the dominant national subject. However, the fallacy of this position requires a certain blindness to the fact that the racial group is only *one* subordinate division—and is as “artificial” and subject to redefinition as any other “minority” group.

Furthermore, as the task of border maintenance increasingly falls into the realm of the neoliberal “cultural” agenda, such political struggles are already rendered irrelevant in many ways. While there are, without a doubt, still uses for the affirmative assumption of the racial identity as both a political and cultural act, the risk of such assumption becomes that “claiming cultural unity in the face of oppression often results in the masking of differences among members of the cultural group” (Duncan 66). Because the neoliberal dominant subject only becomes *more* clearly defined in the face of its abject, such a “masking of differences” may have more deleterious effects within the minority group than positive effects outside it. Such a masking of differences does nothing to alter the dominant-subject’s position of superiority and only serves to solidify the abject status of the entire minority group—while oppressing the

internal abject under further power hierarchies. Additionally, Bow argues that “to represent maintaining diasporic loyalties as a resistant stance [...] may elide the pressures that ethnic groups themselves assert over individuals in the process of upholding group boundaries and self-definitions” (Bow 16), thus obscuring the internal mechanisms of hierarchical identity construction. Enforcing the dominance of racial identity over gender or sexuality is actually a tactic by which to further the competition between multiple “abject” groups—thus weakening their authority as part of the “national” identity and strengthening the position of the dominant subject as being unquestionably white, male, and “straight.” Only when this process is understood as being perpetuated by both the most-dominant subject *and* the subordinate subjects (within the abject) can the boundaries of identity truly begin to shift or become erased. This is because any process of division of identity within the abject—even with the intention of affirmation of the abject’s “self”—can only ultimately serve to affirm the identity of the dominant subject.

This process of division between the different “minority” categories must not only be recognized in the “real” world, but also examined in literature and in literary/cultural theory. It is too often the case that a work of literature either “avoids” the issue of dealing with multiple categories of abject identity or—worse—actively perpetuates the divisions between categories. I have already explained how this “replication” of the dominant-subject’s categories of division is a “political” act (perhaps both conscious and unconscious) for the minority group with which to reclaim some “subject” identity in the face of the dominant subject—at the expense of creating another abject category. As I have also explained, this replication of division in literature—regardless of the “source” of the literature as either subject or abject—is a tool which is easily turned to the maintenance of the dominant national identity, and a tool which is implemented by

mass media and systems of education. Yet although these replications are most readily found within the literature itself, literary and cultural critics are equally guilty of perpetuating these borders whenever these groups choose to focus exclusively on one aspect or “subject” of minority identity, especially at the risk of excluding or denigrating others. Thus, it is not only the “tool” of literature itself which must be intensely scrutinized and altered, but also the (perhaps surprisingly) powerful “tools” of literary criticism and theory.

Such a criticism of the literary community is at the heart of Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Anzaldúa examines the problem of competition between multiple “identities” and asks what can be done to change the ways of thinking about such issues not only on a personal level, but also on a societal level—including new approaches to literary and social theory. “The answer,” she finally asserts, “lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle” (102). Although we may still be limited by our “dualistic thinking” and are deeply “accustomed” to breaking identity groups into pieces, genuine attempts by both authors and critics to begin the “long struggle” within literature are still possible. One recent line of inquiry—transnationalism—shows significant promise in helping us to begin this struggle, although this movement is certainly not without problematic divisions of its own. The power of transnationalism, Kang asserts, is that the movement “establishes, dismantles, and mediates boundaries between non-majority cultures,” while “targeting such concerns as the divergent interests of immigrant versus native-born, and the threat of hegemony by better-established ethnic groups over smaller, less acknowledged ones” (Kang 29). Such actions have obvious possibility for challenging, and perhaps erasing, the dualistic thinking that Anzaldúa describes as associated with “boundaries” or borders. Similarly,

Rachel Lee argues that “better methodologies to emphasize ‘Asia’ and ‘America’ as interlinked” ought to recognize that “the separation of the two identities ‘Asian’ and ‘American’ represents a false choice” (6). Such an approach should also simultaneously develop a more flexible approach to understanding the “reactionary” nature of behavior on *both* sides of a border, by remembering that “the imagining of America is simultaneously the imagining of Asia, and vice versa, with the two sometimes posed in opposition and at other times overlapping” (Lee 6).

However, as Lee indicates with her phrase “the *imagining* of America/Asia,” it is also critical for such theories not to overfocus on the “geopolitical” borders (although these borders are still unquestionably important to political boundaries). We must also keep in mind the fundamental shift in American/Canadian *internal* border control from the “institutional” method to the “imaginary,” a move which has vital repercussions for any “transnational” studies. An imaginary or cultural definition of borders allows for more “complicated” and often paradoxical definitions of national identity: a “transnational” identity can exist within a single institutional/political nation’s borders, while a unified “national” identity may cross political borders. Kang also addresses this idea of the “imaginary” sphere of transnationalism in her essay, saying, “The expression of the transnational can be intensely localized and personal [...] or it can be as it is in Goto’s work where the ‘trans’ implies a movement across, not just spatially but through more abstract categories like ontological spheres, cultural orientations, and metaphysical planes” (Kang 29). Such an approach—not only to the construction of new “national” literature (as in Goto’s case), but also to thinking critically about literature and its methodologies of reproducing/constructing national identity—can open the door to a more fluid understanding of all identity borders as “imaginary” cultural constructions. As Bow suggests, “the processes of imaginary identification are most perceptible when the bonds that these identifications forge are

traumatically severed” (Bow 177). Becoming a “betrayers” and violating the boundaries of national identity through transnational approaches is one way of achieving this goal. Such an act is one powerful way to critically address the realm of the imaginary. However, “the problem,” Lee cautions,

becomes how to acknowledge that the nation is a suspect category in a transnational age, while not losing sight of issues regarding gender and sexuality. While these imperatives are not inherently incompatible they are often ranked in importance, with gender and sexual oppressions configured as a subset of the more salient and widely appealing subject of postnationality. (84)

Even a transnational approach to analyzing the “imaginary” construction of identity borders can still fall into the dangerous trap of dividing subordinate groups into a secondary hierarchy. Once again, race—or its more sinister neoliberal alternative, “ethnicity”—may become the dominant category of distinction. Furthermore, when utilized by the dominant-subject, a neoliberal transnational movement can be just as oppressive as (if not more oppressive than) a purely “national” movement.

However, Obourn suggests that even within “American national” literary theory, “texts that illuminate the paradoxical demands of contemporary liberal multicultural models of identity and examine alternatives to them” (2) should still be examined as models of ways of rethinking these divisions. She further argues that “[such] texts suggest that liberal multicultural modes of citizenship limit political and artistic representations by reifying individual and group identities and that new ways of narrating and articulating citizenship identity are needed” (Obourn 2). In order to “articulate” these identities, I argue, the “new ways of narrating” must essentially undermine the authority of the contemporary literary culture which allows literature to do the work of the dominant subject and which actively and passively uses the “imaginary” as a valid means of production of identity borders. This “undermining” entails a fundamental questioning

of the borders themselves and how they are defined. More significantly, this new approach also requires an examination and challenge of existing literature—in other words, a betrayal. As a part of the “apparatuses of social and cultural reproduction” of “mass media and systems of education” which Li describes, most of the currently “dominant” literature and literary theory must necessarily and inherently be fulfilling the needs of the dominant national subject.

It is an unavoidable paradox of our current society that “speech from the margins must be legitimized by cultural norms in order to obtain a forum” (Bow 171). Thus, every literary/cultural work which is accepted by cultural norms is suspect in some way of being a tool of the dominant subject used to maintain its power over the abject. In order to carry on the increasingly “cultural” task of maintaining national identity, the dominant subject *must* generate and perpetuate only those cultural ideas which are beneficial to validating its existence. This validation process between “culture” and the oppressive hierarchy of the dominant subject is, in fact, a powerful cycle by which *one* continually reifies the *other's* existence. Culture, as the representation of what is “sayable,” presents the image of the dominant identity. The dominant identity simultaneously uses the hierarchy of power to enforce the boundaries of what *is* sayable—defining the borders of betrayed and betrayer, or of the sacred and profane within a culture.

Few realms of cultural identity are considered as sacred as the realm of the “myth.” The myth or cultural “narrative” is considered the very “story” of the people it theoretically represents. (Into this category I also sacrilegiously add “religious myth.”) Myth is considered to be one of the crucial pillars of a particular culture’s identity. Therefore, it must also be one of the pillars of *national* identity. Yet despite the clear and obvious connection of these cultural “apparatuses” to a political identity, the popular conception of myth is generally that myths are

somehow outside or beyond the realm of the “institutional.” Yet paradoxically, the popular conception also remains that myth is indeed an “imaginary” tool, but that it is a tool which can only come out of some pre-existing “essential” identity—not a tool which can precede “identity” itself. Thus, the perception is that myth can (and should) indeed be used as a metric for judging an individual’s or identity-group’s status of “belonging” to a dominant cultural identity, but simultaneously, that no single individual or identity-group is responsible for generating or perpetuating this myth for use specifically as a metric of defining “belonging.”

I argue that this incredible rhetoric of double-think is actually the *greatest* triumph of the neoliberal method of oppressive “imaginary” identity border-construction in contemporary American society: that American society can acknowledge and even reaffirm that culture is a tool which defines identity, while simultaneously believing that culture is a separate and “essential” process which is somehow generated from an “essential” cultural identity. This paradox effectively confuses the issue of the “ownership” of myth and culture by placing myth into some kind of timeless and “apolitical” space—a space which is supposedly independent from the “reality” of everyday life—even as individuals *consciously* use it to define the identity-boundaries of their own “lived experiences.” Anzaldúa describes the impact of culture on the political experience of both identity-groups and individuals quite clearly, asserting that “Culture forms our beliefs. We perceive the version of reality that it communicates. Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through the culture” (Anzaldúa 38). Myths create “political” realities. Yet the opposite claim—that political realities create myths—is not considered “sayable” within the culture. Therefore, the oppressive “dominant paradigms” of these myths are allowed to exist as “unquestionable” legacies.

At this point, we finally return to Hiromi Goto's questioning of the "legacy" of myth and story. Who does own the stories? If, as Anzaldúa asserts, it is "dominant paradigms" and "predefined concepts" which are shaping our very "version of reality" of national identity, then who has made these concepts? Or, more accurately, who *is* making them? I have already argued that all forms of "imaginary" cultural constructions require the approval of the dominant subject-identity, and myths and stories clearly fall into that category. Therefore, it must be the case that the dominant subject of American society both maintains and constantly *sustains* ownership of myths and those "cultural stories" which are considered "important" by the "apparatuses of social and cultural reproduction" such as "mass media and systems of education" (Li 6). Anzaldúa's simple response to this question is: "Culture is made by those in power—men" (38). To this answer, I would also add (in this instance) "white" and "straight" men. Thus, cultural stories and myths are an indispensable tool in the contemporary neoliberal strategy of border construction and management by the dominant subject-identity. Cultural stories and myth also make an exceptionally *good* tool, thanks to the paradoxical perception of myth as I have laid out here, a perception which renders their usage nearly invisible.

In fact, it is not only useful, but actually *crucial* to the use of myth as "identity-border" that these myths be perceived as "eternal," "unchanging," "essentialist," etc. This "timeless" quality of myth need not necessarily be true—in fact, myths have obviously changed and must *continue* to change in order to suit the needs of those in power, as social conditions change. However, the popular perception *must* be that these cultural "stories" are enduring. The borders must be perceived as inviolable and inflexible. "National identity" must be essentially impervious to "betrayal." This perception also prevents any "alien" or "abject" additions to the nation from claiming the right to contribute to or otherwise alter vital "cultural stories."

Otherwise, myth would lose its value as an “essential” definition of a national identity-group. (Once again, additions and alterations are indeed frequently made to myths, but even the historical *conception* of the alteration is immediately erased through this continued perception of myth as “predefined” and timeless.)

At the same time, the popular cultural perception must also be that an *individual* (even a “non-alien”) cannot change a myth—that is, that she has neither the capacity nor the authority. Put simply, *a person* cannot make a myth—*a people* build myths. “Myth” can only exist on the highest level of culture, as a group representation. The “stories” that an individual tells are not valid entries into the realms of mass media and education on the level of identity-defining myths—these stories do not meet accepted standards for either “aesthetic” or national representations of “what is sayable” (Obourn 10). Only “culture” as a general entity—as defined by the dominant identity-group—can “generate” (as opposed to “create,” which carries an unwanted connotation of consciousness) myth.

Thus, the nature of myth is, itself, also a cultural myth: not only in the popular use of the word, but also literally as a crucial story which reflects and shapes cultural beliefs. By maintaining this primary myth within American culture, all *other* myths remain firmly in the authority of the dominant subject. Thus, these “secondary” myths are able to properly function as a method of defining the very divisions and hierarchies which keep this dominant subject in power. At this point in my argument, it seems almost redundant to assert that myths must also contain fundamental social messages which perpetuate the divisions of the subject from the national subject—including race, gender, and sexuality. But it is worth re-stating that the tool of cultural myth—as used to define a subject against its abject—can *also* be used by a subordinate subject to separate itself from *other* categories of abjection. Moreover, I assert that *any* use of a

cultural myth by a minority group is necessarily an act meant to define identity against an “other.” This “self-definition” can include both the cultural myths of the dominant “national” culture *and* the myths of a minority (or immigrant) “national” culture, as utilized by the subordinate-subject of that group.

In this final context, the questions of Goto’s narrator become both critically important and inherently complex. The opening quotation of this chapter comes from the narrator of *The Kappa Child* as a response to a story ostensibly “told” by the unnamed protagonist’s father. The father—who habitually abuses his wife and four daughters, both emotionally and physically—will occasionally “reward” his children with stories about his homeland, but only if they are “good enough” and follow his unpredictable expectations (Goto 46). His favorite stories to tell seem to revolve around the Japanese myth of the Kappa, a “mythical” creature. Yet immediately after the narrator asks the enduring question, “were we good enough,” when it looks like the father might indulge in a story, the actual text of the book breaks and a different “voice” is inserted (46-47). A story about *a* kappa is told on the *next* page—a separate page, completely in italic text and from a third-person perspective (as opposed to the highly localized first-person perspective of the narrator’s voice). The story itself begins with the somewhat cryptic opening, “There is a story” (47). The narrator’s normal voice then resumes on the *following* page after the story ends, with the apparent effect that time has passed in the timeline of the narrator’s account of events, and that *a* story (at least similar in some ways to the one the narrator is discussing, because of the narrator’s reference to a kappa and a human—both of which are in the textual story) has been told to her.

But who, exactly, is telling this story, the one that we actually read? Is it even the “same” story as the one which the young narrator listened to on that particular day? Goto offers no direct

answers. The quality of the voice possesses a poetic aspect: so if it is the father, Hideo, then this passage represents a side of him which he does not show in any other context. Such an interpretation is possible—as is the interpretation that the kappa/kappa child is telling its own story, or that it is merely Goto-as-author’s interpretation of the myth. But most importantly, the question of “telling” immediately invokes the question of “owning.” Does the “speaker” have the correct “authority” to claim ownership of the story on a cultural level? Furthermore, any implied speaker of the story must also necessarily take over the *burden* of ownership, with all of the ramifications for border-construction which comes with a speaking “subject” (as opposed to a silent “object”). In this light, it seems vital to properly understand the identity of the speaker in order to understand the significance of this story about *a* kappa, as well as Goto’s intention for *The Kappa Child* as a story itself.

However, it is also central to the message of the book that the idea of “kappa” is never precisely defined during the main text of the novel. Goto instead includes several different perspectives from which the reader is meant to form her own, hybrid, definition of what a kappa “is.” Only one perspective is from a few “stories” about kappa told from a detached third-person perspective (such as the example above). Another perspective is the impressions of “kappa” from the narrator’s immigrant parents, as told from her perspective of their behavior (judged both from their tales of their Japanese past and from their reactions to the mysterious footprints which finally arrive in their Canadian rice field). We also see the first-person (main) narrator’s apparent temporary involvement with and impressions of a kappa “stranger” in the city (which leads to the creation of the “kappa child” which may or may not be developing inside of her). Lastly, we have the mysterious first-person textual interludes of what appears to be the voice of the “kappa child” itself. These several perspectives do not completely match up—the different visions of the

kappa sometimes overlap and sometimes diverge wildly. Furthermore, accounts of the features of a kappa are not even necessarily internally consistent within one single perspective.

Lest the reader miss the significance of this lack of an “authoritative” definition of what a “kappa” *is*, Goto additionally forces the reader to juxtapose her own hybrid impression (as formed from the different above perspectives, plus her own) against a dictionary-style definition of “kappa” at the very end of the book. While the penultimate page of the text consists of only three lines—“*I am a creature of the water. I am a kappa child. Come, embrace me*” (276)—the final page of the text is an entry credited to “The Aun Society Field Guide to Folk Creatures,” which includes categories of description about the kappa such as “description,” “breeding,” “habitat,” and “range” (277). Such dry, mundane details seem comically trivial after the complex and emotional experience of the book preceding them—these details certainly fail to capture the real experience of *The Kappa Child*, despite the fact that they appear to come from a position of relative “authority.”

I therefore suggest another possible interpretation of the kappa story which I discussed earlier: that the story tells itself, or rather, that it simply *exists*. Using this interpretation, the textual story is not and cannot be (mis)taken by the reader for being the same story as the “father’s” story: this interpretation disavows that the conception of the hybrid kappa of this book can be “owned,” especially by a dominant-subject, and therefore used to delineate (oppressive) identity-borders. Such a presentation of myth is an ironic reversal of the popular conception that myths only exist outside individual “lived experience,” by taking this (mis)perception literally and displacing the “story” from the main narrative. This use of myth also subverts the idea of cultural authority, while simultaneously validating the reader’s own right to construct a personal

“myth” by allowing the reader to arrange the hybrid perspectives of the kappa for herself, thus creating a new perspective.

Because Goto is consciously shining a light directly on the ability of myths to shape identity, the narrator’s questions following the “story” of the kappa take on new meaning. In fact, these are precisely the questions that Goto wants us—as readers and as members of contemporary American/Canadian society—to ask not only of her book, but also of the constructions of “cultural” myth which we constantly encounter each and every day. To even *ask* these questions challenges the “unquestionable” and “unchallengeable” “dominant paradigms” of myth which Anzaldúa describes (Anzaldúa 38). “I *wondered* about Dad’s story” (Goto 48), the child-version of the narrator remarks—a dangerous questioning which could in itself be read as a “betrayal” of the dominant-subject, according to Bow’s description. By doing anything other than passively accepting the paradigms which are being transmitted to her through culture, she has breached the seemingly inviolable identity-borders both contained within the story and those in the real world, the world of her father as “speaker.” She then goes on to question several important details of the story that has been passed on to her: “Was the human a girl or a boy? What about the kappa? Did Dad make up the story or did someone tell him?” (48)

Each one of these questions opens the door to a fundamental re-evaluation of national identity-construction and -definition. As Kang remarks, “[such] questions illuminate the fault-lines running across family, chronology, and race” (32). In *The Kappa Child*, it is certainly important that “the text compels readers to evaluate the adaptations made by the second generation” of Japanese immigrants such as the narrator, who “[espouse] such Confucian values as obedience, politeness, deference to tradition, loyalty, discipline, and conformity,” values which “have been passed down through generations but with varying degrees of fidelity” (Kang

28). However, it is more significant that the book fundamentally implicates *both* those very values *and* the vehicles of transmission that allow these values to persist and which even validate their existence. Goto is explicitly criticizing the unquestioned transmission of cultural myths as “pure” objects which cannot be examined or altered—especially not by “subordinate” groups such as “colored” races, women, “queers,” or children.

Each of these subordinate groups—who are consistently addressed throughout the book—is implicitly addressed here by the narrator’s questions. As I have indicated, the questions about the kappa and the father initiate an interrogation of “ownership” of the story. Does Dad own the story? Does he have the right to change it? And even if *he* does, do *I*? The narrator’s sensitivity to the issue of whether the “human was a girl or boy” in the story indicates that she is already keenly aware that gender is a division of identity which is very significant to her own “lived experience.” From her perspective, the perspective of the abject “female,” such definitions mark her daily as inferior—not only within the dominant Canadian culture, but also within the patriarchal, abusive home of her racially “minority” family and father. Considering the ambiguously “queer” nature of her sexuality as adult (she is definitely attracted to women, possibly to men, and has some kind of “intimate relations” at one point with a kappa), this question can also open into the regulation of sexuality through such myths. Without “proper” gender cues, she is left uncertain of what the appropriate reaction to this human should be. Association with a similarly-abject individual? Admiration for a subject which is superior to herself? Or denigration of the inferior abject? Furthermore, is this an expected and accepted sexual partner or not?

Interestingly, the father’s apparent choice (not Goto’s choice) to withhold such information simultaneously reinforces both his own “blindness” to a status of being superior to

other groups, as well as the very real strength of that superiority. It may not “matter” to *him* whether the human is “a girl or a boy,” but the issue clearly *does* matter to the narrator.

Furthermore, as a representation of the dominant-subject of the family, the father implicitly (and explicitly) *expects* such definitions to matter to her. For her, resolving such questions of identity-borders is fundamental to her daily survival as an oppressed “abject.” Although her father may feel the oppression of his position as a racial minority, he can still enjoy the privilege of his position over those in other abject groups—such as women, “queers,” and children. (Which constitute, unfortunately, the rest of his family.)

One such moment of privilege comes after an argument with a white Canadian motel-owner, on the first night that the family arrives in their new hometown in dusty Alberta (having moved from coastal British Columbia). When Hideo asserts that he “[lives] here now,” the owner appears apologetic and replies, “I always thought it was terrible what was done to you people” (70). The father, sensing the challenge to his own status within the dominant national identity, explodes with anger and shouts “We are CANADIAN!” (70) When his wife, sensitive to family embarrassment, meekly attempts to calm him after this outburst by saying that there is “no need,” Hideo publicly slaps his wife (70). No one, including the other (white) man, does or says anything to reproach Hideo for blatantly abusing his wife—affirming the unequal divisions between both race and gender. In this moment, his superiority over others (male over female) goes unquestioned and is even reaffirmed by the most dominant subject in the environment. Although the border between himself and the dominant national identity has ultimately been reinforced, the father has still effectively distanced himself from the “abject” of his “minority” group and has at least asserted his status as a subordinate-subject, thus reclaiming some sense of “self.”

While the divisions of identity-characteristics in the father (as well as the mother) are fairly clear—male, “Asian,” straight—the categorization of the narrator is actually highly ambiguous and is somewhat hybrid. The completely unnamed narrator is, in fact, never explicitly referred to by a specific gender. Gendered pronouns are also never used to refer to the narrator. I have been referring to the narrator in my text as “female” because I believe that there are more textual clues⁵ to lead to that conclusion than to almost any other, but Goto obviously wants the narrator to remain at least partially ambiguous in that regard. “Her” current age and most physical statistics are also not given (unlike the authoritative kappa definition at the end of the book). Thus, like her own response to the “kappa story,” the narrator-as-character raises more questions than she ever answers. In this regard, too, Goto challenges the ability of literature/culture to delineate “borders” of identity along various divisive lines: both by refusing to *give* any clear borders, while also revealing just how arbitrary the divisions in our current society really are. Thus, *The Kappa Child* stands as both a criticism of works which *do* participate in the project of “defining” the national identity of the dominant identity, as well as an example of a possible technique to refute and diffuse the neoliberal “cultural” project.

Like the narrator, the kappa itself is also an ambiguous and hybrid concept that refuses a simple understanding or easy answers. As Kang describes:

The myth of the kappa, neither indigenous to Canada nor to North America, informs Goto’s entire novel; it is a trope of transnational possibility, of Asian experience embodied in the supernatural, mythic, and hyper-real—but re-vivified in the local and almost anti-cosmopolitan environment of a small, arid prairie town. (29)

⁵ Such clues include the fact that the other three siblings are clearly female, a lack of (extreme) reaction by the narrator’s doctor or two (also female) friends to the idea of the narrator’s possible pregnancy, a certain symmetry with her (possibly queer and definitely male) childhood friend who exhibits some reversal of expected gender traits, the sexual psychodynamics of the conflict of the narrator’s feelings for her mother and father, and a clear parallel to Laura Ingalls within the book.

The kappa—especially as reinvented by Goto—is, in many ways, the perfect symbol of a new “hybrid” approach to national identity construction, an approach of the kind which Anzaldúa describes. A “person of questionable gender and racial origin” (Goto 121), the kappa seems to possess both “masculine” and “feminine” qualities. Although the narrator’s version of the kappa, as a “manifest” being, does engage in some sort of vaguely sexual behavior with her (namely, sumo wrestling), this action is hardly a clear indication of the kappa’s sexuality—not to mention that inter-species relations would seem to be far from “straight.” (At one point, the kappa even remarks, “Guy, girl, so what? [...] Do I look like someone who cares?” [Goto 119]) Appearing in a roughly human form, the kappa (whom the narrator refers to as “The Stranger”) nonetheless appears “alien,” being actually “greenish” (122) and having suspiciously “hairless and moist” (122) skin and a “complexion that [looks] almost olive” (88), which also make its human “race” impossible to determine.

Kang also adds that “because its habitat rests ‘in the borders between natural and human environments,’ (Goto 277) the kappa is an overall hybrid, inhabiting multiple spaces and yet avoiding the stigma associated with typical monsters and aliens as threatening interlopers in the human world” (30) and posits that “the kappa’s presence acts (not unlike water) as a solvent, bringing together disparate ethnicities” (31). However, the kappa is such a useful example of a “hybrid” myth capable of disassembling identity-border hierarchies not simply because of its ability to mix national and racial identities—its ability to adapt to the new location of Alberta, much like the narrator—but also because the kappa is able to embody several conflicting “identity divisions” at once. Moreover, the kappa embodies this “multiplicity” of identities in a manner which does not really privilege any one “identity” over another.

Such an approach offers a possible solution to the continued problems with identity-divisions that are often faced within other “transnational” approaches—as discussed earlier—by creating a “hybrid transnationalism” which rejects *all* forms of border-distinction. So while the kappa *should* be considered “as a response to the gendered and racial hierarchy of the strong Asian father and submissive Asian mother,” in which “the kappa emerges as genderless and non-parental,” the kappa can also simultaneously be “gender-ambiguous and even ‘queer’” (Kang 32). The kappa is a true alien to its environment and culture, yet it is somehow familiar: it bears a resemblance without being a replication. The kappa is not *actually* Asian any more than it is *actually* female, or *actually* “queer.” In this way, while “the kappa’s mythic and ontological ambiguities mirror the non-conformity of Goto’s androgynous protagonist” (32), the narrator serves crucially as a figure to remind the reader that these myths and identity-borders *do* take on a real and oppressive “lived experience” for individuals in contemporary American/Canadian society. Thus, the kappa is still recognizable to our “real” world as a subversion of those divisions—and the myths which support the divisions—without actually replicating them.

The final step in Goto’s erasure of these divisions is to be certain that myth-construction (as neoliberal hierarchical production) has been deconstructed on *both* sides of the issue: the subject *and* the abject. With her deconstruction/reconstruction of the kappa, Goto focuses mainly on addressing the limits (and possibilities) of the use of myths by an *abject* group. (The narrator’s immigrant family clings to the myth of the kappa even in the face of their own oppression.) While the kappa is the only significant example of “Japanese” myth in the book (besides some oblique references to “Eastern” myths and religion), its hugely significant influence on the “imaginary” of the text stacks the myth effectively as a counterweight to Goto’s more frequent use of Western/American/Canadian (or *subject*) myth and popular “culture.” In

contrast, there are *staggering* numbers of casual references in *The Kappa Child* to various well-known (and some lesser-known) “classical” myths, cultural stories, Canadian/American mass media products, and even “Western” religion. While some of these “influences” are blatantly refuted by the text, others are openly embraced—and some are modified or altered in order to create a more “hybrid” version. One significant and poignant example of this last category comes during the climax of the narrator’s relationship with her father: when she goes back to confront him after her mother’s departure (she has, it turns out, left to speak out on tour about her experiences as an immigrant victim of alien abduction in Canada), the enraged narrator ends up physically beating her father. After many years, the tables have finally turned—but now she runs the ultimate risk of crossing the border from “oppressed” into “oppressor,” from abject into subject. Following her difficult act of self-restraint—just before doing any real harm—she pointedly asks, “And if Grendel was aged-frail by the time Beowulf caught him, would the hero have shown compassion?” (261) The significance of this “literary” act of comparison should not be lost: it is tantamount to a “betrayal” of both Asian *and* Western-dominant culture. Simply daring to cast herself (a “queer,” Asian woman) in the role of one of the dominant culture’s (white, male, “straight”) most sacred roles is an important border violation and a deliberate act of both defiance and acceptance.

However, Goto’s most condemnatory deconstruction of the dominance of the “subject-myth” (a myth that is about and is utilized by the dominant subject) is saved for her appropriation of Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House on the Prairie*. Second only to the kappa in “imaginary” importance within the novel, Wilder’s version of American prairie life is a constant source both of and for derision within *The Kappa Child*. As a child, the narrator is completely obsessed with the book, even going so far as carrying it constantly inside her shirt, so as to have

the book close for consultation at all times. She looks to *this* book to answer any and all questions about her new life on the prairie and even life in general. However, as may be expected, *Little House on the Prairie* utterly fails to provide satisfactory—or even accurate—answers.

Goto critically tears apart the hierarchy of divisions that hold together this widely-accepted and widely-taught “children’s classic,” exposing blatant racism and sexism in the process. For example, when the narrator is confronted with her new neighbor—a boy of her own age, who is of “mixed” race—she immediately looks to *Little House* for a point of comparison, attempting to understand the complicated nature of his “racial” identity as being part “Japanese” and part “Indian.” When looking at her guidebook in this context, she suddenly “realizes First Nations peoples were unproblematically constructed as enemies by the author, Laura Ingalls Wilder, [who is] the intertextual foil to the narrator’s own frontier-dwelling, four-daughter family” (Kang 32). Yet Gerald, her new neighbor, does not seem to be her “enemy.” The subject-myth of *Little House* has not prepared the narrator for the reality of her own situation. Initially, she is completely unable to process reality in the face of the myths she has been given: reality is revealed not to be the black-and-white, subject-object relationships of the dominant cultural myths. “Gerald Nakamura Coming Singer,” she says,

was incomprehensible. In Laura Ingalls’ book-world, Indians meant teepees on the prairies and that was that. Indians didn’t equal someone who was both Blood and Japanese Canadian. Indians certainly never meant someone who lived next door on a chicken farm. (188)

Later, the narrator even notices that her own father “could pass for an Indian” (43). Once the subject-myth has been questioned, the narrator begins to notice similarities across borders, as well as becoming more aware of her own object state within the national identity. Of course,

Goto's further implication, through analysis of the similarities between the First Nations people and Asian Canadians, is that the Ingalls family would also likely have been in favor of the exclusion of Asian immigrants—had they only known about it.

Just as *Little House* does not adequately prepare her for her own (or others') state of racial abjection within the nation, the book likewise does not prepare her for the reality of oppressive gender or sexual divisions. When one of her sisters questions (of *Little House*), "Did Laura's pa hit the ma?" the narrator's immediate reaction is a vehement, "He never hit her! Ever! He played the violin!" (43) However, the question opens up a wider field of inquiry, causing her to eventually notice something she "hadn't noticed before"—that "Ma seemed so much weaker than [she'd] imagined" (43). And after hearing her parents having sex in the same hotel room (possibly an act of dubious consent on the part of their mother), the narrator later speculates that "Laura and her sister must have" also had a similar experience, although "[Laura] never mentioned it in the book" (129). Eventually, these failures of "imagination" and the burden of her own oppression force the young narrator to burn, in a fit of despair and anger, the book she cannot live by—although it will still be many years before she learns that she can create her "own" story.

Although clearly commenting on the nature of dominant-subject myth as perpetrator of social inequity, Goto ultimately seems to blame Laura Ingalls Wilder "personally" more for Wilder's "deviation from reality" than for the totality of the hierarchy itself. After all, *The Kappa Child* asks, wasn't "Laura" *actually* a girl who was oppressed by her own forms of abject-identity, much like the narrator is? Then why should she have changed the perspective within her own "auto-biography" to fit the dominant subject's agenda? This conflict—between the reality of Wilder as an abject entity and the subject-myth that her book has become—mirrors the narrator's

(and Goto-as-author's) struggles within *The Kappa Child*. Thus, as the adult narrator's crisis of identity is finally coming to a climax, an avatar of the "real" Laura Ingalls steps out of a TV in order to pass on a message to the narrator. Somewhat ironically, this message is vital to *The Kappa Child*'s overall message, despite Goto's complete rejection of the divisive hierarchies of *Little House*:

"They changed the book, you know," [Laura] croaks.

I shake my head.

"They did! They got it all wrong." Laura Ingalls' lips are bitter. [...] "And I can't do anything about it!" Laura is fierce, heat exudes from her skin and I can't pull back from the intensity.

Laura stares at me and I'm afraid to blink.

"You can, though," she nods.

"You can." (252)

Laura's critical message to the narrator is both a warning and a promise: it is Goto's way of telling *us* that we should be wary of the power that the dominant subject wields over all myths and stories (including *her* own book) and conscious of the deleterious effect that these myths can have on our own identity. But Laura's message is also a gift, an opening of a door into a new world—a world in which the oppressive subject-object process of division might be altered.

With this final message from her "double," Laura, the narrator is able to begin embracing a new "hybrid" national/transnational identity which is able—like the kappa, another "double"—to "evolve" cultural myths. She must evolve the myths that she received from both the dominant subject *and* from her immigrant "abject" culture. This hybridity, which is similar in many ways to Anzaldúa's conception of a "mestiza consciousness," allows the protagonist to finally begin healing her own childhood wounds and the damages consistently accumulated from the various

oppressions of her multiple abject-identities. Only through a *fusion* of these multiple and “conflicting” identities—which can only be achieved through a critical process which involves analyzing the myths on both “sides” of the subject-object nationality divide—is she able to build a symbolic “new” life: that of the kappa child.

As Kang asserts, “the kappa, alongside the narrator, suggests a generative site between such traditional binaries as male/female, native/ transplanted Asian, and myth/reality” (33). In addition to the figure of the kappa, *The Kappa Child* serves as an excellent model for future literary efforts to deconstruct the borders between different nationalities *precisely* because “the text is not, however, a conventional meditation on liminality, or the threshold state between state of being and another” (Kang 33). Such a “conventional meditation” risks ultimately *reinforcing* the idea of borders. In contrast, the blending within *The Kappa Child* is effectively achieved “because the kappa child is a part of and yet *apart from* its presumptive human parent” (33), a move that defies binary thinking without simply reversing its positions. Only by integrating the “abject” of myth and culture into the subject can we hope to alter the hierarchies of “oppressive” national identity. (Although this integration should be handled in a manner that must, at least for now, still insist on some difference as a concession to the very real and unequal contemporary “lived experience” of minorities.) However, only by concomitantly doing the reverse—accepting some parts of the dominant subject-culture into the abject—can we achieve true balance. Obourn cautions that this twofold integration is neither an easy nor completely “safe” process:

The (re)entrance of these histories and complexities into contemporary stories of Americanness do not simply produce the aesthetic effect of the uncanny, they threaten actual trauma—at least to the extent that they present experiences that have no cultural narratives through which to integrate them into a broader understanding of American identity. (Obourn 15)

Yet this process of “(re)entrance” must be begun if the “words” of the abject are ever to become truly “sayable.”

During this process of integration, however, we must also remain vigilant not to (re)create further divisions among “abject” groups or to invalidate those individuals who exist along multiple “borders” by forcing them to “choose” the hierarchy of those identities. I return again to Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* as a guide to describe this struggle of the “hybrid” identity:

We are a synergy of two cultures [...] [but] I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. [...] One day the inner struggle will cease and a true integration will take place. (85)

While this “borderland conflict”—including the cultural struggle of the myth—has endangered her very concept of “self” at many points, Anzaldúa still offers one particular example of hope from the “borderlands:” the mythical image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Anzaldúa claims that the power and promise of Guadalupe is that she “unites people of different races, religions, languages” (52). Of this “hybrid myth,” she says that “[Guadalupe], like my race, is a synthesis of the old world and the new, of the religion and culture of the two races in our psyche, the conquerors and the conquered” (52). Guadalupe “betrays” her origins and somehow becomes sacred through her very profanity. A world in which this kind of myth becomes the “dominant” form (always allowing for the myth to continue to change, of course) will allow those of hybrid identities, like Anzaldúa, to finally make themselves heard. “I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing,” writes Anzaldúa. “I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white” (Anzaldúa 81). Like the protagonist at the end of *The Kappa Child*, Anzaldúa has risked the threat of

“negation” of identity which comes with betraying the borders between multiple categories, but has ultimately gained something perhaps greater than the subject-adjacent “zero-sum” of her parts.

What makes this particular transnational, hybrid model of dealing with “myth” (as found in Goto’s book) the *best* model for the goal of border erasure is Goto’s careful consideration of the current system of neoliberal, oppressive identity-construction which currently thrives in contemporary American society (both United States and Canada). No critical or theoretical approach to undoing the oppressive hierarchies of the “dominant national subject” can be truly effective without taking into account the real conditions of this “political” system as a dominant paradigm. As evidenced by her extensive manipulation of cultural myth, Goto correctly concludes that the arena of “national definition” has shifted away from the “institutional” and into the realm of the “imaginary.” The “unchallenged” myth of the unchanging myth *must* be betrayed. Thus Goto both targets myth as the primary enemy, while also promoting myth as the crucial hero.

As Anzaldúa asserts, “The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. [...] Nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads” (109). The cultural imaginary—the realm of myth and story—is the new battlefield on which we must fight the oppressive hierarchies of the dominant subject, even as subject-myths attempt to shape our “visions of reality.” But in order to live a new reality, we must first conceive it in myth, the “images in our heads.” Thus, to use the pen is far mightier than using no sword: “I write the myths in me, the myths I am, the myths I want to become. The word, the image and the feeling have a palpable energy, a kind of power” (Anzaldúa 93). On the “imaginary” battlefield, our new weapons are hybrid myths—and the best defense really *is* a good offense.

CHAPTER 2

“THE HONOR OF THE SACRED SHEEP”:

ILLUMINATING THE POWERFUL USE OF MYTH AS AN OPPRESSIVE TOOL
THROUGH DANI KOUYATÉ’S REPRESENTATION OF PEOPLE AS ANIMALS IN *SIA*,
THE DREAM OF THE PYTHON

In his film *Sia, The Dream of the Python*, director Dani Kouyaté spins a devastating re-telling of one of the traditional myths of the Ghana/Wagadou Empire: the “defeat” of the Python-God⁶. Kouyaté’s film, adapted from a play by Moussa Diagana, is a blistering commentary on the corrupting nature of power and on the deliberate use of myths by the dominant “subject” to abuse the abject of a society. The film is also a compelling depiction of the inevitable denigration of a people in the hands of a blindly-accepted leader. One of the strongest metaphors in the film for this denigration is the frequent comparison to and mention of animals in relation to humans. Kouyaté uses various animals to symbolize characteristics found in people at all levels of the culture, as well as to highlight the “dehumanizing” nature of the oppressive and hierarchical society depicted in his film.

Although ostensibly set in the “ancient” history of the Wagadou Empire, *Sia* makes no pretense that it is not a deeply charged film. Right from the very beginning we are warned that

⁶ My use of the term “Python-God” is derived from a translation of the film from the original language (Bamana/Bambara) into English. However, I must note that this use of the word “God” in reference to Wagadou/West African culture should not be confused with the term “God” in the usual Western sense. The original meaning of the term for this character/figure is more like that of a “totemic animal,” a term which I also use in my discussion of the Python.

The legend tells us that at one time, the empire offered its most beautiful girls to the Python-God in return for prosperity... But, where today does our story unfold? In which epoch? Jean Cocteau said, “Legends have the privilege of being ageless.” So, it is as you please.

Kouyaté definitely wants the audience to draw very large and very broad conclusions about his film—including critical comparisons to “real” contemporary societies. He is also foreshadowing in this sequence that this “tale” will be no gentle, friendly legend: not only are the beginning visual scenes of priests conducting their preparations very menacing, but this overlaid vocal introduction also has teeth. Immediately, the astute viewer will pick up on the implication that an empire willing to exchange human lives for prosperity is deeply flawed and is inherently marred by violence. If this “story” could exist in any place, at any time, then we ourselves may be in danger. And why *would* such a gruesome legend be considered ageless?

The Python-God is also immediately introduced in this scene. Already, we feel suspicious of this god, and our unease is aided by the juxtaposition of this narration with the arcane procedures being conducted onscreen in the dark of night. The impression therefore is of a shadowed, mysterious god—not a transparent, understanding, and understandable one. Of course, several characteristics—both good and bad—associated with the python, as an animal, will also be quickly called to mind. Although the python is considered to be one of the three important totemic animals within the Wagadou society, the python certainly has some “unpleasant” characteristics—for example, it is a predatory animal—and Kouyaté appears to be playing on this kind of fear. It is never clear to the audience exactly what the mechanisms of the Python-God are or what his reasons may be. We only know that “he” is a legend. Although we are told as the film progresses (through the narrative, not by the narrator explicitly) that certain rites must be performed in order to secure wealth, rain, safety, etc., for the empire, the audience

is never given any specific examples of how this acquiescence has actually helped the empire in the past. We can only accept the legend at face value— much as Kouyaté implies that the empire itself does. Indeed, the very next shot of the film is a silent and unexplained scene of two men fully prostrating themselves before the emperor, as they lie face-down and look at the ground. The juxtaposition of these two opening scenes reinforces the blind and unquestioning “belief” of the people in both their “cultural” and “political” leaders, as well as in the systems which necessarily support those leaders.

After this ominous introduction, Kerfa, the resident “madman” makes his debut. Kerfa is the first character used to represent the “abject” people of Koumbi. His voice is the first we hear after the brief introduction by the narrator, and what he has to say turns out to be equally ominous. At first Kerfa calls out to the women washing down by the shore (with the city seen in the background), saying:

I salute you, people of Koumbi. I salute your suffering, your poverty. Men and women, children and adults, dead and living, nobles and slaves, I salute you all. I am grateful to you all. I salute Kaya Maghan and his people.

Suffering and poverty are not particularly “fine” characteristics for Kouyaté to single out as an introduction to a city: such an introduction seems highly loaded and (perhaps) surprisingly negative. However, since the women are laughing Kerfa off, his description of the people might initially be taken somewhat lightly. But he continues on against their indifference, responding to their laughter with, “Woman! The night belongs to spirits, the day belongs to doings. Listen! Hear you not the thunderbolt? See you not the whirlwind? Trapped! Koumbi, you are trapped!” At this point, his rant has taken on a decidedly unpleasant aspect, but only two of the girls (Sia and her friend) appear worried. The two dress quickly to follow Kerfa into town, yet the other

women only seem to reinforce Kerfa's joint assessment and warning: they are blind and deaf to rantings and to the signs of danger.

As Kerfa proceeds into town, he now directs his scathing comments at the Emperor himself, the Kaya Maghan, all while children laugh at him and most adults ignore him. Suddenly, a group of soldiers arrives during his ranting—apparently coming out of nowhere—and beats Kerfa viciously. The two girls come up to tend to him after the soldiers have moved on and Sia's friend warns Kerfa that he is too reckless and should be careful of “those people.” He quickly replies that, “The vulture does not sing. The hyena does not dance,” and shouts, “People of Koumbi, wake up! Sleep does not rule this world!” On cue, a horn immediately sounds following Kerfa's warnings and the people begin to clear the town—including the two girls—in order to allow the procession of the Python-God's priests to pass. Kerfa then cries out, “Goats who would be free! Orphaned ewes! Hide yourselves! Stay away! Be gone! The cruel feast of Kaya Maghan begins!”

This opening sequence is not particularly subtle. But Kouyaté does not *want* to be subtle: he is re-telling a myth. He is borrowing the “language” and the structure of a traditional legend in order to turn it upon itself. In this opening sequence—from the very beginning of the film to this point—not only are we quickly introduced to the main characters, themes, and conflicts, but the way in which the entire story will unravel is also implicated. We already know that there is something unpleasant about the Python-God, that the Kaya Maghan is a vicious leader whose “time” will soon be coming to an end (as Kerfa says, “Kaya Maghan, your reign is eternal? False! Most false!”), and that the people are indifferent to their plight (“asleep”)—with the only exception of Kerfa, and perhaps Sia. Such “transparency” is common in popular legends and cultural stories. As tools of identity-construction, myths also cannot afford to be too vague: the

crucial social and “imaginary” messages which form the borders between subject and object may sometimes be “coded,” but those messages must still be easily deciphered by the dominant-identity in order to properly enforce those borders. Therefore, using these first five minutes of the film as a guide, we can interpret much of the rest of the story.

One significant theme which Kerfa has also quickly introduced in his speech is a use of animals as metaphors for particular human characteristics. For example, Kerfa uses an animal-related metaphor to illustrate his position as a response to the suggestion that he should avoid speaking his mind in front of the Kaya Maghan’s lackeys. (“The vulture does not sing, the hyena does not dance.”) The two animals he chooses—the vulture and the hyena—are the other two main totemic animals of the Wagadou people, along with the python. The Vulture and the Hyena, as god-like or totemic figures, are taken very seriously by the people of this culture: these are the two figures who traditionally led the Wagadou people to the area in which this people eventually founded their empire. Thus, the vulture and hyena are viewed somewhat as “guides.” These animals are also taken seriously because they are considered to have a relatively “serious” or reflective nature. Indeed, it appears that Kerfa views these figures as “animals” deserving of respect or emulation: their steadfast adherence to their own nature is worth praise. The contrast between these two totemic animals and the “Python-god” will become clearer as the film progresses, but Kerfa does seem to have some respect for the position of these two figures from the traditional mythology. Therefore, when Kerfa replies that “the vulture does not sing, the hyena does not dance,” his comparison is not meant as a slight to these animals. Rather, his metaphor indicates that he respects these figures and that to ask him to be other than himself—or to behave in a manner that is unfitting to his character—would be as ridiculous as asking these “god-animals” to do the same.

Although *Kerfa* appears to have respect for these totemic animals, *Kouyaté* may be intentionally flirting with blasphemy. There is a somewhat uncomfortable implication within *Kerfa*'s comparison to these "sacred" animals: if the people of Koumbi can learn, like *Kerfa*, to emulate these animals, then they too will be "awake" and will in some way "become" these totemic figures. This implication is yet another subtle, but powerful, move by *Kouyaté* to further his deconstruction of myths and the power that myths have to abuse the abject groups of a society. Such a move to "become" a god is tantamount to a "betrayal" of the borders of the dominant identity, whose borders are normally presented in myth as being completely impenetrable and unchallengeable. Furthermore, if the average person can become like a "god," then what use is the god afterward? And more to the point: if a person can become a god, then what use is a god *or* king? Perhaps these totemic animals only need to exist in order to help wake the people up to their own more "noble" qualities, especially in times when the human examples of how to behave are very poor examples. *Kouyaté* may be implying that these positive "god-animals" only need to exist in a world where humans fail to live up to their own noble characteristics and are, in fact, "less" than human. In a world completely without such subject-object divisions of identity, these figures might not be needed at all. In any case, *Kerfa*'s naming of the vulture and the hyena in this situation is meant to highlight *positive* characteristics that his fellow humans should choose to cultivate.

Only a few seconds later, *Kerfa* gives us an example of animals we should *not* choose to emulate. Observing the procession of priests, *Kerfa* cries out, "Goats who would be free! Orphaned ewes! Hide yourselves," thus drawing an unmistakable parallel between the people of the town and these animals (goats and ewes). Unlike the vulture and hyena, however, there is nothing noble about goats and ewes—these are slaughter animals. Such animals are not revered

or respected, but rather are domesticated, used, eaten, and sacrificed. Unlike the totemic vulture or hyena, “average” goats and ewes are not considered to possess any self-awareness, insight, or caution. However, Kerfa is not only saying that the townspeople possess these negative characteristics, but that the people of Koumbi *are* these animals already. They have fully passed into the realm of the abject-other. Kerfa is also pointing out two other negative aspects of the people’s condition: that they are not “free,” and that they have been “orphaned” by those in power who should be caring for them—namely, the Kaya Maghan and the priests themselves—as “the cruel feast of Kaya Maghan begins.” The real question, however, is *how* did the people “become” goats and ewes? What process has worked this cruel metamorphosis and who is responsible? In order to examine how one goes about losing one’s “humanity” so completely, we must further examine how “human nature” is represented in the film and the signs that Kouyaté gives us to indicate that something has become very wrong with humanity in this society.

Through Kerfa’s opening call for the people to “wake” up to danger around them, we can see from the very beginning of the film that something is in conflict within this society. Some kind of double-think or intentional hypocrisy *must* be at work in order to let a people “sleep” even amidst obvious signs of danger (such as the brutal “recrimination” of Kerfa by the soldiers) and to “sleep” even when compliance seemingly goes against their own best interests (being slaughtered like sheep or ewes hardly seems beneficial). This hypocrisy only becomes increasingly pronounced as the film continues. As the priests reach their destination in the Kaya Maghan’s court, we learn what the purpose of their earlier mysterious rituals has been: to choose a girl for sacrifice to the Python-God. We, having been specially privileged to a view of the “selection” ritual, already know that nothing about this process has seemed self-evident or

transparent to the average observer. In this scene, however, we can also immediately sense the tension which is caused by the fact that no one else in the empire—not even the Kaya Maghan—is allowed to question the priests’ judgment. Even the faces of the priests must remain covered by deep hoods and their identities concealed. The entire empire must simply *accept* their decision, which is based on a system of flawed reasoning, and which Kouyaté intends for the audience to be highly suspicious of. The dialogue in this scene highlights the absurdity of the entire situation:

Priest One: The oracles have spoken... They have named Sia Yatabere. She is the most beautiful, the most noble, and a virgin.

Priest Two: Deliver Sia to the Python-God’s lair.

Priest Three: There, we shall offer her up.

Priest Four: Now you shall speak.

Balla (the Jeli): Kaya Maghan, it is for us to speak.

Kaya Maghan: Let that which has been said, be done.

Balla: Kaya Maghan hereby offers to Sia’s parents their daughter’s weight in gold. Honorable priests, beseech the Python-God to give us prosperity at last. May he grant us long life, and to our children and grandchildren.

Wakhane (the top general of the army): Forgive me. But Sia Yatabere is not free of engagements. She is the fiancée of my nephew Mamadi.

This conversation is filled with nothing but ironies and faulty logic. Firstly, it seems ridiculous and yet strangely telling that a “beautiful virgin” is the most “noble” citizen of the empire—instead of the Kaya Maghan himself, or even any other member of the ruling class. The entire charade of a “discussion” is also ironic, as it is perfectly clear from this exchange that the priests have complete power and that there is actually no need for them to discuss—or even really to

inform the court of—their decision. Although the Kaya Maghan is allowed (commanded, even) to speak, he can do nothing but say, “Let that which has been said, be done.”

The greatest irony of all, however, is that a “noble” virgin—by all accounts, a decent and appreciated member of the community—should be sacrificed in order to “save” the empire.

Shouldn’t “noble” members of society, like Sia, be considered valuable to the community? How can a community last without members to uphold its (supposed) values and customs?

Theoretically, “noble” citizens ought to be able to preserve the community from within. Instead, the society has not only turned to an “outside” source (the Python-God), but to an outside source which doesn’t even seem particularly logical. It is deeply ironic for the people of this

community to ask the Python-God to preserve the “children and grandchildren” of the empire, while at the same time, they unquestioningly sacrifice one of the community’s *best* children to him. (Of course, intentionally giving away *any* child would seem to be a contradiction.)

Furthermore, not only is Sia somebody’s *child*, but she is on the verge of becoming a *mother* herself through her engagement to Mamadi. Wouldn’t such a “noble” person make a desirable parent within the community? Again, a culture seemingly needs its “finest” members to pass on the legacies and values of that identity-group.

Since the people have little interest in preserving either their children or the quality of life within this society, their real goal in perpetuating this “tradition” of sacrifice would seem to be prosperity. Yet there is no sign that this goal will be achieved, as Balla asks that the Python-God give the empire “prosperity *at last*,” indicating that prosperity has not yet been forthcoming—even though the leaders have supposedly been following this ritual for some time. Kouyaté is indicating that some mechanism or belief has thus become detrimental to the logical order of things, interfering with the lives of the citizens and with the ability to run an effective society.

Not only are the Kaya Maghan and his court not remaining true to themselves (or emulating the vulture and hyena), but they have even abandoned their own *human* logic. Kouyaté implies—through the so obviously flawed thinking of the court—that the ability to reason is part of what makes us human. Furthermore, he wants us, the audience, to use clear-headed reasoning to examine this situation—precisely in order to demonstrate how the people of this empire have abandoned their own. Why should those who are capable of reason follow leaders who do not demonstrate this same ability? Kouyaté is saying that to follow blindly to slaughter, without question, is the role of an abject-animal. For a human to follow blindly either the dictates of a ruling “subject” (or the “cultural” belief system which supports that subject) makes that person “animal-like” at best, and less than human—an “actual” animal in the eyes of the dominant subject—at worst.

Thus, another example of this “negative” type of animal comparison is then found in the reaction of Sia’s father when Balla comes to inform him that his daughter has been chosen for sacrifice. Although Yatabere himself is not the sacrifice, he has still been reduced to another type of subservient animal: a horse. Balla offers up this particular metaphor when he comes to inform the Yatabere family of the “blessing” they are about to receive, saying, “Nobility is not given to everyone. Of the Yatabere nobles, you are a thoroughbred.” While this comment is intended as praise, it is actually a denigration of Yatabere to an abject-animal. As with the sacrifice of the “noble” virgin, this kind of “nobility” is false and cheap: the only price that must be paid is total subservience and obedience, much as a “noble” line of thoroughbred horses is expected to perform well as a beast of burden in the service of its masters. Although this denigrating animal-comparison is initially given by Balla, Yatabere truly seems to accept it as a compliment—effectively proving that he has *already* become the animal. Furthermore, Yatabere

completely accepts the role of sacrificial animal which has also been forced onto Sia, saying, “Tell our venerated emperor, if the country’s survival depends upon the sacrifice of my daughter, then so be it. May custom be respected.” Kouyaté thus shows that Yatabere has abandoned his own humanity in order to blindly follow the “venerated” emperor and the faulty “customs” of his people. He accepts this abject role so well that he is even willing to reduce his own daughter into something less than human: he sincerely perceives her to be a sacrificial animal which he can “make ready,” at a moment’s notice, for the Kaya Maghan and the priests.

But Sia herself does not accept this dehumanization. Despite all attempts (by everyone except Kerfa) to force her into the role of the abject-animal, she rejects it. Sia refuses to let the dehumanizing influence of the system touch her, either from without or from within, by choosing to flee the society in which these beliefs pervade. She then comes to Kerfa (who lives outside the city) for refuge, knowing that he is the only one who has truly escaped the stripping of humanity within the community. (Although he has obviously paid the price for this “freedom” by becoming an outcast of the community.) He challenges her, ironically testing her for the hypocrisy of the society, saying, “Women! You can never fathom them! She has the honor of being the prettiest and she gets angry! The honor of the sacred sheep!” However, Sia has genuinely rejected this indoctrination of her people and cries out desperately, “I am not a sheep, I am a woman! I don’t want to be sacrificed. Help me.” Unlike her father, Sia recognizes the actual intention behind such “praise” and rightly fears it, rather than self-adopting the role of the sacrificial other.

Sia is not the only “sacrificial” girl who is described in animal terms. Reinforcing his comparison of the abject-animal to the abject people of the society, Kouyaté also includes mention of another “noble” virgin who was sacrificed years before—the supreme general,

Wakhane's, own daughter. This daughter, "Little Mother," is described similarly to Sia, in "animal" metaphors. Wakhane *himself* describes "Little Mother" as having "distraught antelope eyes" on the day that she was "delivered up to the Python." Once again, the antelope is an animal of prey, hunted by the "powerful" for their own enjoyment and sustenance. Having been offered up by her own father, she apparently did not protest beyond asking to be blindfolded, saying, "Father! You always told me that death was invisible. I am not afraid of death. It is the serpent that I fear... I beg you, Father, blindfold me. I don't want to see the Python!" It seems that even "Little Mother" had some unconscious form of awareness of the hypocrisy of her society. She perhaps realized that it is not death that should be most feared, but rather the assumption of the negative qualities of the python by her people, including her own father. Yet in order to "conform" to the myths and "culture" of the society, Wakhane willingly denigrated "Little Mother" with hardly any pause. Kouyaté further condemns Wakhane, adding that Wakhane later received his promotion (to top general) as "compensation" for sacrificing his daughter to the Python-God. A sinister implication that Wakhane's actions may even have been a *calculated* move hangs behind this revelation for much of the film—an implication which Kouyaté encourages and will ultimately affirm.

However, after Sia makes her escape, the people seem to come to an awakening. For a while, they protest her treatment, enduring beatings by Wakhane's men and singing songs of dissent:

Sacrificing human beings,
 how appalling,
 Human life is sacred!
 I declare it, most solemnly!
 Sacrificing human beings,
 how appalling.

Yet we should remember Kerfa's warnings at the beginning of the film: the vulture does not sing and the hyena does not dance. This song is only a mockery of the gravity of the situation—and the singers are not sincere. Although this song contains the truth, the people who sing it are still blind to their own hypocrisy and they do not truly realize to what extent they themselves have actually devalued humanity through their own compliance with the system of the Kaya Maghan and the Python-God. Despite their “protest,” these people actually still believe in the corrupt system of the Python-God and they fear committing “blasphemy” against these traditions. As the barber (one of citizens who is least afraid of punishment, though he is still not truly “awake”) points out at one point, “A girl is to be murdered and you talk of blasphemy!”

This “awakening” of the citizens is only a false one. Kouyaté emphatically proves this inherent hypocrisy by the ending of the film, when these same citizens first eventually concede to offer up Sia to the Python-God and then finally turn her out of the community when she survives the “encounter.” By including this song, Kouyaté is ironically highlighting the fact that human life *is* “sacred”—and therefore godlike or holy by its own rights—and therefore should truly *not* be sold out to any god, nor certainly to any “lesser” being. Yet the people of Koumbi have in fact completely “sold out” human life and have willingly participated in their own denigration—and will continue to do so.

Only Kerfa fully understands how dehumanizing the situation has become and only he can see through the representation of the Python-God that the people have been worshiping. This connection is no coincidence—the oppressive situation is caused by the oppressive myth, which is then fed by the people's acceptance of their situation. *Both* the myth and the actual “lived experience” of this society must be questioned and changed. Thus, Kerfa sees through the construction of the python as a “god” to the underlying (nasty) human characteristics which this

“myth” actually represents. Simultaneously, he also realizes that the entire system—the very idea of the oppressive, subject-object system—is wrong. In response to the people’s (temporary) protest Kerfa cries out:

People of Koumbi...

Python-God! God who devours his children! His most beautiful daughters!
Python most misshapen... Deep in your stinking cave, what do you know of
beauty? Be gone! All our daughters are beautiful!

In fact, all is beautiful in Wagadou! The earth, the sky, the sun, the stars, the
water, even the wind!

In this speech, Kerfa is rejecting not only the negative aspects of the Python-God, but he is also praising the inherent worth of *humanity* by saying that “all their daughters are beautiful.” This is a serious “betrayal” of the original myth by Kouyaté—indeed, of all such myths. Kouyaté is apparently rejecting the entire notion that a god-figure should have to dictate or control the life of a human community, where “all is beautiful.” Kouyaté further implies that, other than humanity and nature, what else does an “empire” need? What can a god—and the myth that supports him—offer that cannot already be found within that community? Such a system of belief only serves to create and support the subject-object hierarchy of the *humans* of the society. Therefore, by extension, Kouyaté is also rejecting the control of the dominant subject and the belief that such a subject is necessary: noticeably, Kerfa does not include “emperor” in his list of the “beautiful” things of Wagadou.

Similarly, it is not only the “lower” (or object) people of Wagadou who are ascribed negative animal characteristics. The members of the dominant subject—as “perpetrators” behind the dehumanizing of the people of Wagadou—are also described as animals at various points in the film. For example, Kerfa compares the Kaya Maghan to a drowned cat, saying, “You shall

soon drown in the misery of your people! Like this cat! Completely drowned! Be patient, you wretch. We'll have your hide." Kouyaté uses such a "negative" comparison to violate the sanctity of the dominant subject's identity, showing how easy it really is to pass from the category of "subject" into the "abject." The borders between the two identities are not as impenetrable as myths and other cultural constructs would make them seem—which is, of course, their primary function. What matters, however, is that as long as the division between the two categories exists, then denigration must necessarily exist within the society. In this instance, we can *almost* feel sorry for the Kaya Maghan. Even the emperor himself finally senses this vulnerability near the end of the film: in a desperate attempt to stop the shifting of his position, he even "stoops" to asking Kerfa (commanding, really, in a near-parody of his conversation with the priests) to give him advice on how to maintain the "will of the people." Kerfa merely laughs in the emperor's face, assuring him that it is already "too late." Through the subject-abject hierarchy, even someone who appears powerful can eventually be reduced to the level of a pathetic-looking dead cat. Once the Kaya Maghan loses control of the system of cultural myth and belief that seemed to keep him in power, that same dominance of the "imaginary" can (and will) turn against him.

Therefore, the most important animal "representation" in the film is the Python-God himself. Through the use of this "animal" metaphor, Kouyaté makes his criticism of the system very clear: the people of Wagadou choose to worship certain "values" when they choose to worship this representation of the Python-God. This "misshapen" god is not even comparable to whatever "nobility" the totemic Vulture or the Hyena may be seen to possess. Kouyaté wants us to consider the attributes of the python as an animal, especially those described in the film, and to ask why such characteristics should be worshiped. Kouyaté describes, through the fate of

“Little Mother,” that the ironic horror of this society is that people must be sacrificed to a god that apparently seems displeasing to them. Why worship a god whose characteristics frighten or abhor? Yet Wakhane never considers this question, even as he relates the fear of his own daughter, “poor Little Mother, she...who was so afraid of snakes.”

Because it could be argued that *this* Python-God is just a corrupted version of a totemic python, Kouyaté makes his point blatantly clear: the Python-God does not even exist! Even within the “mythic” context of the film, it is revealed that no such “god” ever existed in the world of this narrative. The “Python-God” of this society is only a creation of the priests—which makes the myth even more dangerous. The seven priests have intentionally adapted and appropriated these negative characteristics of a python by their own volition. They have used the guise of the python so well that they have *become* the python. As Kerfa says to Mamadi, “You fool! My head wouldn’t make you a hero. Go see the Python, he has seven. You can chop off as many heads as you like.” The actions that the priests have taken—raping and then killing the young girls “sacrificed” to them—seem almost unfathomable when they are discovered. In fact, the sacrifice of the girls seemed much more comprehensible to the people when they could believe it was a “python” committing these acts—rather than their own “human” figures of authority—*precisely* because people do not expect (or want to accept) such behavior from other humans. However, using the “excuse” of myth, the society was perfectly willing to accept the *same* abhorrent behavior from the Python-God.

Thus, by equating the priests with the python, Kouyaté asserts that the priests have become less than human by perpetuating this myth as a tool for constructing this oppressive hierarchy of power. At the same time, through their equation with different “abject” animals,

Kouyaté insists that the other members of the community have also become less than human by accepting these myths.

But if both the “victims” (abject) and the “oppressors” (subject) of this society have become dehumanized, then what is the ultimate source of this denigration?

Kouyaté wants us to look at the hierarchical nature of this society as a whole. If the *entire* society is full of non-human humans, then something must be very wrong with the structure of the society itself. He is suggesting that the very notion of this top-down, subject-abject power structure—which is necessarily based on corrupt “legend” and myth—inherently strips all of the people within it of their own humanity. This structure denigrates not only by convincing the “abject” to relinquish their own free will, rationality, and human rights, but also by forcing the “subject” to become less than human in order to maintain the system.

Sia makes its condemnation of the subject-abject system (fundamentally supported by the “authority” of myth and cultural legend) undeniable: it is blatantly obvious that the entire structure is to blame when the people of Wagadou reject their temporary “awakening” in order to accept a “new” version of the *same* system. After *Sia* is finally captured and given over by the people to be “sacrificed,” her fiancée Mamadi leads a coup d’état against the Kaya Maghan’s regime and goes to “rescue” her. Of course, this “coup” happens entirely under the advice and guidance of Mamadi’s uncle—the crafty and powerful general, Wakhane. However, although the army is able to save *Sia*’s life, Mamadi does not reach *Sia* in time to prevent her brutal rape at the “hands” of (all seven) priests. When *Sia* reveals that there is, in fact, no “god” within the Python’s cave (only the remains of previous “sacrifices”), Mamadi is shocked and confused. But Wakhane—without shedding a tear for his own daughter’s fate—convinces Mamadi to turn these revelations to his advantage: Mamadi can kill the priests and return to the city with *Sia*, claiming

a fictional victory over the Python-God. With the help of the army in running out the Kaya Maghan, Mamadi will be loved and accepted as a new “mythic” hero and leader.

Kouyaté’s biting criticism hits here on several levels. One level is internal to the story, with the obvious resolution to the brutal “cyclical” nature of oppressive power and myth, as I have already described—the old Kaya Maghan and the priests (the dominant subject) are denigrated and replaced by a new “dominant subject” coming from within the abject. This action will be supported by—and then perpetuated through—myth. However, Kouyaté’s criticism of myth takes on a more “meta” level at the end of his film: we must remember that *Sia* is based on an *actual* myth of the *actual* Ghana/Wagadou people. In the “traditional” myth, Mamadi and Sia return to lead the empire after Mamadi slays the Python-God (who does “really” exist in the world of the legend), thus beginning a “new” era for the people. By changing the end of the story so drastically, Kouyaté is also clearly criticizing the actual myth: just as within the narrative of the film, the myth of the Python-God is used as a crucial tool for the “real” Wagadou society to define its identity. And in both cases, it is clearly and specifically in the interest of the *dominant subject* to control the borders of this identity, in order to maintain the oppressive hierarchy which gives the subject power over the abject. Thus, Kouyaté’s final assertion is not only that *any* myth can (and perhaps must) be used in the cycle of subject-abject hierarchy maintenance, but that we—the audience—are already willing participants in that cycle, through our belief in our own “cultural myths.”

Sia lays out the paradoxical nature of this cycle quite lucidly: myth justifies and defines the “heroes,” and the “heroes” simultaneously create and define the myth. Thus, in order for Mamadi to become the new Kaya Maghan, he must “re-invent” the myth of the Python-God. The “old” myth kept Mamadi within the abject. But (as Wakhane craftily points out) without a new

“myth” or cultural tradition, the people will not accept him—thus, he cannot do away with the use of myth as oppressive tool. The last barrier to this “redefinition” of identity-borders (through a “redefinition” of the myth) is to get rid of any other members of the society who might refuse or reject this “new” system. Therefore, under Wakhane’s orders, all witnesses of the reality within the cave (except himself, Mamadi, and Sia) are put to death as “traitors.” After Mamadi is accepted by the people, Wakhane attempts to rule from “behind the scenes.” However, Wakhane is a victim of his own insight: Mamadi is the new “hero” of the system of myth, not Wakhane. Therefore, Mamadi must not only *also* eventually kill Wakhane in order to maintain his position, but his position as the “hero” gives him the authority to do so.

At the end of the film, Mamadi—who seemed relatively sympathetic to begin with—has become a vicious and ruthless killer. He has also become the new emperor. As a willing participant in the oppressive subject-object hierarchy, Mamadi has lost his humanity—just like every other member of that system except Sia. (Kerfa was also killed by Wakhane’s men during the change of regime.) Sia, refusing to accept her new role as “queen,” attempts to make the “truth” of the situation heard. She repeatedly tries to discuss the shame and horror of her rape with Mamadi, but he refuses to address her complaints—Sia’s rape is not part of the new myth, therefore it doesn’t (and can’t) exist. Sia quickly perceives that her new “role” as queen is not actually any different than her old “role” as “sacred sheep.” So, as before, she attempts to speak out—but this time, Kerfa is gone and Sia must speak alone. When summoned to address the people of the empire, Sia threatens to overturn the authority of the new myth and must therefore be removed.

Mamadi finally completes the cycle and rejects the last of his humanity by rejecting his love for Sia: by actually throwing her out of the empire when she tries to disrupt the new order.

He labels his former lover a “madwoman” in order to dis-empower her accusations and proclaims her an outcast—just like Kerfa. Confronted with the possibility of examining their own compliance in an oppressive system, the “abject” people of the society would rather accept Mamadi’s power and his myth—and expel Sia. At the moment of their unquestioning acquiescence to the “new” system of belief, Mamadi has truly become the “Python-killer”—a new type of predator, a new version of an old god, and no longer human. In fact, Balla even ascribes animal characteristics to him, calling Mamadi “the dog who defies the panther! The lizard who defies the crocodile! The people are proud of you! The new... new... Kaya Maghan!” He then goes on to say to Mamadi that, “Your will is our will,” and thus the cycle of mutual subject-bject dehumanization is complete.

Kouyaté does offer one opportunity to break the cycle. However, in order to truly destroy this system of power, the people must learn to move beyond it—and that will not be easy. As we were told in the beginning, the legends that form a society have the “privilege of being ageless”—a trait which we may now rightfully view with suspicion. Therefore, we may also assume that this system, left unchecked, will continue into our times and beyond. Yet both Kerfa and Sia *did* escape the dehumanization of their society: although their only refuge to escape the subject-bject hierarchy, until its complete collapse, is in “madness” and complete ostracization from that society.

Freed from the oppressive cycle of dehumanization, a still-human person is free to dream—to dream a new kind of reality. But Kerfa warns that not just anyone can use these dreams, saying, “They wanted my dreams, my madness. I refused! Not just anyone can be mad! You must earn it!” Only by rejecting the indoctrination and denigration of these myths, which fundamentally reduces humans into the strict identity-divisions of subject and abject (and thus

also choosing to retain human logic and sympathy), can one be free to break the abusive cycle of such a society. However, one free person alone cannot change the order of such a system. Like Kerfa and Sia, a single person possessing true vision of society will be cast out as a madman—even as he or she attempts to communicate to the rest of society the reality of their “dehumanized” condition. We must all deeply interrogate the role that myth plays as an oppressive tool of identity construction within our society—and, simultaneously, examine honestly our own compliance within the hierarchies that these myths create. Indeed, Kouyaté suggests that a “dream” in the hands of someone who has become less than fully human may become just another oppressive myth—a false god, further used to lessen the people who created it.

CHAPTER 3

ANDROID VS. CYBORG:

THE *MASCHINENMENSCH* IN *METROPOLIS*

By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. (Haraway 150)

The *Maschinenmensch*: golden and gleaming, “she” sits upon a throne, an inverted pentagram ominously framing her head. Few cinema images have been as lasting or as influential as Fritz Lang’s robotic temptress, the specious “future of mankind” as depicted in *Metropolis*. As one of the first symbolic representations of its kind to be shown on screen, Lang’s robot firmly established a filmic model which would be revisited many times over the coming century. The demonically destructive *Maschinenmensch* became *the* preferred symbol for a perceived threat from technology to the very nature of man’s existence—a fear that becomes increasingly pronounced within society as the “machine” continues to permeate human culture.

However, it is critically important to note that, despite its temporary appearance as a human, Lang’s *Maschinenmensch* is an *android* (more specifically, a “gynoid,” or female android): it is a pure automaton. The *Maschinenmensch* has no “mind” of its own, nor anything even vaguely resembling a “human” nature. It only borrows the *appearance* of the woman Maria and does not actually incorporate any of her human body into its own. In fact, despite its

deceptive name, the *Maschinenmensch* (literally “machine man/person”) itself has nothing to do with humanity—other than the circumstances of its creation. In actual construction, this android is all “Maschine” and no “Mensch.” Yet an android is only one type of cybernetic “model” among many from which Lang could have chosen. Perhaps instead of an android, a more accurate model of the *Maschinenmensch* might have been a *cyborg*, which is a real “hybrid of machine and organism” (Haraway 149). However, Lang’s decision to make the *Maschinenmensch* a “pure” machine, which does not engage in any real blending with humanity, actually highlights the social fear in *Metropolis* of both technology itself and of any possible changes to the (oppressive, subject-object) social structure that technology might represent.

If, as Donna Haraway suggests in her *Cyborg Manifesto*, “cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves,” then the android imagery of *Metropolis* seeks to strengthen those very dualisms (Haraway 181). Furthermore, the entire film is nothing *but* a “maze of dualisms” until its unsatisfying and contrived ending, in which the deeply divisive split between “head” and “hands” is supposedly bridged by the “heart.” This ridiculous message—which has been venomously and consistently criticized, from the film’s original release until today—fails *precisely* because the many dualisms of the film remain completely intact, thus making it impossible for a critical viewer to believe that any real cross-connections can exist within the narrative of *Metropolis*. The central image of the inhuman android—a false bridge between man and machine—is key to understanding the destructive system of subject-object dualities that structures *Metropolis* and continues, even today, to dominate the artistic discourse between technology and society, machine and “human.”

Haraway describes the cyborg as a conjunction of multiple identities and elements, capable of combining even the most contradictory of ideas “because both or all are necessary and true” (149). The cyborg not only is a product of our fiction, but also is a reality of any society which employs “technology”—especially as our technology increasing pervades our everyday lives and even our literal bodies. “The cyborg,” she says, “is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation” (149). Thus, the cyborg exists in both realms (imagination and reality), which means that it has the ability to move constantly from one to the other, influencing both simultaneously. Such a “dual” approach is vital to undoing the paradoxical cycle between “imagination” and the power hierarchies of society, a cycle in which one is constantly validating the other. In this capacity, the cyborg-as-artistic-image therefore has the potential to challenge many different historical systems of belief present in the “real” world, as well as the categorical distinctions and identity “borders” that these systems are based on. However, the cyborg is particularly well-suited to discussing issues of science and technology, for obvious reasons. When used in fiction, the cyborg can be “one important route for reconstructing socialist-feminist politics,” precisely because of its ability to address the “social relations of science and technology, including crucially the systems of myth and meanings structuring our imaginations” (163).

One might expect Lang, in creating a film like *Metropolis*, which deals so crucially with these very structures, to use a route such as Haraway describes. In contrast, Lang chooses to completely avoid the route of the cyborg (and socialist-feminist politics in general). Interestingly, many of the “[structures] and modes of reproduction of ‘Western’ identity” that Haraway’s cyborg seeks to “subvert” are central themes in *Metropolis*, such as those “of nature and culture,

of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind” (176). (All of these divisions are inherently hierarchical dualisms—in this case, with the former element being “abject” and the latter being the “subject.”) Unlike the hybrid cyborg-image, however, the android is a creation of distinctions and dualities. The android thrives on all of the above established structures—as well as rigid constructions of gender and sexual identities—although its primary duality is that of the human/machine or man/tool. Yet the use of the android over the cyborg in the film is no accident: Lang ultimately does not *want* to undo any of the core dualities in *Metropolis*. The choice of the android-image makes manifest the true fears of the film, which ultimately conform to the fears of a hierarchical society. Despite the seductive appearance of the machine as the golden *Maschinenmensch* (which continues to attract and fascinate viewers even today), the technology of *Metropolis* must remain firmly fixed within the historical system of Western dualities—a system that neatly aligns “machine” with both “evil” and, curiously enough, with “woman.”

In keeping with this “imaginary” system, the strong predominance of Christian mythology in *Metropolis* clearly grounds much of this dualistic hierarchy. The film’s use of Christian imagery is not particularly complicated and is far from subtle. For example, the motherly—yet chaste—Maria (whose very name gives her away) prepares the way for the prophesied mediator’s arrival. The mediator himself, Freder, is the compassionate son of a powerful father—a “father” who has become distant from those “below” him. Additionally, a long portion of the film is dedicated to Maria’s telling of (an only slightly modified version of) the story of the Tower of Babel, with the moral of that story remaining quite intact. (Do not enter the realm of Godliness, nor stray from the natural place of humanity: do not become “slaves” to your own ambitious creations, lest you be destroyed.) Last, but certainly not least, is the image of

the *Maschinenmensch* as the Whore of Babylon, with her ability to summon up the Seven Deadly Sins.

It is no coincidence—or even benign “artistic” reference—that a film that is so ostensibly about the issues of the “future” (as actually experienced in the early twentieth century) relies quite heavily on conventional Christian imagery to develop its metaphors and themes. The cyborg actively rejects the conventional structures of Christianity and “the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden; that is, through the fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished whole, a city and cosmos” (151). The android, however, both conforms to and actively *reinforces* Christian myths and values, despite its appearance as a “new” image in the cultural imaginary. Essentially, this is because the android is a pure “other,” one who is blasphemously created by man in the image of man, yet is thoroughly inhuman and thus is incapable of having a true “soul.” If “the cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden” and therefore rejects the myths of Christian origin, then the android is an image-tool meant precisely to *remind* us of that very moment of “failure” in the mythological history of humanity (151). The android in *Metropolis* serves this function specifically by acting as the axis through which most—if not all—of the primary Christian dualisms of the film are aligned: it is the evil to the good, the woman to the man, the seat of vice as opposed to virtue, the tyranny of artifice over nature, the violent against the peaceful, and the representation of man’s conflict with “God.” Yet the *Maschinenmensch* never combines any of these hierarchically divided elements within her “person.” She is a creation of pure opposition—an antithesis that cannot be reconciled, only become destroyer or destroyed.

These systems of opposition rigidly separate not only the *Maschinenmensch* from the humans who surround her, but also separate the humans from each other. The android merely

serves as an example for all of the “underprivileged” (abject) halves of these dualisms—dualisms that affect “real” people, those considered abject to the dominant identity of society. This “real” impact of the hierarchy of dualisms may be particularly felt by women. For although the *Maschinenmensch* is not *actually* a woman, and contains no real element of a biological human female, her image clearly *depicts* a woman (as defined specifically by the gender norms of her creator’s culture). Her actions, after taking Maria’s appearance, are not really “supernatural” or even particularly “robotic.” When instructed by the “scientist” Rotwang to “destroy Frederson, his son, and his city,” the *Maschinenmensch* attempts to accomplish these goals using the conventional tactics of an “evil” woman. Rather than shooting deadly laser beams from her eyes (or something similarly exciting), she settles for an old-fashioned strip-tease and some “seductive” lying and deceiving. The android is not told explicitly which means to use—and yet she seems to invent these means, even though she has no real “mind” of her own. But it is exactly because she is purely a *product* of these conventional systems of myth and thought—rather than an independent entity—that she must necessarily resort to the “conventional tactics” afforded to a woman who has set herself against the “correct” axis of Christian morals and values. Her conformation of these ideas is an inherent quality of her existence as an “Other” within this system. Within the story, the dominant subject must define and defend its identity-borders against the abject. Therefore, the “abject-other” android *must* use deception, sexual lust, artifice, and physical violence. As soon as she takes on the guise of a woman, she is dictated by the social imaginary system to incite men to lust with her actions (a process that she, of course, is somehow solely responsible for). This lust will then *naturally* inspire men to kill over sexual jealousy. Then she must incite the workers to physical violence through lies and deception.

After all, her very *existence* is a deception, an artifice that is fundamentally designed to seduce humanity and lead them away from the correct values.

Yet the unfortunate irony is that although the *Maschinenmensch* is merely an image—an illusion—of woman, the qualities that she embodies simultaneously originate from, and can be projected back on to, *real* women. She thus perfectly performs the paradoxical task of myth as tool: the explanation for her actions is simply that she was imitating a woman. Within this system, the meaning of woman is already completely defined. The “imaginary” representation defines the identity of the “real,” while the “real” representation is used as justification for the imaginary—all as necessary to maintaining the borders of the dominant identity within the society. Even though she is pure machine, the *Maschinenmensch* does not need to be told what a woman is or does. She does not even have to (and in fact, should not) imitate Maria directly. “Woman,” as other, has already been inscribed on the android, just as it has been on the “real” women within the film and in the audience. To what extent this conception of “woman” is based in “reality” or in “imagination” is completely irrelevant. Presumably, both the *Maschinenmensch* and the audience will know exactly what characteristics an “evil” woman possesses. What other explanation is necessary? As long as her existence does not question the fundamental historical and mythical structure—which her image intentionally does not do—then the structure’s laws remain inviolate. Thus, unlike the cyborg (which contains the subversive potential of having a hybrid identity), the other-android serves perfectly as a dummy that can be made to both mimic and reinforce the belief systems of society. As a *gynoid*, this dummy works even better.

The other main “abject-othering” that the *Maschinenmensch* upholds—that of placing technology in opposition to man—is equally harmful to the “lived experience” of the people within our contemporary society. By alignment with the other “negative” halves of Christianity’s

dualisms, technology is clearly equated not only with woman, but also with “evil.” This equation of technology with evil is deeply problematic to the actual functioning of our society: technology has become indispensable to our everyday experience of the world and of our “selves.” To ignore this reality within our “imaginary” culture prevents society from redefining or examining technology’s role in our actual lives. Haraway asserts that “taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology” (181). In the case of *Metropolis*—with its heavy Christian imagery—“a demonology of technology” certainly does not seem like an exaggeration. (Remember, too, the inverted pentagram of Rotwang’s laboratory—the unholy halo of the enshrined *Maschinenmensch*.) But by rejecting and “object-othering” technology, society is left fundamentally unable to reconcile technology’s growing influence with the perceived notions of “human life.”

This tension between the imaginary and the social reality of technology is even seen within the film: while the representation of “evil” technology—the *Maschinenmensch*—can be neatly destroyed, the city-powering machines cannot. Despite the fact that the city machines (which generate power and perform other cryptically essential functions) have been villainized—or even demonized, as in the case of Freder’s Moloch hallucination—the destruction of the “heart machine” also causes the Worker’s City to flood. This flood then threatens the innocents of the story, the children. In fact, the final attitude of the film towards technology seems incredibly and ridiculously confused. On one hand, technology is an “eater of man,” a threatening other that either destroys humanity or transforms humans into the image of machines. (This is exemplified by the workers’ “mechanical” movements and behaviors, such as the scenes in which crowds march in a slow and precise unison.) Such a “demonizing” message would seem

to demand that the machines be destroyed, like the android *Maschinenmensch*. Yet on the other hand, destruction of the machines destroys the “innocent”—thus making the destruction of technology seem like a bad idea.

One *might* argue, based on the only “true” attempt at reconciliation of the film (between Joh Frederson—Freder’s father—and the workers), that the blame for technology’s “bad behavior” could be laid at the feet of the misdirected “head” of society. In such a case, the mediation of Freder, “the heart,” would somehow *also* bridge the gap between technology and man by putting technology to its “correct” usage. But what *is* technology’s correct usage within the context of the subject-object dualisms of *Metropolis*? Where would such a compromise, a blending of opposites, come from? Such an idea of “compromise” between two hierarchically opposed elements seems half-realized, at best, and is simultaneously refuted by the presence of the *Maschinenmensch* as grounding image for the film. The android of *Metropolis* has strengthened the film’s dualisms too tightly—served its imaginary function too well—for these structures to be simply undone by a single platitude. Moreover, it is the failed attempt to reconcile this final dualism of the class-struggle between “hands” and “head” that ultimately reaffirms the *android-image*’s role as the central axis of the entire story, rather than the “heart” fulfilling that role. And, once again, the android cannot be reconciled: it cannot serve as a go-between. It cannot be a cyborg.

In fact, the role of Freder as “go-between” is functionally an aberration to the structure and mythos of the world of *Metropolis*. Every other element of plot and theme reinforces the image of the android as being central to the film. Because the android is a double, an other, it therefore enforces a system of “doubling” onto the rest of the film. Many things within *Metropolis* are divided into “pairs”: the two cities (the above, “master’s” city, and the below,

“worker’s” city), Freder and the worker who temporarily takes his place above ground, and the two Marias. Interestingly, even the *Maschinenmensch* has its own internal “doubling”—it is simultaneously both “Hel,” the golden image of the woman Rotwang lost to Joh Frederson, as well as the false Maria. Among all of these doubles, the film offers no middle ground except for the single “mediator.” Lang attempts to embody all potential “middle” spheres in Freder, but, against an entire system of duality, the attempt collapses. The hierarchical subject-object structure is overwhelming—the *Maschinenmensch* has fulfilled its role of both building *and* maintaining separation quite perfectly. Excluding the attempted class reconciliation, absolutely no other dualities have been subverted in *Metropolis*. The persistence and (conscious) maintenance of these other dualisms is exactly the reason why, in its very attempt to refute this *one* dualism as a contrast to the others, the film fails so utterly in its “moral” message. To attempt to highlight and reconcile one division only enforces the strength of *all* of the dualisms.

There are two additional reasons why Freder is an unbelievable mediator (although both actually stem from the domination of the android-dualism). The first is that, quite practically, no rational viewer can see Freder as a “third” element: there is nothing that really marks him as being different from his father. He incorporates *none* of the elements of the “underprivileged” abject “half” of this dualistic society. Freder is unquestionably the dominant identity of his society: he is not “poor,” he is not a woman, he is not a machine, and he has never done “evil.” Like the android, he is actually inviolate to the “other” and his borders of identity are quite fixed.

The second reason that he cannot serve as mediator, then, is that Freder is not even the *most* logical choice of mediator within the context of the film itself. A more “organic” choice for the role would be Maria—she comes much closer to transgressing the boundaries of *Metropolis* than Freder does. Not only does Maria come into direct contact (and conflict) with the machine-

double of herself, but she also is able to somewhat penetrate the world of “poor” men (albeit, in a very gender-stereotyped role of the “mother”) when she goes to preach to the all-male workers. More importantly, she is also a woman—thus possessing a fundamentally different alignment of identity traits than Joh Frederson, the “father” of the dominant identity. However, even Maria merely resides on the “opposite” side of some of the dualisms of the hierarchical society—she does not combine opposites.

Thus, logically, the best potential “mediator” of this system would actually seem to be the *Maschinenmensch*. Only *it* has real possibility for combination and “multiplicity”: it is neither man nor woman, rich nor poor, God nor “man.” Therefore, understanding Lang’s refusal to see the *Maschinenmensch* as a cyborg-image is central to understanding the “real” message of the film: to essentially support the borders of identity that keep these “Western” subject-object oppositions in place. By choosing the dualistic android, Lang has cut off the only *real* possibility for mediation within the context of the film. Ultimately, therefore, *Metropolis* must necessarily fall back upon the conventional structures of dualism that govern Western society’s approach to both gender and technology. Although “there is a myth system waiting to become a political language” through using the cyborg-image, the film does not embrace such a system (Haraway 181). Using the cyborg “to ground one way of looking at science and technology and challenging the informatics of domination—in order to act potently,” is exactly what the dominant identity of our society does not want—in reality *or* in the imaginary. By faithfully replicating and enforcing the myths of the subject-object division, *Metropolis* simultaneously reveals the fears of both Lang and his society and—even worse—projects those fears onto future generations.

Metropolis relies on the android because it is afraid of the cyborg. Ironically, the film is afraid of *actually* breaking the very dualisms that its “moral” claims to break—because

destroying such systems has repercussions beyond the world of cinema. As Haraway suggests, “The structural rearrangements related to the social relations of science and technology evoke strong ambivalence” (172). It is no small task to rearrange *any* “social relation” between a human “subject” and a human “abject”—especially since any change in the social “reality” must be simultaneously matched by a change in the social imaginary. However, the rearrangements demanded by a *cyborg* also fundamentally require a change in the distinction between human and machine—and this examination of the boundaries between humanity and technology brings to light the uncomfortable “problem” that “it is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine” (177). It is precisely the fear of such uncertain borders that drove Lang to choose the figure of the android to dominate *Metropolis*. This same fear drives other directors and writers to follow Lang’s pattern, even in contemporary films.

Unfortunately, this choice of the android precludes the power of real “mediation,” not only in the artistic world of *Metropolis*, but also—more significantly—in our actual society. We continue to grapple with these *same* oppressive subject-abject systems within our cultural imaginary of myth and literature—as seen in the continued dominance of the *Metropolis* *Maschinenmensch* android-model in Science Fiction literature and film. The imaginary, in turn, feeds the reality again. But “mediation” *is* embodied in the hybrid cyborg: offering the only real possibility of changing these borders. A true cyborg must be both “Maschine” *and* “Mensch.” Haraway describes the possible result of embracing this conjoining as follows:

Intense pleasure in skill, machine skill, ceases to be a sin, but an aspect of embodiment. The machine is not an *it* to be animated, worshiped, and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; *they* do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they. (180)

Only when we embrace the cyborg in the imagination of our film and literature can we embrace it in our own lives: and vice versa. To do so may be a paradox—but “paradox” is what cyborgs do best.

CHAPTER 4

A PACK OF CYBORGS:

A THOUSAND PLATEAUS AND A CYBORG MANIFESTO AND I'M A CYBORG, BUT THAT'S OK AND US

Almost a century after Fritz Lang first created the image of his golden *Maschinenmensch* in woman's image, the deadly female android continues to dominate the imagination of both screen and page. This golden dominatrix of an image refuses to let anyone—or *anything*—else join her party, even well into the 21st (Western) century. Yet the very idea of the android is an outdated model, a representation of the fearful and dualistic thought of the patriarchal late-nineteenth century, doomed to eventual failure—even if she doesn't know it yet. We are already living in “our time, a mythic time,” where “we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs” (Haraway 150). Yet even though we live in a time of cyborgs—*our* time—the image of the cyborg has yet to come into its true power. Much of what is often labeled a “cyborg” in media and culture is usually only another false idol, a golden calf, another *Maschinenmensch*. The few sincere cyborgs in film and literature are mainly constrained within a “science fiction” context—trapped in a dialogue of aliens, robots, and far-future adventures—which most of society deems irrelevant to “real” life, even while its members live out their own cyborg existence. In this light, Chan-Wook Park's 2006 film *I'm a Cyborg, But That's OK* is unusually bold on two accounts: it has the guts to tackle a *real* 21st-century cyborg, and it has the power to place that cyborg in an unmistakably contemporary context.

Park's cyborg, Young-Goon, not only fits Donna Haraway's description of a cyborg/myth, but she is also "programmed" with a real capacity to alter our own "social reality." This potential not only lies within the significance of the cyborg-image for our current world, but also is made manifest through a Deleuzian/Guattarian "becoming-cyborg," which is crucial to the film: a "becoming" that is experienced not only by the characters of the film, but also by the audience ourselves.

In her *Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway describes the cyborg as a conjunction between multiple identities and elements, capable of combining even the most contradictory of ideas "because both or all are necessary and true" (Haraway 149). By definition, "a cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism," and is "a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (Haraway 149). "Social reality," Haraway explains, "is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction" (Haraway 149). The cyborg is not only a product of our fiction, but also a reality of any society that employs "technology"—especially as our technology increasingly pervades our everyday lives and even our own literal bodies. Therefore, she says, "The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation" (Haraway 149). Thus, the cyborg exists in both realms (imagination and reality), which means that it has the ability to move constantly from one to the other, influencing both simultaneously.

Haraway's conceptualization of the cyborg also resonates with several of Deleuze and Guattari's key ideas from *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Of primary relevance (to both Haraway's cyborg and Park's film) are the concepts of "rhizome," "multiplicities," "becoming," "the Body without Organs," and "the line of flight." All of these

concepts are essentially opposed to the traditionally dualistic, subject-object structures of Western thought and reality, structures that the cyborg seeks to destroy through its very existence. Deleuze and Guattari rightfully point out that “binary logic and biunivocal relationships still dominate psychoanalysis, linguistics, structuralism, and even information science” (Deleuze and Guattari 5). Haraway also sees dualistic structures as a source of domination and proposes that “cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves” (Haraway 181). The cyborg’s source of power comes from the fact that

The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. [...] Cyborgs are not reverent; they do not re-member the cosmos. They are wary of holism, but needy for connection. [...] A cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden; it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end (or until the world ends); it takes irony for granted. (Haraway 151, 180)

This resistance to a “holistic” and ordered identity is a resistance to the patriarchal systems of dualism which structure and order our social reality into a hierarchical, binary structure. This “arborescent” structure *necessarily* affects us in our everyday life because, as Deleuze and Guattari have pointed out, this binary system organizes the fundamental doctrines of all Western disciplines, ultimately affecting everything, including “our bodies, ourselves; bodies are maps of power and identity” (Haraway 180). Deleuze and Guattari go even further, to say that “the tree has dominated Western reality and all of Western thought, from botany to biology and anatomy, but also gnosiology, theology, ontology, all of philosophy” (Deleuze and Guattari 18). However, both Haraway and Deleuze/Guattari stress the importance of connection as a means of escaping this system—a type of connection that avoids this dualistic, “arborescent” structure. Deleuze and Guattari clearly assert that “arborescent systems are hierarchical systems,” which revolve around

a “point of Unity” and thus not only impose binary relations, but also a clear order of domination (Deleuze and Guattari 16).

Deleuze and Guattari describe an anti-holistic (and thus, simultaneously anti-dualistic) system of connection as being that of a “rhizome.” Deleuze/Guattari argue that the binary tree-organization of “connections” is a false one, and thus should be dismissed—not only because it is an inaccurate system of representation, but also because it actively cultivates the kind of subject-object domination in “social reality” that Haraway also describes. (“There is always something genealogical about a tree,” they assert. “It is not a method for the people” [Deleuze and Guattari 8].) Any system that seeks to destroy this domination *must* utilize the rhizome, with its unorganized “principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order” (Deleuze and Guattari 7). Given that this “order” of the tree has structured Western society for thousands of years, the proposal of switching to the “rhizomatic” method would seem to conform to Haraway’s description of the necessary “ironic” and “perverse” connections of the cyborg.

Simply switching from an arborescent model of organization to a rhizomatic model, however, is only one part of destroying these binary systems of oppression. We must come to see ourselves, our own existence, as defiant of the “unity” of the Western arborescence. Like the cyborg-image, we must embrace the ironies and partialities of our identities: we must seek what Deleuze and Guattari call “multiplicity.” In fact,

[Multiplicity] was created precisely in order to escape the abstract opposition between the multiple and the one, to escape dialectics, to succeed in conceiving the multiple in the pure state, to cease treating it as a numerical fragment of a lost unity or Totality or as the organic element of a Unity or Totality yet to come, and instead distinguish between different types of multiplicity. (Deleuze and Guattari 32)

This idea of the multiplicity, as a “pure state,” allows us to distinguish between individual cyborgs (“different types of multiplicity”) while seeing the cyborg-image as a multiplicity in its own right. Using this concept of the multiplicity (which defies the dialectics of the One and the “multiple”) in our social reality might allow us to reconceive our “cyborg world”: by embracing multiplicity, “a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints” (Haraway 154). A cyborg world does not respect the strict boundaries that are required by the “dominant identity” in order to maintain its power over the abject-other.

However, both Deleuze/Guattari and Haraway assert that we must not only learn to see ourselves as “multiplicities,” but must also learn how to actively seek and build multiplicity. When thinking about multiple identities—such as the cyborg-hybrids between animal and man, or machine and man—we must actively fight the trend to allow these identities to arborify or Unify. This is true in both the realm of the imaginary (myth and literature) and in social reality:

The multiple *must be made*, not always by adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest of ways [...] always n-1 (the only way one belongs to the multiple: always subtracted). Subtract the unique from the multiplicity to be constituted; write at n-1 dimensions. A system of this kind could be called a rhizome. (Deleuze and Guattari 6)

It is crucial that this active process—always consciously removing the One—be applied to the construction of the cyborg, in order to maintain the cyborg’s true rhizomatic power. It is the rhizomatic nature of the cyborg that differentiates the cyborg from the android. Therefore, when Haraway describes the construction of the cyborg and the cyborg-world as a “skillful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication

with all of our parts” (Haraway 181), in which “any objects or persons can be reasonably thought of in terms of disassembly and reassembly” (Haraway 162), we must *always* remember to “reassemble” a multiple. Haraway rightfully points out that, in this process, “no ‘natural’ architectures constrain system design” (Haraway 162)—following an arboreal, patriarchal/genealogical organization is not only not *necessary*, but is completely undesirable. If “the cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self” (Haraway 163), then the One is what must be disassembled, so that we may embrace multiplicity and hybridity, in order to avoid relapsing into the android-image.

Yet “multiplicity” is not simply a noun, another word for “multiple”—multiplicity is a continual process of existence. Deleuze and Guattari assert that “it is only when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive, ‘multiplicity,’ that it ceases to have any relation to the One as subject or object, natural or spiritual reality, image and world” (Deleuze and Guattari 8). In contrast to the somewhat “fixed” nature of the multiple, “a multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature” (Deleuze and Guattari 8). The concept of the rhizome, therefore, more properly belongs with “multiplicity” because “the rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple [...] It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion” (Deleuze and Guattari 21). Thus, it is the multiplicity of “directions in motion” that is more relevant to the cyborg.

Two other Deleuzian/Guattarian concepts, which are key to the cyborg-image, are closely related to this definition of multiplicity: “assemblage” and “the line of flight.” On one side, “assemblage” loosely defines the limits of what a multiplicity is—or can be, until it changes into another multiplicity. “An assemblage,” Deleuze and Guattari qualify, “is precisely this increase

in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands the connections” (Deleuze and Guattari 8). On the other “side” of the multiplicity is the nature of its boundaries as borders to everything that is outside of the assemblage: “Multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities” (Deleuze and Guattari 9).

Furthermore, “the line of flight marks: the reality of a finite number of dimensions that the multiplicity effectively fills” (Deleuze and Guattari 9). But true multiplicities do not want to be constrained—they are never satisfied to fill only certain dimensions. Neither should cyborgs be. In contrast, an android can, in some ways, be multiple—but the android-image can never be a multiplicity. Multiplicities are always trying to escape themselves, to further their own line of flight. This is achieved by following “distinct but entangled lines,” which are “lines of flight or of deterritorialization, becoming-wolf, becoming-inhuman, deterritorialized intensities: that is what a multiplicity is” (Deleuze and Guattari 32). Cyborgs must do the same.

Therefore, this idea of “becoming” is the last concept that is necessary for understanding the “assemblage” of true cyborgs (in this discussion, at least). Any real discussion of a rhizomatic cyborg (which is the only real kind of cyborg) must necessarily include a becoming-cyborg. The arborescent systems which constrain Western thought and reality—a “reality” that continues to spread and thrive with contemporary influence of “globalization”—can only be completely “destroyed” through a *constant* deterritorialization of those dualisms, a deterritorialization that never allows the binary system to reform for any meaningful period of time. This is precisely because “what is at question in the rhizome is [...] totally different from the arborescent relation: all manner of ‘becomings’” (Deleuze and Guattari 21). Androids cannot

“become,” they do not enter becomings, they will never be rhizomatic. But cyborgs can—and we must. This is the role of the cyborg-image.

Yet although our literature—particularly science fiction—is already “full of cyborgs—creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted,” there is still little recognition or acceptance of these creatures that walk among us (Haraway 149). However, by acknowledging the cyborg multiplicity, the cyborg-as-artistic-image has the potential to challenge many different historical systems of belief present in the real world and the categorical distinctions and identity borders that these systems are based on. To achieve this multiplicity “means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories” (Haraway 181). When used in fiction—as well as social reality—the cyborg can be “one important route for reconstructing socialist-feminist politics,” precisely because of its ability to address the “social relations of science and technology, including crucially the systems of myth and meanings structuring our imaginations” (Haraway 163). Deleuze and Guattari also recognize this ability of literature, but posit that “the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work” (Deleuze and Guattari 4). Therefore, in order to begin to deconstruct these dualisms, we must first begin to recognize the “rhizomes” and “multiplicities” within ourselves—a goal that the literary machine (or cultural imaginary) can help us to fulfill. Just as “a woman has to become-woman, but in a becoming-woman of all man,” we 21st-century cyborgs must enter into a becoming-cyborg in order to affect a change in all humans (Deleuze and Guattari 292). A rare example in the literary discourse on cyborgs, Park’s *I’m a Cyborg, But That’s OK* offers a clear and conscious entry point into this becoming, a way for the literary machine to consciously interact with other machines.

Our introduction to the film's "becoming-cyborg" begins with the opening credits of *I'm a Cyborg, But That's OK*: the first images are (computer-generated) shots of turning cogs and wheels—machine parts—filmed in a filter resembling that of an X-ray exposure. We may not initially be certain what we are looking at, but we can certainly guess: this is the "inner-workings" of a cyborg. Park is immediately playing off of the expectations of the audience—most people think of mechanical processes, rather than biological, when they envision a "cyborg." It does not matter that the strict definition of a cyborg is an entity that is both human *and* machine—for most people, it is the "machine" that denotes a cyborg. It does not matter that this assumption will eventually be proven "true," because the image itself is still a projection of the characters' imagination, based on their *own* cultural assumption of what a "cyborg" is. The cyborg herself expects to see machinery inside, so that is what *we* see: such is the legacy of the dualistic android, an image that continues to impose and superimpose itself onto the cyborg. Yet it is the android that stands in complete opposition to "man," which cannot be reconciled and stands as "other," not the cyborg. Although this first impression of a cyborg seems alien, the film actually insists that the cyborg is already among us—as Park will demonstrate with his cyborg, Young-Goon.

Young-Goon's outside, it turns out, look (more or less) just like any other young Korean woman's. She is working in an electronics factory when we are first introduced to her, only one among many other women. Her outward appearance is completely normal—she is even wearing the red uniform of the workers, which gives her the illusion of being part of a mass. It is her *behavior* that makes her stand out, as she is clearly on a different frequency than all of her co-workers. Literally: while every other worker is focused on their individual work desk, listening to their own headphones, Young-Goon is following some mysterious instructions that are

coming from the factory's main speakers. She is the only one to look up from her work station and the only one who is interacting with the world around her. It just happens that this "world" is partly in her own mind: Young-Goon believes that the speakers are giving her step-by-step instructions to complete the "charging" process necessary for her to fully become a cyborg. However, it is significant that we can also clearly hear these directions, which Young-Goon seems to be following perfectly. We are included in Young-Goon's world, rather than being outsiders to her becoming. The last steps, of course, involve connecting herself to an electrical power source—which, quite naturally, involves cutting her wrist so that she can insert the wires that she then must plug into the outlet. Young-Goon falls backward onto the floor as she is "recharging," breaking the even line of her seated co-workers—all of whom continue working without interruption. Once this line, this mass, is broken, Young-Goon's outward transformation also begins.

This introduction to Young-Goon (after the initial images of machinery) is important for a number of other reasons, as well. The narrative of this sequence is actually split between the narrative following Young-Goon as she carries out her own instructions and a narrative of Young-Goon's mother explaining her daughter's "mental history" to a doctor—presumably during the process of Young-Goon's later admittance into a mental institution. (Her becoming-cyborg is interpreted by mainstream society as an attempt to "become dead.") This dialogue between Young-Goon's mother and Young-Goon's primary psychologist is itself split again between the interview itself and the mother's recollection of an instance in her own childhood: the moment in which she first realizes that her own mother (Young-Goon's grandmother) is partially living in an "alternate" world where she and her entire family are all mice.

This sequence of foldings and unfoldings in time clearly establishes a narrative “multiplicity” almost from the beginning of the film—although not chronological, these events are obviously entangled, part of the same assemblage. The voice-overs of the different narratives frequently overlap: the mother’s interview is overlaid during shots of Young-Goon’s work, while the “radio transmission” is overlaid during the mother’s responses to the interview. The adult-mother’s voice is also placed over the images of her childhood discovery, with the adult’s dialogue even coming “out” of the mouth of the child. The main back-story of the film is told in this one jumbled, rhizomatic sequence, in which all of the related characters (grandmother—mother—daughter) and time periods (mother’s childhood—Young-Goon’s “suicide” attempt—admission to hospital) intermingle and vie equally for the viewer’s attention. The mother even confuses the different chronologies in her interview, saying, “Truth is, my mother was raised by Young-Goon—No, I mean, my mother raised Young-Goon. That’s why the young one talks rather like an old person.” On one level, her slip indicates the first hint that she, too, “suffers” from some form of mental illness. However, in the context of the film’s actual construction, her statement takes on a deeper meaning—Park is pointedly calling attention to the interdependency and deeply intertwined nature of their collective “mental illness” assemblage. Their connection does not simply flow linearly, arboreally, from the grandmother through to Young-Goon. Rather, it is a continual process that shifts back and forth—shrinking and expanding, ebbing and flowing—as the three family members come in contact with not only the physical presences of the others, but even their “memories” of the others and themselves. This shared “mental space,” particularly between Young-Goon and her grandmother, will become increasingly important as the film progresses. However, it is vitally important to note that these three characters are not the only ones who can partake of this assemblage—many of the other characters (patients, not

doctors) from the mental institution increasingly interact with Young-Goon's mental illusions and delusions. Yet the most important participant is the audience: we will be equally and rhizomatically presented with different narratives throughout the entire film.

The film's introduction also firmly and intentionally grounds *I'm a Cyborg, But That's OK* in a familiar context. Because most of the film will take place within the grounds of the mental institution, with only the exception of this introduction and occasional flashbacks and "hallucinations," this introduction serves an important function by framing Park's cyborg narrative within a certain "social reality"—that of the audience. Without this context, it would be all too easy for us to dismiss the power of Young-Goon's cyborg identity as the pathetic delusion of an impotent, ill person without any hope of changing even her own future. We could write her off completely into a world of pure fantasy and escapist humor. The concept of such a "monster" (another one of Haraway's terms for a cyborg) affecting any meaningful social change would be a cruel joke, a false irony. Instead, the factory, her grandmother's home, and her mother's restaurant (where Young-Goon's mother "some days [feels] strangely close to the pig intestines") all serve as connections to the familiar "real" world of the audience—particularly the film's native Korean audience. These locations all function as potential sites of actual and painful oppression within society, not only for Young-Goon, but for us, as well. For us 21st-century female cyborgs, this oppression has a particularly poignant flavor: both industrial workplace and family home are historically great seats of the dualistic, patriarchal oppression by the "dominant identity" of all that is "other": machine, animal, child, nature, tool, and woman—just to name a few. The domination of the abject-other in these sites exists not only *within* individual Western and "Westernized" societies, but also in the "transnational" subject-object relationship *between* "Western" and "othered" cultures in our global society. Haraway even

points out this curious link in Korean society, in particular, noting that “young Korean women hired in the sex industry and in electronics assembly are recruited from high schools, educated for the integrated circuit. Literacy, especially in English, distinguishes the ‘cheap’ female labour so attractive to the multinationals” (Haraway 174). No small coincidence, considering that our Young-Goon cyborg tries to “escape” from an “electronics assembly” through her own vision of the “integrated circuit.”

The escape that Young-Goon is seeking can only be found through pursuing a new, cyborg identity. The decrepit image of the android will not work here and would only make a mockery of her efforts: the android represents the very othering that Young-Goon seeks to escape. It belongs fully in the world of patriarchal and arboreal dualisms, only serving to perpetuate the very idea of the borders between “self” and “other.” The android is a One, not a multiple. As Haraway suggests:

To be One is to be autonomous, to be powerful, to be God; but to be One is to be an illusion, and so to be involved in a dialectic of apocalypse with the other. Yet to be other is to be multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial. One is too few, but two are too many. (Haraway 177)

Thus, it is the cyborg-image that Young-Goon has latched upon. Her schizophrenic delusion is that of a cyborg, not an android, and a critical feature of the cyborg is that “cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves” (Haraway 181). Although our first impression of the film’s conceptualization of a “cyborg” may appear to be a pure-machine with only the outward imitation of a human, the overall role of Young-Goon in the film is definitely one of hybridization and multiplicity. She is not purely mechanical—although, perhaps, she initially tries to be—and she does not simply imitate the machine. Neither is her cyborg-identity an imitation of humanity. Young-Goon *is*

human, and yet she is other. Her otherness does not come from a simple division between man and machine, but rather, from her ability to collapse and combine many of the traditional dualisms within her cyborg existence.

Therefore, she does not simply replicate the usual dualisms that come with the android-image. For example, Young-Goon does not possess the “ghost in the machine” effect which plagues the early examples of androids and fake-cyborgs. The concept of the “ghost in the machine” represents a split between human “mind” and mechanical body, which only furthers a dualism that has “structured the dialogue between materialism and idealism that was settled by a dialectical progeny, called spirit or history, according to taste” (Haraway 152). However, the film itself treats her as simultaneously human and machine by showing us both the “view” of those around her who see her as human (such as her mother and her doctors) and her own perception of her machinic insides. Ultimately, *I’m a Cyborg, But That’s OK* has no interest in forcing us to choose between the perspectives. Neither does the film try to frame Young-Goon’s “delusions” within reality, thus disempowering them by labeling them as products of the mind (and a diseased one, in fact), as opposed to physical reality. If anything, the film slightly privileges the cyborg perspective, in the sense that these scenes—such as Young-Goon’s ability to levitate with jet boosters, turn her head around backwards, or turn into a living machine gun-girl—are highly entertaining and deeply engaging, compared to the limitations of the “normal” humans. (As Haraway says, “Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert” [152].) However, both perspectives are still crucial for understanding the film as a whole: the “internal” visions of the mind (the imaginary) and the “external” world of the physical body (the social reality).

Similarly, *I'm a Cyborg, But That's OK* confuses the boundaries between animal and human. Young-Goon herself manages to ironically combine the “narrative” of her grandmother’s schizophrenia with her own, and her complete acceptance of this multiplicity sets the tone for the audience’s own acceptance of it. We learn through the introductory “interview” of Young-Goon’s mother that the grandmother’s delusion of being a mouse also extends to her children, presumably including Young-Goon. Young-Goon’s mother claims that, “My mother told me she had a secret that she really shouldn’t tell...but she didn’t want to hide it anymore.” When the child-mother discovers the grandmother feeding a group of mice, the grandmother tells her, “As much as you’re my daughter, so are these mice.” She then adds, “I am the mother mouse,” and explains that the other mice are the child-mother’s “little brothers and sisters.” The grandmother eventually takes to eating nothing but radish, due to her belief that this is what a mouse should eat. It is never explicitly stated whether the grandmother also sees her daughter as a mouse or as a human—but somehow both mice and humans are equally her children. There seems to be absolutely no conflict for the grandmother in having a “pack” of mice and humans as family. (Deleuze and Guattari would particularly love this delusion, since they specifically point out that “even some animals are [rhizomatic], in their pack form. Rats are rhizomes” [Deleuze and Guattari 6].) For her, the entire family has entered a becoming-mouse.

Appropriately, the film cuts to a shot of the doctor’s computer “mouse” at this point during the interview. Although Young-Goon’s mother initially lies to the doctor, claiming that Young-Goon does not know of her grandmother’s “story,” we later learn that Young-Goon not only knows of her grandmother’s becoming-mouse, but also that she completely sympathizes. After her admission to the institution, Young-Goon’s prized possessions include her grandmother’s dentures and a computer mouse. Young-Goon needs the dentures to mediate her

connection with the other machines in the hospital—she can only communicate with them when she has the dentures in. (Which, incidentally, further distorts her outward appearance and gives her a truly creepy smile.) Her initial goal is to escape the institution so that she can return the dentures to her grandmother, who was previously taken away to (another?) mental institution. By Young-Goon’s own admission, the “white ‘uns” at the hospital do not want the grandmother to eat the radish (and therefore, to continue becoming-mouse). Young-Goon refuses to talk to her own doctor, but tells all this to the lamp in her bedroom, saying, “Granny needs [her dentures] to eat radish. She’s a mouse, you know.” The computer mouse clearly represents her connection to—and perception of—her grandmother, as Young-Goon often talks to it, pets it, and even buries it with her grandmother’s ashes after her grandmother’s death.

But what makes the computer mouse truly rhizomatic is that it *also* represents Young-Goon herself. The image of the computer mouse is a perfectly ironic symbol for the Young-Goon cyborg—an irreverent hybrid of human-animal-machine-tool. Young-Goon’s complete acceptance of the irony of the computer mouse represents her acceptance of the irony of her own existence: she is the cyborg-child of an animal and a human. As Deleuze and Guattari assert, “a becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity” (Deleuze and Guattari 239). Unlike her mother, who feels the need to lie about the becomings of their family, Young-Goon has no problem with embracing her “partial” identities—while still affirming her own “multiplicity” as a cyborg. Her mother, however, dismisses (rather inadequately) the link between the grandmother’s “story” and her daughter’s “suicide” attempt by saying, “Mother probably felt a little closer to the mice that day. Some days I feel strangely close to the pig intestines, too. Don’t you feel like that sometimes with your patients?”

Her mother's denial of the schizophrenic connection of "becoming" between the three women partly illuminates another critical subject-object dualism that Young-Goon must address: man/woman. It is clear that this schizophrenia has passed along the maternal line, though all three generations. There is absolutely no mention of either Young-Goon's father or grandfather within the film. Here, again, Park is obviously linking his cyborg to the conditions of our own "social reality." By virtue of their social status as "woman," all three family members necessarily occupy a position of the "object-other"—a position of the oppressed. Social issues of the "insane" woman, the dependent woman, and the woman unacceptable to public eye are clearly involved here. The relevance of this particular dualism seems irresistibly obvious to our own social reality, even though it is the one that Park perhaps spells out the least: the young girl and the old woman left alone to care for each other, each seeking her own means of escape from the position which society has trapped her in. They have no power, no authority, outside their own delusions. This is exactly the place for "socialist-feminist" politics and the rhizomatic cyborg—and in fact, this is precisely where Young-Goon and her grandmother enter into becomings, chase their own multiplicities, and begin to tell their own stories. While the mother tries to escape their shared oppression by re-affirming her "human" identity (a tactic that will only serve to re-affirm the oppression), Young-Goon and her grandmother refuse to resign themselves to this constriction. Haraway also describes cyborgs as any "people who refuse to disappear on cue," people who take to "actively rewriting the texts of their bodies and societies" (Haraway 177). This is because "survival is the stakes in this play of readings" (Haraway 177). Young-Goon and her grandmother are both re-writing the texts of their oppressed bodies, in a similar schizophrenic-cyborg assemblage. It is important that part of Young-Goon's "rewriting" of her cyborg body seems to be erasing the borders of her identity as "girl."

While Young-Goon does not exactly combine “male” and “female” within her new body, Park does seem to imply that overcoming or altering the social perception of her “gendered” identity is an important part of her becoming-cyborg. After her “recharging” incident at the factory, Young-Goon’s physical appearance changes dramatically. Gone is the red uniform of the female workers—replaced with a hospital garment that resembles a burlap sack with long sleeves, a uniform of a different kind. Her limbs dangle pathetically out of this garment, which manages to completely hide the shape of her painfully thin torso. Her hair looks exactly like that of someone who was just electrocuted—choppy and terribly cut, it stands up like a wig and seems to be blue at the top of her scalp. Most striking is her face, which is completely pale, including white lips and bleached eyebrows: hardly the appearance of a normal woman, let alone the standard of feminine beauty. Even her movements are decidedly “un-feminine.” In fact, it is in her alternating patterns of complete stillness and stiff movement that Young-Goon’s body is its most machine-like. In contrast to several of her female roommates in the sanitarium, who are consumed with fastidiously maintaining their appearance, Young-Goon apparently has absolutely no interest in such a gender performance—or even any interest in her appearance at all.

Tellingly, it is in interactions with her mother that Young-Goon’s “womanness” seems most important. This is because her mother tries to deny the becomings of her family members, including her own potential becomings. She tries desperately to force the emerging multiplicities of the women back into oppressive, dualistic systems of thought by trying to fix the other two to strictly human identities. And once a binary identity has been selected from one category, the appropriate identity (object-identity, in this case) must also be selected from every other binary construction: in order to be “human,” Young-Goon must also be woman. In the initial interview,

Young-Goon's doctor asks the mother, "Did Young-Goon ever say she was something else, too?" to which she responds, "Never, doctor. Young-Goon is a human being." Not only is the mother lying about her daughter's words—as we later find out in a flashback of Young-Goon's—but she, very critically, makes a pronouncement on her daughter's essential identity. She does not say, "Young-Goon believes she is a human being," but rather, asserts what Young-Goon *is*. Her fear of Young-Goon's becoming-cyborg, and of her own potential becoming, causes her to react with a definite act of arborescent labeling. She also tries to pin Young-Goon down to this fixed identity when she asks the doctor, "My girl will be OK, right?"

But it is the moment in which Young-Goon first reveals her becoming to her mother that best reveals the mother's inextricable link between being human (a non-becoming) and being woman. The conversation, which takes place after the grandmother's "abduction" and before the factory incident, goes as follows:

"Mom, I think I'm a cyborg."

"What's that?"

"I think it's kind of like a robot?"

"Have you missed a period? Because you're a 'sybor?' Anything you want to eat—like radishes? (Young-Goon shakes her head.) Then it's okay...it's okay if you're a 'sybor.' It won't interfere with the way you live. Just don't let anybody know. Who would come to eat at a shop where the daughter's a 'sybor?'"

Although the mother claims that being a cyborg is "okay," clearly, the multiplicity that the cyborg represents is anything but okay. Not only does she not understand what Young-Goon is trying to say to her (she consistently mispronounces "cyborg"), but she also attempts to link Young-Goon's becoming to that of the grandmother—and then deny it. Furthermore, the "gender" element is heavily stressed through the reference to her period and the comment about "a shop where the *daughter's* a sybor." In fact, being a "sybor" is only okay if it means conforming to a binary, arborescent identity: the exact opposite of a true cyborg. Such is the

realm of the imposter android. By the end of the film, it is clear that Young-Goon's mother will never understand the becoming-cyborg—and thus will never be able to escape her own fear of becoming—as long as she chooses to remain in the dualistic world of the informatics of domination. If, as Haraway suggests, “we have all been injured, profoundly,” and thus “we require regeneration, not rebirth, and the possibilities for our reconstruction include the utopian dream of the hope for a monstrous world without gender” (Haraway 181), then *I'm a Cyborg, But That's OK* shows that even the oppressed can refuse to participate in such a world. Simply “being” a woman does not necessarily create a deterritorialization or a becoming. The multiple must be made.

There is one further, crucial, system of division that Young-Goon collapses or dispels, one that is equally important to us 21st-century cyborgs as the man/woman dualism: that of human and machine, or human and tool. As I mentioned earlier, in reference to the traditional mind/body dualism that the android represents, the boundaries of the human/machine split are obviously irrelevant to Young-Goon. Furthermore, as shown by the machine-gun and levitation examples, she also has no *conception* of a human/tool distinction. She *is* her weapon, she *is* her own method of transport—she has no use for “separate” tools. This particular dualistic construction (between man/machine or man/tool) is not only critically important to understanding Young-Goon's proper analysis as a cyborg-image, but also in linking her image back into the social realities of the film and our own world. Remember that Young-Goon was a worker in a small-electronics assembly “line.” (The product appears to be radios.) She, and her other human female co-workers, were the “tools” in the factory-assemblage—whose final product was another machine, a machine whose use is so ubiquitous to everyday human life that it practically goes unnoticed. The further irony is that all of the other workers are simultaneously

more and less integrated into this mechanized process than Young-Goon. Although they do not consider themselves to be cyborgs—in fact, they do not consider their role at all—they are actually more acutely “tools” to the machine than Young-Goon is. They even submerge themselves further into the “machine” world by isolating themselves from the other humans and listening to their own personal headphones (more machines). Thus, they are considered “sane” for remaining within their “line” and for not questioning their identity, whereas Young-Goon is labeled “insane” for realizing what is simply her own social reality and for trying to find a way to mediate it without being dominated. But Young-Goon does not want to be a “tool” in any other assemblage—she wants to become-cyborg, her own “human” and tool. She becomes outcast the moment she tries to follow her own line of flight out of the factory assemblage, to escape domination.

This kind of active examination and movement is precisely the source of the cyborg’s ability to affect *actual* social change. These are the traits that allow the cyborg to “function” both in the social imaginary and in social reality. Just like the flashbacks to Young-Goon’s home environment with her grandmother, Park’s inclusion of the factory-assemblage is not simply for some sort of trite comparison of the “oppression” of the real world and the “freedom” of an insane asylum. The problem of the factory-assemblage and its importance to social reality cannot be answered with such a simple dualism. It is not a question of “who is really trapped by the machine” or of “who is trapped by their own mind.” Rather, it is a call for the audience to recognize our existence for the hybrid life that it already is, so that we may begin to understand that hybridization more clearly and in a socially conscious manner. Increasingly, in our everyday life,

It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. It is not clear what is mind and what body in machines that resolve into

coding practices. In so far as we know ourselves in both formal discourse (for example, biology) and in daily practice [...], we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras. (Haraway 177)

This cyborg existence cannot be negated by putting on our headphones while we become tools to the arborescent system of the dominant identity. Ignoring the reality of our situation does not protect us from becoming oppressed by other, very real, systems of domination—most of which depend on our continued maintenance of the classical Western structures of dualisms and the “myths” that validate those structures. That is why the cyborg-image of Young-Goon offers us a very real possibility to escape these dualisms and their inherent “informatics of domination,” as Haraway calls them. “Liberation,” in fact, “rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility. [...] This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion” (Haraway 149). Young-Goon’s wild, “imaginary” line of flight from the dualistic factory—the recognition of her cyborg identity—is one that the rest of us must follow in order to escape our own informatics of domination. When we reach such a level of consciousness,

Intense pleasure in skill, machine skill, ceases to be a sin, but an aspect of our embodiment. The machine is not an *it* to be animated, worshiped, and dominated. The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; *they* do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they. (Haraway 180)

With great responsibility comes great power—power to change both our own embodiment and structures that oppress us in our own everyday lives. The home-assemblage and the factory-assemblage are only two of the many forms of the arborescent system of oppression that we see in our 21st-century social reality.

However, as I have suggested earlier, Young-Goon must actually enter into a *becoming-cyborg* in order to achieve a true multiplicity, rather than simply “realizing” her cyborg identity. Only in a sustained becoming-cyborg can she truly diffuse the dominant identity’s power to create and control borders and divisions of identity. She confesses—during a conversation with the lamp above her hospital bed—that this “new” identity has only come into clarity fairly recently. “So you knew from the beginning that you were a light?” she says. “I only found out later in life that I’m a cyborg. [But] I had to pretend I had always known.” In fact, her sudden discovery comes in response to a specific traumatic event: the recent, sudden removal of her beloved grandmother to a sanitarium. Whatever small amount of stability and comfort she had found in her home situation has now been completely shattered. Her partner in becoming-mouse has been taken from her by the patriarchal system of the dominant identity, which seeks to re-establish a hierarchical and “sane” organization in every aspect of her life. That the agent of this “abduction” is her own mother—who has asked for the grandmother to be taken away—only makes it worse. The informatics of domination, including her own mother, are trying to force Young-Goon’s rhizome into a tree, a human One—so she runs out, following her grandmother. It is while Young-Goon is chasing after the ambulance carrying away her frantic grandmother that a bicycle informs her of her true cyborg identity—a revelation for which she is unprepared. As she continues along this line of flight, chasing after her mouse-grandmother in the wailing ambulance, Young-Goon begins to change rapidly. This change is first internal/mental, then external/physical, following her “incident” at the factory.

Young-Goon’s desire to escape the dualistic systems of oppression drives her to seek a line of flight and brings her into the world of what Deleuze and Guattari call “the Body without Organs.” In fact, Deleuze and Guattari assert that “you can’t desire without making [a Body

without Organs]” (Deleuze and Guattari 149). They describe the Body without Organs as “what remains when you take everything away” and explain that “what you take away is precisely the phantasy, and significances and subjectifications as a whole” (Deleuze and Guattari 151). The Body without Organs (BwO) is a natural companion of multiplicity and of becoming: “You never reach the Body without Organs, you can’t reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit” (Deleuze and Guattari 150). Although the Body without Organs, like the rhizome, is a path to undoing the arborescent system of domination, there is a certain real danger for the individual involved in “taking everything away” and reaching “a state of absolute deterritorialization, the state of unformed matter on the plane of consistency” (Deleuze and Guattari 55-56). To move from having a strictly-defined identity to having *no* identity unfortunately has very real consequences in the “lived experience” of an abject or “minority” individual, as a political—and even physical—entity. For an individual in the dominant social reality, following a line of flight—or emptying the body of organs—too quickly can result in a very real “nothingness,” rather than a multiplicity. Therefore, Deleuze and Guattari insist that “the BwO is not at all the opposite of the organs. The organs are not its enemies. The enemy is the organism” (Deleuze and Guattari 158). However, in order to function properly, “you have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn [...] you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality” (Deleuze and Guattari 160). This process is as complicated as it sounds—the multiple must be made. The construction of the cyborg requires responsibility:

What does it mean to disarticulate, to cease to be an organism? How can we convey how easy it is, and the extent to which we do it every day? And how necessary caution is, the art of dosages, since overdose is a danger. [...] invent self-destructions that have nothing to do with the death drive. Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels,

and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations measured with the craft of the surveyor. (Deleuze and Guattari 160)

Similarly, Haraway also suggests caution when she states that the search for a cyborg politics is “an argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction” (Haraway 150). All becomings are intensely powerful, but it is easy for them to fail, to be aborted. Young-Goon has already passed through a becoming-old (recall the confusion of her mother between which is grandmother and which is daughter), becoming-animal (the mouse daughter of her grandmother), becoming-woman (“You haven’t missed a period, have you?”), and becoming-insane before she finally comes into a becoming-cyborg. It is vitally important that this becoming continue, for both her sake and ours.

However, Young-Goon actually struggles throughout the film to fully accept—or at least, adapt to—her “cyborg” identity and to find a way to deterritorialize along her chosen line of flight without collapsing into the dangerous state that Deleuze and Guattari describe. This struggle is, in fact, the main conflict of *I’m a Cyborg, But That’s OK*: how do you make yourself a cyborg-body without organs and still be OK? Through her becoming-cyborg, Young-Goon has come to see herself too literally as a body without organs—her initial conception of a cyborg is that of the film’s titles, a purely machined body. And, according to this conception, machine bodies not only do not need to eat human food, but are actually harmed by eating as a human would. She therefore refuses to eat any real food after her admittance into the sanitarium, instead continuing to attempt to recharge herself using battery power. Thus, Young-Goon enters her second near-death encounter (the first being her initial “charge” attempt in the factory), as she slowly starves herself to the very edge of no return. Because she keeps her “cyborg identity” a secret from them, her doctors fail to understand the reasons for this behavior and are baffled by

her refusal to eat—once again, chalking it up as a “suicidal drive.” (Park is also clearly making a statement about the detachment of the doctors, their inability to see what should have been obvious, even without Young-Goon making it explicitly clear to them.) But Young-Goon herself has no desire to die—on the contrary, she believes that she is ensuring her own survival.

“Survival” is one of the main themes of the film: it is the impetus for initiating the process of becoming, in order to escape domination. The doctors cannot understand this: they are too concerned with trapping Young-Goon in a single identity, a human One. Instead, she must find a way to make her Body without Organs, her becoming-cyborg, “less a destruction than an exchange and circulation” (Deleuze and Guattari 155). Thus, it is necessary for Park to introduce another character who *can* understand the rhizomatic, schizophrenic nature of Young-Goon’s becoming—in order to help her slow her own deterritorialization, so that she may, in fact, survive. It will take a collective becoming of the patients in the sanitarium—with the special help of one in particular—in order to finally figure out a way to become-cyborg together. The mental-illness-assemblage of the sanitarium is an excellent site for this collective becoming to take place. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the nature of the patients’ status as the “oppressed half” of the subject-object sane/insane dualism and the nature of their “minority” views of reality allow for a true becoming to develop:

There is an entire politics of becomings-animal, as well as a politics of sorcery, which is elaborated in assemblages that are neither those of the family nor of religion nor of the State. Instead, they express minoritarian groups, or groups that are oppressed, prohibited, in revolt, or always on the fringe of recognized institutions. (Deleuze and Guattari 247)

Such a collective-becoming of the oppressed has great significance for the audience, as well: Park intends for us to learn how to apply this process to our own social reality. As Haraway asserts, “who cyborgs will be is a radical question; the answers are a matter of survival”

(Haraway 153). This survival is also our own; thus we must also be a witness and participant in discovering Young-Goon's "answers."

However, in order to facilitate this process, Young-Goon's main "fictional" partner in this search—a fellow patient named Il-Soon—must also enter into a "becoming-cyborg." Fortunately, he is better prepared for this process than most people are: as a fellow patient in the sanitarium, Il-Soon specializes in "stealing." Although he sometimes steals precious objects from the other patients (like Young-Goon's dentures), his main focus is on stealing the abilities or character traits of other people. He usually does this by identifying a trait that he would like to steal and then approaching his "victim" with the proposition. (Despite the fact that these thefts are supposedly "unwanted" by the victims, the other patients are still active participants in the process.) Il-Soon then performs a certain ritual in which he spreads paint on the "victim's" face, and then presses a piece of cardboard to the face in order to make an imprint. Both parties then shout "transfer" and slap hands together. Il-Soon makes the cardboard into a mask, which he wears with the "face-print" side against his own face.

Despite the seemingly one-sided nature of this "theft," these encounters actually turn out to be exchanges—they are forms of becoming. Deleuze and Guattari assert that "a becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification" (Deleuze and Guattari 237). When Il-Soon makes his masks, he does not simply replicate or duplicate the victim's "face": he stylizes the mask. He also always includes some element of his own delusions or personality in the mask's design. (Most often, these are rabbit ears, which are inexplicably one of Il-Soon's personal symbols.) Furthermore, these temporary "transferences" are really two-sided—the victim gets to act as someone else for a time, while Il-Soon acts "like" the victim. Just as Deleuze and Guattari say, the

“deterritorialization is always double [...], the two terms of a becoming do not exchange places, there is no identification between them [...], both change to the same extent” (Deleuze and Guattari 306). However, despite their temporary nature—Il-Soon always “gives” the stolen trait back after a few days or so—these exchanges leave a permanent change on *both* parties. (For example, after stealing one patient’s Ping-Pong playing ability, Il-Soon finally gives the ability back to the other man, saying that the ability “made his butt itch.” After receiving the technique back again, the other man’s butt begins to itch incessantly.) This final property is the most important element of “becoming” in these exchanges: “each of these becomings brings about the deterritorialization of one term and the reterritorialization of the other” (Deleuze and Guattari 10). Although each partner retains a stable identity again at the end of their “temporary” exchange, the exact boundaries of their “territories” have been altered.

Il-Soon engages in these “becomings” because of his own awareness of his oppressed, minoritarian abject-identity. He explains his drive to share in other people’s identities to another patient, saying,

“What if I [take the mask off] and I’m invisible? [...] That’s why I’m good at stealing. Because people can’t see me sometimes. [...] I don’t know why they call me anti-social. I have my reasons for stealing. I’m afraid I’ll vanish. I’m anti-vanishing. They say there’s no cure for being anti-social [...] but the doctor says to have hope...”

His own particular delusions—which Park allows us to view, as well—include occasionally perceiving himself as becoming smaller than the people around him as he “vanishes” and an obsession with brushing his teeth to prevent the teeth from falling out. (This obsession, which stems from the last words his mother spoke to Il-Soon before leaving him, also serves as a link to Young-Goon’s dentures “delusion.”) Il-Soon wants to participate in constant becomings because he is afraid that if he stops doing so, then he will cease to exist in the “dominant reality.” In

response to his statement above, his fellow patient dismisses the goal of trying to “fit in” again to such a reality by being “cured,” telling him, “Just...give up hope...and...keep your strength up.” She is exactly right: conforming to the very system of hierarchical domination that oppresses him will never eliminate the problem. His “hope” does not lie in reforming a dualistic identity of One. Ironically, his only real strategy is to continue pursuing his becomings, in an effort to destroy the dualistic informatics of oppression. Thus, it is in Young-Goon’s becoming-cyborg that he finally finds his best means of survival.

Similarly, Young-Goon is quickly drawn to Il-Soon, but her fascination with him does not unfold in a normal “romantic” manner. She does not seem to be attracted to him in a heterosexual, human way. Instead, she only cares about the usefulness of his unique skill for own survival and goals: specifically, Young-Goon needs him to steal her “sympathy” (the greatest of the “seven deadly sins” of the cyborg, according to her radio) so that she can avenge her grandmother by killing the doctors who are “holding” both of them and then return her grandmother’s dentures. But she also has another reason for finding her grandmother: to finally hear her own “purpose of existence.” Since she has entered her becoming-cyborg, she has been increasingly troubled by her lack of understanding of her true goal—her true desire. She first expresses this problem to the light in her room, saying, “I didn’t come with an instruction manual or a label on me anywhere. I still don’t know what my purpose is. What was I made for?” However, as the movie progresses, it becomes clear that her grandmother has this answer. Before her grandmother’s death, Young-Goon has several delusional visions of meeting with her grandmother. During these meetings, her grandmother repeatedly tries to communicate to Young-Goon the “purpose of her existence,” but other factors keep interfering—drowning out her grandmother’s words or pulling the grandmother away before she can complete the message.

Young-Goon hopes that, after she has lost her “sympathy,” she will finally be able to eliminate all of these interfering factors (including those pesky doctors) and truly catch up with her grandmother. But she needs Il-Soon’s help.

After Il-Soon finally agrees to steal her “sympathy,” he rapidly enters into a becoming-Young-Goon. This process begins even before he makes his new mask. Just as he does with all of his other “victims,” Il-Soon follows Young-Goon around for days before the theft, observing her mannerisms and traits. He even narrates his observations about Young-Goon in a voice-over while following her. Since the only conceivable audience for this commentary is us, the audience, Park has once again pulled us in, including us in the becoming-process. After he finishes his cyborg mask—complete with rabbit ears—Il-Soon quickly finds himself overwhelmed with concern for Young-Goon. Her goals have become his goals. This “hopeless” anti-social patient even sobs helplessly and tells his doctor that he “[feels] so sorry for her that [he] could die.” He then becomes fully invested in Young-Goon’s cyborg-identity and even begins to observe and participate in her moments of delusion: he witnesses (with some horror) her delusional killing spree of the doctors and begins to see her cyborg-body in the same way that she does. (All of the patients, in fact, participate increasingly in joint “delusions” as the film progresses.) He is even present with Young-Goon when she meets with her grandmother in their final shared delusion—Il-Soon even tries to hold the Grandmother there, so that she may finish the message, but he is unable to hold her long enough. (Somehow, Young-Goon knows through this “delusion” that her grandmother has died, even before anyone tells of her of the “real” fact.) This particular delusion also takes place in an “imaginary” world that is clearly a joint creation of both Young-Goon and Il-Soon, as well as some of the other patients.

Il-Soon has now entered a becoming-cyborg with Young-Goon that does not end. Unlike his previous thefts—becomings in which a mutual deterritorialization and reterritorialization quickly stabilized—Il-Soon has no desire to continue stealing after he enters into Young-Goon’s becoming. Although his cyborg-mask is destroyed, Il-Soon does not (and will not) make any other mask: he has found his anti-vanishing solution. His new becoming is permanent—it is no more or less significant than love. Deleuze and Guattari assert that love can be a powerful tool of becoming, as “love itself is a war machine endowed with strange and somewhat terrifying powers” (Deleuze and Guattari 278). That Il-Soon should become so deeply involved with Young-Goon’s own becoming—and able to understand its inherent schizophrenic logic—is hardly surprising. Deleuze and Guattari describe the nature of the two characters’ shared becoming perfectly, by pointing out that:

any individual caught up in a mass has his/her own pack unconsciousness, which does not necessarily resemble the packs of the mass to which that individual belongs. [...] An individual or mass will live out in its unconscious the masses and packs of another mass or another individual. What does it mean to love somebody? It is always to seize that person in a mass, extract him or her from a group [...] then to find that person’s own packs, the multiplicities he or she encloses within himself or herself which may be of an entirely different nature. To join them to mine, to make them penetrate mine, and for me to penetrate the other person’s. [...] Every love is an exercise in depersonalization on a body without organs yet to be formed, and it is at the highest point of this depersonalization that someone can be *named*, receives his or her family name or first name, acquires the most intense discernibility in the instantaneous apprehension of the multiplicities belonging to him or her, and to which he or she belongs. [...] We go through so many bodies in each other. (Deleuze/Guattari 35, 36)

Unlike the doctors, Il-Soon does not question Young-Goon’s cyborg identity: as a member of an oppressed-patient-mass, Il-Soon is already able to understand that she, like him, is made up of many multiplicities. Instead, he tries to find a way for her to avoid self-destruction, a way for her to deterritorialize at a rate that will remain true to her becoming-cyborg, but that will allow her to

retain enough of a tie to the “dominant reality” to survive. He selects *her* out of all the other patients—he acts out her multiplicities, he adopts her body. He apprehends her cyborg-name. He even quotes Young-Goon’s own words back to her, saying, “We must carry on living through thick and thin.” He also admonishes her, saying, “So, you’re a cyborg, but you can still eat and be okay.” In order for Young-Goon to go on living, she must find a way to integrate enough of her humanity back into her cyborg “body.” Because Young-Goon is too consumed with finding her cyborg “purpose for existence,” Il-Soon must apprehend her multiplicities and then join them to his.

Through his shared becoming, Il-Soon is able to devise the perfect solution to Young-Goon’s conundrum: the “rice megatron,” a mechanical device that can safely convert the human food that a cyborg consumes into electrical energy. (Fortunately, Il-Soon’s other, real-world ability is electrical engineering.) He uses his own metal keepsake box—with a picture of his mother inside—as the basis for this “special” device. In a particularly touching scene, Il-Soon convinces Young-Goon to integrate the device into her body by opening the door on her back which gives access to her machinic body. We clearly see that Il-Soon is capable of perceiving the “dominant” reality as well as the “schizophrenic”—he only pretends to cut her open, fooling her while leaving her unharmed. Yet it is precisely this ability to merge the “imaginary” with the “real” as equally important realms that allows him to facilitate her becoming-cyborg. Although he later buries the “real” megatron with Young-Goon’s grandmother’s ashes, Il-Soon is still ironically able to see the “schizophrenic” megatron within Young-Goon’s body when she looks at it. He has not betrayed her becoming-cyborg—in fact, he has made it even more truly ironic. This kind of hybrid, paradoxical irony is precisely what the cyborg excels at and thrives in.

The final integration and implementation of the rice-megatron becomes a shared event between Young-Goon, Il-Soon, and the rest of the patients. As Il-Soon leads his cyborg-partner through the meal line in the sanitarium dining hall, all the eyes of their co-schizophrenics are upon them. Although no one seems to have informed them of the new addition to Young-Goon's body, they still seem to know that something has changed and are instantly involved in her becoming—yet the doctors are nowhere to be seen in this pivotal moment. In a scene that is intentionally reminiscent of Young-Goon's earlier factory "re-charge" attempt, Il-Soon (instead of a radio) carefully talks her through the process of trying out her new device—step by step. However, in stark contrast to the factory-assemblage, every other person in the room is fully aware of these instructions. Every one of the other patients is hanging on Il-Soon's every word and watching Young-Goon intently and silently. They know precisely what the stakes are: survival of the oppressed. In fact, they are *so* attuned to Young-Goon's becoming, in this moment, that everyone in the room is carrying out Il-Soon's instructions together. They have become-pack-cyborg. And they all share as, with some final reassurance from Il-Soon, Young-Goon finally completes the process that she began in her line of flight from the factory. They all eat as she eats. And they all cheer as she sees—and we see—the rice-megatron begin to do its work within her new body.

Once Young-Goon has integrated this bit of her "human" element back into her cyborg-body, as facilitated by Il-Soon, several other elements also fall into place. By "compromising" from her original perception of a cyborg—something more like an android—Young-Goon must also begin to reincorporate other "human" characteristics into her identity. As her health stabilizes, she is even able to communicate more freely with her doctor—finally revealing to the doctor her traumatic past and her true "identity" as a cyborg. She also compromises on some of

the supposed “seven deadly sins” of the cyborg by allowing herself to feel sad over her grandmother’s death, and to feel some sympathy and some thankfulness. These compromises do not, however, keep her from continuing along her chosen line of flight—they only mediate it. She begins spending more time with Il-Soon, who promises a “lifetime warranty” on the rice-megatron. And is it only after successfully stabilizing her Body without Organs that she is finally able to decode her grandmother’s message. With Il-Soon’s help, Young-Goon reconstructs (from her memories of the meetings with her grandmother, reading the grandmother’s lips) her reason for existence: “You’re a nuke bomb. Purpose of existence is world’s end. Need a billion volts.”

This ironic desire is the last element that Young-Goon needs to firmly establish her line of flight, her becoming-cyborg. Her desire—which is, once again, not truly suicidal—gives her a reason to “keep up her strength” as she continues to chase this (nearly impossible) goal of achieving “a billion volts.” The final scene of the film shows Young-Goon and Il-Soon camping out in a thunderstorm, with Young-Goon holding on to the antenna of her radio—she hopes to be “charged” by getting struck by lightning. Once again, unlike her factory re-charge, this charge is different: she has the means to stabilize her becoming. She will survive. Young-Goon asks her new pack companion, “What if [the lightning] doesn’t hit me?” to which Il-Soon replies, “Let’s just give up hope and keep our strength up.” As Young-Goon continues to grasp the antenna, the two share a large “picnic” meal (in the pounding rain) and Young-Goon asks where the cork for the wine bottle has gone. Il-Soon puts his finger into the bottle, claiming not to know where the cork has gone, while the camera pans up to show that Il-Soon has secretly tipped the end of Young-Goon’s antenna with the cork—thus, in the logic of the film, mediating her desire to prevent it from becoming truly destructive. She even shares Il-Soon’s toothbrush with him, brushing her new cyborg-teeth after eating a full meal. The final shot of *I’m a Cyborg, But*

That's OK is of the morning after the storm has safely passed. Young-Goon and Il-Soon are shown, from a long angle, lying out naked together—presumably, they have made some kind of love. A full rainbow—Young-Goon's symbol of her body's maximum charge—crosses the sky.

Ultimately, the title of *I'm a Cyborg, But That's OK* is reaffirmed by the conclusion of the film: Young-Goon is still a cyborg, and she is okay. Young-Goon may have her “reason for existence,” but a perfect, unified solution would be unsuitable for a true cyborg. She is not “cured” of her schizophrenic delusion (of reality). Her becoming-cyborg is not at an end—it has only stabilized enough to allow her survival. As Haraway asserts, “cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism” (Haraway 176). Although she has successfully integrated both human and machine traits, the Young-Goon cyborg will still continue to search for new ways to achieve her “billion volts.” Likewise, Il-Soon must continue to adapt, to constantly perceive the multiplicities within both Young-Goon and himself. Il-Soon's constant interpretation and mediation of Young-Goon's cyborg-logic allows her to continue to “keep up her strength” as she continually chases her “purpose,” always knowing and seeking her desire, but never fulfilling it. In turn, Young-Goon must continue to integrate Il-Soon's interpretations—literally—back into her own body: through this process, she ironically prevents Il-Soon from his unwanted “vanishing.” He, too, must constantly continue to chase his desire by participating in her becoming. Their journey is shared, since “a becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or decent running perpendicular to both” (Deleuze and Guattari 293). Their multiplicities interpenetrate—their packs travel together.

Because of their mutual interdependence and continually interfluctuating perceptions of reality, the Il-Soon/Young-Goon assemblage cannot be described as anything resembling an android: they are cyborg. Both will continue along their shared line of flight. Although their number (two) appears to establish a dualistic or binary system, they are, in fact, multiple: not only through their self-multiplicities, but also through their rhizomatic connections to the other “patients” and to us. Between them, “there is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by a common rhizome” (Deleuze and Guattari 10). Together, their individual and shared pack of cyborgs will continue to merge irreverent and hybrid entities—chasing a line of flight that is perpendicular to both of them, always in defiance of the arborescent and of the subject-object hierarchy.

Thus, in *Young-Goon* (and all of her related assemblages and multiplicities), Chan-Wook Park has finally given us a new model to challenge the obsolete android. Park does so by taking us through, and into, Young-Goon’s becoming-cyborg in his film. We not only see the world simultaneously “objectively” (the “real”) and through her “eyes” and the eyes of her fellow minoritarian schizophrenics (the imaginary), but, more importantly, we realize that the two perspectives cannot actually be separated. The two realms mutually inform each other. Through its ties to our own, recognizable, 21st-century social reality, *I’m a Cyborg, But That’s OK* establishes itself as a film whose “relevance” cannot be dismissed: our shared becoming-cyborg-pack cannot be ignored. The importance of the cyborg-image in film and literature cannot be understated because

cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other. [...] The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities. (Haraway 175)

The dominance of the android-image must be destroyed if we 21st-century cyborgs are ever to seize those tools: we must “write the rhizome” (Deleuze and Guattari 10) in order to overcome “her” dualisms. Park has given us one such line of flight, a way to escape the binary informatics of oppression and thereby find our own “integrated circuit.” If “cyborg unities are monstrous and illegitimate,” then “we could hardly hope for more potent myths for resistance and recoupling” (Haraway 154). In *I’m a Cyborg, But That’s OK*, Park has immersed us in the world of the cyborg, our world, a world that can be made “OK.” However, this world can only be “realized” through our own active acceptance—*both* in the imaginary of literature and myth and in “social reality”—of ourselves as hybrid and ironic and irreverent and monstrous and rhizomatic and multiple and OK. As Young-Goon says, “A cyborg can beat anything. How come you don’t know that when you’re a cyborg yourself?” Becoming-cyborg is more than a narrative flight of fancy. It is more than reality. It is our survival.

CHAPTER 5

THE WARRIOR CYBORG AND THE CANON:

XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS AS A TRANSNATIONAL CYBORG MYTH AND SOCIAL TOOL

In Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto," she asserts that "one important route for reconstructing socialist-feminist politics is through theory and practice [...] including crucially the systems of myth and meanings structuring our imaginations" (Haraway 163). However, any attempt to restructure the systems of myth must find a way to challenge and "conquer" the greatest bastions of literary and cultural thought that support the "dominant identity": the traditional canons. For the "Western" world, this canon has undeniably been constructed of "white" European, (mostly "straight") male thinkers and artists. Griselda Pollock suggests that the consequence of women and non-Europeans being "left out of the records and ignored as a part of the cultural heritage" is that the canon "becomes an increasingly impoverished and impoverishing filter for the totality of cultural possibilities generation after generation" (Pollock 500). Thus, that very same filter prohibits new "object-voices" from meaningfully contributing to or "reconstructing" the canon. Such a canon also actively inhibits the very imagination needed to generate new cultural possibilities and combinations between cultures and identities.

How, then, can feminist theory and politics hope to reach the canon in order to "restructure" the "systems of myth and meanings structuring our imaginations" as a society at large? The answer may be found within Haraway's construction of the "cyborg myth" as both a

necessary tool for change and as a future “face” of humanity, a face that she describes as “a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self [...] [that] feminists must code” (Haraway 163). Haraway describes the construction of the cyborg and the cyborg-world as a “skillful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts” (Haraway 181), in which “any objects or persons can be reasonably thought of in terms of disassembly and reassembly” (Haraway 162). By Haraway’s definition, “a cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism,” and is “a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (Haraway 149). Because the cyborg is not only a product of our fiction, but is also a reality of “lived experience” within any society that employs “technology,” the cyborg therefore exists in both the “cultural imaginary” and in “social reality.” Therefore, Haraway says, “the cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality,” with these “two joined centres” giving it the ability to move constantly from one to the other, influencing both simultaneously (Haraway 149).

Thus, Haraway’s cyborg can be both “story” and “person,” both a new myth *and* its intended audience: for the literary canon, the “reassembled” myth of the cyborg has the power to become the “retrospectively legitimating backbone of a cultural and political identity” (Pollock 499) that challenges the very nature of “canon” itself. Specifically, I intend to explore this idea in relation to the “reassembled” myths found in the television program *Xena: Warrior Princess*. While Xena (the character) may not initially seem to be anything like a cyborg, I believe that the program itself clearly fits Haraway’s definition of the cyborg and is “an ironic political myth faithful to feminism” that is “about humour and serious play” and that is “a rhetorical strategy and a political method” in its own right (Haraway 149). Ultimately, the possible supplantation

into the literary canon of new, “reassembled” myths such as *Xena* positions this myth as a possible tool with which we might actively shape and change social and political thought.

As Pollock points out, the canon “determines what we read, look at, listen to, see at the art gallery and study in school or university” (Pollock 500). She also illuminates the history of both the word itself and its function:

The term *canon* is derived from the Greek *kanon*, which means ‘rule’ or ‘standard,’ evoking both social regulation and military organization. Originally, the canon had religious overtones, being the officially accepted list of writings that forms the ‘Scriptures.’” (Pollock 499)

This “officially accepted” list was written, proposed, and accepted all by the same category of people: men who wanted to achieve—and then maintain—a certain class and position within the context of their society (essentially, to become the dominant identity). The “writings” that were selected were those that best supported their own “identity” as a position of power, and the writings that contradicted or otherwise challenged this conceptualization were dismissed or otherwise destroyed. Thus began the problematic and paradoxical cycle of the canon: the privileged class (the dominant identity, or “subject”) grants authority to texts that grant *them* authority; then back and forth again. “Canons,” Pollock suggests, “may be understood, therefore, as the retrospectively legitimating backbone of a cultural and political identity, a consolidated narrative of origin, conferring authority on the texts selected to naturalize this function” (Pollock 499). The definition of “canon” has expanded in our contemporary society beyond more than a purely religious, or even “written,” context: the “canon” of the contemporary neoliberal dominant identity includes any—and all—stories, narratives, and “myths” of the established “cultural imaginary.” However, the “legitimizing” nature of the canon—intended for a specific category of political and cultural power—remains the same. Even today, the dominant

“cultural and political identity” (Pollock 499) of European/White men determines the “officially accepted list” of myths and writings that society (both Western and, increasingly, the “globalized” transnational society) is constrained to look at, read, and study in schools and universities.

Furthermore, if the purpose of the canon is to legitimate the privileged position of one specific identity-group, then these myths of the canon must, by their very nature, also legitimate the oppression of other social groups in order to create a dichotomy—the subject-object divide. A “privileged” class (the subject) cannot logically exist without an “underprivileged” class (the object). In the case of the literary and cultural canon, Pollock clearly (and correctly) specifies this underprivileged class as being composed largely of women—although it certainly also extends to the treatment of other nations, ethnicities, races, ages, economic classes, etc. Therefore, in order for feminists to recode a new “postmodern collective and personal self” as Haraway describes, it is precisely these oppressive myths of the canon that must be disassembled and reassembled in order to allow a restructuring of our social systems of belief and of our very imaginations.

Of all the oppressive myths of contemporary Western culture, few have had as lasting of an impact as the “classical” myths of Greek and Roman origin. Although these stories are thousands of years old, they continue to be highly privileged within our society—ranking highly even within the already-privileged mythologies of the canon. Given an understanding of the purpose of the canon such as I have laid out, the only explanation for the continued prevalence of these myths within the literary canon is that they must fundamentally reinforce and legitimize the power of the dominant subject-identity—even within our increasingly “transnational” and hybrid global reality. It is, therefore, no coincidence that *Xena: Warrior Princess* most clearly “draws”

from these “classical” myths above all others. However, it is critically important that *Xena*’s use of these myths is *not* a blind reproduction of the canon.

While *Xena* does draw extensively from the “classical” Grecian-Roman mythology, the show also pulls elements from many other “canonical” literary, historical, and cultural sources. This “mixing” can be found both within individual episodes and between episodes. For example, a single episode (such as “Beware Greeks Bearing Gifts,” which will be discussed in detail later) may contain an impossible historical combination of iron-age weapons with weapons such as crossbows (of a late-medieval design), in a bronze-age time period in which neither one could have “actually” existed yet. Because the show was filmed in New Zealand, rather than the Mediterranean, the environment and plant life—including such plants as imported bamboo and tomatoes, which are indigenous to neither the Mediterranean *nor* New Zealand—are often completely unbelievable for the supposed setting of the canonical myths. Even the cast (particularly the extras) of the show are themselves a blatant inconsistency, using thick New Zealand accents and representing a much wider racial diversity—including “indigenous” peoples of New Zealand and other Asiatic backgrounds—than could ever have been possible within the countryside of “classical” Greece and Rome. The inconsistencies *within* episodes also extend beyond the “abuse” of historical detail (such as appropriate costuming, setting, and inclusion/exclusion of “known” historical facts) to blatant warpings and confections (conflagrations, even) of mythological characters and stories.

However, it is *between* episodes that the truly conflicting elements of the show become most evident. In one episode, Xena witnesses the end of the Trojan War (“Beware Greeks Bearing Gifts”) which is dated at approximately 1250 BCE. In another episode (“Destiny”), she meets and is betrayed by Julius Caesar—approximately 75 BCE. Xena also ostensibly runs

across the infant Jesus with Mary and Joseph (“A Solstice Carol,” 0 CE or so), helps David defeat Goliath somewhere near Israel (“The Giant Killer,” 1025 BCE?), and eventually will find her way to China (“The Debt,” around 600 BCE), Mongolia, and Japan. Xena’s apparent ability to fly through time and space could have been a source of humor within the show, but this is not the case. While there is, in fact, much humor within the show, a self-mocking of this synthesis is not considered appropriate. These “discrepancies” between episodes pass almost entirely unremarked within the show itself.

Moreover, *Xena* does not make *any* real attempt to unify these sources into either a “conventional” timeline or plotline. In fact, the show often overtly does the opposite: *Xena* intentionally mixes “source material” from various time periods, cultures, and literary works with a (relatively) contemporary outlook and political sentiment, in order to create combinations that would be impossible for any traditional canon to accept. Yet it is precisely these “impossible,” reassembled myths that the show *does* expect its audience to accept. The intent of the program is not to do a “contemporary” reading of the canonical myths. Instead, these reassembled myths demand acceptance on their own, hybrid terms. The *Xena* myths are not purely meant to be illuminating “commentary” on the previously established (oppressive) canon, but rather are an ironic supplantation of that canon, by Haraway’s definition of irony. Haraway’s cyborg irony

is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible together because both or all are necessary and true. Irony is about humour and serious play. It is also a rhetorical strategy and a political method. (Haraway 149)

The reassembled myth of *Xena* knows that its “modern” political sentiments would never fit within the canonical myths; therefore it is intentionally full of “contradictions that do not resolve

into larger wholes” and holds “incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true” (Haraway 149). In the reassembled *Xena* myth, there *really* was a large racial and cultural diversity in the “ancient world”—which therefore sets a progressive standard for racial integration in today’s society. The two “facts” legitimate each other. And people (like Xena) could actively choose rational and empirical medical “science” over superstition, thereby using that knowledge to save the lives of others. Women could—and did—“change the world,” as the opening credits of the show proclaim.

These “betrayals” of the canon are not constantly explained away or watered down by “revealing” or relating the “true” story of the canon within the *Xena* myth. Ultimately, the reassembled myth of *Xena* neither asks nor *expects* its audience to be familiar with the “sourced” myths outside of what, exactly, is presented on the show. The plotlines and characters of each episode are coherent unto themselves and the story does not require any “external” information in order to be watched and enjoyed. It is precisely this expectation (or rather, lack of one) that truly frees the reassembled *Xena* myth from its disassembled parts. *Xena*’s use of the most classical and most “sacred” canon for “source material” is equally as intentional as the show’s unapologetic omission or alteration of “details” from that same oppressive canon—precisely those “details” that would prevent the show from telling the story *it* wants to tell. This apparent contradiction is in keeping with Haraway’s cyborg, which is “resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity” and is “oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence” (Haraway 151). The myth of *Xena* is guileless but not innocent—its perversity is transparent, but genuine, in its attempt to supplant the oppressive beliefs inherent in its “source” material.

In order to illuminate exactly how the oppressive beliefs and subject-object dualisms of the “classical” canon are being supplanted by “an ironic political myth faithful to feminism” (Haraway 149), I will examine two episodes of the show in which the divergence of the *Xena* myth from the canonical myth is particularly pronounced. It is in such episodes that the political ramifications of such “cyborg irony” for our contemporary “social reality” are perhaps most evident.

The first of these episodes is “Beware Greeks Bearing Gifts,” a reassembled version of the conclusion of the Trojan War. The Trojan War is the “source material” for two of the very “biggest” literary works in the classical canon: *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. (I here include “The” as part of these titles to indicate the total authority that the work represents.) It is important to remember that *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* themselves are later “reconstructions”—of what are the supposed “facts”—of events surrounding the “real” Trojan War. Additionally, these versions of the story are generally believed to have been written down sometime between the 6th and 7th centuries BCE, after being handed down in “oral tradition” until that point, with the “definitive” version attributed to Homer. The “myth” of *The Iliad* focuses exclusively on the description of this “epic” battle—specifically, the final year of the ten-year battle—and is a hefty tome at 15,000 lines long. *Xena*’s “Beware Greeks bearing Gifts,” however, manages to wrap up the war and get its desired messages across in just about 40 minutes of airtime.

This compression of time is perhaps the most superficial difference between the episode and the myth in terms of a feminist “reassembly,” but the condensing of this epic does send a clear message: the ongoing myth of *Xena* has other stories to tell. While *The Iliad* is arguably the most epic and pivotal myth in the classical Western canon, the *Xena* version of *The Iliad* receives exactly as much time as any other story, and therefore is exactly as important as any other story

(which, as I have hinted at, could be based on any one of a number of cultures or even be completely original). *The Iliad* has not been eliminated completely from the *Xena* mythology—it has simply been disassembled and reassembled in new ways, as well as being placed into a reassembled order of “canon” that is crucially different from the subject-object hierarchy. Already, this devaluing of the Trojan War from a privileged position to a somewhat equal position with other myths—perhaps even an inferior position, as some of *Xena*’s personal “backstory” episodes are actually two-part episodes—upsets the established hierarchy of the literary canon.

The basic characters and story of this canonical classic have also been reassembled. In this *Xena* myth, most of the “familiar” heroes and villains are either missing or have been significantly altered. Many prominent characters from *The Iliad*—including Hector, Ajax, Agamemnon, Achilles, and Odysseus—are completely absent from “Beware of Greeks Bearing Gifts.” However, these characters are not “conspicuously” absent in terms of the *story* of the episode—rather, there is simply no mention of them and they are not even vaguely necessary for the plot of the episode. It is also no coincidence, either in *The Iliad* or in *Xena*, that those “heroes” are all men. In the case of *The Iliad*, male heroes legitimize the currently dominant, patriarchal cultural and political “identity.” (This is especially true when one considers that these heroes are frequently also depicted as “white” and “straight” in most contemporary representations.) In the case of *Xena*, the absence of male heroes indicates that such an identity is *not* valued.

Although the character of *Xena* herself *is* depicted as a hero, she is not meant to be raised to the *exact same* privileged position of “dominant identity” that the male heroes of the canon currently fulfill. The *Xena* myth makes it clear through *Xena*’s actions and beliefs that a simple

inversion of the privileged-underprivileged, subject-object dualism is not the goal of this reassembled myth. While Xena may be a very capable warrior, she has no intention of fighting either for her own honor or for anyone else's "gain." Furthermore, Xena is one of *three* different female characters in the story—who constitute the focal characters of the episode—and she is the only real "warrior" among them. (This is in contrast to the "heroes" of *The Iliad*, who were *all* expected to be excellent fighters as a condition of being both heroes and "real men" in their society.) Yet all three women—Xena, Xena's bard-friend Gabrielle, and Helen of Troy—all agree that the war is pointless and should be ended as quickly as possible. These female characters are the only characters within the episode to openly voice the opinion that the war should end, without considerations of "victory" or "pride." When Xena's companion Gabrielle first hears mention of Helen of Troy, she claims that she wants to see the "face that launched a thousand ships"—quoting a well-known expression in our current culture. However, Xena immediately cautions Gabrielle against such idealizations, saying, "Yeah, a thousand *warships*" ("Beware Greeks").

In fact, Xena has only come to Troy at the request of Helen herself, who sent for Xena explicitly in order to end the war which is being waged "in her name." This kind of autonomy and self-possession does not exist for Helen's character within *The Iliad*. However, in the *Xena* myth, Helen has been stripped of her illusions and of her naïve beliefs about love and honor: she finally recognizes the pain that her privileged position has brought to others, as well as the devastation that her husband Paris is continuing to wreak with his oppressive, patriarchal ways. To further break from the "dominant subject" of the canonical myth, this Helen is also dark-complexioned, racially "other."

The *Xena* myth is not subtle in its criticism (and devaluing of) the oppressive behavior that privileged men wield within the society. At the very beginning of the episode, before sending for Xena, Helen tries to communicate to her husband her own growing horror and shame at the now ten-year long battle between Greece and Troy. Paris' response is completely dismissive, saying, "These nightmares rob you of your beauty, and after all, isn't that what I've been fighting for?" ("Beware Greeks") Helen is literally locked up in the castle, and her role as queen and wife only allow her one possible avenue of power within her patriarchal society: her husband and king. Thus, when he refuses to empower or value her, Helen finds it necessary to search outside the patriarchal society of Troy (represented by its king, Paris) in order to find someone willing and able to help end the madness of war.

When that help arrives in the form of Xena, Helen admits that, "After ten years of war, Troy has become a city of misery and death. Paris may have loved me once, but now he is consumed with victory. We're barely more than strangers. I just want the war to end" ("Beware Greeks"). The link created in this quote between the destructive social nature of Paris's patriarchal beliefs and the personally oppressive nature of his relationship with Helen is also a critical reassembly of the *Xena* myth. In the canonical version of the Trojan War, the war began after Paris either stole or seduced (depending on whom you ask) Helen away from her husband, Menelaus of Greece. The two sides then went to war over which king had the right to "own" Helen as his wife. In the "classical" versions of the story, Helen's reasons for "participating" in these events are either generally obscured or are downright inscrutable—or even shamelessly offensive. Whom of the two she may have loved—or both or neither—is not clear. She is essentially given to Menelaus in marriage by her father and then taken from Menelaus by Paris. Certainly, she has no real capacity to act (making her truly abject), and she even continues to be

shuffled around after Paris' death—between Paris's two brothers and then possibly back to Menelaus. Yet, at the same time, her "love" with Paris (or rather, his "love" of her) continues to be idealized within the canon of the myth, as Gabrielle's comment about the ships is meant to highlight.

This patriarchal, subject-object domination of Helen's personal life must necessarily be torn down and replaced in the *Xena* myth along with the patriarchal depiction of "war" within the story. "Beware of Greeks Bearing Gifts" makes it quite clear that Helen does not love either of her "husbands" and that neither of them truly loves her. When Helen begins to think of leaving, she asks Xena, "But where will I go? What will I do?" To this, Xena replies, "What do you want to do?" Tellingly, Helen admits, "I don't know—No one's ever asked me that before" ("Beware Greeks"). Before Paris is killed by his own brother, who desires Helen, Paris tries to escape blame for the war by saying, "I don't know how all this happened. I just wanted to love you." Helen refuses his false patriarchal apology, saying, "No, you wanted to own me," and then says that she will not stay with him, proclaiming, "I want my own life" ("Beware Greeks").

By explicitly linking and refuting these two elements (oppression of the "object" through physical warfare and oppression of women as socially object), the *Xena* myth implies that their presence in canonical myth fundamentally encodes a system of oppressive beliefs that allow the canon to privilege men and Western/European classist patriarchy over other categories of people. In this episode, the main object-identity that is focused on is that of women (although there are hints of other categories). The knowledge of women is clearly devalued in the Troy of "Beware of Greeks." For example, when Xena immediately spots the (classically ridiculous) trap of the Trojan horse and tries to warn Paris, he discredits her opinion and throws her into jail. Paris also

refuses to listen to any suggestion that Helen tries to make, saying that he “didn’t fight ten long years to listen to [her] judgment” (“Beware Greeks”).

Besides the primary focus on women as abject in this society, the episode also indicts “classist” oppression within a couple of “reassembled” details of the *Xena* myth. Although it is entirely the battle between the kings that drags out the Trojan War in both versions of the myth, both stories do show the “powerless” abject-citizens of the kingdoms suffering. However, within the canonical myth, Menelaus’s army successfully slaughters all of the citizens of Troy after gaining entry through the Trojan horse in *The Iliad*. In “Beware of Greeks,” Xena actively tries to protect (nearly) all of the fearful residents of Troy (including Helen), and succeeds in doing so, leading them out of the battle raging within the city to safety—although she leaves behind the dead Paris and his traitorous brother (after defeating him in battle, of course) for Menelaus to deal with. Therefore, even though the classical myth claims to mourn the tragedy of the “abject” as victims, *The Iliad* ultimately reaffirms precisely that they *are* abject—victims that can be seen as unacting “objects” for the real “subjects” of the society to maneuver. The *Xena* myth, in contrast, refutes this hierarchy more fully by refusing to leave the “abject” to their fate as “unimportant.” Xena herself makes it quite clear that the *kings* are primarily to blame for the destruction of Troy, saying, “When two kings are bent on destruction, there’s nothing much anyone can do” (“Beware Greeks”). Thus, after Xena saves her life, Helen decides to forfeit her royal status and to travel as a “normal” person, in order to discover herself.

Overall, the impression left of the Trojan War is one of smallness and pettiness. Troy is a tiny and drab-looking “city” with what looks like only about 30 citizens—at most. (This may mostly be a result of budget constraints in the show’s development, but the image remains for posterity, nevertheless.) There are only about three sets for the whole “kingdom” and Paris and

Helen's castle is far from being "plush." The Greeks don't come out looking much better: Xena is able to fight her way through the entire siege of the city in about three minutes, by defeating less than ten Greek soldiers before breezing in through the city gates. From the more limited time "allowance" for the story to the omission of several "key" characters, this reassembled myth would be a complete let-down for anyone looking for a recreation of the epic relevance that *The Iliad* has traditionally played in society. Fortunately, the *Xena* myth doesn't care to live up to those expectations: it can't fail at something it isn't even *pretending* to be doing. This reassembled myth neither anticipates nor desires any comparison. It clearly refutes the patriarchal oppression of women found in the canonical *Iliad*, as most clearly represented by Helen, and then negates that oppression by consciously supplanting that myth with a reassembled one. This "ironic political myth faithful to feminism" (Haraway 149) paradoxically uses the "original" myth even as it disavows that myth and makes it irrelevant. More importantly, this cyborg myth embraces that paradox.

The methods by which this ironic, reassembled myth is developed in the *Xena* mythology can take many different forms. Therefore, an interesting episode to look at for a different angle is "The Giant Killer," a reassembled version of the Biblical myth of David and Goliath. The (truly) canonical version of this myth pits David, the future king of the Israelites, against a heartless (and essentially faceless) giant named Goliath, who has come with the Philistine army in order to defeat and oppress David's people. However, in the *Xena* myth, Goliath is a sympathetic character who has become consumed with his desire to avenge the murder of his family. (His wife and child were, in fact, killed while he was saving Xena's life in a past battle.) The episode focuses at least as much on the past and present friendship between Xena and Goliath as it does

on the struggle of David and the Israelites against the Philistines (with whom Goliath is only a grudging partner).

The interesting political twist to this *Xena* myth is not simply the “exposure” of Goliath’s half of the story. Although this aspect is certainly canon-challenging in its questioning of the both religious and moral authority of the dominant identity-group that the myth privileges, this interest in Goliath is perhaps not as obviously “faithful to feminism” (Haraway 149). The most salient point of *feminist* supplantation of the canon in “The Giant Killer” is actually *Xena*’s prominent role as authority and voice within—and beyond—the myth. Despite the importance of David as a Biblical character which is (particularly) highly privileged within the Western canon, “The Giant Killer” is clearly framed as *Xena*’s story: the episode both begins and ends with her reminiscences about the giants and about Goliath in particular. She *could* be discussing the canonically important character—David—but she is not. Throughout the episode, *Xena* (and not David) is the voice of both morality and rationality. She pleads with her friend Goliath several times to amend his ways, saying that “a man’s soul can be poisoned by hatred” (an experience that *Xena* herself has overcome) and reminding Goliath that his wife would not want him to kill innocent people in his quest for revenge (“Giant Killer”). Goliath is *almost* swayed by her pleas, but is ultimately unable to climb out of his (patriarchal) cycle of vengeance and violence. Even the triumphant victory of David over Goliath and the Philistine army—the canonically relevant part of the story—is intentionally overshadowed by Goliath’s sincerely touching death scene. Once again, it is *Xena*’s words in this scene that carry not only the relevant morals of the episode, but also the emotional conclusion of the story itself. As he is dying, Goliath asks *Xena*, “Do you think I’ll see my family on the other side?” *Xena* replies, “I don’t know—I can’t be the

judge of that. I hope so, my friend,” and gives him some measure of peace by saying, “Go now—your war is over” (“Giant Killer”).

True to the nature of the reassembled cyborg myth, however, David’s voice still remains as a part of this *Xena* myth. His voice exists, in a paradoxical manner, to both support and serve as a foil for Xena’s voice. Because a complete subject-object dualistic reversal is undesirable for the cyborg myth, David is allowed to exist in a (somewhat altered) form of his canonical symbolism. Xena does not openly antagonize David or his beliefs (or his “voice”). Yet while David’s skills as a psalmist-author are mentioned and “his” psalms directly cited within the episode, the final words of the episode belong to Xena. The final shot of the episode is of Xena in the burial ground of the Giants. Xena’s voiceover narration proclaims, “Goliath, I know you can hear my thoughts. [...] When I think of you, I’ll remember Goliath the great warrior, and a loving husband, and my friend” (“Giant Killer”). The finality of Xena’s viewpoint of Goliath clearly indicates that her version is the “true” version of the myth, no matter how “anyone else” might twist it.

In terms of the *Xena* myth, this implied “anyone else” is the canon and the dominant identity that supports it/is supported by it. However, due to the method of ironic and calculated supplantation of the canon that I have laid out, the *Xena* myth cannot and does not call explicit attention to the myth it sources. The very fact that a *woman* is given the authority to determine the “officially accepted” text of the canon is a political move that shakes the canon as it currently stands. This, in turn, opens the canon to the previously “voiceless” voices of those outside the culturally dominant identity—namely, the currently oppressed and underprivileged abject-classes of our cyborg, transnational social reality. In fact, Pollock asserts that the desired goal of challenging or supplanting the canon is not simply to continue reacting within a dualistic

structure to the ideas of the privileged and the oppressed, but rather to encourage a *variety* of voices, similar to the nature of the hybrid, cyborg identity that Haraway describes. “Instead,” Pollock asserts, “we need a *polylogue*” (Pollock 501).

Therefore, this concept of the ironic, reassembled myth allows *Xena: Warrior Princess* to challenge “real” and oppressive social structures that are essentially encoded in the myths of the historical Western canon. The politically conscious construction of a reassembled myth, which challenges the canon as a system that frames imaginative thought, can be a tool for “feminist theory and practice” as Haraway describes. However, this kind of change will come about not only through the reassembled *myth* as a cyborg itself, but also through the cyborg *audience* that it is intended for. This audience must *also* necessarily be composed of a “postmodern collective and personal self” (Haraway 163) which is able to both work within paradox and to accept irony and contradiction. This primary audience includes children and those who have never been exposed to the current canon that the cyborg myth strives to supplant. The hybrid, cyborg audience, in turn, will continue to provide the polylogue of voices needed to maintain the cyborg myth. As Haraway points out, “The boundary is permeable between tool and myth, instrument and concept, historical systems of social relations and historical anatomies of possible bodies, including objects of knowledge. Indeed, myth and tool mutually constitute each other” (Haraway 164). In this way, a new cyborg myth that constructs a less strictly-defined system of “identity” can be both “story” and “person,” entering into the paradox of the canon, and become the “retrospectively legitimating backbone of a cultural and political identity” (Pollock 499) of polylogue cyborgs. Therefore, if the “cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work” (Haraway 154), then works like *Xena*, with its canonically impossible

“mythic” combinations, could be used similarly as a powerful political tool. In order to truly change the “social reality” of our contemporary subject-bject society we must supplant the “cultural imaginary” of the oppressive cannon with the cyborg myth—using the cyborg as our tool. We must both *wield* the sword and *be* the sword: it is our only weapon. The “warrior cyborg” cannot be ignored.

CONCLUSION

AFTERCARE:

The purpose of this thesis is, ultimately, to create a movement towards “liberation.”

So, like a “perverse” and “blasphemous” cyborg (Haraway 151), I once again come back to my own origin. The questions must (always) be asked:

How do we become cyborg? And how can we become myth?

My analysis of the “cultural imaginary”—as observed from five different angles—has shown that there are very real, very powerful forces at work that maintain “unhealthy” systems of domination within our daily lives—and even within our own imaginations. These forces define the powerful “self” of the “national identity” by constructing an identity-border between that “self” and the “other.” The link between identity construction and the cultural imaginary (specifically myth) is a paradoxical cycle of *mutual* validation, in which myth is used as a vital tool in the construction of oppressive social hierarchies, while these same hierarchies decide the cultural definition of “myth.” Essentially, the definition of a “dominant identity” *requires* clear borders between that identity and the “other” or “abject” of the social hierarchy, a definition which is *necessarily* found in cultural myth.

The cultural imaginary of our contemporary society is therefore a powerful tool for building the structures of “social reality,” a tool that unquestionably belongs to the (oppressive) dominant subject. In order to effectively “cure” oppressive, systemic dualisms, we must first

learn to accurately and *consciously* perceive these “imaginary” myths of the dominant subject-identity *as* tools—then we must learn how to use them. Even hybrid “literary” works with canonically impossible “mythic” combinations (such as *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *The Kappa Child*, and *I’m A Cyborg, But That’s OK*), can be used as potent political tools against this oppressive hierarchy. Therefore, my “final prescription” for curing the “illness” of our subject-*object* society is the politically-conscious construction of a reassembled, hybrid, cyborg myth. Such a construction actively challenges the “cultural imaginary” as a system that frames imaginative thought and makes the “hybrid myth” a critical tool for “feminist theory and practice,” as Haraway puts it—thus opening the “possibility” of liberation for all *object* identity-groups. A “betrayal” of any *one* boundary between a “subject-identity” and an “*object*-identity” throws *all* such boundaries into question, undermining the supposedly “unchallengeable” position of the dominant subject.

However, this kind of change to the cultural imaginary must come about not only through the reassembled *myth* as a cyborg itself, but also through the cyborg *audience* that this hybrid myth is intended for. This audience must, therefore, *also* necessarily be composed of a “postmodern collective and personal self” (Haraway 163), which is able both to work within paradox and to accept the irony and contradiction of “multiplicity.” This hybrid, cyborg audience will in turn continue to provide the polylogue of voices needed to maintain the cyborg myth. That audience is *us*: “By the [early twenty-first] century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs” (Haraway 150). We only have to believe it to make it real.

Although I have *tried* to follow an “intersectional” approach to discussing the *object*-groups of our society, I know that I have not really succeeded. I *can’t* succeed. But I can always

continue along my own Deleuzian/Guattarian “line of flight” towards liberation: a deterritorialization, a becoming-cyborg. Like the Young-Goon cyborg from *I’m A Cyborg, But That’s OK*, I must chase my “purpose of existence” while paradoxically knowing that I cannot (and should not) ever achieve it—the “imaginative apprehension” (Haraway 149) of that “possibility” is enough. I *can* write “the myths I want to become” (Anzaldúa 93). But I need your help.

Together, we can form a polylogue, a pack of cyborgs. It is essential that this movement towards liberation be sustained by the multiplicity, by the potential-rhizome of our society—from both sides of the subject-object border. Other writers and theorists *must* contribute to our hybrid myth by embracing the cultural imaginary as a critical social and political tool. This thesis is only One: we need to “write the rhizome” (Deleuze and Guattari 10). We need more hybrid myths, like Xena and the kappa, in order to supplant the canon of the dominant subject. We also need more hybrid and transnational approaches to social and literary *theory*, approaches that refuse to support the oppressive hierarchies of our neoliberal society. I call on my fellow cyborgs to fill in the (infinite) gaps that are left by this thesis—to continually examine the fundamental “interpenetration” of race, class, gender, sexuality, animal, machine, and every “other(ed)” identity. The work of a cyborg is never finished, and the task is exactly this: How do we become cyborg? And how can we become myth?

It is impossible for me to fully respond to my own questions. But the stakes are high: “Who cyborgs will be is a radical question; the answers are a matter of survival” (Haraway 153).

I ask you to join me in a becoming-cyborg. It is our time to become myth.

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