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## *Ghost in the Shell 2*, Technicity and the Subject

**Daniel Hourigan<sup>1</sup>**

This article examines how *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (*Inosensu*, Mamoru Oshii, 2004; hereafter *Innocence*) questions what remains of being human and the assemblage of humanity when the human and the machine collide and elide their limit of differentiation.<sup>2</sup> The former, being human, is a question of what philosophy terms *ontology*: the way or structure of existence or being. *Innocence* treats the question of reorganising the ontology of humanity (its place in existence) in noticeably technological and esoteric registers. Therefore it will be necessary to dwell on the particular moments in the film when human ontology is confronted: are we to expect a smooth unfolding of an artificial post-humanity where everything becomes a technological fabrication, malleable and easily substituted, or is there an invitation to rupture both the ontological notion of human *being* and the conceptualisation of technology in the elision of their difference as the definition of humanity is encoded in a technological framework? These questions are linked to the way that *Innocence* constructs and assembles humanity in the film by renaming subjectivity as a ‘ghost’. Herein it will be shown how the film’s predilection for technology in its narrative content and technological rationalism in its wider conceptual embedding reconstructs humanity but rejects the metaphysical valuation of humanity through notions of dignity, taboo, respect, affect, and so forth. This rejection results in the ghost having the structure of what psychoanalysis calls a ‘symptom’: a ciphered message/signifier that appears in a discourse but is not addressed to anyone in particular. By connecting this twin problematic of ontological difference and metaphysical poverty to the ontological philosophy of Martin Heidegger and the psychoanalytic philosophy of Slavoj Žižek, this article aims to unearth and lay bare the paradoxes inherent in the view of technology and society deployed by *Innocence* and how the film is able to, in the presence of these explicitly ontological paradoxes, put the question of what constitutes a human Subject into crisis by coding it as a symptom.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Release titles for the film have varied and also include *Inosensu: Kōkaku kidōtai* and *Innocence: Ghost in the Shell*. This discussion relies on the Australian special-edition DVD release, which is entitled *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* [<http://www.madman.com.au/catalogue/view/6347/ghost-in-the-shell-2-innocence-2-disc-special-edition>].

<sup>3</sup> Subject is capitalised here to emphasise its philosophical status, the Subject devoted to a Cause rather than the signification of a (human) person. For further clarification, please see ‘Technicity and the Symptom’ below.

### Ghosts, Subjectivity, and Paradoxes

Mamoru Oshii's technophilic obscuritanist opus *Innocence* is a film that highlights the virtues and vicissitudes of contemporary humanism in the encounters between the human Subject and technology. The narrative of *Innocence* speculates that, in the immediate future of 2032, the line between the human and the machine will have been erased and human civilisation is thoroughly saturated with and supplemented by technology. Dolls, known in other science fiction terminology as androids, function as robotic companions, and a particular line of Locus Solus gynoids (female robots designed for the purpose of sex) are malfunctioning and killing their owners. Two agents, Batô and Togusa, from the top-secret government agency known as Section 9 are called in to investigate the homicides as a potential terrorist threat. What Batô and Togusa uncover, however, is terror rather than terrorism: the humanness of the Locus Solus dolls, their *je ne sais quoi*, is the illegal imprinting of the psyches of adolescent girls against their will. This imprinting gives the dolls a 'ghost' that is a type of soul for the technological age in which the film is set.<sup>4</sup> The empty rattling of the dolls' ghosts, while the cause of their murderous malfunctioning, is also a plea for aid by the girls who are being imprinted onto the dolls against their will. This imprinting serves to underscore the elision of any traditional demarcation of difference between the human and the machine: the excessive essence of humanity that conferred its uniqueness is now itself part of technology (see Žižek 2006, 102).

The question this discussion pursues, through the vantage of philosophy and psychoanalysis, is what rejoinder does *Innocence* offer to this erasure, if any? The script of *Innocence* knits together a patchwork of references to the metaphysics of Descartes, the fallen state of man from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the cyborg-affects of Donna Haraway, and more, to render this erasure visible. Yet the links between these meditations remain obscure throughout the film, consistently being trumped by a mystical relation with the technological spectacle. *Innocence* thus often presents kernels of wisdom only to fold into a sublime technological spectacle: Descartes is discussed in a surreal lab scene (a scene to which I will return at length); biblical psalms are quoted while flying over the shimmering neo-Gothic communications towers of a northern frontier; Milton is pondered while landing outside the chateau of a hacker named Kim; and so on it goes for the duration of the film. The task of this discussion is therefore to intervene in this sublime foreclosure on contemplation and to dwell on what make technology tick in *Innocence*. The question underlying this discussion is thus: is *Innocence* a film about ontology of the human Subject, or the

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<sup>4</sup> For a useful analysis of how these aesthetics and inherent theology are established in the preceding film, *Ghost in the Shell*, see Napier (2005, 103 – 116).

metaphysics of technicity that determines the conception of humanity?

As previously stated, the plot of *Innocence* revolves around the investigation into a series of geisha-esque dolls, endowed with the imprint of subjectivity (the opaque kernel of subjectivisation that the film calls a ‘ghost’) that have begun to murder their owners, by the mostly human counter-terrorist operative Togusa with his cyborg partner Batô. Like Togusa’s partner Batô, many other characters in *Innocence* are cybernetically enhanced to the point where removing such enhancements would result in the inability of the body to sustain itself. Rather than rehearse the tired opposition between the human and the machine, the narrative of Oshii’s film underscores how humanity actively seeks to create itself anew in technological prostheses, substitutions, and supplementations: a motif being revisited from the first *Ghost in the Shell* film (*Kôkaku kidôtai*, Oshii, 1995) (Napier 2005, 106 – 108). A surreal maze-like encounter between Togusa, Batô, and Kim late in the film explicitly details the way that the film’s narrative as a whole makes it hard to justify the idea that one can be ‘more human’ simply because the body has not been materially substituted by technical devices; rather, technology embodies the essence of humanity and humanity’s effort to fashion itself by ‘making dolls in its own image’ and herein technology repeats humanity’s discomforts as much as it enables greater power and pleasure.

But in this *fabula mundi* of self-wrought humanity *Innocence* does not entirely dispense with the idealist conception of subjectivity wherein an immaterial air or psyche animates the body. To draw a bare and minimal difference between humans and machines, Oshii’s script carries forward the trope of a ‘ghost’ from the first film, which can loosely be defined as the intuitive subjective essence that grants a being human subjectivity. Hence the narrative of *Innocence* invites the idealist concept of a ‘ghost’ to bear the burden of subjectivity so that we, the viewers, are not merely watching machines involved in automatic motion but observe these highly modified humans as Subjects with an intuitive interiority, a type of metaphorical depth of character (Napier 2005, 107). As Batô says to Togusa of the cyborg lab technician Haraway: ‘I bet she writes her own opinions in the margins of her reports though; I used to do that.’

In a lab scene where Togusa and Batô discuss the subjectivity of machines with a technician named after the cyber-feminist Donna Haraway there is an especially instructive interaction for discerning whether *Innocence* is a film about the further unfolding of human ontology or the reconstruction of the metaphysical categories that give humanity metaphorical cache (Osmond 2005, 63 – 64). Taking place early in the film, this scene throws an ethological swerve into the narrative: the technician Haraway asks Togusa and Batô whether a child is as fully ‘human’ as an adult, suggesting that the chaos that precedes adulthood called ‘childhood’ is able to be deconstructed as an arbitrary designation rather than an innate

difference between children and adults that somehow defines the essence of their humanity. Using the example of a little girl playing with dolls to demonstrate this deconstruction, Haraway comically interrogates the detectives about the meaning and humanistic context of the play of the girl:

Children have always been excluded from the customary standards of human behaviour. Only if you define humans as those who possess a conventional identity and act out of free will. And what are children who live in the chaos preceding maturing as humans. They clearly differ from humans but they definitely have human form. Little girls use dolls to play house and pretend that the dolls are their babies. The dolls are not surrogates in place of real babies; the girls are not practising child rearing at all. It may just be that playing with the doll happens to be similar to raising children.

The problem here is that hypothetical little girl in the example might as easily be playing with the doll, be that with or without the wish to have a child of her own, as much as an android designed to perform the same game might also imitate nursing an infant with a doll. What Haraway offers the detectives here is a criticism of a logical fallacy based on the construction of some necessary *raison d'être* of humanity from the empirical evidence of the child's play, which is only held in the immediate fantasised coordinates of the example.

While this *aporia* is made plain in the film by Haraway's interrogation of the Togusa and Batô, there is a further complication if we examine the temporality of the doll example. The doll with which the girl plays presents itself in the immediacy of technician Haraway's example as something that exists as an independent object that metaphorically stands in for another meaning: that is, caring for children. However, the link between the doll and the girl at play is far more tenuous: is the doll a supplement for a projection into a future that is yet to exist (the girl becoming sexually mature and then bearing and raising a child)? If the doll were instead a substitute rather than a supplement for the hypothetical infant-to-be then this would mean that the substituted doll precedes the (ontological) presence of both the child and the doll in the example by its association with a future state of the child. Thus the emphasis on the future state of the girl-child as a mother-figure over-determines the object made in the image of humanity: the doll. In effect, the technology of the doll is humanised by its appropriation into a discussion of the child's future *vis-à-vis* her present, but the discussion of the child becomes technical and rationalistic in its flawed elaboration of the existence of the doll as less than what it is ('less' in the sense that the future is not yet, while presence is a totality).

The problem with the way that *Innocence* elaborates the existence and the future of the girl-child is that it substitutes the presence of the child

with the ambiguity of a future that may or may not come to pass and displaces this presence to render it incomplete. Such a substitution removes emphasis from the play of the child in its immediacy, in its ontological there-ness, and condenses this ambiguity in the supplementation of the doll's existence by adding this ambiguity to the doll as a metaphor that ultimately suggests that the girl-child may not just be leisurely enjoying herself. We can rephrase the problem with this example in more concise terms as: it is predestined that all which appears to be has already been (will come to pass), and simultaneously that all which is cannot be what it appears to be. This *aporia* appears in *Innocence* as the diegetic erasure of the limit between the human and the machine: the doll and the child lose their uniqueness by the substitution of the doll's presence and the concomitant betrayal of the child's presence through the over-determination of its future: that is, she will or will not have children. Herein the example of the child and doll offered by Haraway to Togusa and Batô offers an ontological function of the child's play by blurring the category of the child's ontological position (as a unique singularity that has a manifold plurality of relations to other beings) with the category of her ontic activity as a Subject. The technician Haraway is effectively suggesting that the doll is simultaneously on the side of the child (as a human Subject) and on the side of being, and uses the dynamic of supplementation to put a question mark over the status of the little girl's activity as it is condensed in the technical object of the doll.

Furthermore, what the technician Haraway offers us in the place of the diegetic erasure of the human and the machine is an illegitimate argument for the presence of the doll through the technical reduction of the child. Put simply: the supplementation cannot be consistently given as a procedure of the presence (material existence) of all beings including the doll because to do so is to admit that the doll *in*-exists. Herein the doll is not what it appears to be *because it is present* and therefore has no claim to this presence outside of its association with the child, and yet this is the crux of the argument upon which Haraway relies in order to differentiate the doll in the hands of the little girl from the infant in the arms of a parent. As this scene plays out in *Innocence* the human detective Togusa 'breaks down', and we can perhaps understand his anxiety given that this paradox of presence manifests precisely where the human (child) and the machine (doll, as technical object) meet and their differentiation is elided: all technology becomes an extension of the human.

### **Being, Fabricated**

Although the lab scene example ostensibly begins with the question of whether or not a child is as 'fully human' as an adult, the example itself circulates around the meeting of the human and the machine through their general indistinction by way of the former's substitution of the latter. This

generalisation of the human and the machine as ‘stuff’ is a recurring motif of *Innocence*—from cyborgs to technologically enhanced vision—that strikes a chord with the thinking of technology as technicity elaborated by Martin Heidegger. The Heideggerian conception of technicity is especially useful for understanding the substitution and supplementation at work in *Innocence* because Heidegger’s discussion directly addresses the same thematics of substitution, supplementation, and generalisation with which we have been engaged thus far and reveals the structure of the grounding philosophical assumptions about technology deployed by Oshii in *Innocence*.

Heidegger’s conception of technicity addresses the importance of the common perception of technology that *Innocence* melds with the human. This common perception can be summarised as: the understanding and rationalisation of the Subject as a force that drives or gives purpose to a tool that then carries out a given task. We can observe this summary explanation at work in the early parts of the film when Batô taunts a Yakuza boss, ‘Hey, Wakabyashi, do you really think two grenades are enough take out an armoured cyborg,’ and the previous example offered by Haraway in the lab scene; it is through the child’s play with the doll that the doll performs its function as a supplement (which I have criticised above). As Heidegger eloquently suggests, this supplemental relation is important to analyse because:

One points out with enthusiasm that the machine is powerless without the power of man and then concludes, equally enthusiastically, that the overcoming of technicity by man is thus already and fundamentally accomplished. However, on the one hand, the machine is not the same as technicity. And, on the other hand, there arises the question: what is this power of man that utilizes the machine? This power is nothing other than the empowering of engineering to the fundamental form of organizing beings. And this empowering is grounded in the includedness of man into being insofar as being is determined as machination. (Heidegger 2006, 155)

In this quotation from his second major socio-historical treatise, *Mindfulness* (2006), Heidegger is sensing the problem of technological structure, or ‘technicity’, as it ensnares the Subject: it is only in terms common to the discourse of technicity that the Subject can emerge; however, these terms are already part of the self-referential chain of representation allowing us to recognise ourselves as subjects in the first place (Heidegger 2006, 151 – 155). In the encoding of technology as an extension—perhaps even the *res extensa*—of the human, *Innocence* effectively renders technology as the discourse of the Subject.

The figure of Batô stands out in the film as a being ‘determined by

machination’ (Heidegger 2006, 155). His repertoire of technological enhancements and quirks—his bottle-cap eyes in particular—define him as a machine in part, but the stream of esoteric references to ancient literature such as the Old Testament and his ostensibly human form seem also to include him under the aegis of humanity. What neither of these brief definitions attends to, however, is the way that Oshii’s film—akin to Heidegger’s discussions of beings (Kisiel 2005, 14)—does not seek to delineate the human from the machine. Instead, *Innocence* draws a character like Batô through an understanding of being prior to its description as this emotion or that servo motor, this child or that circuit, etc. Batô and, to a large extent, most of the other characters in the film understand their own existence in a frame that is technologically engineered, in which most parts of their bodies are government property and their lives are not ‘an issue’ for the recovery of this property. This technologically engineered organisation of beings empowers Batô’s humanity but at the price of this humanity never being able to exist independently of the technological supplementation and substitution that enables him to be the Subject that he understands himself to be. This echoes Heidegger’s argument that humanity’s encounter with technological supplementation is not a matter of being so much as a supplementation disguised as anthropomorphism wherein subjectivity becomes ‘human subjectivity’ that resists transformation beyond the sway of technology (2006, 137 – 141). The terms of Batô’s subjectivity are thus conditioned by what Heidegger calls ‘technicity’; even the very terms of his self-expression are wrought of a discourse of producibility and machination (Heidegger 2006, 151 – 155).

Heidegger’s elaboration of technicity makes this matter all the more pressing when we consider his definition of ‘machination’, as ‘the accordance of everything with producibility, indeed in such a way that the unceasing, unconditioned reckoning of everything is pre-directed’ (2006, 12). Heidegger’s outlining of machination here directs our attention to the way that machination ‘adjoins beings as such to the space of a play that continually plays into machination as an ongoing *annihilation*’ and the way that machination constantly annihilates in ‘the very threat of annihilation’ (2006, 12). This threat of annihilation grounds the producibility/fabrication of machinations, and *Innocence* repeatedly displays this threat of dissolution as an abyss: the rationale for the production of technologies and technical objects in the film is never addressed, although it is questioned by both Haraway and Kim at different times wherein both lines of questioning ultimately refer back to the discourse of technicity (producibility, annihilation, machination) as a way to overcome organic evolution. The film is thus consonant with Heidegger’s insistence that the representations erected by the discourse of technicity collapses into the metaphysics of technicity of these structures: metaphysics in the precise sense that technicity is a transvaluation of existence through its ability to annihilate



and fabricate/produce (Heidegger 2006, 151). Thus we have the situation that technicity can offer itself up as a world-view that obfuscates the ontological grounding of a Subject such as Batô in existence by reducing this Subject to merely an object of discourse that cannot defy description and therein annihilation.

Heidegger decries this delicate dynamic of technicity for hiding being, for disenfranchising the Subject's questioning of technology by claiming that the Subject only questions out of ignorance of the 'essence' of technology: its producibility (2006, 154 – 155). Questions of the *a priori* justifications of technology do not feature in the metaphysical hierarchy of value sustained by *Innocence*'s technophilic obscurantist cosmology precisely because any 'thing' must be able to be annihilated/produced. For all of the film's high-minded referencing of Descartes and Milton, the over-determination of technicity renders what appears as the 'erasure' of the distinction between the human and the machine to be a reification of the technological as a metaphysics.

### **Technicity and the Symptom**

*Innocence* exhibits a powerful portrayal of technicity but it also presents a series of disruptions, of points where technology goes awry across a spectrum of rationales from intentional intervention (called 'hacking') to disrepair and misuse. Heidegger's emphasis on the threat of annihilation may seem too broad a stroke to deal with this malfunctioning of technicity, but in the context of Heidegger's project this is a matter of organising and understanding existence. However, in the context of *Innocence*, the threat of annihilation appears to incite a more complex response than the zero-sum enframing of beings by technicity: symptom.

The contemporary reception of Heidegger's critique of technicity takes many forms, but the one of particular interest for its understanding of the symptom is that of psychoanalytic philosophy, particularly that of Slavoj Žižek. Žižek's limited engagement with technology is largely complicit with the Heideggerian critique of technicity, although it hardly sustains this critique for long before moving back to Žižek's more familiar Lacanian territory.<sup>5</sup> This return to Lacan reveals Žižek's reliance on the Lacanian point that 'the symbolic world is the world of the machine' (Lacan 1988, 47). We may therefore read Žižek's discussions of the Symbolic with an eye to the way these are also discussions of technology, despite the absence of an overtly phrased critique of technicity (Žižek 2006, 195). And herein we might open up a different road to the ontology and metaphysics of

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the discussion of cyberspace in *The Plague of Fantasies* (1997, 127 – 167); or this discussion's improved version in Žižek's contribution to Janet Bergstrom's *Endless Night* (1999a, 96 – 125); the reading of becoming against Deleuze in *Organs Without Bodies* (2004, 15 – 19; 118 – 123); or even his essay on traversing the fantasy in cyberspace in *The Žižek Reader* (1999, 102 – 124).

*Innocence*: the royal road to the unconscious.

The Lacanian understanding of the Symbolic makes the nuances of technicity in the diegesis of Oshii's film apparent: the annihilation and producibility of technicity are endowed with the fantasmatic privilege of being necessary archetypes over the valuation/metaphysics of the world (Lacan 1988, 48). This can be observed in several ways: firstly, the way in which everything inhabits the annihilation-producibility binary of technicity, from Batô to his cloned pet Basset Hound; secondly, how fabricated objects are revealed as meaningless due to mechanised production's need for the annihilation of the non-technological aspects of an object, which subsequently renders the world of *Innocence* as intensely technical/technological; and, lastly, how technicity ordains the 'subjectivisation' of the Subject's self-experience, by representing her/his inner-states as signifiers in the chain of technicity's signification, with the promise of having ourselves understood by other agents/objects/signifiers in the discourse of technicity: as Batô—commenting on the government's desire to recover the body of his beloved Major—says, 'the brass [...] don't give a damn about her life, it's not an issue for them.' The latter point also suggests that in the world of *Innocence* any power a Subject suspects they have over technology—following the afore mentioned common perception of technology—is a metaphysical misnomer for the fantasy supplement offered by technicity, wherein the Subject is promised a fabrication that will deliver them from their illusory subjective mind (*res cogitans*): as in the dream of 'uploading' consciousness that is made concrete in the film with 'electronic brains' and the mysterious Major Kusanagi's existence 'somewhere on the vast net.'<sup>6</sup> While these examples may appear as a somewhat scattered collection, what they serve to underline is how *Innocence* consistently offers its audience a concrete conceptualisation of technology in the discourse of technical objects and cybernetically-enhanced characters that constitute the film's diegesis. This technicity of the film structures a supplement for its characters that hinges on their reflective inclusion into the discourse of technicity (a point to be expanded upon below): a supplement that promises but does not necessarily deliver a release from all too human limitations (see Žižek 1989, 131 – 132).

This promise of deliverance is a feature of technological structures worth puzzling over because it promises to validate the Subject as a notional 'Subject' and simultaneously constitute her/him in the metaphysics of technicity (see Žižek 1989, 105 – 108).<sup>7</sup> These two positions can be understood as: the Subject is how we appear to ourselves to be likeable, embodying the Ideals of the hierarchy of values in which plural relations are

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<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that, while she has a name in the first film (Major Kusanagi), the second film reduces her to only a title: the Major.

<sup>7</sup> The 'Subject' is herein capitalised to emphasise its transcendent status as the point from which we observe ourselves.

embedded; and our constitution is what we would like to be, the (future) projection of what we lack (see Žižek 1989, 105). Returning to the example of the child playing with the doll offered by Haraway in *Innocence*, this promise of deliverance presents a different approach to the ‘neutral’ technical terms in which the example is phrased. If a paradox does indeed inhere in the example through a category error, then we can postulate that this promise of deliverance sustains this paradox through the inclusion into technicity, reread as the annihilation and fabrication of the child as a Subject domesticated within the demands of technicity.

This *fantasmatic* promise of technicity is promulgated through its metaphysics and herein conditions the manifestation of the Subject as s/he is integrated into the discourse with ‘the dotting of the I’ by the promise of metaphysical validation. Here metaphysics appears to be restricted to designating the background of rules giving a discourse its conditions of signification; which is to say, annihilation and producibility condition the signification of technicity as a discourse (see Heidegger 2006, 152 – 153). In this limited capacity metaphysics gives a form to the integration of the Subject into a discourse that is particular to that discourse: the technological Subject-machine, the psychoanalytic Subject-analysand, etc. Where the promise of technicity gestures to some future fulfilment for the Subject, this promise functions as a metaphysical treasure, thus sustaining the Subject’s place in the conditions under which the discourse operates rather than simply being a mere signifier in the discourse alone (see Heidegger 2006, 152). To follow Žižek’s paraphrasing of Lacan, the ‘Subject of the I’ is the point from which we observe ourselves (Žižek 1989, 105).

It is not the case that the Subject is in some pre-Symbolic Beyond, but rather that the place of *Innocence*’s characters in the discourse of technicity only defines them in signifiers common to the signification of technology, and therein the Subject proper to their being cannot be fully articulated by the delimiting modalities of discourse.<sup>8</sup> Again and again in the film, we see the disquiet with which the protagonists Batô and Togusa are burdened when they examine the limits of technicity; in an especially pointed moment at the end of the film, Batô angrily and rhetorically asks how much must be subjected to the annihilation-fabrication binary, all the while knowing what the answer is: Everything! Batô’s visceral disquiet in this late scene on the Locus Solus factory vessel is aimed at the immoral imprinting of subjectivity onto robots by Locus Solus not only because of the fatality it inflicts on the adolescent girls whose ghosts are being copied, but equally because there are machines being created with the burden of subjectivity. What drives Batô’s anger in this scene is the gap between discourse and ontology, between being a Subject whose inner-states are

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<sup>8</sup> Heidegger refers to this phenomenon as the ‘forgetfulness of being’ constitutive of the metaphysical conditions of the annihilation-producibility binary in technicity (2006, 191).

reflected back to them with names given by technicity and the basic ghost-like feature of existence that persists in excess of the integration into technicity; the crafting of subjectivity, the *techne* of the ghost, is an all too human burden that is mapped onto the machines. For Batô this is a fundamental error of technicity: its symptom. And this symptom occurs precisely at the point where the *techne* of Batô's ghost, the burden of his subjectivity, functions as a bar between his humanity and the non-human cybernetic enhancements without which he would perish.

### **The *Techne*-Symptom**

With the technicity of *Innocence* thus elaborated and the symptom it constructs through Batô's encounter with Locus Solus's methods of fabrication, we are now in a better position to understand the radical differentiation of ontology and metaphysics that inheres in the film. In *Innocence*, *techne* has the status of a bar between the metaphysical ghost of subjectivity and the discourse of technicity (technological structure) wherein technicity produces the Subject: but for this discourse first to emerge it must arbitrate the instantiation of its own order or logic (see Žižek 1996, 76). In this grounding of the validity of the discourse, the discourse posits a 'ground' from which extends the justification for its symbolic law. That is to say, the emergence of technicity accompanied by the technocratic 'end of metaphysics' heralded by *Innocence*'s nihilism must first violently penetrate the Subject's self-conscious relation to herself or himself.

In *Innocence* we see the mysterious Major as well as the cyborg Batô and the mostly-human detective Togusa engaged in acts of reverse-engineering this cut or 'scission', giving language to themselves as Subjects, and facilitating the articulation of an 'I' in technicity.<sup>9</sup> Presented with the choice between ontology and metaphysics, *Innocence* falls on the side of metaphysics every time because the collapse of the human into the machine is not a meeting of equal and ideal types but rather of the highwayman, money, and life. Without technicity the Subject cannot inhere in the abstract causality mystically invoked by the logic of detection carried out by Batô and Togusa: everything happens for a reason that robs subjectivity of its freedom, happens for a motivation that makes it valuable to a Subject, for a *cause* that lets the Subject be a Subject. Technicity enables the latter cause under its terms of annihilation and fabrication, and the drama of *Innocence* follows this cause, even to the point where the protagonists become reflexively angered by the very plot that enables their characterisation: that is, those rare moments where they truly become Subjects.

Here it is crucial to avoid misinterpreting the instantiation of a discourse and

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<sup>9</sup> An important qualification to be made here is that the 'symbolic totality' promised by technicity is not 'monadic' but, rather, self-referential and repetitive.

its attendant metaphysics as an absolute beginning because this merely mystifies how a Subject like Batô can exceed his grounding in technicity and become angered by the polyvalency of technicity: that is, making machines more human not just humans more mechanised (see Žižek 1996, 78). As a discourse, technicity must misinterpret what persists to refuse full symbolic integration, and, as this objecting element, *techne* is a cipher that stands for the emergence of autonomous self-consciousness parallel to the instantiation of the mechanics of discourse (see Heidegger 2006, 152). What this means is that the presentation of *techne* in *Innocence* exhibits itself as a self-conscious engagement with technicity.

The ramification of this is that the *techne* of ghosts in the film does not arise from the mechanics of the discourse of technicity but *ex nihilo*—from the void outside the discourse—insofar as a Batô-Subject who exceeds technicity and disrupts its normative order is party to technological structure, yet cannot begin from within the discourse of technicity in its totality. The *techne* of subjectivity in the film—the burden of a ghost—thus operates in the fashion of a symptom: the *techne*-symptom. This ‘*techne*-symptom’ is a cipher through which technicity can promise full symbolic integration on the side of discourse but shift the failure of this integration onto the insufficiently technical nature of the void starting point of the Subject. This shifting of lack is the cause for Batô’s anger on the Locus Solus factory vessel when he recovers a terrified girl calling for help from one of the imprinting machines: technicity is making ghosts technical by copying them at the cost of the life of the being that bore that ghost. In a twist reminiscent of film noir and cyberpunk literature, the narrative of Oshii’s film plunges subjectivity into the black market economies where the clean sci-fi dream of uploading consciousness becomes mortifyingly decadent (see Napier 2005, 108 – 109). Subjectivity—the non-technical object *par excellence*—becomes a problem to be solved through its technification, not as a technology but instead as a fabrication that literally annihilates the being from whence it came (see Heidegger 2006, 154). Thus what *Innocence* adds to the discussion of technicity and the symptom is that it is all too simple to envisage technicity fabricating symptoms and embedding these in its discourse as Subjects, provided that the insufficiency of technicity to understand the *techne*-symptom of the ghost is made the insufficiency of the ghost and not of technicity.

This shifting of lack occurs in *Innocence* through a blurring of the distinction between the ‘Subject of the I’ repeated in the discourse of technicity and the metaphysical externalisation of the inner self-conscious states of the Subject in the mechanics of this discourse (the point where we observe ourselves). And, moreover, this obfuscation hides the void-Subject indicated by the contingency of the arbitrary justification of technicity as a discourse through its self-posed ground. In a particularly interesting conversation between Batô and Togusa just prior to their arrival at the lab

where they discuss the malfunctioning dolls with Haraway, this distorted mirroring of the Subject is made plain:

BATÔ: When one's face is distorted, why should you blame the mirror?

TOGUSA: The mirror does not help to enlighten but, rather, to confuse. Right?

BATÔ: Well, neither one of us are good looking enough to stare into a mirror.

Although Batô passes off this discussion with a jibe about their looks, the brief chat emphasises an elision concealing a paradox: the arbitrary justification that conceals the violent grounding of technicity ('why should you blame the mirror?')—the cut of discourse—reveals a void-Subject where the *techne*-symptom ('one's face') threatens the *fantasmatic* compensatory promise of technicity with its dissolution ('the mirror does not help to enlighten but, rather, to confuse').

This paradox of concealment and revelation situates the *techne*-symptom between metaphysics and discourse as an impediment blocking any direct relationship between the metaphysical hierarchy of value that binds the mechanics of technicity and the self-justification of the discourse as such (see Heidegger 2006, 161). Throughout *Innocence* this is made plain as the impossibility for a singular technical rationale as to why the Locus Solus dolls are malfunctioning; even Haraway cites multiple factors that could contribute to the problem. Humanity as a ghost—as the *techne*-symptom—bars technicity from its elucidation of this ghost as a technical object by externalising its inner-states. The problem for explaining the malfunctioning dolls is that the discourse in which the film phrases its narrative is technicity rather than technological rationalism: the very mechanics of the discourse of technicity come to stand for the value of objects rather than the subjective encounter with them: cuing Batô's anger when he uncovers the burdening of machines with ghosts/souls. Herein the mechanics of the discourse become mimetic significations of the metaphysics rather than the presence of metaphysics itself. The metaphysics of technicity is thus repressed and re-emerges as attributes of the discursive objects themselves; that is, annihilation and producibility become the *prima causa* of technical objects in their totality. There is no logic as to why the machines are attacking their human owners except that the machines are, at the very least, *machines* (see Heidegger 2006, 152).

### **An Aporia**

The *techne*-symptom is an *aporia* of technicity that emerges as a point of failure in *Innocence*. The difficulty here begins with the objectification of the Subject through the externalisation of her/his inner-states, which represents the Subject in technicity and also points to this objectification as

the motor driving representation (see Heidegger 2006, 153).<sup>10</sup> This is problematic for technicity because technicity is predicated on the objectivisation of materiality, positing the apparition of reality prior to the experience of its representation, or *meta*-physics: a view which is incommensurable with the self-legitimation of technicity's own demarcation of what exists (to be annihilated and fabricated) (see Heidegger 2006, 153 – 154). This encounter between material objectivity (that posits what 'is' as a kind of epistemic index, unquestionable in its truth-value) and the objectification of the Subject (in the fabricated signifiers that make up the discourse of technicity) produces the strange effect of foreclosing on the interpretation of individual characters such as Batô and Togusa because their manifestation as Subjects puts them at a double-remove from whatever might precede, in Heidegger's terms, signification in technicity (2006, 155). In a type of endless refrain throughout the film, discussions of what exists within technicity is met with a mystical sense of awe: the Major is 'somewhere on the vast net'; Kim's hacking of virtual experience is indistinguishable from lived experience at a purely phenomenological level, voiding questions of what exists and what does not; Haraway's nihilistic deconstruction of the category of child reduces all distinctions to useless aporetic formality; and the Chief's 'let no one walk alone, living no sin, with very few wishes. Like elephants in the forest' recurs, bobbing up to the surface and retroactively suggesting that he, like Batô and Togusa, might have also been hacked by Kim. The paradox of technicity in *Innocence* is thus: the need to interpellate the characters as Subjects with interiority through the notion of a ghost/subjectivity—and therefore maintain the diegesis within conventional narrative limits—is contradicted by a conceptual framing of technology and human-machine fusion that serves to fabricate even this experience of a ghost (because all experience and memory is malleable in the *mythos* of electronic brains in the film), to deprive the subjectivity of the Subject of its unique ontological disclosure in the world of the film. This paradox produces different effects in the narrative, but the recurrent mysticism is the most obvious.

A less obvious result of this paradox is that while *Innocence* may ostensibly seem to be dealing with metaphysical questions of subjectivity—reality versus simulation, and signification—the deployment of technicity in the film betrays it as an inherently anti-metaphysical discourse. This anti-metaphysical emphasis manifests because (as a discourse) technicity's founding premise is self-legitimizing and cannot repeal the investment in materiality of the ghost of subjectivity without destroying the discourse of technicity in the process.<sup>11</sup> This naïve materialist inhibition therefore refuses

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<sup>10</sup> 'Objectification' is herein the re-presentation of an object in the terms of an unchanging character: for example, the inscription of elements on the periodic table or the reduction of corporeal responses to ever-more basic units of interaction.

<sup>11</sup> See the '*Techne*-Symptom' section above.

the legitimacy of objectification (of rendering any character, Batô, Togusa, etc., a Subject as such) because it leads to the re-presentation of the limits of materiality and therein reveals the *a priori* position of the Subject to be beyond the realm of technicity. Indeed this problem is precisely how Batô, after the Major helps him to escape Kim's maze of virtual experience, responds to Kim's question—'Batô, are you certain that this is not an extension of false illusions generated by virtual signals'—late in the film: 'my ghost is whispering to me, if that's what you mean.'

Even more strongly, however, this inhibiting of objectification drives the supplementation of the Subject's position in technicity (a name) together with the material-yet-contingent symptom of the Subject's existence wherein the fantasy space of all hypothetical imaginings become apparitions of reality, ordering fantasy into the category of hallucination: Kim's question cited above, for example. We are thus confronted with the question of the Subject's immateriality: if the *techne*-symptom of the Subject's being is contingent, then where is the Subject if there is no nervous tic of being; if all goes smoothly in technicity, in what domain is the Subject if not being? This question shows that the materiality of technicity in *Innocence* is strung over the abyss of nothingness and that this is what grounds the presupposition of the apparition of materiality by technicity in the film (and perhaps in Heidegger's conception also, although such a reading would be against the grain of his later emphasis on the *Ereignis*) (see Malpas 2006, 214).<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, it also means that the manifestation of the Subject as an object—its objectivisation—can assure its registration by technicity provided that the objectification involved remains inhibited and void. If the Subject is held to be a contingency—a symptom of their *techne* in lieu of having a ghost—then this also introduces an inner-outer boundary to the abyss that voids the Subject when they are in the abyss; the Chief's statement 'one need not be Caesar to understand Caesar' becomes incarnate as 'one need not be Caesar to be Caesar's ghost'. This is precisely the sort of phrenological supplementation of subjectivity with which the film struggles in the figure of the Locus Solus doll. Here, the manifestation of the *techne*-symptom in *Innocence* is part of the idealist *topos* of material reality, wherein any claim to the *techne* of a ghost rests in the void that remains unprescribed by technicity's metaphysics and yet prescribes the being of the Subject articulated by the discourse of technicity. This means that the dolls malfunction because of the burden of having a ghost, of becoming Subjects.

## Conclusion

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<sup>12</sup> A point which deserves further discussion but is beyond the scope of this investigation.



The dynamic interplay of the human and technicity in *Innocence* offers a wide ambit of philosophical themes. But what this interplay most importantly shows us is a Subject in crisis: burdened by the weight of their ghost, of machines with subjectivity. *Innocence* does not offer any diegetic resolution to this crisis, but with the aid of Heidegger and Žižek it was possible to discern some of the problems surrounding the narrative's subtle elision of the divide between the human and the machine, which initially appeared to substitute technology as an extension of humanity but was revealed under the analysis of technicity in the film to be a supplementation of the Subject whose humanity had become a malleable technical object to be annihilated and fabricated. This Subject was shown to be predicated on the *techne*-symptom: the burden of subjectivity. And the imprinting of ghosts onto the Locus Solus dolls was identified as the precise narrative kernel that revealed the transgressive portent of technicity. *Innocence* is not simply a film about technology, yet it does reveal a troubling vision of technology in a conceptual mode—technicity—that puts the Subject out-of-joint but hides the paradoxes that support this crisis of the Subject.

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