

# Soul and Body in Cyborg Anime

サイボーグアニメにおける魂と身体

Satoshi TSUKAMOTO

塚本 鋭司

愛知大学国際コミュニケーション学部

*Faculty of International Communication, Aichi University*

*E-mail: satsukam@vega.aichi-u.ac.jp*

## Abstract

この論文では1994年に公開された押井守監督のアニメ、*Ghost in the Shell*、2004年に同じ監督によるアニメ、*Ghost in the Shell: Innocence*、2017年にアメリカで制作された実写版で、ルパート・サンダース監督による *Ghost in the Shell* の3作品において、サイボーグにおける魂と身体との関係性、サイボーグとコンピュータ・ネットワークとの関連性、サイボーグの記憶と自己認識とのつながりなどを分析する。押井監督による2つのアニメ作品は海外において高い評価を得ているが、その理由はどのようにしてなのかを解明する。また実写版では、日本に対して否定的なイメージを与える *Techno-Orientalism* という考え方が示されてされているのではないかと筆者は指摘する。

## I. Introduction

When I taught anime to international as well as Japanese students in English at Aichi University, I learned that *Ghost in the Shell* was one of the most popular anime series in foreign countries. Like *Akira*, directed by Katsuhiro Otomo, *Ghost in the Shell*, directed by Mamoru Oshii, was a kind of sacred script for international students from the United States, France, and Germany. However, this anime did not receive any enthusiasm from Japanese students. A few of them knew the Japanese title of *Ghost in the Shell*, *Kokaku Kidotai*, but many of them did not know about this epoch-making

anime. I wondered why their reactions were so much in contrast.

Since the inception of *Astro Boy* on TV in 1963, robots have been familiar to young children in Japan. Atom, the main character in *Astro Boy*, is born after the son of a mad scientist, Dr. Tenma, passes away in a traffic accident. Atom is a reincarnation of Dr. Tenma's son; however, he is not a human being. He is a robot with brain; he understands 60 languages and expresses emotion. He has enormous power and can lift heavy objects. He is not clearly defined as a cyborg, but he has a mechanical body with a human mind.

Cyborgs became popular when manga artist Shotarou Ishinomori published *Cyborg 009* in 1964. Nine cyborgs form a group and attempt to defeat an organization called Black Ghost that controls the world by its evil power. Originally, the nine cyborgs are created as a prototype by Black Ghost, but they decide to turn against the organization because it promotes a violent world. The cyborgs want to make the world peaceful.

Cyborg 009 is a boy whom Black Ghost catches when he escapes from a prison. An accelerator is implanted in his body so he can move quickly from one place to another. Cyborg 001 is a baby with a genius brain, and he can move objects with his psychic ability. Cyborg 002 has the ability to fly at high speeds like an airplane. Cyborg 003 is the only female character among the nine cyborgs, and she has super audio-visual ability. Cyborg 004 can launch small rockets from his elbows and knees. Cyborg 005 has super power and can lift anything. Cyborg 006 spits fire from his mouth. Cyborg 007 can change his appearance at will. Cyborg 008 can stay underwater for extended periods of time. In short, all of them have special abilities that differentiate them from humans. As these descriptions show, a cyborg is believed to be a creature with special abilities although it looks like a human being.

Donna J. Haraway (1991) states that the cyborg image is associated with both imagination and reality. She believes that cyborgs are entities that show something beyond what we possess as well as something that exists in the real world. I think that this definition captures what it really is. A cyborg is a hybrid of a biological organism and mechanical structure. For instance, Cyborg 009 has a human side that expresses emotion and a mechanical side that can move at high speeds. Other cyborgs in *Cyborg 009* possess human emotions and abilities that humans cannot possibly obtain. In a sense, the cyborgs in *Cyborg 009* possess the qualities that Haraway mentions.

## **II. *Ghost in the Shell***

*Ghost in the Shell*, directed by Mamoru Oshii, was released in 1995. The protagonist is Major Motoko Kusanagi, a cyborg who belongs to Section 9 in the police department, a secret division that deals with terrorism, cyber-crime, and diplomatic relations. At the beginning of the movie, Motoko

eavesdrops on wired communication between politicians on the top of a building. When the wired messages are mixed with noises, she says to herself, “I’m menstruating, so I’m receiving more noises than usual.” This comment shows that Motoko has a human side even though it is assumed that she does not menstruate because all of her body parts are synthetic and mechanical. In other words, she wants to believe that her body is biological and is similar to the human body despite the fact that her body is artificially manufactured.

Motoko’s mission is to kill a diplomat who helps a genius computer programmer go into exile. She dives from the top of the building, breaks the windows of the room with a machine gun, and shoots the diplomat mercilessly. As soon as she completes her mission, she jumps back outside and becomes invisible with optical camouflage as she falls.

A garbage collector stops by a public telephone booth and inserts a card to jam the network and erase the footprints in it. Batou and Togusa, colleagues of Motoko in Section 9, chase the signals that the garbage collector sends in the network. Batou and Togusa finally stop the garbage truck and catch the garbage collector, who is suspected to be a criminal. When they interrogate him and show him a picture, he says that he recognizes his wife and daughter. However, it is a picture of him with a dog. This indicates that his memory has been overwritten, and he lives with false memories. The scene provokes how much we need our memories to be who we are. In other words, memory is important for us to be ourselves. Memory is accumulated by experience. A newborn baby experiences very few things, so the baby does not recognize who he or she is. In contrast, an older person has had many experiences and has memories, good and bad, so they form an important part of his or her identity. In an older person, it is assumed that he or she has multiple identities. To sum up, a person forms and establishes his or her identity with memories.

When one’s memories are overwritten, life can be very different from what it was before. How is this possible? In *Ghost in the Shell*, many characters have a plug in their neck that is connected to the network, and they can receive a lot of information through this network. This seems to be convenient. However, there is a high risk that computer programmers can hack the network, invade personal domains, and change or damage the brain. One’s life depends on the network and the information available to each person, and it is ironic that information plays a more important role than experience and that one’s life can be completed in the network. Is this the future of human life? It is a scary future.

In *Ghost in the Shell*, the Puppet Master, a hacker whose code name is Project 2501, speaks from the inside of a broken cyborg. Through the cyborg, the hacker explains that he only exists in the network, and without the body of the cyborg, he cannot claim his being. The Puppet Master wants to

claim that he exists and be recognized in the network. Toward the end of the story, the Puppet Master tries to find Motoko because he wants to merge with her. In other words, he wants to diversify his DNA so that his offspring can become resilient and strong, regardless of the environment where his offspring is born. Motoko is interested in what is going on in the network and tries to discover who the Puppet Master is. Finally, she meets the Puppet Master in the network. He confesses that he has wanted to be united with her. Christopher Bolton (2018) suggests that the Puppet Master's desire to mingle with Motoko is similar to the double suicide in Japanese puppet theater. However, I think that the Puppet Master only wants to be united with her; he does not want to transcend this world by suicide. Therefore, the Puppet Master's idea does not reflect the traditional idea of double suicide.

The military force finally destroys the bodies of the broken cyborgs where Motoko and the Puppet Master temporarily reside. In the end, Motoko lives on in a young female body. This ending shows that life in the network can be perpetual. To put it differently, Motoko's soul is permanent, and it does not matter whether she chooses a young girl or a mature woman. Life is maintained in the network, and whenever a soul finds a suitable body, it can decide to live there. This belief is familiar to Shintoism, in which many Japanese people believe. According to Shintoism, a god can exist anywhere in this world, whether the object is animate or inanimate. Shintoists believe that a god in the land, in the sea, in a tree, in a mountain, in animals protects us from any danger and damage caused by nature and living creatures.

One of the most thought-provoking scenes in *Ghost in the Shell* is when Motoko dives into the deep sea and floats on the surface. On a ship, her colleague Batou waits for her, and they have a conversation. Motoko tells Batou that she feels afraid in the sea because her body may not be functional there. She mentions that her body belongs to Section 9, not to herself, so she does not feel comfortable with her body. However, she also says that she feels hope in the sea. Batou asks her if she wants to quit her job, but she does not answer his question. Then, they hear a voice in the air, which must be a ghost of Motoko. In this case, a ghost is a soul that exists independent of any body, and it is suggested in this scene that a ghost is the essence of being.

In *Ghost in the Shell*, a cyborg's body is shown as vulnerable and damageable even though it generates strong power. When Motoko tries to open the hatch of an armored tank that is firmly attached, she uses all of her strength to open it, but both of her arms tear off. This scene indicates that her arms are not strong enough to lift a very heavy object. In other words, her body is not perfectly made and is damageable by her own strength. This is similar to the human body, which is vulnerable and can be injured by external objects such as stones or bullets.

*Ghost in the Shell* shows the relationship between soul and body, and Major Motoko Kusanagi

represents this. In her case, her synthetic body seems to be invulnerable, but it can be damaged. On the other hand, her soul is ubiquitous in the network and is curious to find another soul who is enigmatic.

### III. *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*

*Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* was released in 2004 and was also directed by Mamoru Oshii. In *Innocence*, the main characters are Batou and Togusa, both of whom belong to anti-terrorist unit in Public Security Section 9. A gynoid, a kind of cyborg, attacks two human beings and kills them by deliberately causing it to break down. Batou and Togusa investigate the case because some politicians and retired public officers may be involved, and they go to where the gynoid is hiding. When they find it, they hear a voice that says, “Help me,” just before Batou kills it. The voice hints that something is going on behind the scenes.

The gynoid that Batou kills is brought to a police forensics lab, and a scientist, Ms. Haraway, explains to them that the gynoid has some organs that provide humans with sexual pleasure. This kind of gynoid is called sexaroid and is made by a robotics company, Locus Solus. Ms. Haraway finds a file that is erased in the gynoid’s brain, but the voice that says, “Help me,” remains in the file.

Batou and Togusa visit a boathouse where a Locus Solus inspector, Jack Volkerson, has been killed. Jack had submitted a vacation notification five days before, but then he went missing. Three days before, he had rented the boathouse for one week. He has been brutally killed with kitchen knives, and the kitchen sink is full of blood. Batou finds a three-dimensional photo of a girl in a book; the picture says, “Help me.” This is another clue to the place where Batou and Togusa may eventually find the girl who needs to be rescued.

In the room, Batou finds a book on the shelf that is clearly different from the others. The book is written by Hans Bellmer, a German artist known as a painter, photographer, and a maker of unique female dolls. Hans Bellmer’s ball-jointed dolls were introduced in 1965 by Tatsuhiko Shibusawa, a critic of French literature, and since then, Hans Bellmer has been well-known in Japan. In my opinion, the ball-jointed dolls provoke the erotic fantasies of men, representing their desire for a “Lolita.”

Batou and Togusa are asked to go to a castle to find a hacker named Kim who knows the secret of the gynoids and Locus Solus. In the castle, they find an old man who seems to be dead, sitting on a reclining chair, with his neck connected to the network by cables. Batou assumes that the old man is Kim and that he pretends to be dead, so Batou throws him on the floor. Kim then says that he does not understand why some people try to inject a soul into a doll because a doll without a soul is the

most beautiful. Kim tells Batou that humans' incomplete perceptions create a partial reality, which means that the reality that humans perceive is not perfect. Kim also claims that gods and dolls are perfect beings in this world.

When Togusa touches the books on the shelf, a replica of the castle appears in front of him. When he peeps into a window, both Togusa and Batou quickly move to the outside of the castle. They walk on the bridge and enter the castle again. This time, a middle-aged man sits on the chair, and Batou throws the man on the floor. The man laughs and stands up by himself. He tells them that humans are afraid of dolls because they fear that humans can be reduced to mere objects, like a doll, and that they are associated with nothingness. The man also claims that when humans start to use external memory, they are eager to make many of their body parts mechanical to be the fittest in the world. Batou's face suddenly becomes a kind of skeleton, and Togusa shoots him. When the sound of the shot is heard, Batou and Togusa are outside the castle and run inside again. This time, Togusa finds an old man, but the castle is attacked by a battleship, and a bullet hits Togusa's chest. His chest opens, and his artificial ribs stand out. Togusa suddenly recovers from the illusion. Batou tells him that he has been hacked, and he sees the illusion.

These three similar scenes appear consecutively as I explained them in the previous paragraph. The viewers may wonder which scene is real and which is the illusion. The *dejavu* scenes destabilize the reality where the viewers watch, and this confuses the authenticity of the reality. Some viewers may feel that both Batou and Togusa are in the network where reality and hallucination coexist.

As Steven T. Brown (2008) indicates, the female dolls inspired by Hans Bellmer play an important role in *Ghost in the Shell 2*. The first encounter with a doll is when Batou chases the gynoid who has killed two people in the building. The gynoid wears a kind of kimono, traditional clothing in Japan, and when Batou shoots her, her chest opens to show that she is a cyborg. The second encounter is when Batou and Togusa visit the lab where that gynoid is anatomized. The scientist, Ms. Haraway, talks with them about the gynoid. The third encounter is when Batou and Togusa are looking for Kim, and they enter the castle where a female doll sits on the floor with a dog. In front of her are Hebrew letters indicating life and death. It seems to me that Motoko's soul is inside this doll. The fourth encounter is when Batou sneaks onto the factory ship where Locus Solus makes the gynoids. He finally finds the girl who keeps saying, "Help me." She confesses that she does not want to be a gynoid. The last encounter is when a warning system in the factory ship detects Batou, and many ball-jointed dolls attack him. None of the dolls are clothed, and they use their bodies like Kung Fu fighters to fight Batou. In other words, they move their hands, feet, and bodies quickly and smoothly like martial artists, and they do not give Batou any time to protect himself.

During this battle scene, it turns out that one doll is inhabited by Motoko, and she protects Batou from the other aggressive dolls. She tells Batou that she can stop the rampage if she hacks the ship's network system. While she connects herself to the network system, Batou protects her, and her hacking is successful in stopping the dolls' movements. However, at the same time, the doll in which Motoko resides also stops moving. Just before she is gone, she tells Batou that she is always with him when he connects himself to the network. This shows that Motoko likes Batou, her long-time colleague in Section 9.

In *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*, the relationship between reality and the network is blurred (Brown 2008). The story is complicated, and the viewers may wonder if any scene shows the plot that the main characters face or a hallucination that they experience in the network. The previously mentioned *dejavu* scenes are good examples of the blurred line between reality and hallucination. Throughout the story, Batou misses Motoko, and toward the end of the story, she appears clearly as a ball-jointed doll, protecting Batou against the other dolls on the ship. There are two other dolls in the story that Motoko may inhabit. When Batou gives Togusa a ride to his house, his daughter welcomes him, and she holds a small doll whose eyes are blue. It is implied that the doll watches Batou. The second incident is when Batou recognizes a doll with a dress and a dog when he enters the castle to find Kim. The doll does not move at all when Batou approaches her. I think that Motoko hides herself in this doll as well.

When Motoko stops the network system on the ship, all of the ball-jointed dolls stop moving. At the same time, Motoko leaves the doll she is in. This scene indicates that Motoko exists as an invisible soul in the network even though she does not have a body. In other words, life can exist in the network without any tangible object. I believe that this way of thinking is similar to Shintoism. Many Japanese people believe that the soul exists in nature, and they pray to live in harmony with nature. Motoko is a kind of god who protects Batou. Many Japanese people believe that their ancestors protect them from harm, and they visit a shrine at least every year to ask for well-being.

Steven T. Brown (2008) refers to Japanese puppet theater when he analyzes this film. He also mentions that there are close associations between puppets and cyborgs. I understand how Brown tries to connect the Japanese tradition; however, I think that this film hides or avoids some Japanese things. For instance, *The Doll*, written by Hans Bellmer, is found by Batou on the shelf of the house that Jack Volkerson rents; however, the language printed on the pages is Korean, not Japanese. Another example is that the setting of the story is a fictional city that includes streets that can be found in Hong Kong and Venice. There are many signs on the road that are common in Hong Kong, and only Chinese characters are on the signs. In addition, there are canals and floating boats, similar

to Venice. There are a couple of scenes with big animal dolls on a ship, and these dolls look like animals that are popular in China.

The tea-carrying doll in the castle where Batou and Togusa enter to find Kim looks made in Japan. The mechanical doll moves in the mainspring and stops in front of the guest. After the guest picks up a tea cup, drinks it, and puts it on the plate the doll holds, the doll turns around and moves back to the starting point. This mechanical doll is a clear indication of Japan, but its face does not seem typically Japanese. Even though *Ghost in the Shell 2* was made in Japan, I think that Mamoru Oshii, the director, deliberately avoided clear signs of anything Japanese, and by doing so, he wanted this film to be more appealing to non-Japanese viewers.

#### **IV. *Ghost in the Shell* in 2017**

*Ghost in the Shell*, a live action film directed by Rupert Sanders, was released in 2017. This Hollywood movie is a remake, based on the *Ghost in the Shell* series, including *Stand Complex Alone*, *Stand Complex Alone 2nd*, *Arise*, and *Ghost in the Shell* in 1995.

In the near future, Major Mira Killian is a prototype of a human being with a smart brain and strong cybernetic body. Her brain comes from a young woman who dies in a terrorist attack, and her body comes from the Hanka Robotics Cooperation. She becomes a soldier fighting against terrorists who hack the network that is connected to humans, and she works with Batou and Togusa in Section 9, commanded by Chief Saisuke Aramaki. Mira experiences a hallucination, which is treated as a glitch at first. She takes medicine for it, but her condition does not improve. In addition, she hardly has any memories of her past life and feels that something is wrong with her brain. When Section 9 catches a terrorist named Kuze, she learns the secret of the Hanka Robotics Corporation—she has been used as a guinea pig, and 98 people died before the successful operation that created her.

One of the distinctive features of the live action version of *Ghost in the Shell* is that a brain is implanted in a fully synthetic body before the title role. It is clearly indicated that the human brain as an object is shown, and a body as a form of material is combined with the brain. Therefore, the brain and the body are distinctly separated at first. In contrast, the line between the brain and body is not clearly distinguished in 1995's *Ghost in the Shell*. The brain is part of a synthetic body, and the viewers do not recognize the brain as an independent entity. Rather, the original *Ghost in the Shell* shows that Major Motoko Kusanagi is connected to the network from her birth.

One year later, Mira is a member of Section 9, and she listens to a conversation between Dr. Osmond, a representative of the Hanka Robotics Corporation, and an ambassador from the African Federation. They talk about cyber enhancement, its benefits, and drawbacks. There are Geisha-



looking robots in the room that entertain the people. The robots start to attack the people, and one robot hacks into Dr. Osmond's neck. Mira jumps from the top of the building, breaks through the window, and shoots the robot.

I recognize techno-Orientalism in this scene. Techno-Orientalism is the idea that Japan is presented as the new home of cyborgs. During the 1980s and early 1990s, Japan experienced a prosperous economic boom and enjoyed luxury and material wealth (Denison, 2015). Japan was proud of its technological advancements such as the Walkman, which enabled people to listen to music anywhere, and the Game Boy, which was a portable game machine. For Westerners, Japan was a technologically advanced nation at that time. According to Ken McLeod (2013), Japan was also viewed negatively because Westerners felt uneasy or threatened by Japan's economic and technological power. To minimize the dominance in cyber space, Westerners created negative, dark, merciless, grim images that were associated with Japan. The faces of the Geisha-looking robots are inhuman, merciless, and cold. When Mira tries to shoot the Geisha-looking robot that hacks into Dr. Osmond's neck, the robot transforms into a spider walking on four legs, and it climbs the wall, holding Dr. Osmond. The robot shows a skull-like face before Mira shoots it to death. The scene depicts the Geisha-looking robot as grotesque and ugly, and this is a good example of the techno-Orientalism that degrades Japan.

The Geisha-looking robot that transforms into a spider reminds me of *Wicked City*, an anime film that depicts the balance between the Black World and the human world. The Black World is a place where wicked creatures live, and there has been a peace treaty between the Black World and the human world for many centuries. The balance between them is maintained by a secret society called the Black Guard. One of the main characters is Renzaburo Taki, an electronics salesman who belongs to the Black Guard. He has casual sex with Kanako, a young woman he meets in a bar. When Renzaburo goes to bed and makes love with Kanako, she suddenly transforms into a spider and tries to cut his genitals. Luckily, he escapes. I think that the depiction of the woman in *Wicked City* is very similar to the Geisha-looking robot, and the transformation of the Geisha-looking robot into a spider-like creature reflects the same disgust and grotesqueness.

When Mira meets Kuze, a hacker who builds his own network, he tells her that he is a failure of the experiments in Project 2571, which was an attempt to create a synthetic body with a human brain. After this encounter, Mira talks with Dr. Ouelet, a scientist working for the Hanka Robotics Corporation, and learns that she is the first successful cyborg after 98 failures. Mira's desire to know who she is increases; she searches for her identity and the reason she does not have memories of her childhood. I think that she struggles with figuring out who she is, but we do not see such an internal

struggle inside Motoko in the original *Ghost in the Shell*. I assume that the fundamental factor of establishing identity is memory, even though Dr. Ouelet has previously told Mira that what Mira does defines who she is.

Mr. Cutter, the president of the Hanka Robotics Corporation, asks Dr. Ouelet to kill Mira because she starts to have a soul. Mr. Cutter regards Mira as another failure. Dr. Ouelet disobeys his order, and gives Mira a memory chip that contains Mira's past. Mira successfully escapes from the Hanka Robotics building and visits an apartment where an old woman lives. The woman tells Mira that her daughter had run away one year earlier. She also says that Mira reminds her of her daughter. It is noted that Mira's brain came from the woman's daughter, Motoko Kusanagi. Then Mira is finally convinced that the old woman is her mother.

Unlike the original *Ghost in the Shell*, Mira does not feel the conflict between mind and body. Her mind is human while her body is manufactured. In other words, she has a soul within a synthetic body, and they live in harmony with each other. Her internal struggle comes from the search for her identity. False memories are implanted in her brain to fight terrorists, but she feels some glitches and gradually realizes that she has to search for her true identity.

## **V. Conclusion**

I have analyzed two anime films and one live action film that deal with similar themes. I say that *Ghost in the Shell* is unpopular among Japanese college students. I think that philosophical inquiry as to what reality is and how memory shapes identity are difficult questions to answer. Japanese college students rarely engage in such philosophical questions inside or outside the classroom. This is one of the major reasons why they are not familiar with anime that makes the viewers question their identity and existence. In contrast, American and European students have more opportunities to discuss philosophical questions on campus. Even though many universities in the United States tend to minimize humanity classes and increase business-related and practical subjects, philosophy is one of the most fundamental and important subjects. Therefore, I think that college students in the United States and Europe like to watch thought-provoking anime films such as *Ghost in the Shell*.

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