

In Search of Innocence

Keywords: Human nature, innocence, heaven, consciousness

Film title: Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence (Inosensu: Kôkaku Kidôtai)

Director: Mamoru Oshii

Screenplay: Mamoru Oshii

Distributor: DreamWorks SKG

Cinema Release Date: 17 September 2004 (USA limited release); 28 October 2005

DVD Release date: 27 February 2006 (UK)

Certificate: 15 (UK); PG-13 (USA)



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'One of the most visually ravishing and thought provoking future fantasies to ever hit the cinema screen' – *Hotdog*

'This film will absolutely dazzle you with its command of weighty mood and its eye-popping visuals.' – *Philadelphia Weekly*

'breathtakingly beautiful . . . a perfect union of form and content' - *TVGuide*

'Visually dazzling and entertaining anime' – *Hollywood Reporter*

'The most impressive Anime ever' - *The Daily Record*

'A Dazzling Spectacle' - *Empire*

The first anime to be nominated for the famous Golden Palm at the Cannes Film Festival, nominated for four Annie awards (including best animated feature), and winner of the Orient Express Award at the Catalonian International Film Festival, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* is the critically-lauded sequel to writer-director Mamoru Oshii's groundbreaking *Ghost in the Shell* (1995):

The acclaimed director of animation classics, *Patlabor* (1990), and the original *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), as well as live-action films such as *Avalon* (2001), is a stylistic master akin to Ridley Scott, while having a philosophical bent similar to the Russian director, Andrei Tarkovsky. His works are meditations on what it means to be human as much as they are techno-actioners. His direction veers between Scott's intimate lens and Tarkovsky's remote gaze.^[1]

Despite their futuristic settings, Oshii (1951-) is clear that his films are not about the future: 'The future I describe in the movies is actually not the future. It's the present, so if the future in the movies looks very dark and very sad, unfortunately, that's the way our present is.'[\[2\]](#)

In terms of form, *Innocence* is a luscious and often seamless blend of 2-D cell and 3-D computer animation. To compare *Innocence* with the original *Ghost in the Shell* is to witness 'a technological leap akin to the one between Terminator and Terminator 2 . . .'[\[3\]](#) *Innocence* deploys cutting-edge technological resources with great cinematic flair and to haunting effect. According to Mamoru Oshii the expanded use of computer technology actually made his job harder:

Animators have this tendency of always doing the best they can, and with digital technology, they could keep repeating the level of effort . . . The animators had done a scene 10 times more [carefully] than they did with the last movie, and it translated into me having to check 10 times more carefully. When I made the first movie, it took overnight to render one scene. But now they have a lot more materials to render. Each person had two or three computers working at the same time, and that also added to the amount of the work. Digitalization didn't actually lessen the amount of work.[\[4\]](#)

Although the finished film features many computer-generated elements, they generally began life as hand-drawn images:

Most of the [textures] were done at the source - hand drawn - because if I had used all of the textures that came with the software, then the film would have looked the same as other films. That's my credo: that textures should be done at the source by hand.[\[5\]](#)

The detailed sumptuousness of *Innocence* is audible (available in stereo, surround sound and Digital Theatre Sound) as well as visual, with an Annie-nominated score by Kenji Kawai[\[6\]](#) (who also scored the original *Ghost in the Shell*) and sound design by *Star Wars* veteran Randy Thom[\[7\]](#) of George Lucas' *Skywalker Sounds*.

In terms of content, *Innocence* is densely packed with literary references and philosophical concepts, from the Psalms to Milton and from Rene Descartes' mind-body dualism to Richard Dawkins' concept of the 'extended phenotype'[\[8\]](#). A host of concepts are conveyed through both the spoken and written word as well as by visual means, although it is the quotation-heavy dialogue that is most immediately apparent. Scenes in which characters do little but trade philosophical quotations can grate upon viewers whose expectations of a script are shaped by more naturalistic traditions of film dialogue, but they are to be expected from Japanese anime. When the *Washington Post*'s Michael O'Sullivan says that *Innocence* is 'surprisingly talky for a sci-fi action thriller,'[\[9\]](#) and that it 'contains violence (but not nearly enough)',[\[10\]](#) he says far more about his own expectations than about the film he is reviewing. *Innocence* is a film that repays repeated viewing, as a grasp of plot and philosophical theme help turn sensory overload into a rewardingly coherent whole.

Synopsis

'An animated film noir populated by existential cyborgs.' – J. Hoberman[\[11\]](#)

Innocence takes place in 2032, 'a future time when most human thought has been accelerated by artificial intelligence and external memory can be shared on a universal matrix'.^[12] The line between human and machine has been blurred. On the one hand, humans house their consciousnesses, or 'ghosts', within cyborg shells. They replace human with robotic body parts, enhancing and merging their memories with a vast, accessible external matrix. This has the unfortunate side effect that people's 'ghosts' can be 'hacked' to alter their perception of reality. In this world what you see, or don't see, isn't necessarily what you get. On the other hand, humanoid robot 'dolls' ('ningyo' in Japanese), are made ever more indistinguishable from their creators.

The original *Ghost in the Shell* used scenes and stories from several issues of the original manga by Shirow Masamune (issues 1, 3, 9 and 11). *Innocence* was inspired by issue 6, 'Rondo'. The *Locus Solus* Corporation has created a new humanoid doll, the Hadaly 2052 gynoid, a prototype sex-robot. For no discernable hardware or software reason these sex dolls are going berserk, killing their masters before self-destructing. Covert anti-terrorist unit Public Security Section 9 is called in to investigate because several gynoid victims were well connected in political and business circles. Cyborg investigator Batou and his new partner, the almost-human Togusa, are assigned to the case. Batou's last partner, Major Motoko Kusanagi, left behind the cyborgized vestiges of her corporeal existence and vanished into the net at the end of *Ghost in the Shell*. Ever since then, Batou has wondered what has become of her, and whether he will ever see her again. While Batou's old partner has transcended even the physical embodiment of the cyborg, Batou's new partner is a minimally modified human being. Consequently, his perspective is closest to the perspective of the film audience. Police forensics officer Haraway (named after Donna Haraway, the American author of *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991)^[13]) suggests the gynoids are not malfunctioning but actually committing suicide. From here, a trail of subtle clues (note especially the hologram discovered by Batou *inside* the book on dolls) and not so subtle talks with informants leads Batou and Togusa from a dismembered *Locus Solus* employee, through a den of yakuza (Japanese mafia), into a surreal hall of illusions constructed by mercenary hacker Kim, and, finally, to *Locus Solus's* offshore production facility. Here Batou and a downloaded fragment of the Major discover that the gynoids are produced under 'morally suspect circumstances'^[14] that explain their suicidal behaviour.

Sources Surreal and Noir

More than one commentator has observed that Oshii's 'sumptuous philosophical mystery'^[15] owes an imaginative debt to the classic sci-fi movie *Blade Runner* (1982) and to its source, author Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (especially in Batou's relationship with his basset hound). However, Oshii also draws inspiration from such diverse sources as Cartesian philosophy, the erotic doll photographs of twentieth century surrealist sculptor Hans Bellmer,^[16] and the 'writing of proto-Surrealist Raymond Roussel, whose 1914 novel *Locus Solus* anticipates many of the film's preoccupations.'^[17] As the director comments:

I was convinced about the outcome of this film when I visited a museum in New York, the International Center of Photography. They exhibit the dolls made by Hans Bellmer, and those are the dolls depicted in the movie. Those

dolls were made by [Bellmer] about 50 years ago, and are famous for the balls they have for joints. I based the idea of the gynoids on them.[\[18\]](#)

He also explains that '*The Long Goodbye* was actually my origin for the film, and *Chinatown*, by Roman Polanski.'[\[19\]](#)

The Search for Innocence

The 'Innocence' subtitle of *Ghost in the Shell 2* is not at all 'inexplicable'[\[20\]](#), as the *Philadelphia Weekly*'s Dan Buskirk opines. Rather, it establishes the central theme of the film: the human search for existential happiness.

Ghost in the Shell 2 defines 'innocence' as a sinless state of being that is possessed, albeit in different ways, by animals (e.g. Batou's basset hound, the creatures who appear on the spinning globe in Kim's mansion, or the elephants in the twice-quoted saying about the animals walking in the wood with few desires), by 'dolls' (e.g. the robotic gynoids or the doll that agent Togusa gives his daughter in the film's closing scene) and by gods (e.g. Togusa quotes Psalm 139). Animals and inanimate objects are innocent because (however human the latter may seem) they lack the sentient self-consciousness possessed by humans:

From the haunting stop-motion animation of Kihachiro Kawamoto to recent attempts at live-action simulation via CGI à la *Malice@Doll*, the marriage of dolls with the world of animation has often played on these feelings of the eerie and the uncanny brought about by the paradox of striving to reconcile this discrepancy between psychological and physical 'realism'. Oshii's new film uses this idea as its central axis.[\[21\]](#)

Gods, we are told, are innocent because they have *infinite* self-consciousness. The question posed by Oshii is whether humans, with their finite self-consciousness, can ever aspire to a state of innocence. Indeed, having classified three states of innocence, *Ghost in the Shell 2* forces us to ask which, if any, of these states of innocence humans may enter.

Ghost in the Shell 2 seems to suggest that the desire for innocence is what drives humans to expand their consciousness by becoming cyborgs linked to the matrix, and to create dolls that are as human as possible. For the idealized human represented by the cipher of the doll, like the mirror image process of cyborgization, holds out the hope that humans can be idealized into a state of innocence. As we will see, both examples simultaneously raise the fear that the price of gaining innocence is the loss of our humanity, presenting us with an existential 'Catch 22'.

Innocence presents a world obsessed with replication. As people become more robot than flesh they appear to feel increasingly alienated from humanity past and present (despite, or perhaps because of, the networking of their consciousness). For example, the Chief of Section 9 shares his concern over Batou's mental state with Togusa, saying that he 'reminds him more and more of the Major before she vanished.' There is some disagreement between Togusa and the chief as to whether Togusa is in a position to understand his cyborg partner. As a result of this sense of alienation, people seem to have become consumed with the past. Cars driven by members of Section 9 may have security-conscious head-up displays, but they all have a look that harks back to the early twentieth century. The huge towers of the Northern Province are futuristic 'white elephants', whereas the stunning 'Chinese-

Gothic' carnival (a five minute scene that took a year to complete) that greets Batou and Togusa features ancient masked costumes and floats (including, significantly, a large mechanical elephant).

Humans have also become obsessed with creating inanimate objects that reflect the human and animal worlds they are leaving behind. Batou not only keeps a basset hound (which may or may not be a clone, another example of replication) as a pet, he owns a cut-away mechanical basset hound music box (named 'Gabriel' after the director's own basset hound). The aircraft that transports Batou and Togusa to the Northern Province has flexible wings that mirror those of the birds circling the massive gothic-style cathedral. The submersible which takes Batou to the manufacturing plant is modelled after a shark:

Innocence's topography springs fully formed from a grab-bag of stylistic influences drawn from different eras and different sources across the world. Similar to the way that the melody of Joaquín Rodrigo's 'Concierto de Aranjuez' . . . works its way into the bluesy ballad, 'Follow Me', that closes the film, the movie's ersatz locations, too, parade as nothing more than replications, elements divorced from their original circumstances; the sleek retro designs of the cars that drive through the futuristic streets; the gaudily exotic Chinatown parade dominated by the statue of a towering ornate elephant; the musty Victoriana of the mansion where the skeletal presence of former ghost-hacker Kim... hides out, lounging in an armchair wrapped in a red smoking jacket. Bateau and Togusa's investigation leads from sterile laboratories kitted out with doll parts... through old dark mansions straight from the pages of Agatha Christie, whose musty libraries have their walls racked with leather bound books, and whose sinks overflow with blood-stained murder implements. The script even cross-references Oshii's previous work: A scene with Bateau returning to an apartment of empty beer cans and coffee mugs to feed his basset hound is sure to bring smiles of recognition.[\[22\]](#)

Bearing in mind Oshii's assertion that his futuristic films are actually about 'the present', it is interesting to observe other social commentators arguing that desires at least analogous to the search for innocence are at work in contemporary culture. For example, *Midnight Eye* reviewer Jasper Sharp writes:

Much could be made of Japan's doll obsession. From its traditional roots in celebrations such as that of the Hina Matsuri (or Girl's Day) every March when families take out their ornamental figures to ensure the happiness and well-being of their daughters, to everyone's favourite synthesised pet, the robotic dog created by Sony known as the AIBO, the nation seems driven with this urge to reconstruct the real without having to deal with the messy parts. Who was it that pointed out that the geisha represented the ultimate desire to reduce a woman's role to that of a purely functional 'living doll'? I even heard recently that someone over here had managed to build a life-size robotic female whose chest heaved up and down to emulate her breathing. It would seem that Oshii's vision of the future isn't so far off after all.[\[23\]](#)

Sony began selling AIBO the robotic dog in 1999:

The bulk of its sales have been in Japan, and the company says there is a big difference between Japanese and American consumers. American AIBO buyers tend to be computer geeks who want to hack the robotic dog's programming and delve in its innards. Most Japanese consumers, by contrast, like AIBO because it is a clean, safe and predictable pet. AIBO is just a fake dog. As the country gets better at building interactive robots, their advantages for Japanese users will multiply. Hiroshi Ishiguro, a robotocist at Osaka University, cites the example of asking directions. In Japan, says Mr Ishiguro, people are even more reluctant than in other places to approach a stranger. Building robotic traffic police and guides will make it easier for people to overcome their diffidence.[\[24\]](#)

The breathing robot mentioned by Sharp is 'Repliee Q1 Expo' designed and built by Osaka University and Kokoro Inc., which was exhibited at the 2005 World Exposition Prototype Robot Exhibition:

The humanoid is meant to look and act the same as an average Japanese woman and has a little sister, Repliee R1, that is supposed to simulate an 8-year-old child. She mimics a number of human movements and characteristic. Her chest expands and contracts as if she was breathing. She shifts her position slightly, like any person unconsciously does. She also flutters her eyelids and can gesture to people. In many respects, it's a good illusion.[\[25\]](#)

Professor Hiroshi Ishiguro comments:

Repliee Q1Expo can interact with people. It can respond to people touching it. It's very satisfying, although we obviously have a long way to go yet... An android could get away with [passing as human] for a short time, 5-10 seconds. However, if we carefully select the situation, we could extend that, to perhaps 10 minutes. More importantly, we have found that people forget she is an android while interacting with her. Consciously, it is easy to see that she is an android, but unconsciously, we react to the android as if she were a woman.[\[26\]](#)

As the carnival scene makes clear, humanity has historically sought a form of transcendence through inhabiting inanimate objects, whether directly (e.g. wearing costumes) or indirectly (e.g. by animating the inanimate). While we can distinguish between representation and reality, we can 'suspend our disbelief' and react *as if* there were little or no difference. Oshii's message and his medium are perfectly matched: 'An alternate word for the puppeteer, "animateur", spells out the similarities between the two. The very word "animation" means giving psychic qualities - an "anima", or a soul - to an inanimate object.'[\[27\]](#) However, as Kim the hacker points out, since consciously we know that 'dolls' are in the end nothing but inanimate objects, they simultaneously confront us with the fear that we too are nothing but dolls:

The eeriness of dolls comes solely from the fact that they are completely modelled on human beings. In fact, they are nothing but human really. They make us face the fear of being reduced to simple mechanisms and matter. In other words, they make us face the fear that fundamentally all humans belong to the void. Science seeking to unlock the secret of life also brought about this

fear. The notion that nature can be calculated inevitably leads to the conclusion that humans too can be reduced to basic mechanical parts.

As Professor Luc Steel, director of Sony's Computer Science Laboratories in Paris says: 'There is a danger in the field of viewing humans as machines, as automata, the way biology looks at humans as complex machines.'[\[28\]](#)

Is there any difference between a child's make-believe that a doll is a person and our belief that the child is a person rather than a doll? Most people believe so, but this belief is clearly incompatible with a naturalistic worldview, and clear minded naturalists recognize this fact. For the naturalist, the difference between Professor Hiroshi Ishiguro and Repliee Q1 is a matter of quantitative degree rather than of qualitative essence. Francis Crick, co-discoverer of the helical shape of the DNA molecule, therefore advances *The Astonishing Hypothesis* that:

your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their assorted molecules. As Lewis Carroll's Alice might have phrased it: 'You're nothing but a pack of neurons.'[\[29\]](#)

Crick's naturalistic hypothesis is advanced in direct opposition to the view 'that some kind of spirit exists that persists after one's bodily death and, to some degree, embodies the essence of that human being.'[\[30\]](#) However, to the precise degree that Crick's hypothesis is *astonishing*, is it *prima facie implausible*. Indeed, many philosophers would argue that in the final analysis, Crick's astonishing hypothesis is self-contradictory. For how much store should we set by a hypothesis advanced by nothing but a pack of neurons?[\[31\]](#) Crick's denial of the 'ghost in the shell' is a deduction from the assumption that naturalism is true, not an inference from the available evidence. According to metaphysical naturalist Jerry Fodor, 'Nobody has the slightest idea how anything material could be conscious.'[\[32\]](#) Naturalist Ned Block candidly admits:

We have no conception of our physical or functional nature that allows us to understand how it could explain our subjective experience... we have nothing – zilch – worthy of being called a research programme, nor are there any substantive proposals about how to go about starting one... Researchers are *stumped*.[\[33\]](#)

It is therefore hardly surprising to find philosopher of mind John Heil reporting that, 'In recent years, dissatisfaction with materialist assumptions has led to a revival of interest in forms of dualism.'[\[34\]](#)

Perhaps the Major has the right idea, in having shuffled off both her mortal coil and her cyborg body for a disembodied existence within the Matrix? After the Major has helped him to capture the gynoid production ship, Batou asks if she considers herself 'to be finally happy now'. Her reply, that to be 'happy' is a 'nostalgic value', but that 'at least' she is now 'free of dilemma', is ambivalent. Has the Major gained innocence by transcending embodiment at the price of losing something as fundamental as a capacity for happiness? She begins to recite: 'Let one walk alone, committing no sin, with very few wishes . . .' 'Like elephants in the forest,' finishes Batou. This poem expresses the idea that while animals are innocent, innocence eludes humans due to both their capacity for sin and their complex desires for the

future, which lead them to fear death. Before leaving, the Major enjoins Batou to 'always remember, whenever you access the net, I'll be there by your side.' These words echo those of Jesus to his disciple that, 'For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them,' (Matthew 18:20) and point once again to the centrality of relationships to human flourishing. They also bring our focus back to a sense of the desire for transcendence.

The chief seems to advocate abandoning the search for innocence: 'Most of us aren't as happy or as miserable as we think we are,' he says to Togusa, 'The important thing is not to get bored with living your life or having hopes.' However, such stoical resignation about the human condition does nothing to solve the problem of sin, or the fear of death. Nor does it answer the fear that we are no more alive than a doll, discussed so eloquently by Kim. Hence, *Ghost in the Shell 2* is a meditation highlighting our existential need for a path to innocence that fulfils rather than eradicates our humanity, which provides a genuinely human communal existence free from sin and the fear of death, a new state of being which both exceeds the simple innocence of animals and which cannot be reduced to the atoms in the void level of a doll. In other words, *Innocence* is a meditation upon the human desire for heaven. By ending his film on a scene showing both a dog and a doll, as Batou and Togusa return from their mission, Oshii effectively holds up two 'no entry' signs on the search for innocence and leaves his audience to decide for themselves whether that search can ever be consummated.

Recommended Resources

IMDb, [Ghost in the Shell 2](#)

[Movie Website](#)

[Movie Website \(with clips\)](#)

[Anime on DVD Review](#)

Kirk Honeycutt, *Hollywood Reporter* [Review](#), 21 May 2004

Suvendrini Kakuchi, ['Robot Lovin'](#), *AsiaWeek*, 9 November 2001

['Expo robots close but not ready for prime time life'](#) *Japan Times*

Ted Chamberlain, ['Ultra Life-Like Robot Debutes in Japan'](#), *National Geographic*, 10 June 2005

[Wakamaru – life with a robot](#)

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[3] Jasper Sharp, ['Innocence'](#), *Midnight Eye*

[4] ['New Tec Enhances Ghost 2'](#)

[5] ['New Tec Enhances Ghost 2'](#)

[6] cf. ['Kenji Kawai'](#)

[7] cf. ['Randy Thom'](#)

[8] cf. www.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Extended_Phenotype

[9] Michael O'Sullivan, ['Ghost in the Shell 2: Anime Malfunction'](#), *Washington Post*, 16 September 2005

[10] O'Sullivan, ['Ghost in the Shell 2: Anime Malfunction'](#)

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- [28] Luc Steel, quoted By Matthew Broersma, '[Does schmoozing make robots clever?](#)'
- [29] Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis*, (Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 3.
- [30] Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis*, p. 3-4.
- [31] cf. C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, (Fount), chapter two; Victor Reppert, *C.S. Lewis' Dangerous Idea*, (IVP, 2003); '[The Argument from Reason](#)' and Quality Christian Internet's '[Interview with Dr. Victor Reppert](#)'
- [32] Jerry Fodor, 'The Big Idea: Can There Be A Science of Mind?', *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 July 1992, p. 5
- [33] Ned Block, 'Consciousness' in Samuel Guttenplan (ed.), *A Companion to Philosophy of Mind*, (Blackwell, 1994) p. 211
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