Ghost in the Shell as a Cyberpunk Rhapsody

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The article proposes a reading of one of the constituent aspects of the feature film *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), its plot, as a compendium of influences of what is usually considered to belong to the science fiction genre. According to the reading, the movie presents ideas and an aesthetics that points to the newest trends of science fiction, such as cyberpunk, suggesting passages of many previous films, something that can help draw the constitutive master lines of the plot as similar to the concept of rhapsody, an old, if not ancestral concept. In an attempt to understand this pendulum-like movement that presents the new but is made up of the past, one of the canons of Western literature of all times was sought as the theoretical support for an attempt to explore this old facet in a futuristic film. From this point of view, concepts such as mimesis and emulation were used in this approach to the filmographic version of the homonymous manga published in Japan in 1982, a film that presents itself as a challenging puzzle whose resolution finds, in this article, a beginning and also an incentive for future studies.

Introduction

"The instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated" (Aristotle, 2000, IV: 7). In his *Poetics*, Aristotle analyses, among other things, the characteristics of written composition, in the excerpt he does not even mention textual production, on the contrary, he speaks broadly, considering the act of imitating to be atavistic to the human being, something that, additionally, it would engender some kind of pleasure. Regarding imitation, a few pages earlier he recorded that "Epic poetry and Tragedy, Comedy also and Dithyrambic poetry (...) are all in their general conception modes of imitation" (Aristotle, 2000, I: 4), considering that some forms of writing or genres – therefore dealing with the art of textual composition, are forms of imitation and, a few pages later, expands his understanding of imitation, now considering also other artistic expressions: "The poet being an imitator, like a painter or any other artist, must of necessity imitate one of three objects (…)", and follow its settings (Aristotle, 2000, XXV: 35). In summary, given the above, it can be considered that Aristotle understands imitation as something natural to human beings and, for him, art is a form of imitation.

Perhaps more important than that, the transcribed excerpt can be considered a true philosophical postulate in that it seeks the core, the ultimate cause of a phenomenon – education which, according to the philosopher, is initiated by imitation, an imitation that would be, in his words, "one instinct of our nature" (Aristotle, 2000, IV: 7). This understanding of the imitative instinct as a possibility for the foundation of knowledge had been previously explored among ancient thinkers. Without going back too far in time, Plato himself, Aristotle's teacher, frequently explores the theme of imitation in his dialogues, amid analogies between text and painting (Halliwell, 2009: 42). However, in book 10 of *The Republic*, Plato states that the mimetic poet does not have the capacity to teach because he is a person who only knows how to imitate. For Plato, when the poet sings, he does not create this something sung, as it exists in nature, a dawn, for example. The poet sings what this dawn looks like to him, that is, it is a situation of absence of veracity, because the truth is the sun rising, the poem would just be a figuration of the truth, a reading, an interpretation (Plato, 2003, X: 313-327). Aristotle disagrees and criticizes this interpretation. For him, mimesis can generate knowledge because it is also constituted by creation, by reconstruction. From then on, mimesis, imitation, emulation, also comes to be considered pedagogical in addition because it tensions possibilities: as Aristotle postulates, for the work of art to fulfil its function of provoking recognition from the public, it is up to the author to pursue verisimilitude, making the plot, or the image, or the performance, plausible and not necessarily how it happened, but how It could have happened – in the case of a fictional text, for example. Encouraging this movement of imaginative speculation, the artist instigates his imaginative capacity in the public, enabling cognitive expansion – therefore learning, the accumulation of experience/knowledge.

Many centuries later, just to mention a sporadic, but symbolic case that mimesis, which the same Aristotle, in the same *Poetics*, stated served for instruction, as seen, to purify emotions (Aristotle, 2000, VI:10) and even to generate pleasure (Aristotle, 2000, XIII: 18; XXIII: 32 and others), continues to be investigated and thematized, the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa wrote in the poem *Autopsychography*: "The poet is a feigner / Who's so good at his act / He even feigns the pain / Of pain he feels in fact. / And those who read his words / Will feel in his writing / Neither of the pains he has / But just the one they're missing." (Zenith, 2021: 63). This composition, only partially reproduced here, seems to echo Aristotle, as all of this philosopher's ideas, regarding what has been presented so far, seems to appear condensed in Pessoa's verses: they show the poet (artist) as a pretender (imitator) in addition to being a generator of knowledge and delight, as it causes the reader to discover a sensation that they do not have, the pain that the lyrical self claims to be feeling and that they do not feel – something that can provoke satisfaction as pain is generally not something appreciated.

And if the artist is able to make his audience not only learn but apprehend, retain in their understanding, something of their own human nature, this artist has reached the universal (Aristotle, 2000, IX: 14), that is, that which is common to humanity. Whether they know it or not, there are artists who, since ancient times, have dedicated themselves to imitation as a way of trying to achieve the universal. In the field of Literature, Vergil, for example, composes his *The Aeneid*, in the 1st century BC, imitating Homer's *Odyssey*, from the 8th century BC. This imitation, however, is not servile, it progresses, amplifies the concept, seeks not only pay homage by pointing out the model followed and how to overcome it. It is as if the author made a point of making it clear to his reader which paradigm he followed, which in itself is already a compliment, as no author, interested in doing a good work, will choose a bad paradigm and then, indirectly, invite the reader to see how he did it, how he surpassed the

model work. Therefore, emulation can also be considered as the continuation of a tradition and, in *The Aeneid*, it appears in different ways, in addition to the many allusions, starting with the meter, the measure of the rhythmic scheme of the verses: both books were composed with the dactylic hexameter. The hero of *The Aeneid*, Aeneas, is a navigator, like Ulysses in the *Odyssey*. The hero's story, in both works, has as its contours the departure from his homeland and, in the end, his return. In both, a council of Gods takes place to discuss the hero's fate. In both books the hero goes through the catabasis, that is, the descent into hell, where he undergoes a revelation that changes the course of history.

Following tradition, in the 16th century AD, Luiz de Camões composed what would be the founding book of the Portuguese civilization, emulating the respective ones on the Greek civilization, *Odyssey* (along with the *Iliad*), and Italian, *The Aeneid*. The hero of *Os Lusíadas* is also a navigator who leaves his homeland and then returns. In the middle of the story there is also a meeting between deities to decide on the hero's future and there is, equally in *Os Lusíadas*, a revelation given to the hero at the moment of access to the metaphysical, in this case to heaven, therefore an anabasis instead of a catabasis. Not using the Greek or Latin languages for the composition of his work, Camões was unable to use the dactylic hexameter meter, also called heroic. *Os Lusíadas* is composed using the decasyllable verse and, in song I, 3, still in the invocation, the initial part of the work, he makes clear his intention to follow the paradigm but, mainly, to overcome the model: "Let us hear no more then of Ulysses and Aeneas and their long journeyings (…) The heroes and the poets of old have had their day; another and loftier conception of valour has arisen" (Camões, 2011, I: 3), or, in other words – in Camões' own literally translated: "Cease everything that the ancient Muse sings, That another higher value rises!"[1] – the ancient Muse, in this case, is already existing poetry and, by "old", one can also understand outdated, obsolete.

Based on the reflections presented, this article proposes a reading of the science fiction film *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) as an emulation, as an imitation of previous cinematographic works, at least one of graphic animation, among other various footage of real actors, in this aspect also something that allows it to be considered as a true rhapsody, comprising countless films – not necessarily science fiction, interweaving a complex mesh of possible references and quotations, veiled, apparent or even explicit, comprising thematic, visual, sound and also in the dialogues between the characters.

The word rhapsody is usually associated with a musical genre. In this sense, the *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (2003: 770) begins its definition by pointing to the Greek root of the word:

> [fr. Gr. *rhapsōidos*, a singer or reciter of epic poetry] A section of an epic poem that is separately recited. (2) In the 19th and 20th centuries, a title chiefly for instrumental pieces. Borrowed from 18th century literature, it implied no particular form, content, or compositional method. (…) Liszt's 19 Hungarian Rhapsodies (1846–86), with their loose, episodic forms (like epic poetry), their exaggerated, contrasting moods, and their supposed folk themes, initiated a long tradition of nationalistic rhapsodies, many of which use folk or folklike materials.

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[1]Translation by the authors.

As the dictionary records, the word implies a kind of miscellany, a composition made by the juxtaposition of parts that are not necessarily organic. This understanding is similar to that of the classicist Ilaria Andolfi, for whom rhapsodies were also types of compendiums of information like

> the patchworks of commonplaces compiled by erudite writers in the Renaissance (…) refer to the activity of stitching together collected materials into a consistent whole (the rhapsode as one who "sews together" pieces of song). They might have done so by singing or reciting a piece before an actual audience and/or by writing things down. (…) This does not automatically mean that he (the rhapsode, our note) wanted to compile an encyclopaedia in the modern sense of the word: he probably did not make references to his sources like Ps. Apollodorus did, nor did he seem to have registered different versions of the same plot. (...) he is an observer of the tradition, of which he could offer explanations, rectifications, and expansions. Moreover, like a rhapsode, in the narration he hid himself: he let the stories speak by themselves. (Andolfi, 2019: 32)

It is proposed here, therefore, and without neglecting that the film is derived from a pre-existing comic work, and therefore cannot exaggeratedly deviate from this initial script, a reading of the feature film *Ghost in the Shell* not just as a follower of a tradition, that of science fiction films, but also as an emulator/imitator/tributary of the genre and, at the same time, composer of a patchwork of these same influences, mentioning them, as already established, veiled or more expressly, creating a kaleidoscopic image, rhapsodic of science fiction cinema – based on the expanded concept of rhapsody, which in its principles – as seen, was restricted to music and/or epic poetry. It is as if the film deliberately set out to tell – through the countless references presented or suggested, the entire history of science fiction up to that point. Next, we will seek to describe the work chronologically, identifying possible cinematographic intertextualities, with a view to corroborating what was presented: that the cinematic version of *Ghost in the Shell* can be read as a cyberpunk emulation. More than that, it is rhapsodic because, paraphrasing the writings of Ilaria Andolfi, the film observes a tradition and offers expansions, allowing allusions and references to appear on their own (spoiler alert from now on).

Ghost in the Shell as A Rhapsody Cyberpunk Emulation

Directed by Rupert Sanders and released in 2017, *Ghost in the Shell* portrays the life of Mira Killian, an elite police officer. The time presented is that of the near future, indefinite, and there is, apparently, nothing very different from what today's time presents to humanity, there are no extra-terrestrial beings living among humans, for example, despite the apparently humanoid robots much more widespread than currently. It is therefore a very feasible description, as if it were a city in a few decades. The film takes place in an unidentified metropolitan region of a city like those located in the eastern part of the planet. The analogy with a Japanese city is immediate because the traffic signs are apparently in Katakana, the names of several characters are Japanese names and one of them uses exclusively the Japanese language to communicate. Furthermore, at a certain point in the film an action takes place in a bar frequented by the "Yakuza", according to the words of one of the characters.

Just a year before joining the public force, Mira had her body synthetically reconstructed after an accident. The only remaining organ from his original organism is the brain, the rest of the body is robotic although not noticeable to the eyes of the other characters in the film or to

the audience, those who watch the film. It is at this point that the film begins, amidst the processes that unite the manufactured body with Mira's brain. Motivated by some events, the character begins a search for her true essence despite being described as someone with practically no memory, due to the accident she went through and also the surgery she underwent, like a body transplant. This search for origins will make it conflict with her daily life. The synopsis already reminds us of some similar conflicts, such as those of the Nexus 6 replicants, in *Blade Runner* (1982), a film by Ridley Scott, which also involved the characters' memories and the search for their origins.

Ghost in the Shell also emulates films that are conventionally characterized as following the cyberpunk aesthetic. This term emerged after the release of the paradigmatic 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, written by William Gibson. Interestingly, Gibson did not create this term nor use it in the novel. What he seems to have created was the term "cyberspace", in the novel a place in which one of his characters "projected his disembodied consciousness into the consensual hallucination that was the matrix" (Gibson, 1988: 23). As one of the interpretations of the word "punk" indicates a person without an occupation, a wanderer, and in *Neuromancer* there are characters who could be described in this way, being frequenters of cyberspace, the association is immediate, hence the term cyberpunk. The cyberpunk aesthetic, arising from the images, colours, sounds and themes of young wanderers in cyberspace, drove countless works – not just cinematographic, which reverberate to this day.

The film version of *Ghost in the Shell* seems to emulate many works, hence its understanding as a rhapsody, as anticipated, as a composition, a miscellany, and in different ways, even sonically. This is already noticeable in the first visual information of the film, when no image has yet been shown, next to the first sign presented to the public containing the words "In the future, the line between human and machine is disappearing" there is a sound "boom", like a big bass sound that echoes lightly and deeply and lasts, reducing the volume, for a few seconds. This same resource, with a very similar timbre and sound, occurs in the opening of *Blade Runner*, a science fiction film considered a classic of the genre and from which it seems that *Ghost in the Shell* sought inspiration/emulated many times – a phenomenon that also occurs with most of the other films mimicked, which also had several of its ideas paid homage to in *Ghost in the Shell.*

From *The Matrix* (1999), the ideas for cables probably came from, which, at times, appear plugged into the characters' skulls, especially the back of the head, but at other times also into the upper parts of the head, as occurs at the beginning of *Ghost in the Shell* and, in *The Matrix*, at the moment when the character Neo leaves the matrix and starts living in Zion. There is also a movement, mentioned in both films, which causes these cables, once unplugged from the characters' necks, to cause them to fall. More than that, one can even remember the revelations of the catabasis that occurred in the *Odyssey* and also in the *Aeneid*, mentioned previously, because here too, both in *The Matrix* and in *Ghost in the Shell* there are, as expected, revelations after the downfalls of the characters that will change their story and, consequently, the film. In *Ghost in the Shell* there are two falls, one of them occurring at the beginning of the film, when the heroine is being assembled. At this moment, after unplugging the cranial cables, the body suffers a gentle fall, and from then on it is always shown from a point of view in which the audience sees it lying down, apparently being moved by liquid environments resembling a uterus, after all. It is still a kind of birth, its "creation", in the words of Dr. Ouelet, later in the film. By contrast, in *The Matrix*, when Neo is also being kind of reborn, after all he transfers his existence from inside the matrix to outside, after taking one of the coloured pills, he suffers a

big fall, leaving an environment that is also liquid and apparently very peaceful, to a kind of disposal site, from where it is rescued by inhabitants of Zion. Returning to Mira Killian, in this kind of her re-conception, she is later shown inside rotating machines. Despite a very suggested image, with few definitions and blurring, the movements of the machine around the body resemble those displayed in the spaceship in which Dr. Floyd travels in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), directed by Stanley Kubrick, specifically when the flight attendant moves inside the ship using anti-gravity shoes. At these moments, the stewardess uses revolving doors, or portals, that connect one area of the aircraft to another. These portals are similar to the machines that work on the construction of Mira, at the beginning of *Ghost in the Shell*. The end of its montage is accompanied by a great profusion of colours, it is as if the final preparations were in progress, or in completion, and this would generate the emission of many lights, of different colours – which again seems to refer to *2001: A Space Odyssey*, in the famous scene of the trip to Jupiter undertaken by Dr. Dave Bowman, with the Pod, the small space exploration module.

Once Mira's construction is finished, she finds herself in a closed environment accompanied by the main scientist responsible for the job, Dr. Ouelet, played by actress Juliette Binoche (this information is important for a future moment, as will be seen in this article). Mira's first obstacle and learning, right after opening your eyes, in this new life of a synthetic body is to breathe. The hero Neo goes through the same difficulty in *The Matrix*, and in both cases what those who witness the situation can do is emphasize: "- Breath!", they say, repeatedly. After, symbolically, they are reborn in their new conditions, both Mira and Neo need rest. These two passages evidently emulate human nature in its beginnings. In both *The Matrix* and *Ghost in the Shell* the hero/heroine are considered by their peers as the chosen ones, as if they were very rare individuals, therefore representing a kind of embodied hope, the same occurring with Anakin Skywalker in *Star Wars – Revenge of the Sith* (2005), as revealed by Obi-wan Kenobi.

The city portrayed in the exterior scenes of *Ghost in the Shell* is very reminiscent of the one shown in *Blade Runner* (which in turn has Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* as one of its references, as is publicly know), with building facades marked by image projections and 3D holograms, some of them accompanied by sound announcements. Some of these ads seem like advertising for self-help products, but in this case, they offer cyber-development, as proposed in the film, that is, types of electronic implants that expand human capabilities, such as vision, arm strength, and so on. Interestingly, in *Ghost in the Shell*, one of these three-dimensional projections on theIe of a building breaks the fourth wall of the show, displays a human head that follows the camera as it flies over the city, moving in such a way as to look directly at the viewer of the movie. Still, there is always fog in the air, but the cars in *Ghost in the Shell* don't fly like in *Blade Runner*. In aerial and night shots, despite the lack of large built blocks, representing mega-corporations in *Blade Runner*, the look is practically the same in *Ghost in the Shell*, with an orange light, as if they were mercury vapour lights, very common in cities a few decades ago.

It's still the beginning of the film. Mira rested for a year and is now fully operational, already holding the rank of major and fighting crime through the police division called Section 9. This name may have some relation to the classic Sci-fi horror film called *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1957). In her first action, Mira is on the terrace of a building, monitoring a business meeting taking place a few floors below. Practically identical to the 007 briefcases that Neo and Trinity use in *The Matrix*, the briefcases of the agents who invade the meeting monitored by Mira also transform into weapons with a flick of the wrist. Mira enters the meeting space and

starts running along the wall, taking some steps there in defiance of the force of gravity, as Trinity did in the opening moments of *The Matrix*, when this manages to escape a police raid.

Something that remains unexplained and even confusing in *Ghost in the Shell* is the external part of Mira's body, her visual appearance, what would be her skin. When she goes to enter the meeting space that was taken over by armed men, she takes off the coat she was wearing and her body appears as it was naked, but entirely covered with a tight texture, neck to feet, plasticized in appearance and in light grey tones. The erogenous zones are also very tightly covered by this kind of plastic, but it is still a corporeal appearance that may suggest, for some, a very sensual tone because all the contours of your body, buttocks and breasts, for example, are quite demarcated. This grey laminate is not displayed, not even in the form of a suggestion, as being worn or undressed by Mira, during the entire movie, and this can give the viewer the impression that it is, in fact, Mira's skin. At other moments in the film, however, she appears to have human-like skin, such as when she is in her bed wearing only a t-shirt and panties, for example, or when she undergoes repairs to some parts of her injured body, something that occurs twice, or when she takes off a diving suit, inside the boat. At these times, the tight grey plastic coverage does not appear. In the end, when she makes a lot of effort and tears this kind of grey plastic garment, it appears to be her own skin, because underneath the light grey what appears are the wires and electromechanical devices that make up her cyborg body. It seems, therefore, that this grey plastic coating was not something very well resolved in the film, maybe a continuity mistake.

Another unresolved situation, and this one a little more serious from the point of view of verisimilitude, appears immediately after Mira's intervention in the business meeting she monitored and invaded. She raises her left arm and realizes that her wrist was somehow injured in the exchange of gunfire. Next to her, at this moment, is Batou, a colleague from Section 9, who also entered the room along with other police officers, to help resolve the conflict. Mira looks at a robot geisha that she shot and apparently rendered inactive, and then looks at her own wrist. Apparently impressed, she hears from Batou: "You are not the same. It's just a robot!", while Mira turns her back and walks away in silence, apparently upset. She is then portrayed on a bed, thoughtful, and looking at her wrist wound. It is believed that, for the film's directors, it was very clear to the audience that the fact that Mira had been injured made her somehow worried in a deep, existential way, but this seems to be far from feasible, from the point of view of the film viewer. The impression given is that the event causes an artificial, forced change in the direction of the story, as if it were a solution found outside the original script, unreasonable, with the function of making the story continue, that is, a solution outside the original resourcefulness of the script's creator, what Aristotle called "Deus ex Machina", meaning something like "solution from outside of the plot, off the engine":

> As in the structure of the plot, so too in the portraiture of character, the poet should always aim either at the necessary or the probable. Thus, a person of a given character should speak or act in a given way, by the rule either of necessity or of probability; just as this event should follow that by necessary or probable sequence. It is therefore evident that the unravelling of the plot, no less than the complication, must arise out of the plot itself, it must not be brought about by the 'Deus ex Machina' – as in the Medea, or in the Return of the Greeks in the Iliad. The 'Deus ex Machina' should be employed only for events external to the drama, – for antecedent or subsequent events, which lie beyond the

> range of human knowledge, and which require to be reported or foretold (…). Within the action there must be nothing irrational (Aristotle, 2000, XV: 20-21).

Mira uses medication that is administered through two holes in the back of her neck, and the liquid is yellowish in colour, practically the same idea explored in *Equilibrium* (2002), with the difference that, in this case, the substance is administered using a small injection gun applied to the side of the neck. In both *Ghost in the Shell* and *Equilibrium*, when the protagonists stop taking medications of their own accord, their behaviour begins to change significantly.

From a certain point in the film, Mira starts to have some unexplained problem that makes her see fragments of images mixed with real ones, coming from her own eyes – as if they were interference. And the first of these instances displays the image of a tabby cat. The first occurrence of a repeated image, *déjà vu* in *The Matrix*, the errors or reconfigurations caused by/in the matrix, is also perceived by the appearance of a feline, and it is still curious because among the many images evoked by felines, in ancestral popular mythology, it is to be a kind of guide and messenger. In the case of both films, the allegory seems appropriate.

After the action of the Section 9 team, at the headquarters of this detachment, they use computers that display light projections in the air as a screen, and are controlled in the air, by the hands of the characters. This is exactly what happens, too, in *Minority Report* (2002). After this, Chief Aramaki philosophizes to his subordinate, Mira: "when we see our uniqueness as a virtue, only then do we find peace", as she seems, in some way, uncomfortable with her own identity.

Then, outside, Mira and Batou walk down the sidewalk and pass next to two girls who look like twins and are wearing identical light blue dresses and high socks. It is surprising how the colour of the dress resembles that of the twins' dress from *The Shining* (1980), a non-science fiction film, as is known. They continue walking through a downtown that is always very busy, with lots of people, many in a hurry, lots of noise, lots of visual stimuli, and it always seems to be drizzling or raining. There are many food stalls on the sidewalks, often separated by transparent plastic, with food hanging and neon lights everywhere. The cars portrayed are marked by straight lines, referring to the design of cars from the 1970s and 1980s, but always with some detail that gives an abnormal/different appearance, as if they were adaptations, due to the dimensions, the position, the general appearance of the vehicle, anyway. It's as if they were somehow tuned cars, to use the jargon of the trade. The car they often use has a design practically identical to a classic model from the 1980s, the Ferrari Testarossa, and their vehicle has a wheel with a graphic very close to that of the classic BBS model wheel, popular for decades and, perhaps for this reason, also possessing a *démodé* appearance; the entire interior of the car, from seats to doors, steering wheel and roof, is white, like the car that clergymen Andrew Brandt and John Preston ride in *Equilibrium*. This can give an idea of the discrepancy/strangeness caused by the cars portrayed: if it were an old car, it would possibly be rare to find one with a completely white interior. Cars with a similar appearance and this undefined *ethos* between old and updated are also shown in *Blade Runner* and *Equilibrium*. In *Ghost in the Shell* and also in *Minority Report*, cars and motorcycles sound like airplane engines. In the first of them, Mira ventures to ride a motorcycle without a helmet through the city and the interesting thing about the fact is that no other motorcycle is shown in the film, it seems that the only motorcycle in the city is the one that Mira rode, no others are shown in the various exterior and traffic scenes.

Noticing her injured arm in the confrontation, Mira is accompanied by Dr. Ouelet, who wears a blue apron with the same appearance as the one worn by the same actress, Juliette Binoche, when she plays another scientist in the science fiction *High Life* (2018). In this film, Juliette Binoche's character, Dibs, wears a white apron, but as the lighting in the room she inhabits is normally tinged with a bluish light, this colour ends up reflecting on her apron. The coincidences with the characters played by Binoche do not end here, as will be seen later. Again, in *Ghost in the Shell*, there is another moment of philosophical inspiration, and faced with Mira's uncertainty about the nature of her own identity, Dr. Ouelet asserts: "I can see everything, all of your thoughts, your decisions (…) you are human, people see you as human (…) of course you have a past. And with time you'll feel more and more connected to it (…) We cling to memories as if they define I but… they really don't. What we do is what defines us."

Then, another sequence of implausibility occurs: Mira and Batou go to the laboratory where the shot geisha is being analysed, as she tragically malfunctioned in the meeting taking place in the building that Mira invaded, at the beginning of the film, which is why she was shot by the major. The scientist who works on the geisha seeks to find out who reprogrammed her, hacked her, so that the robot acted as she did. As the task would be time-consuming, Mira concludes that she needs to do a "deep dive" on the geisha, something not mentioned in the film until then, which is why it appears to be a very artificial, magical solution to resolve a conflict. In other words, another "Deus ex Machina". And so, she proceeds, when she has a cable plugged into the back of her head, in the same room where she was, Mira then "projected his disembodied consciousness" (repeating the definition by William Gibson, already stated here) and enters the geisha's cyberspace. The experience begins with Mira passing through a kind of portal, with the distinction that this portal is horizontal, so she seems to fall into it, and the falling movement is clearly as if into a pool, very deep and dark, with practically all the light remaining up there, in the portal, while the camera follows the descent of the body. Second situation of the character's fall, here the analogy with the catabasis is better drawn. At the end of the fall, as if in slow motion, Mira finds herself walking in a dark and poorly defined environment of a kind of nightclub. In it, semi-static regulars are portrayed as if in a frozen world in which Mira walks and, attracted by screams and an atmosphere of tension, a little fuIther on, in a movement that suggests some type of violence being practised against a woman, follows those figures, enters through a door and down a staircase. There, she walks a little further and sees the image of a hooded person, standing, partially leaning under a lying body. Suddenly, Mira finds herself surrounded by dozens, hundreds of beings with human appearance but monochromatic, with a dark greyish tone, completely imbued with that colour, as if they were muddy people. The beings surround Mira and hold her with arms and hands, holding her, pulling her. Meanwhile, in the laboratory where the deep dive began, Mira's body, which had remained inert and unconscious on the stretcher while her mind was doing the deep dive, begins to shake frantically. Just like what happens in *The Matrix*, in *Ghost in the Shell*, when the heroine is in trouble, with her inert body on a bed and attached to a cable plugged into the back of her head (a device that makes her being, in fact, go to a kind of another dimension), to save her the solution is for someone to remove the cable plugged into the back of her head so that she returns to her body. Batou does so and she regains consciousness, scared, saying: "I know where he is", referring to the robot geisha hacker, who they are looking for to find out why she acted the way she did in the business meeting that ended with many people dead. The quick, easy and unlikely solution returns to the film, "Deus ex Machina" again: how does a

person who has no memory have a vision of the inside of a nightclub and, immediately, know which club it is, in which part of the metropolis? The passage sounds forced, again.

While the film's music seems heavily inspired by Vangelis' keyboards from the *Blade Runner* score, Mira, Batou and another colleague head to the nightclub glimpsed in the deep dive. There, as expected, there is confusion and the ambient music, which was calm, at the sound of the first gunshot, becomes a heavy electronic rock. Like Neo in *The Matrix*, Mira dodges two shots fired at her, but here at close range, and it's incredible how Batou has time, even though there are several people shooting, from different points in the club, to throw it back the coat he wears to reach the weapons he carries on his waist – without being shot a single time. Everything pacified, they go down the stairs that Mira saw in the deep dive. There a bomb explodes and she and Batou are injured. In the laboratory, after being rebuilt, Mira hears from Dr. Ouelet: "You're what everyone will become one day", and responds to her: "You don't know how alone that makes me feel".

Meanwhile, another important scientist from the company that manufactured Mira, a company with very strong ties to the government, is murdered, one of them having already died in the business meeting at the beginning of the film, with the help of the robot geisha and then three other scientists, all linked to the Mira manufacturing project. They discover that the next scientist at risk of losing her life is Dr. Ouelet, and they go in search of her. She is in traffic at that moment, accompanied by a person who uses a computer but, according to the film's dialogue, is inaccessible because "she's in transit, comms are down". "Deus ex Machina", once again, now facilitating the transition between conflicts. The question that arises is: how, in a metropolis of the future, can someone become incommunicable because he or she are "in transit" if even today this is practically impossible, given the broad reach of all telecommunication facilities?

At that moment, two apparently innocent urban cleaning employees suddenly stopped talking and changed their attitudes. The truck where the two were, which was stopped, is turned on and put in motion, apparently in an aggressive way, as if they were in a rush for something. It is then understood: the two men are as if taken by a superior force, they have brain implants that glow and emit noises. They have been hacked and begin to behave in unexpected ways. This is practically what happens in *The Matrix*, doubly so: firstly, because the agents, led by Smith, in that film, normally embody themselves in other people, on the city streets, in order to shorten the path to any confrontation. Secondly, the garbage truck with a driver incorporated by major force also becomes a protagonist at a certain point in *The Matrix*, with a powerslide U-turn and then run over of the telephone booth where Trinity was. In *Ghost in the Shell*, he hits the side of the car where Dr. Ouelet was and it flips over. Section 9 forces arrive at the scene and a huge shoot-out ensues. In the end, the truck driver is arrested and taken to interrogation by the Section 9 team. There, with a different voice, a different attitude, he refuses to accept that he did something wrong, he doesn't remember what happened, the shots, the weapons, nothing. Before his arrest, however, he and Mira engage in an extensive physical fight and the viewer is left to wonder: if the hacker only took a second to control that man's mind, why did it take him so long to leave? He preferred to be beaten by Mira, who appears to be very strong given the damage caused by her blows. During the interrogation it becomes clear that the hacker escaped from the boy's body, he is in a glass dome and cannot see what is outside of it. However, from a certain point onwards, even without seeing outside, he appears to stare into Mira's eyes and even walks towards her. She realizes that something has changed and enters the dome. The hacker once again controlled the boy's mind. She asks

who he is and he asks her to come closer, and they stand so close, almost cheek to cheek, speaking softly and close to each other's ears, that it is impossible not to remember the first meeting between Neo and Trinity, in *The Matrix*.

Other agents outside the dome ask themselves: How? How did the hacker get in there now? "Using the lie detector", suggests a police officer. The conversation with Mira, inside, continues within earshot, meanwhile they manage, through the invasion via lie detector, to geographically locate the origin of the invasion.

In the next scene they are already heading towards the hacker's bunker, inside there are bodies of people hanging from plastic bags and some of them, more regular, have the practically exact appearance of the astronauts placed in hibernation inside Discovery One, the main ship from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In the underground bunker, Mira comes across the hacker and is made his prisoner. They begin a brief dialogue and Mira finds out that she was also manufactured by the same scientists of him, in the same company, but his project was discontinued due to deficiencies and he was discarded, as were dozens of others before him, all murdered in the end, and he managed to escape of this destination. Kuze, the hacker, tries to convince Mira that she's been fooled, and says in a philosophical way: "Your shell belongs to them but not your ghost. Your ghost is yours, remember that". He releases her, his colleagues arrive and Kuze escapes. When Batou approaches, Mira also runs away and goes to Ouelet's house, wants to know the truth, how many experiments were done before her? What did they do to the people? Who got them? Were the few memories she has true? Dr. Ouelet clarifies everything, she put all the blame on Mr. Cutter, owner of Hanka Robotics, the company that manufactures Mira's synthetic body. Mira's memories of her parents being killed by terrorists were false, explains Ouelet. They were implanted in her mind to reinforce her anti-crime stance. Ouelet has been very involved with the project since the beginning, and through several attempts, managed to perfect the technique of brain implantation in a synthetic body until reaching the perfection represented by Mira's existence.

Mira runs away, goes diving, disconnects. She's confused. Batou meets her on the boat and they talk. Batou asks why she didn't stop Kuze, to which she responds: "I don't know who to trust anymore", a question that echoes the one asked by Padmé to Anakin Skywalker when he invites her to dethrone the Chancellor and rule together. Astonished, Padmé says: "I don't know you anymore!", in *Star Wars – Revenge of the Sith*. Batou continues with the boat and leaves her at a pier, where police forces arrive to stop her. She is taken to Hanka Robotics where Cutter discovers that "we cannot control her", therefore "she is no longer a viable asset", in the words of Cutter himself, who orders Dr. Ouelet to give Mira a lethal injection. Mira observes the dialogue from a side room, she is tied to a chair and sedated, like Morpheus from *The Matrix* when captured, just observing things. Instead of the lethal injection, however, Ouelet gives Mira a kind of antidote for her lethargy, frees her from the handcuffs and encourages her to escape, all very quickly, while Cutter, from the next room, calls security. Cutter shoots Ouelet and the scientist, having completed her career, remains in the viewer's memory as a tireless worker seeking to improve her research and her dreams, capable of donating her own life for them, exactly the same role she played and *High Life,* the same actress.

Mira visits a lady who would be her mother, and she invites her for tea in Avalon, a very populous residential condominium apparently inhabited by the working classes, practically the same recipe as the Oracle visited by Neo, in *The Matrix*, in which Neo hears assertively: "You are not the one", in which Mira is asked: "Who are you?". In both films, as a possible

backdrop, the issue of technology corrupting the world. Telling the story of her missing daughter, the woman says: "And then one day, the police came". "And then one day" is also what Kevin Flynn, the main character of *Tron: Legacy* (2010), says, adding: "I got in".

Following a wiretap planted in Aramaki's office, Cutter realizes that Section 9 as a whole is about to rebel because Mira discovered everything. Cutter states: "The virus is spreading", which echoes the words of agent Smith, in *The Matrix*, when agent Smith speaks aggressively about humans with the captive Morpheus: "There is another organism on this planet that follows the same pattern (of a plague, our note). Do you know what it is? The virus. Human beings are a disease, a cancer of this planet"

Cutter sends his men to ambush Aramaki in the parking lot where his car is. The car has a design practically identical to that of the Citroen Xantia from the 1990s, a car that had among its features that it allowed the driver to control the height of the car's suspension, so it was very common to see, at the time, cars parked with the suspension completely lowered, causing the bodywork to almost touch the ground – in the same way that Aramaki's car was, in the film, after the hail of bullets to which it was subjected in the attack. Curiosities aside, it is interesting to observe the effort of the film's art direction to create this retro, nostalgic look, while mimicking previous films and, perhaps, even mentioning the active suspension of a car that caught the market's attention, for this characteristic, a few decades ago. The men approach the car, the rain turns heavier. Aramaki retaliates against the shooters' ballistic attack, kills the three and finds time to philosophize: "Do not send a rabbit to kill a fox", he says. Rabbit is also the image of movement, in *The Matrix*, (and before, referred to as *The Matrix*, in *Alice in the Wonderland*) after Neo's computer wakes him from sleep and displays on its screen: "Follow the white rabbit". Here, rabbit is the pursued, in *Ghost in the Shell*, the pursuer.

Mira takes the motorcycle and heads to a "lawless zone" in the city, as shown, seeking, in some way, to meet Kuze. In an undefined location, he seems to experience moments alongside a robot geisha. Kuze apparently senses Mira's approach, possibly through telepathy, and opens his eyes, moving his head upwards in a movement very similar to that made by Luke Skywalker when he is called, in thought, by Darth Vader, in the final scenes of *Start Wars – The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), to which the young man responds: "Father!".

Mira and Kuze find themselves in the lawless area, as if it were an old and abandoned part of the city, but with buildings still standing. One of these buildings is a small house that they both frequented before they were kidnapped by Hanka Robotics to become an experiment. Mira sees a kind of hallucination in that house which, in slow motion, shows the strong light of a helicopter illuminating a police raid, the house burning and two young people being forcibly removed from inside. Outside you can see Mr. Cutter. The sound of the helicopter and the slow-motion movements are reminiscent of the Morpheus rescue scene in *The Matrix*. They were, Mira and Kuze, young militants and, as described in the film, they only had each other. Now that they meet again in the same place, they see that there is their name written on the walls, and they remain in practically the same way, they only have each other. Says Kuze: "Come with me, into my network, we will evolve beyond them, and together we can revenge what they have done to us", a construction also similar to that pronounced by Anakin Skywalker to Padmé in *Star Wars – Revenge of the Sith*: "I am more powerful than the Chancellor; I... I can overthrow him. And together, you and I can rule the galaxy... make things the way we want them to be!".

A spider-shaped robot tank controlled remotely by Cutter appears to complicate the almost romantic scene. The film seems to explore the symbolism that animals historically have

in society to convey subliminal messages to its audience: first it was the cat, messenger, then the rabbit and the fox, this symbol of resilience, now the spider which, despite also commonly representing persistence is known to be one of the most feared animals to humanity, along with venomous animals, the animals that most repulse people. To enhance the sensation, there's nothing like a soundtrack basically made up of trumpets intoning vibrant low and stridently metallic sounds, along with explosions of deep bass like those heard at the beginning of the film.

The spider-tank fires many shots at Mira who, behind a concrete column, sees that same concrete column, around her, being shattered by the armoured vehicle's artillery, this is the impact effect also portrayed in the sequence in which Neo and Trinity invade the bunker to rescue Morpheus in *The Matrix*. And, to escape from a spider-tank, movements from *Spider-Man* (2002) like those that Mira uses to climb places, making the movement quite implausible and very easy to detect which was done not with traditional filming, but with computer graphics resources. At this point, the film's soundtrack becomes quite dramatic and even overlaps the sound of the countless shots being fired, a sound obfuscation feature that also occurs in action scenes in *The Matrix*. Using a lot of force to open the access door to the interior of the spider-tank, Mira's body appears to be swollen and cracked, as occurs with Tetsuo in *Akira* (1988), when his manifestations begin to occur. And just open the door of the spider-tank and it magically explodes and, voilà, happy ending: Aramaki kills Cutter, Mira meets her mother again – now with the certainty that it really is her mother, and Sector 9 returns to operating successfully.

In the end, like a Neo who sends his message to humanity through a telephone booth in *The Matrix*, Mira passes on her message, which is nothing more than practically a compilation of everything philosophical that she heard during the story: "My mind is human, my body is manufactured. I am the first of my kind, but I won't be the last. We cling to memories as if they define us, but what we do defines us. My ghost survived, to remind the next of us, that humanity is our virtue. I know who I am, and what I am here to do".

Conclusion

As expected in a science fiction film, there are instigating projections about what life will be like in a few years, for example, with the holographic home mirror, which shows the image of the right hand raised when Mira raises her right hand – i.e., not the inverted image of traditional mirrors; with traffic signs on the roads, bright and dynamic, among other small finds. The film also seems to emulate other science fiction films by introducing moments of more philosophical dialogue, but here it doesn't go much beyond good intentions. Overall, the philosophical moments are simplistic and often flirt with self-help. At the end, which would be the moment for a more substantial message, the same thoughts presented during the story are repeated, something that, on the one hand, does not add anything and can be boring, on the other, it can also be a reinforcement, an aid to memorization.

In terms of emulating not only a style, science fiction or cyberpunk, but also a myriad of previous films, allowing it to be characterized, therefore, also as a rhapsody, *Ghost in the Shell* is impressive. In this sense, one can imagine that, perhaps, the same could be said about a few films.

Like the much mentioned and referred to *The Matrix*, ultimately, *Ghost in the Shell* can, however, be considered a film for children and teenagers, or a film for people who are not very demanding in terms of plot. And in this sense, they don't differ much from mainstream cinema

and series, which is sad to see. It seems that creators, producers, directors and studios, in an attempt to reach a greater number of spectators, to increase their audience and thus also their revenue, bring down the level of cultural repertoire demanded for the appreciation of their productions – which makes everyone lose. Thus, they exaggerate in visual resources, in the use of implausible solutions to conflicts and, to return to the classics, they ignore Aristotle's timeless postulates which, although they do not necessarily need to be followed, can also, very usefully, not be ignored. As the Greek indicates, after imitation, another force of human nature is "the instinct for 'harmony' and rhythm" (Aristotle, 2000, IV: 7), and this harmony and rhythms are achievable, in the work of art, if the imitation is well done, coherent, consequential, justified, possessing unity.

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