



Review: Mamoru Oshii (dir.) *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence, Dreamworks / Go Fish* (2005)

Author[s]: Martin Rogers

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 **UCLPRESS**

Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence

Dir. Mamoru Oshii

Dreamworks / Go Fish (2005)

Review by Martin Rogers

Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence (*Kôkaku kidôtai 2: Inosensu*) arrives ten years after Mamoru Oshii's original cyberpunk thriller and revisits the Police Special unit 'Sector 9', which is investigating a series of murders committed by malfunctioning 'gynoids'. These androids are highly developed sex dolls whose computer brains have become susceptible to hacking. The hard-boiled Bateau, guided by the 'ghost' of his former partner Motoko Kusanagi, proceeds to unravel a knot of Yakuza revenge killings, unethical AI developments, and corporate cover-ups — all the while confronting and discussing the degenerating borderland between artificial intelligence and biological embodiment.

Though anime *aficionados* will happily find that this DVD does not offer an English dub, anime 'outsiders' may find this fact discouraging, especially since the only subtitles enabled on the DVD are closed captions. Dreamworks/Go Fish have offered a DVD exchange for those consumers who find the large and often unnecessary captions distracting (for instance, lyrical shots of the futuristic Japan interrupted with captions like '[helicopter sounds]').

Of course, some viewers will find the conversation distracting anyway, as the characters have great difficulty getting through any dialogue without quoting Milton, Confucius, or Shakespeare. Academics, however, may find the script suspiciously informed: its explorations of the anxiety of posthuman consciousness not only echo the cybernetic critiques of Donna Haraway but prominently feature a scientist named 'Professor Haraway' who argues for the fundamental similarities between human reproduction and mechanical replication. The scriptwriters have done their reading.

The tension between the visual splendour of the film and its esoteric and often pedantic cyber-rhapsodies finds formal reflection in the combination of cell animation and the computer-rendered three-dimensional CG. Though both are remarkable in their own right (the CG in particular in the stunning title sequence of an android 'gynoid' being created in its assembly-line womb), they are often at odds with each other and fail to integrate seamlessly. Much of the beauty of the first *Ghost in the Shell* film resides in the floating and fluid animation of its more melancholic scenes. In *Innocence*, the melancholy is served cold in technical and overly-wrought CG close-ups of turning gears, twinkling doorbells, and machinery. For a film that argues for the sovereignty of 'dolls' and the likeness between machine and maker, *Innocence* appears to have spent a great deal of money making the two opposites through the use of visually divergent media.

The film compounds this divide with horrific images of robots being destroyed. Violence against AI becomes a central element to the plot and the overall

'arguments' of the film. These violent sequences are therefore more than simply gratuitous displays of animated spectacle or technical bravado, but they remain terrifying: one of the beautiful, geisha-like gynoids repeatedly whispers 'help me' while panels of her robot torso burst open, revealing tubes, wires and magnetic tape. On screen for mere seconds, the gynoid's self-destruction operates on fears of rape, of evisceration, and on more theoretical anxieties over the body's resemblance to a naked and malfunctioning machine. Do not be surprised to see *Innocence* viewed in the near future as an argument for the rights of AI: the film does more than sentimentalise some anthropomorphic robot and say, 'We'll miss you the most, Tin-Man!' It posits instead the claim that it is wrong to destroy machine life simply because it is mechanical, and that the binary opposition between machine and man is not only outdated but fundamentally inaccurate, immoral, and dangerous.