## Mamoru Oshii's Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence

## Thinking Before the Act

### Frédéric Clément

ince the enactment of the revised Bill 156 of Tokyo Metropolitan Ordinance Regarding the Healthy Development of Youths, 1 creators of *manga* and anime have had to reconsider the representations of sexuality in each of their respective works. A shrewd observer of his medium and society, Japanese anime director Mamoru Oshii, had already been reflecting on the increased sexualization of fictional characters. In 2004, several years before Bill 156, Oshii directed the anime film Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence, a futuristic police story in which 'sex dolls' - modelled after little girls - become sentient and murder their owners. Oshii's preoccupation in this film seems to be with the remnants of desire and sexuality in 'the age of their mechanical reproduction' and the consequent discomfort in such a civilization. In this article, I will first discuss a few points on the depiction of 'little girls' (shôjo literally meaning "little female") brought up in the two essential writings by renowned anime and manga scholars: Susan J. Napier and Frederik L. Schodt. Following this, I will then analyse Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence, mainly through the inversion of what Napier calls the "disappearing shôjo," as well as a reflection on the doll's body within the motion picture as a kind of sexual 'no man's land', both metaphorically and literally. Subsequently, I will analyse the anime film through the prism of horror – that is, focusing my attention on how,

paradoxically, these 'dolls' become 'monsters' in order to combat abjection and, in turn, reclaim their 'innocence.'

#### On Disappearance, Cuteness and the 'Lolita Complex'

Tn 2005, Susan J. Napier, a pioneer in academic studies of Japanese anime in the West, released a revised and Laugmented edition of her 2001 ground-breaking 'anime-exclusive' book, Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation. In one of her added chapters, "Now You See Her, Now You Don't: The Disappearing Shôjo," Napier discusses the evanescent figure of 'the little girl' in recent anime series and movies, and demonstrates the existence of a character type in anime that goes against historical and etymological links between feminine characteristics and their corporeal materiality. Rather than being associated with her corporeality,

Napier's *shôjo* is better associated with a process of evanescence and 'vanishing.' In contemporary anime, the stability of corporeality seems to be a major issue for the 'little girls' studied by Napier: one gradually becomes transparent when she is transported to a 'fantastic world' and must even forgo the use of her name, thus falling into a kind of linguistic invisibility (Spirited Away, Hayao Miyazaki, 2001); another, wandering in a 'surreal world', seemingly ends up being impaled by thousands of flying swords and physically disappears, but also 'vanishes' from her friends' memories (Shôjo Kakumei Utena, Kunihiko Ikuhara, 1997); a group of them, unknowingly imprisoned in a kind of purgatory (most likely to expiate their suicides), eventually 'leave'

their bodies, thus disappearing twice rather than just once (Haibane Renmei, Yoshitashi ABe, 1998); and Lain, the protagonist of Serial Experiments Lain (Ryutaro Nakamura, 1998), assumes the form of an all-powerful, immaterial entity by becoming a 'cyber-goddess' and then 'removing' herself from the memories of everyone who has ever met her, therefore bringing about a kind of psychic 'disappearance'. Napier also identifies the protagonist of the first *Ghost in the* Shell film (Mamoru Oshii, 1995), a cyborg police officer named Motoko Kusanagi who inhabits a little girl's body at the very end of the film, as "the most prominent progenitor of the disappearing shôjo" (Napier 170).

The 'cutifying' - indeed, almost 'fetishising' - aesthetic that permeates representations of the 'little girl' in anime and manga is a prominent visual and thematic characteristic of these art forms. This sexualization of the little girl is known in Japan as 'lolicon' (aka: 'rorikon'), which is a portmanteau of the term "Lolita complex." The word 'lolicon' is used both as an adjective (e.g. a lolicon work) and a noun, in which case it refers to an enthusiast of lolicon material (e.g. to be a lolicon). In one chapter of his book, Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga, Frederik L. Schodt, chronicles the evolution of the representation of sexuality in general – and particularly of lolicon – during the late 1980s in Japan (1996). Up until that time, manga creators adhered to the guidelines set forth by the relatively vague Article 175 of the Japanese Penal Code, otherwise known as 'the obscenity law', as well as tacit rules concerning what belonged to 'good taste' and what did not. Compliance with those guidelines gradually receded to a resurgence of sexual imagery. This resurgence brought, among other things, a progressively more violent sexuality, including depictions of underage characters not exclusive to adult-oriented manga, but also in publications targeting the general public. Schodt sums up this change of disposition in the following way, underlining the difference between the female sexual 'ideal' in the West and in Japan:

The specific prohibition against showing pubic hair, however, may have indirectly encouraged some clever erotic manga artists to draw prepubescent girls as sex objects, with ridiculously inflated breasts. Whatever the original motivation, in the 1980s traditional erotic manga for adult men...gradually gave way to erotic manga with a rorikon flavor. Instead of adult males doing very adult things to mature women (neighbours' wives, waitresses, office workers, buxom foreigners, that sort of thing), the sex objects became increasingly 'cute' – and younger. If in the West it was a Madonna-whore (but nonetheless adult woman) image that fired men's sexual fantasies, in Japan the equivalent was a smiling junior high school virgin, clad in her 'sailor suit' school uniform and holding a stuffed animal toy. (Schodt 54-5)

Although commercial anime targeted at the lolicon market has been mostly phased out, manga and video games of this type are nevertheless thriving on account of their low production costs and ease of distribution (only time will tell how the relatively recent passing of Bill 156 affects digital distribution of lolicon material). The 'little girl' is represented ambiguously in Japanese visual culture: 'innocence' and 'sexuality' exist side by side in the same 'undeveloped' body, a problematic combination that will be magnified in my next section below, the anime feature film Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence.

#### Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence: Material Girls

The first *Ghost in the Shell* film ends with protagonist Motoko Kusanagi's 'ghost' being transferred, **L** after recently merging with that of an artificial intelligence (AI) born from the 'flow' of information on the network, into an artificial body shaped like a little girl's.3 The sequel, Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence, takes place three years after the complete disappearance of the entity that Motoko and the Puppet Master merged into, as cyborg policeman Batô and his human partner Togusa are still part of the counter-terrorist unit Public Security Section 9. While investigating sex gynoids (female androids) that kill their owners, Batô discovers criminal groups are being hired by the maker of the gynoids to kidnap little girls. This 'maker', a company named Locus Solus, is trying to copy little girls' 'ghosts' into the bodies of 'sex dolls' in order to make them 'more real.' By progressively partitioning the process of revealing the shôjo – first through the voice, then through images - before unveiling her in a 'state' of voice/ image synchronicity at the very end of the film, Oshii seems to think of the 'little girl' from the other end of Napier's above-mentioned spectrum.

In Innocence's very first scene, Batô fights one of the gynoids infused with the 'ghost' of a kidnapped girl. The girl, whose ghost is imprisoned within the 'shell' (i.e. the body) of a gynoid dressed as a geisha, beseeches Batô: "Tasukété" ("Please help us..." in the English subtitles). At this point, the 'real,' living little girl exists only on the audio track, since the body seen on-screen is only a borrowed form which she 'haunts' against her own will. Batô shoots the gynoid, 'de-

<sup>1.</sup> Bill 156, which concerned the sexualized representations of so-called 'fictional youths' in Japan, was submitted in November 2010 and then later approved in December 2010. It officially took effect in July 2011.

<sup>2.</sup> The term originates from the title and eponymous character of the 1955 novel Lolita by Vladimir Nabokov, in which a teacher in his 40s falls in love with a girl at the dawn of adolescence nicknamed 'Lolita' (1989).

<sup>3.</sup> The 'ghost' is the 'spirit' and/or 'consciousness' of an individual (this is never made explicit in any of the movies), while the 'shell' is its 'physic-

stroys' it, and the rest of the movie is spent trying to solve the mystery of the 'killer' gynoids. The second appearance of the little girl takes place in the police forensics laboratory run by Coroner Haraway, as Batô and Togusa are investigating the murderous behaviour of the 'sex dolls.' Haraway plays back the gynoid's last words to the two partners: "Tasukété," they hear in a continuous loop. In this scene, Oshii adds visuals to the little girl's voice: the forensic scientist's computer terminal projects a three-dimensional depiction of the voice as a cascade of pixels, which allows the little girl, through a representation of her word, into the realm of the visible.

The little girl's 'voice' is featured in seven shots, as if it were a physical object around which one is able to move to better examine it. In this manner, the voice,

#### Bellmer's Dolls: A Sexual "No Man's Land"

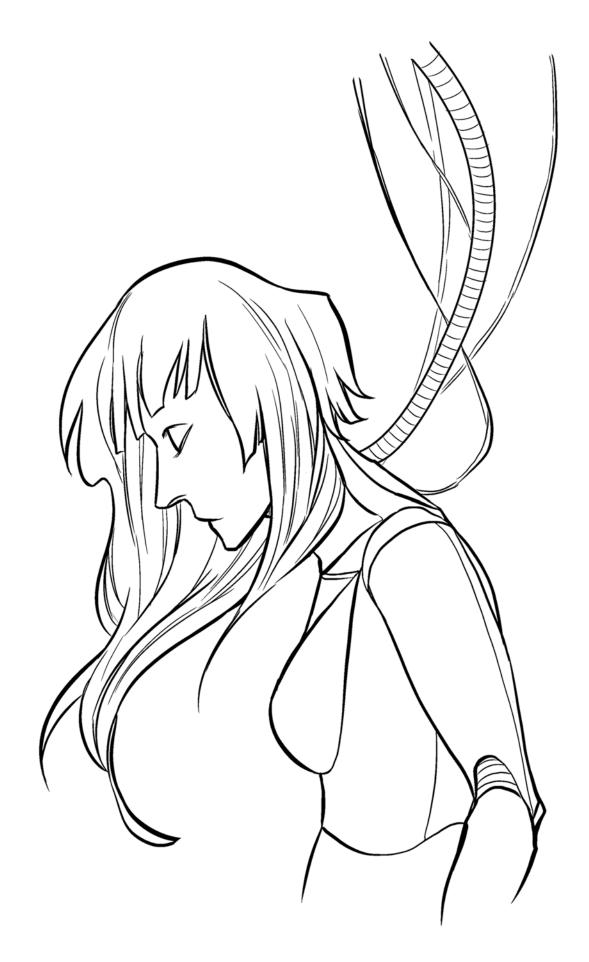
It is revealed during a meeting between Batô, his colleague Togusa and their superior that the 'sex dolls' are called "Hadaly" by their manufacturer. This name is a reference to the novel *L'Ève Future* by French author Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, published in 1886, from which the film takes its opening quote: "Since our gods and our aspirations are no longer anything but scientific, why should our loves not be so, as well?" As for the gynoids' physical appearance, it is directly borrowed from the works of German surrealist artist Hans Bellmer who, in the 1930s, published a photo album titled *The Doll*. In his particularly thorough essay on the thematic and visual links between this film and the works of Bellmer, Steven T. Brown correlates the uncanny

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bodiless though it may be, is nevertheless endowed with a 'physical presence' without ever becoming tangible (since light exhibits both particle and wave properties and is never quite material or immaterial). The third manifestation of the little girl occurs when Batô finds a hologram between the pages of The Doll, a 1934 book by German artist Hans Bellmer, whose importance in the movie soon becomes apparent. This time, we do not hear any sound whatsoever; the little girl is motionless and completely silent in this hologram, still at the border between materiality and immateriality. Lastly, her fourth manifestation happens when she is rescued by Batô at the very end of the film, and her voice and body are, for the first time, perfectly synchronized. Even though Oshii could not have conceptualized his film in response to Napier's writings (her book's expanded edition, which features the chapter "The Disappearing Shôjo," was published after the movie's release), I nonetheless contend that the director, as a careful observer of his field, knowingly focused his reflection on the subject of little girls' corporeality in anime.

subjects seen in the movie and the pertinent elements borrowed from Bellmer (2008): the cruciform silhouette of a doll seen in the opening credits, the book The Doll shown from Batô's point of view (long enough for the spectator to read the title and the author's name), and the geishal gynoid tearing her own torso open to reveal her mechanical 'bowels' which evokes Bellmer's drawing Rose Ouverte la Nuit (1935). As Brown points out, the two little girls are indifferent to the display of their insides, of their intimacy (Brown 239-40). Brown notes that Bellmer's work was partly made in reaction to the ambient fascism of the time; the way the dolls reveal their interior mechanism seems like a protest against the cult of beauty and youth conveyed by the Nazi regime. In the gynoid's self-destruction, Brown sees "an act of resistance against the ideal of beauty to which the kidnapped adolescent girls are being held captive" (Brown 241).

Such exhibition of intimacy does not occur only in that scene, but rather seems to permeate the whole film. Already, in the first *Ghost in the Shell* film, the visual representation of anatomical gender was problematic: despite numerous shots depicting Motoko's bare crotch, no genitals



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<sup>4.</sup> This character is a real-life reference to philosopher and cyborg theorist Donna J. Haraway, who wrote the influential essay "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" (Haraway 1991).

<sup>5.</sup> For more information on the importance of *L'Ève Future* in this movie, see Sharalyn Orbaugh's article titled "Emotional Infectivity: Cyborg Affect and the Limits of the Human" (Orbaugh 2008).

were visible. While it was diegetically possible that Motoko had no anatomical gender (she is, after all, a cyborg whose only remaining organic part is a piece of her brain), the gynoids of Innocence are a different matter altogether. During the investigation, the forensic scientist Haraway tells Batô and Togusa that these gynoids have 'extra' organs unneeded by normal service androids. The gynoids are actually 'sexaroids' ('sexbots' in the English subtitles): dolls that feature functional genitalia. However, the anatomical gender of these gynoids remains unseen, despite the plethora of shots showing their pubic areas, especially during the final battle and the opening credits, just as in the previous Ghost in the Shell.6 The gynoids seem to occupy an anatomical gender of "no man's land": they are artificial beings, unable to reproduce through sexual activity and are powered by the spirits of little girls who are too young to procreate. As automata, the gynoids exist at the threshold of reproduction: they reproduce gestures and words ("Tasukété"), but can never reproduce themselves, in spite of the intrinsic link between their existence and sexuality. Destined for eternal unfulfillment, they instead opt for self-destruction, making this their own 'act of resistance.'

#### Feminine as Possessed Monster

In her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism*, Psychoanalysis (1993), Barbara Creed identifies seven L"faces" of the monstrous-feminine found in horror movies: the archaic mother, the woman as possessed monster, the woman as monstrous womb, the woman as vampire, the woman as witch, the woman as monstrous mother and the castrator. Of these seven types, Innocence's gynoids are closest to women as possessed monsters. Creed describes this archetype by analyzing the movie *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973).

In this movie, a female teenager on the threshold of puberty named Regan MacNeil (Linda Blair) is possessed by an 'evil spirit.' Many parallels can be traced between *The* Exorcist and Innocence, notably that the murderous gynoids seem to relate to the archetype of the possessed monster in the same way: the 'sex dolls' are the hosts of a copied 'ghost' that comes from little girls, just as Regan is the host of a 'foreign spirit.' Just like the little girls that 'possess' the body of the gynoids, Regan, too, has a brief moment of lucidity in *The Exorcist*. When the girl is asleep, there is a sign on her belly that indicates that the 'real' Regan is lucid and also is prisoner of that 'body': as if coming from beneath the surface of the skin, the words "Help me" are inscribed in her flesh. In Innocence, the girl cries for help in the same way when she is trapped in the gynoid's body: "Tasukété". Creed mentions that, for a long time, analyses of *The Exorcist* linked the evil entity possessing the girl's body to the male gender (Creed 39). But the voice we hear in *The Exorcist* is that of a woman, Mercedes McCambridge, to which animal 'screams' were added to complete the sound mix, a fact that lessens the strength of previous analyses. On the other hand, the demon Pazuzu, to which the 'evil entity' is associated in the movie, is of male gender in Mesopotamian mythology, making the gendered categorization of this entity quite hard. This dilemma is not without parallels to the difficulties of assigning a specific gender to the character of the Puppet Master in the first *Ghost in the Shell* movie.

The analogy between *Innocence* and *The Exorcist* is not incidental. In both movies, particular attention is given to the feminine voice separated from the body. In a pivotal scene of *The Exorcist* which seems to take place in a school's language laboratory, a priest, Father Karras (Jason Miller), is analysing the 'demonic voice' that issues from inside Regan in the hopes of learning more about its origin and, in turn, finding 'traces' of the girl. Above the listening stations hangs a large white banner, on which is written, in bold red letters, the word "TASUKETE" (which, as previously mentioned, means "Help me"). The message Regan wants to get through, her cry for help, cannot be part of the audible world (the 'demonic voices' were instead saying "Let her die" and "Fear the priest"), but is nonetheless part of the visual spectrum, on the strip of paper hung above the listening stations. In Innocence, where the repeated voice communicated through electrons and photons, the audio tape is obsolete: what remains is the message itself, which the director manages to insert into the visible realm. The recurrent use of the word tasukété in Innocence is absolutely justified in the script: the girls whose 'ghosts' are copied truly desire to have their cry for help heard. Still, I pose the hypothesis that Mamoru Oshii, an avid cinephile, was aware of the presence of the paper strip in The Exorcist, a movie that, just like Innocence, features the body of a young girl being 'possessed.'

In the second half of her book, Barbara Creed then tackles the Freudian concept of the castrated woman. Creed demonstrates, in her reading of the psychoanalysis of Little Hans in "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-year-old Boy" (2001), that the phobia afflicting the child does not stem from fear of the apparent castration of his mother, but rather comes from the fear of the femme castratrice (in French in Creed's text). Apparently, Freud, along with Hans's father, analyzed the child's dreams and behaviour in such a way as to make them fit Freud's own psychoanalytic theories such as the Oedipus complex and the castration complex, which was sure to bias any interpretation. Freud security guards. Powerful and agile enough to 'take down' the guards bare-handed, they do not even bother picking up their guns once they fall; their artificial and feminine bodies are more than adequate as murderous weapons. This is in stark contrast with 'typical' rape-revenge movies, in which women often use phallic weapons such as knives to penetrate men's bodies – and often to 'emasculate' them.

## Powerful and agile enough to 'take down' the guards bare-handed...their artificial and feminine bodies are more than adequate as murderous weapons.

posits that women are terrifying because they are castrated. Creed, instead, says that women are terrifying because men give them the imaginary power of castration (Creed 87). So, in Little Hans's phobia, "the mother ultimately represents castration, suffocation, death, the void - themes also common to the representation of the monstrous-feminine in the horror film" (Creed 102). Using the image of the vagina dentata - a woman's genitalia containing 'cutting teeth' - Creed defies sexual representations associated to the views of Freud and Lacan, where sex as a woman's "lack" occupies a central part (Creed 110).

#### Rejecting Abjection: A Fight for Innocence

ollowing Barbara Creed's categorization (Creed 123), Innocence can be classified within the rape-revenge sub-genre in which a woman, characteristically associated with feminine traits like beauty, kindness and passivity, suffers a rape and then becomes an 'emasculating' murderer who violently punishes men (her abuser or other rapists) for their sexual crimes, ensuring that those who live by the sword also die by the sword, so to speak.7 In *Innocence*, both the 'rapes' and the 'acts of revenge' are not shown, since the gynoids have already eliminated their owners at the beginning of the movie. However, those murderous 'acts' are the starting point of the plot, and the investigations into the murders takes up most of the narrative. Furthermore, during the final confrontation, dozens of gynoids 'come to life' and almost effortlessly dispose of several male Locus Solus

The monstrous-feminine, as Creed shows, is often associated with abjection from the body. In her Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection (1982), psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva makes a distinction between abjection and the uncanny: "Essentially different from 'uncanniness', more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory" (Kristeva 14). More so than male characters in horror movies, the female's 'monstrous' embodiments are associated with bodily fluids and other viscous elements: menstrual blood, placenta, vomit, etc. In this context of abjection, Innocence's gynoids seem to break the mold. Their artificial bodies are immaculately white and, in a way, their monstrosity is contained: their spilled entrails are cables that do not float in any kind of fluid or viscous element, unlike androids such as the one from Alien (Ridley Scott, 1979) out of which a whitish 'blood' sprays when it is damaged. The gynoids' shattered faces display a skull on which no blood flows: the associated monstrous quality of the feminine in Innocence is sleek, dry and sterile. When the monstrous is displayed in a male character, such as Togusa's wounded torso or the ripped-out organs of Volkerson (a Locus Solus employee found dismembered in his villa), blood drips, spurts and leaves marks, which is the case in Volkerson's bloody handprint in the mirror.

This 'dry' femininity within the monstrosity of the gynoids contrasts with Motoko's character in the first Ghost in the Shell movie, where her female corporeality was much more linked with 'liquid' elements: her genesis in fluid vats, the pouring rain during the scene when she wandered around the city as well as her underwater diving all establish that fact. Furthermore, about halfway through the film, during her battles against a 'hacker,' and in the end against

<sup>6.</sup> In the (mostly Lacanian) psychoanalytic doxa, the woman is defined by what she lacks – the phallus – placing her in a state of 'incompleteness'. In anime, where instead of sexual organs, secondary gender characteristics are depicted, the gender which is defined by the 'lack' is male: They neither have breasts (a prominent feature in most anime) nor eyelashes. Except in the case of men whose 'hairiness' is emphatically depicted, in anime, it is the masculine that is (physically) 'incomplete'.

<sup>7.</sup> Creed identifies a few films that belong to this sub-genre, including Ms .45 (Abel Ferrara, 1981), Violated [aka: Victimized] (Richard Cannistraro, 1984) and I Spit on Your Grave [aka: Day of the Woman] (Meir Zarchi, 1978).

a tank, she becomes invisible and the only sign of her presence is the water she displaces with her steps. The cyborg policewoman evokes the monstrous only once in *Ghost in the Shell*, but her evocation is not of the dry and contained kind like the gynoids'. As she strains to open the tank hatch, her limbs break apart and pieces and debris from her 'body' are scattered around her. Destabilized, she falls to the damp ground and is lifted by the tank's pincers, her body dripping. In *Innocence*, the gynoids are also manufactured in a liquid environment, but even when emerging from the water in Locus Solus' factory, they never look 'wet,' except from their victims' blood. The monstrous they represent is as sleek and cold as the porcelain their immaculate white bodies seem to be made from. This 'whiteness' may be viewed as a symbol of their purity...and innocence.

#### Beyond Innocence: The Anti-Body

Dreamland Japan, the author warns the reader of the downsides of manga's 'booming' popularity outside of Japan, and the skewed reception of some of its content, stating that "[i]n a worst-case scenario, the 'Lolita complex virus' might even be inadvertently exported" (Schodt 340). While Japan's "virus" might not disappear completely even after Bill 156's recent approval, its strength might be seriously dampened. Whatever happens, let us not forget that six years before Bill 156 was passed, Mamoru Oshii had already made public his own version of the antibodies for that particular virus: fabricated instruments of 'pleasure' in the shape of innocent-looking 'dolls' that rebelled against those who abused their souls — unaware that they even had one.

Note: This article is a revised and abridged version of the third chapter of the author's book, Machines Désirées: La Représentation du Féminin dans les Films d'Animation 'Ghost in the Shell' du Réalisateur Mamoru Oshii

(© L'Harmattan 2011). It was also translated from French to English by Guillaume Desgagné.

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