Your Effort to Remain What You Are is What
Limits You: Transhumanism in the Films of
Mamoru Oshii

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and
Postdoctoral Affairs in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Film Studies

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

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Abstract

The purpose of this graduate thesis is to analyze the animated films of director Mamoru Oshii in order to examine the director's use of the concept of transhumanism (the belief that the human race can evolve beyond its current physical and mental limitations, especially by means of science and technology) and how it informs both the subject matter of his films, as well as the director's own signature directorial style and themes. The goal is to demonstrate that all of his films are informed in some way by an analysis of the transhuman, though the difference between them is that some analyze the subject from a cynical angle, others tackle the subject directly in a more optimistic and speculative fashion, while others still use it as an allegory for the director's own political and social views.

Acknowledgments

For starters, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano for her endless support and patience, helpful advice, and ability to critique and praise in equal measure. This thesis would not have been possible were it not for having her as my supervisor.

I would also like to thank the other members of my examination board, Prof. Charles O'Brien and Prof. Andrew Deman for taking the time to go over my work and to allow me the chance to prove myself to a board of peers that I hold the utmost respect for.

Additionally, I would like to thank the hosts of the Toronto International Film Festival's "In Conversation With Mamoru Oshii" presentation for allowing me to have the last question of the Q&A session, thus allowing me to inquire about my thesis topic directly to its subject. Along with this, I thank Brian Ruh for his input and clarifications of his text which he graciously conveyed upon my asking.

Finally, I wish to thank all who supported me through this endeavour in whatever ways they could, with special mention going to my mother, Nelly Haytchouk, for always believing in me and pushing me to work at my best.

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Your Effort to Remain What You Are is What Limits You: Transhumanism in the Films of Mamoru Oshii

When discussing the impact of the importing of Japanese animation, or “anime,” has had throughout the Western entertainment industry for the past several decades, there are several franchises and creators that are often held up as some of the most influential; be it the nature-centric stories of courage by Hayao Miyazaki brought to life by Studio Ghibli, Hideaki Anno’s *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (Anno, 1995) and its apocalyptic tale of sorrow and redemption framed as a series of battles between aliens and giant robots, or the explorations of the darker recesses of the mind found in the works of the late Satoshi Kon. However, the widespread awareness of many of the aforementioned works, as well as of the medium in general, owes a substantial debt to the awareness given to anime on an international scale throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s by the films of one of the medium’s long-established filmmakers, one who continues to produce new work well into the 21st Century. That filmmaker is Mamoru Oshii.

A fan of film since his earliest childhood with a notable interest in politics both domestic and international (a trait not often shared amongst his peers), Oshii’s career and distinct style remain something of an anomaly amongst what is typically expected of a director specializing in anime. In terms of a recurring style, his animation projects are often bookended by live-action output that would be indistinguishable from the rest were they not filmed instead of drawn, and even when working on an exclusively animated feature, the constant bombastic motion expected both from animation and from anime in particular is often replaced by scenes of complete stillness and ambience. Reflecting this, his characters are often stoic and unknowable, as alien to the characters within his films as they are to the audience, yet they also exhibit a very human curiosity regarding their

place within the grander scheme of things. Moreover, despite working in an industry that is often defined by its connection to the world of Japanese comic books, or “manga,” as many influential anime series and films are adapted from their literary counterparts, Oshii’s adaptations often cast aside much of their creator’s original content in favour of his own, often inserting a more political and philosophical message he considers to be more valuable to the work than the characters of the story themselves.

III. 1: Theatrical Poster for *Ghost in the Shell*

In fact, it was one of these liberty-taking adaptations that first brought Oshii to the attention of much of the Western world in the first place. *Ghost in the Shell* (Oshii, 1995), an adaptation of the science-fiction manga of the same name by renowned manga author Masamune Shirow, remains one of the most internationally-renowned anime films of all time; cited often as an inspiration by science-fiction filmmakers such as the Wachowskis, who brought the film to

producer Joel Silver while pitching their own production, *The Matrix* (Wachowskis, 1999), stating that “We wanna do that for real,”¹ while praised by critics such as Niels Matthijs of Twitch Film, who states that ““Not only is *Ghost in the Shell* an essential film in the canon of Japanese animation, together with Kubrick's *2001* and Tarkovsky's *Solyaris* it completes a trio of book adaptations that transcend the popularity of their originals and [give] a new meaning to an already popular brand.”² The film was the first

Japanese animated film to receive a theatrical release in Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States simultaneously, and while it gained the largest portion of its fanbase upon its release on home video, the film has remained one of the definitive works of Japanese cyberpunk to date, spawning an entire franchise that includes a sequel film, a television series, several video game adaptations, and numerous bits of merchandise.

Ghost in the Shell is also viewed as significant among Oshii's work for its tackling of the subject of transhumanism. While some conflicting descriptions exist regarding the true nature of transhumanism, the commonly-accepted definition of the term pertains to humanity working towards an eventual goal of achieving a state of the posthuman; moving completely beyond our typical notions of humanity and becoming something more, often (but not always) through integration with technology.

Transhumanism has endured as one of the most important and prophetic concepts within the culture of the late-20th Century and moving well-into the 21st, as its themes laid the foundation not only for science fiction for years to come, but for the modern world as it has ultimately become. The notion of the expansion of the human condition via humanity's integration with science and technology has gone from the realm of science fiction to a full-blown reality within the past thirty years, thanks to the advent of information technology such as the internet and smartphones; things which invariably connect humanity to the rest of its population worldwide, ever-shortening the barriers between people.

Ghost in the Shell certainly presents much of this technological advent well ahead of it becoming a reality (albeit in a way that now appears archaic), and also tackles subjects such as the physical replacement of sections of the human body with artificial

limbs, something which various real-life organizations have begun to make more viable for people such as those maimed by war and disease. The film presents its audience with a world in which humans are able to replace their entire bodies with artificial cybernetic ones, often only retaining their inner human consciousness, referred to in the film as a “Ghost,” and where cybercrime perpetrated by hackers and those that they manipulate runs rampant, centred around a protagonist whose definitions of what it means to be human are rapidly changing in the face of this new transhumanist reality. In short, it is difficult not to look at it as one of the defining transhumanist works in cinema, just as it is difficult not to understand how it has remained one of Oshii’s most prolific and inspirational films.

However, the continued focus on *Ghost in the Shell* by both fans and historians as representative of Oshii’s stance on the subject of transhumanism also presents something of a unique problem. The fact is, in reality, the majority of the director’s films deal with questions of man’s relationship with humanity and whether or our technological advent would ultimately be beneficial to the whole of humanity in the future. This is something that Oshii himself is highly conscious of; when asked about his interest in technology at a conference at the Toronto International Film Festival, or “TIFF,” Oshii was quoted as saying:

When I was a child, the country was poor because of the war. Then people eventually started getting TVs, fridges, a few cars and bicycles. As time went on, new technologies foreshadowed a brighter future. The Japanese began to find an image of happiness in technology. I felt that it was wonderful at the time, and I basically still do. Looking at technology as a threat to humanity is too extreme a view. We need to think about how we can adapt to new technology, not demonize it. Technology has now become something within humanity; like it or not, we can’t live without it.³

This demonstrates that the advent of technology and the idea of transhumanism (which he specifically references by stating that technology has become “something within humanity”) has influenced the director’s work from the very beginning, something which, while reference is certainly made to it in what critical analysis and research exists regarding the man’s films, is often overlooked by simply focusing all of the attention of the notions of transhumanism found within the *Ghost in the Shell* franchise.

Of course, as previously mentioned, it is not difficult to understand why *Ghost in the Shell* remains the central focus on the majority of the discourse surrounding Oshii’s examinations of transhumanism; both the film and the manga it is adapted from wear their transhumanist subject matter on their sleeves in the tradition of films such as *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1986), depicting dystopian cities where the new and the old form an uneasy balance, as well as versions of our own reality where the definition of what it means to be human may not be as concrete as we once thought. However, while the film and its sequel, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (Oshii, 2004) certainly remain the most on-the-nose representation of the issues of transhumanism found within Oshii’s work, to focus the entire analysis of this theme within his films is to do the rest of his animated films a disservice, as much of both his earlier and later work places equal focus on the importance of the same issues. The difference is, the rest of his films are not quite as overt about it.

When discussing the work done by Oshii on films such as the *Patlabor* franchise, most notably *Patlabor: The Movie* (Oshii, 1989) and *Patlabor 2: The Movie* (1993), a number of recurring themes often come to the forefront; be it the director’s use of religious iconography (especially references to the Christian faith), his ever-present

commentary on the political situation both within Japan itself as well as across the entire world, or even his recurring lone-wolf characters who work within an established system while simultaneously subverting it. While these are all significant to the examination of the director's auteurial status (and *Ghost in the Shell* certainly is not an exception to the inclusion of any of these either), what tends to be overlooked is that many of these themes are examined at least partially through a transhumanist lens, if not meant to directly comment on the notion of the intersection of man and machine directly. In fact Oshii often uses the presence of technology within his films as a means of which to convey the film's overall message, even if that message is not wholly related to the idea of transhumanism in and of itself.

The purpose of this thesis will be to examine the greater breadth of Mamoru Oshii's animated work in order to demonstrate that the entirety of Oshii's films owe much of their themes and overall messages to the inclusion of his analyses of transhumanism in each of them, despite the fact that much of the existing academic study of his films choose to omit most discussion of transhumanism in his films in favour of other subjects. In order to accomplish this, the focus of this study will be placed on six of his animated films, each of which will be placed in pairs (as some are sequels to one-another) and arranged both chronologically and in terms of their ultimate use of the concept of transhumanism. It is to be noted, however, that for the purposes of this analysis, two stipulations have been used to identify these particular films as transhumanist films, as opposed to their potentially being labeled as posthumanist films: the transhumanism in these films is brought about thanks to human effort, and the

transhumanism is either a source of conflict in the world of the film or is met with conflict in and of itself.

The coming chapters will detail out the presence of advanced technology firstly regarding *Patlabor: The Movie* and *Patlabor 2: The Movie*, both as a means to distance them from other franchises within their own subgenre of anime as well as a way to comment on the ever-present fears of the de-valuing of human life in the face of advanced technology. Secondly, an examination will be made of *Ghost in the Shell* and *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*, in order to examine Oshii's direct interactions with transhumanism and the possible repercussions it may have within our own world as time goes on, and the definition of what it means to be human begins to change. Finally, the third chapter will examine transhumanism in the stand-alone films *Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade* (Okiura, 1999) and *The Sky Crawlers* (Oshii, 2008), both of which do not simply examine the interaction between humanity and advanced machinery, but rather elect to use the concept of transhumanism as a metaphor for both the dangerous, pervasive presence of a pack mentality within Japanese society, and the way in which the recurring cycles of war and industry are, in Oshii's opinion, dooming future generations to a cyclical life of repetition and death, respectively.

Ultimately, with the examination of these films and their interactions with transhumanism, it can be demonstrated that, contrary to the popular discourse on Oshii's work, his is a body of work that is forever influenced by both his own personal interactions with technology and with the way he perceives humanity's interaction with the concept as a whole. In his work, transhumanism is not simply an examination of what happens when human effort is replaced with that of the technological and the spread of

digital information becomes all-encompassing, but rather that it serves as a metaphor for the human condition itself, encompassing the greatest highs and the deepest lows that, ultimately, define the human race as existing within a constant state of physical, mental, and social evolution.

Chapter 1 – “If the Gods Won’t Do It, People Will”: Concerns of Transhumanism

Few subgenres of anime have endured to quite the same level as the mecha genre. Named after a version of the word “mechanical,” the genre often focuses on stories told around the concept of walking, humanoid tanks and weapons of war, which are often manned by a group of inexperienced young individuals whose physical and mental capabilities far exceed those of regular humans. It is with this genre where not only does much of the focus of anime research begin, but so too does it begin the examination of transhumanism within Mamoru Oshii’s work.

Originating as a collaborative effort by Oshii’s own artist group “Headgear,” and first appearing in 1988 both as an original video animation or “OVA” series (a term signifying an animated series produced exclusively for release on home video, as opposed to television broadcast) directed by Oshii himself and a manga series written by Masami Yuki, the *Patlabor: The Mobile Police* franchise, at a passing glance,

does little to differentiate itself from the deluge of mecha anime released in Japan throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. In fact, in the very same year of *Patlabor*’s initial release, there was a veritable deluge of mecha anime released to the public, with

III. 2: Original Theatrical Poster for *Patlabor: The Movie*

series and films such as *Armored Trooper VOTOMS: The Red Shoulder Document: Roots of Ambition* (Takahashi, 1988), *Mobile Suit Gundam: Char's Counterattack* (Tomino, 1988), *Dominion Tank Police* (Mashimo, 1988) and *Appleseed* (Katayama, 1988), the majority of which were new iterations of long-established and popular anime and manga franchises (the latter two notably being adapted from the manga of Masamune Shirow, an artist who Oshii would soon become acquainted with through his own adaptation of one of Shirow's series, *Ghost in the Shell*).

Set in a then-not-too distant future version of Tokyo in which much of Japan's physical labour force has been replaced by the widespread use of giant, human-piloted mecha known as "Labors," the franchise is centred around the exploits of the members of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Force's newly-formed Special Vehicle Section 2 (or "SV2"); a division of the police tasked with keeping the peace through the use of specialized Patrol Labors, or "Patlabors," and consisting mostly of new recruits to the organization. This marked a notable turn of subject matter for Oshii, as previous to this, he was best-known as the director and storyboard artist of the romantic comedy television anime *Ursei Yatsura* (Oshii, 1981) as well as its two sequel films, and the highly experimental *Angel's Egg* (Oshii, 1985)

However, what makes *Patlabor* significant not only as a franchise, but also in terms of the evolution of Oshii's musings on the interaction between man and machine, is the fact that unlike franchises such as *VOTOMS* and *Gundam*, which market themselves almost exclusively on the newest designs conceived for their titular mecha, *Patlabor* revels in Oshii's speculation and cynicism both towards humanity's continued reliance on ever-advancing technology, as well as towards Japanese society and the role that the

country began to take on the international stage throughout much of the early to mid-1990s. Beginning with the titular OVA and coming to greater fruition with the franchise's two full-length feature films, *Patlabor: The Movie* and *Patlabor 2: The Movie*, Oshii's work on *Patlabor* is emblematic of the director's exploration on the shifting definition of what it means to be human and the advent of the transhuman, and unlike his far more speculative and optimistic later films, the *Patlabor* films largely place Oshii's stance squarely in favour of a cynical view of the transhuman.

1.1 *Patlabor: The Movie* and Human Effort

Described by Oshii himself as “a proper pop entertainment movie”¹ and often viewed as one of his lighter films in terms of both tone and content, *Patlabor: The Movie* nevertheless demonstrates some of the director's earliest speculation regarding the role of the human in our increasingly-technological world. The film largely acts as a cautionary tale to humanity's increased reliance on technologies that have begun to advance at a rate faster than most people can comprehend (a theme that the titular Patlabors have embodied in the franchise since its inception), as is elaborated upon by Oshii historian Brian Ruh:

Through the world he portrays, Oshii shows how people in modern society have become almost too dependent on computers as arbiters of how we perceive our lives. This dependency is detailed through the predictable disaster scenario at the heart of *Patlabor 1* in which over-reliance on technology threatens to destroy Tokyo.²

Indeed, the technological disaster scenario he describes forms the foundation of *Patlabor: The Movie*'s story; taking place shortly after the conclusion of the OVA series, the film finds the members of the SV2 attempting to solve a series of crimes involving Labors that have gone berserk and cut a swath of destruction while completely

unmanned. The source of the crisis is soon revealed to be the “BABEL” virus created by Ei’ikichi Hoba, the programmer behind the brand-new Hyper Operating System (or “HOS”) that has been installed on over ninety percent of Tokyo’s Labor force, who throws himself into the ocean in the film’s opening sequence as a final preventative measure should anyone attempt to foil his plans. As the SV2 struggles to discover Hoba’s trigger for the virus in order to prevent a full-scale disaster, they find themselves questioning not only what the next point of attack will be, but even whether or not they can trust their own Patlabors to function as needed, as they too have been exposed to HOS.

From the outset of the film there is a veritable atmosphere of unease created by the advancements that are being made to Labor technology by Shinohara Heavy Industries, the company that created the Labors. This is given both metaphysical and physical representations in the forms of HOS and the Type Zero Patlabor, a prototype model of Patlabor meant to replace the SV2’s own aging models, respectively. When faced with the new Type Zero, Noa Izumi, the team’s main Patlabor

III. 3: Type Zero Patlabor

pilot who is consistently portrayed throughout the franchise as having a great deal of familial affection for Labors, immediately remarks that she believes it looks “evil,”

foreshadowing the fact that the Type Zero eventually succumbs to Hoba's BABEL virus and turns on the rest of the team towards the end of the film.

However, the true technological threat of the film perpetually remains HOS, and it is consistently described in something of a demonic light; upon the discovery that HOS is at the centre of the recurring incidents involving renegade Labors, it becomes a surreal omnipresence that is felt in the watchful gaze of every computer monitor and heads-up display found in the various control rooms and Labor hangars that populate the film. This especially becomes the case when Asuma Shinohara, Noa Izumi's dispatching officer and the estranged son of the President of Shinohara Heavy Industries, infiltrates the Shinohara mainframe in an attempt to crack HOS. His efforts result in the accidental release of the BABEL virus into their systems, causing the entire facility to lock down and the screens of their every computer system to simply display lines upon lines of the Biblical term, a trademark of Hoba's, as in life he likened himself to the Judeo-Christian "Jehovah."

III. 4: Babel Unleashed

Between these two representations of the technology at the centre of *Patlabor: The Movie*'s plot, Oshii puts his emphasis on the need for a human presence within

technological advancement by placing the aforementioned technology as a perpetual “Other,” as nearly every moment of new development that occurs within the film ultimately needs to be mitigated by the human characters in order to prevent an inevitable disaster. This can first be seen during the conversation between Sakaki, the team’s Labor mechanic, and Jitsuyama, an engineer, as Sakaki, who is revered by his cohorts as something of a marvel when it comes to knowledge of Labors, states:

I can’t keep up with Shige and the kids under me. [...] There’s no point in two obsolete engineers licking each other’s wounds. I’m just telling it like it is. But one thing won’t change no matter how advanced technology gets. The people who make the machines. The people who maintain them. The people who use them. As long as people don’t mess up, machines won’t mess with you.

However, the truth is that Oshii’s intention within the film is not to condemn the increased presence of transhumanism, but rather to emphasize the necessity to remember the importance of the “human” element of transhumanism, something which he introduces from the outset of the film; the moment that Hoba casts himself into the ocean, he reinforces the importance of human life within *Patlabor*’s world, as it is through his death that the world has been left at the mercy of the system which he has created. Anime scholar Christopher Bolton argues as much, stating that:

The labor [sic] pilots and virtually everyone else view the world magnified and filtered by sensors, displayed on screens, enhanced and often distorted by electronics. The motif of an enhanced vision that has its own blind spots is made to reflect the trade-offs between technological amplification of bodily experience and a progressive alienation from our original bodies, threatening dehumanization.³

In addition, when the SV2 is forced to storm aboard the Ark, a building constructed upon an artificial piece of land known as the “Babylon Project” that the Labors have been instrumental in constructing and which lies at the epicentre of Hoba’s scheme, Noa is forced not only to temporarily abandon her Labor in order to override Hoba’s failsafe

measures, but also to use her significantly outclassed Patlabor in order to defeat the now-sentient and rampaging Type Zero, which has trapped one of her coworkers inside and destroyed the rest of her squad's Patlabors. Despite having only her unarmed Patlabor and her own personal shotgun at the ready, Noa is able to subdue the Type Zero and destroy the source of its operating system, thus providing a moment of humanity triumphing over the power of the unknowable and malicious technology of HOS.

III. 5: The Power of Human Effort

Noa's performance in this scene also paints the film as an interesting contrast to the typical subject matter found within the mecha genre, as despite the fact that Noa is the member of the group most fascinated by the Labors (to the point of near-ridicule by her coworkers), she ultimately becomes more capable when separated from her machine. Ruh also posits Noa as one of the few characters who attempts to normalize the technology of the Labors within the film, stating that:

On the other hand, through Noa's interactions with her Patlabor Oshii portrays technology as comfortable and familiar. One can interact with technology in almost the same way as a family pet. (In fact, [Noa's] Patlabor named Alphonse is the third in the Alphonse lineage; the first two were a dog and a cat Noa had when she was younger.) [...] Knowing Oshii's affinity for pets, especially dogs, the power of this attraction to technology has great meaning. Although frequently

dystopian in tone, Oshii's technology-related films are not totally pessimistic on their outlook on the integration of the human and the machine.⁴

The aforementioned quote by Sakaki is also potentially telling of Oshii's other possible intentions behind the speculative nature of *Patlabor*'s take on transhumanism; specifically the notion of the old being torn down in favour of the new, a theme echoed throughout the film through it being set among dilapidated sections of Tokyo which are gradually being torn down and built upon. During his TIFF Q&A, Oshii comments that

At that time I was living in Tokyo. Tokyo is a strange city. Everything is always changing: the old is always being broken down and the new is always being built up. It's a place that if you don't visit it for a while, things change so much that you might not even recognize it. I didn't know if this was a good or a bad thing at the time. I don't really think about it anymore. I think more about the destination that I follow now. Tokyo isn't for me anymore; I'd rather live away and observe from a distance, which is a feeling that I express quite a bit in *Patlabor 2*. I was actually born and raised in Tokyo, and I feel like I've lost my hometown. To me it's now a very foreign city. I will most likely never make another movie about Tokyo.⁵

With this in mind, the film becomes less a condemnation of transhumanism and more the musings on loss versus gain when technological advancement becomes commonplace and embraced by humanity as a whole.

It is at this point that it also becomes impossible not to take note of the constant aforementioned religious allegory present in the film. Anime scholar and Oshii historian Dani Cavallero elaborates upon this, stating that

Where religious references are concerned, Biblical imagery is especially prominent, and consistently translated into technological correlatives. Thus, the Ark becomes a giant factory, while the Tower of Babel comes to be equated with Tokyo's skyscrapers and, more specifically, with their diabolical connotations as perceived by Hoba [...] Oshii's film makes subtle use of the Babel myth as a quintessential indictment of human arrogance, causing God's wrath and eliciting punishment. In *Patlabor 1*, Hoba plays God by recourse to the virus implanted in the new HOS – and indeed tagged “Babel” – as a means of engineering an apocalyptic collapse of any notions of constructive interaction among humans and Labors.⁶

While this can certainly be viewed as Oshii's own opposition to transhumanism being brought out in the film, it is important to note that despite his use of the aforementioned Biblical imagery as a potential metaphor for the folly exerted by man in pursuit of transhumanism, the character that shares this same notion, Hoba, is kept alive through the use of technology itself, his will being perpetually enforced and upheld by the very technology that he despises. With the final notable exception of Noa, very few humans are able to carry out their desires, positive or negative, in the world of *Patlabor* without a form of transhumanist enhancement (as, for example, the construction of something such as the Ark is implied to have only been possible thanks to the creation of the Labors), leaving the film as more introspective than may be initially perceived.

1.2 *Patlabor 2* and Human Life

While *Patlabor: The Movie* presents Oshii's emphasis on the human aspect of transhumanism by presenting varied reactions to the rapid technological expansion that has defined the late-Twentieth and early Twenty-First Centuries, *Patlabor 2: The Movie* presents a much more topical and morally grey question: what happens when humans are given free rein to manipulate the lives of others, and what happens when soldiers are used as pawns in the machinations of those who have never seen combat and are forced to return to a society that knows nothing of the nature of war?

From the outset of the film, it becomes obvious that the tone of *Patlabor 2* is largely different from that of the original. Both films begin with a sequence of heavy combat involving the use of military Labors, but while the opening of the first film is a largely triumphant sequence in which a squadron of military Labors and soldiers are able to subdue a prototype Labor gone rogue due to the installation of HOS (which is not only

much more typical of the mecha genre but also reflective of that film's ever-shifting perspective on the pros and cons of transhumanism), *Patlabor 2* begins with a squad of Japanese Labors who, while undertaking a United Nations Peacekeeping mission in Cambodia, are ordered not to fire upon their assailants despite having come under extreme combat conditions.

Unlike the soldiers in the original *Patlabor*'s opening, the entire squad is wiped out except for one soldier (a point which becomes relevant to the plot of the film later on), and although the two sequences remain fairly similar in terms of content, it becomes immediately obvious that *Patlabor 2* is far less heroic and triumphant in tone than the original is. This is also where Oshii begins using transhumanism as an allegory for the plight of the soldiers themselves, something which will become a recurring theme throughout the rest of the film. As the scene transitions to a later time of the day, the shots of the destroyed Labors being gradually submerged from rainfall are used to elicit the bodies of soldiers killed both in this particular conflict and in others, felled by the incompetence and indecision of those placed in charge of them.

III. 6: Setting the Stage

The mystery at the heart of *Patlabor 2* serves to shift the focus away from the “man vs. machine” conflict of the first film immediately and instead to turn it

significantly more inward. When a surprise terrorist attack destroys the Yokohama Bay Bridge, the SV2 find themselves in the middle of a power struggle between the Tokyo Metropolitan Police and the Japanese Self-Defense Force (or “JSDF”) as political leaders scramble to find the party responsible for the attack. However, when the terrorist leader is revealed to be Yukihiro Tsuge, the lone survivor of the JSDF forces who participated in the Cambodia Peacekeeping mission and the founder of one of the very first Patlabor pilot training academies, the SV2 soon find themselves having to scramble to avert Tsuge’s plan of forcing Japan’s military and police forces into a complete civil war, with Tokyo as the primary staging ground.

Patlabor 2 distinguishes itself from its predecessor early-on simply by shifting the focus of the story from the Patlabor pilots of the SV2 to their handlers, series mainstays Kiichi Gotoh and Shinobu Nagumo. The two SV2 Commanders have often been present throughout the franchise as a means to drive the plot forward and to fuel the efforts of their mecha pilot subordinates, but here they become the focal point of the events of the film, leaving the rest of the returning cast as little more than cameos in the film’s opening and closing action sequences. The film is ultimately less a mecha anime and more of a police procedural drama, emphasizing human conflict over clashes between giant combat robots.

Nagumo in particular is given significant emphasis, as it is revealed early-on in the film that the reason for her assignment to the SV2 away from the main body of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police is due to an affair she had with Tsuge during her days under his tutelage. While a personal stake in the affairs of the first film is alluded to more than once during its course, as more than one of the characters imply that Asuma’s relentless

pursuit of the true nature of HOS may have something to do with being the estranged son of the president of its manufacturer, here the conflict is made an immensely personal affair, as Nagumo spends much of her pursuit of Tsuge questioning whether or not she will be able to arrest her former lover when faced with the chance to do so.

However, it is the mystery orchestrated by Tsuge himself and the National Defense Family, a small faction of American soldiers and defense contractors based in Japan sympathetic to his cause, that lies at the centre of Oshii's take on transhumanism in *Patlabor 2*, given that, as previously mentioned, here the presence of technology is reflective of the plight of Tsuge and those he faces.

In order to gain a better understanding of this, it is first important to know that unlike the effective but generic disaster scenario that drives that plot of the original film, *Patlabor 2*'s conflict is rooted in then-modern-day events. The year before the film's release saw the Diet of Japan pass the UN Peacekeeping Cooperation Law, a law enabling the previously purely defensive JSDF to allow soldiers to participate in United Nations Peacekeeping operations overseas, thus allowing them to send soldiers to participate in the then-current Peacekeeping missions in Cambodia and Mozambique (a decision echoed in the opening sequence of the film). This decision was met with considerable unrest among the public, with over seventy percent of the nation's population opposing the decision to send the formerly Japan-centric JSDF for a foreign country.⁷ This sentiment was also echoed by Oshii himself (albeit for potentially different reasons), who states in an interview regarding the making of the film that:

[In regards to Tsuge being ordered not to fire upon his assailants] Comparing SDF and policemen, I think policemen have a far greater (grasp of) reality. Their work always requires them to work with people. An animator who did the key animation also told me "in a situation like that, of course you fire." But it's not

whether you can or can not fire. That wasn't the point. Of course, I think you can fire with your own judgment as a front commander. But that's a pure militaristic situation, and the current SDF isn't made that way. I don't think they consider PKO [Peace Keeping Operations] as a militaristic matter. I depicted that as the reason why [Tsuge] could not fire.⁸

Oshii makes specific mention in the aforementioned quote of sending individuals into combat situations they are untrained and unprepared for, and this is a recurring theme throughout the film. In addition to the results of Tsuge's ill-fated deployment in Cambodia, a key moment comes when the SV2, fearful of a potential uprising within the JSDF after suspicion arises of their potential involvement in the attack on the bridge, is ordered to deploy their Patlabors to the exteriors of JSDF bases across the Tokyo area in an attempt to contain the situation. Gotoh, who remains cynical of the decision from the beginning, orders his team's Patlabors to remain inactive despite direct orders from his superiors to man them outside the bases, but is quickly informed by Shigeki Arakawa, a JSDF intelligence officer who first reveals Tsuge's machinations to Gotoh and Nagumo in the wake of the attack on the bridge, that the damage has already been done. The JSDF's military leaders have resigned in disgust over the actions of the police force, and the soldiers are now under the command of the organization's civilian leaders, who intend to turn the actions of the police force into a scapegoat for the current civil unrest in the city. He also informs Gotoh that it was while under civilian command that Tsuge's unit in Cambodia was ordered not to fire, indicating that Tsuge's machinations may be more personally-motivated than previously thought.

This scene is key to *Patlabor 2*'s use of transhumanism as a visual metaphor, as the very presence of the Patlabors outside the military base elicits such a disgusted reaction from the heads of the JSDF. These men are soldiers who, much like Tsuge in the

opening of the film, are finding themselves slowly replaced in manpower by ever-expanding weapons technology, as well as in positions of control by up and comers whose familiarity and reliance on new technology have made them complacent and dysfunctional during times of war. This is reflected in a much more subtle way in the opening of the film, as the bridge in Yokohama is attacked not by a Labor or a similar super-weapon to those found in the first film, but rather by a traditional F-15C fighter jet, one still actively used in present-day military conflicts. It is a relic of the world these soldiers originated in, the one that they strive for people to remember.

The aforementioned Arakawa is nearly as much at the centre of Oshii's commentary on the effects of war upon a society that has flourished without it as Tsuge is, as he is the one who delivers much of the knowledge of Tsuge's plot to the protagonists (and thus to the audience) while interspersing it with his own philosophy on the matter, often putting him directly at odds with Gotoh. In an extended conversation between the two, Arakawa posits that Japan has profiteered from conflict among the rest of the world by electing to consistently ignore it and that their society's punishment for this inaction will arrive in due course. When asked by a more optimistic Gotoh if he expects this punishment to be handed down by God, Arakawa cryptically states that "If the gods won't do it, people will."

This ultimately foreshadows the revelation that Arakawa was once an accomplice of Tsuge's, but when his thoughts turned more towards notions of an outright coup d'état against the Japanese government in order to establish a new military-driven society, he was exiled from the National Defence Family and vowed revenge against his former

leader. Cavallero also comments further on the nature of the conflict that arises between the ideologies of Gotoh and Arakawa, stating that:

The pivotal enigma at the core of the movie is the question of whether an “unjust peace” is finally to be preferred to a “just war” [note: a question that Gotoh himself posits to Arakawa]. The thesis examined by Oshii is the notion that wars can never be just insofar as they are ineluctably motivated by dogmatism, self-interest and mindless pugnacity – as attested to by Japan’s cooperation with the Nazis in WW2. However, peace itself can only be preserved by unjust means, namely at the expense of other countries having to suffer for the benefit of the privileged. As Arakawa observes in the course of the philosophical exchange with Captain Gotoh, “Japan’s prosperity is built on the corpses of racial violence and civil wars. Our peace comes from ignoring the misery of the world.” He later adds: “Perhaps someday we’ll realize that peace is more than the absence of war.” Nevertheless, the film reflects, it would hardly be equitable, in recognition of this state of affairs, to allow terrorism to gain the upper hand. It is on this front that *Patlabor 2*’s central characters find themselves contending with a concurrently ethical and ideological aporia.⁹

Arakawa’s involvement can also be interpreted as a different take on the transhumanist themes presented by Oshii up until this point of the film, as despite being once being allied morally with Tsuge in his desire to see the value of soldiers no longer replaced by technological advancements, his devotion to this ideal is viewed as dangerous and problematic even by Tsuge, demonstrating (in a similarly ambivalent way to the transhumanism in *Patlabor: The Movie*) that not all who wish to see humanity overcome its conversion to transhumanism ultimately have humanity’s best interests at heart.

III. 7: Arakawa: The Face of Violent Revolution

However, the true extent of Tsuge's personal mission (and the one that ultimately reveals this film to be another example of Oshii's emphasis on the value of the human within the notion of transhumanism) is not truly revealed until much later in the film. Despite having previously been informed by Arakawa of the National Defense Family's intention being to cause civil unrest and paranoia in order to create a situation in which American contractors will be better-able to sell weapons to the JSDF, Gotoh and Nagumo both come to the realization that this assumption is completely incorrect. Tsuge's intention has never been to profit off of driving Tokyo into martial law and ultimately civil war; the creation of that atmosphere has been the entirety of his goal all along.

Unable to forget the feeling of being cornered in a losing battle due to the inexperience of his superiors during his time in Cambodia, Tsuge has sought to force all residents of Tokyo to experience the very same feeling, with no intention other than to bring awareness to the horrors that real soldiers must face when they are lead into a possibly fatal situation with inadequate training or assistance from command. This too is reflected through transhumanist imagery by eliciting the images of destroyed machinery found within the opening scene, as when Tsuge's forces begin their preliminary attack to

enact martial law (which, again, is carried out entirely using contemporary military hardware, and even then-outdated technology such as blimps), the attack given the biggest emphasis is the systematic destruction of the SV2's Patlabors, with shots of them being riddled with bullets and ultimately destroyed serving as a metaphor for rage and hopelessness that Tsuge himself felt during the Cambodia mission.

Ill. 8: As was felt by man, so too is felt by machine.

Even when successfully arrested by Nagumo after the SV2 and their Patlabors are forced to fight their way to his base of operations, Tsuge opts not to resist, and instead gazes wistfully at the image of Tokyo on the horizon, stating that:

From here, the city almost seems like a mirage. [...] Three years ago, I returned to this city and lived in that illusion. I tried to get people to see it for what it was. But in the end, nobody realized the truth until the first shot rang out. No... Some might not realize it even now... [...] People never notice things until it's too late. Nevertheless, people should still be punished for that sin.

Tsuge is then asked why he allowed himself to be captured instead of opting to kill himself, and he ends the film with an unexpectedly hopeful comment of “Perhaps there’s a part of me that wanted to see a little more [of] this city’s future,”¹³ reflecting Oshii’s own ambivalence towards the ever-expanding Tokyo mentioned during his TIFF talk.

Tsuge's actions as a whole would come to be examined further by Mark Anderson in his essay regarding the portrayal of the military in *Patlabor 2*, as he comments:

Presumably, Tsuge's terrorist act is calculated to make visible the loss of Japanese life in Cambodia for civilian Japanese on Japanese soil, and thus to allow his men's actions to take on a significance greater than that of this particular conflict or moment. Tsuge's response holds out the hope of a future Japan in which the frailty and finitude of his mission's abjection and failure will be sublimated and overcome by greater Japanese force of will. He seeks to awaken contemporary Japan from its delusion so that in the future perhaps Japan may survive and ultimately triumph over the death by which it currently continues to be threatened. Tsuge's personal refusal to die for his cause may also be read in Buddhist terms as the ethic of a bodhisattva who refuses to move on to the next life until he has done his part to save others in this one.¹⁰

Patlabor 2's ending is far more bittersweet than that of its predecessor because unlike the case of the diabolical and absent-yet-omniscient Hoba, Tsuge is simply trying to force society as a whole to understand the horrendous conditions that he and his fellow soldiers have had to face in the line of duty on a regular basis. His is not a mission of revenge but one of desire for social change, and it is important to note when discussing Oshii's examinations of the human condition through his films due to the fact that, in the director's own words, "Tsuge is the other self of Mamoru Oshii. Tsuge's political thoughts and opinions, if there are any, are all mine."¹¹ Ruh elaborates upon this further, stating that:

Oshii has also expressed a solidarity with Tsuge's goals in trying to get people to wake up from the illusion of modern day life, saying "If people were really capable of realizing those dangers, I wouldn't have to make my films."¹²

III. 9: The World in a Screen

The representation of technology in *Patlabor 2*, while still keeping in line with Oshii's subdued emphasis on it when compared to his later films, is also drastically different from what can be found in the first *Patlabor* film. While the presence of HOS and the Labors infected by Hoba's Babel virus supported Oshii's ambivalence towards transhumanism by acting as an ever-present antagonist to humanity throughout much of the film but simultaneously allowing humanity to accomplish great feats, *Patlabor 2* emphasizes transhumanism by having technology regularly act as an extension of human life and a representation of the plight of Tsuge and his men, as well as by making it integral to the spreading of both misinformation and of Tsuge's humanist message to the population of Tokyo. When the Tokyo Metropolitan Police are deployed to the JSDF bases spread throughout the Tokyo area, and again when the JSDF declares martial law and deploys their armored vehicles throughout the streets of Tokyo, the first that the populace notices of it is through television broadcasts, with the scene jumping between numerous households and storefronts as the population gathers around television sets as the news is ultimately revealed, along with still shots of the war machines patrolling the streets and serving as a jarring contrast to the architecture of the city.

III. 10: Forced Technological Integration

However, as previously mentioned, Oshii also uses the television broadcasts throughout the film as a means through which to comment on the potential misinformation and skewed perspectives that humanity exposes itself to whenever they choose to interact with informative media. In short, while Oshii still opts not to present technology as an outright evil, in *Patlabor 2*, it can still act as a force for the subversion of humanity as a whole. As Ruh elaborates,

For instance, the aftermath of the [bridge] explosion is conveyed to viewers through a montage of television news clips. Later Detective Matsui begins his quest to find a videotape that may be able to provide more detail about the incident. He hopes the tape can at least corroborate the events suggested by the amateur footage garnering repeated airplay throughout the media, but he soon discovers that such evidence is easily falsified [when Arakawa shows Gotoh and Nagumo an unaltered recording of the tape which reveals different information than the one used for the television broadcast had]. The question becomes how we can truly know what is real in our mediated world.¹³

In keeping with this altered perspective on the relationship between humanity and technology, another significant way in which *Patlabor 2* differentiates itself from its predecessor is the fact that, as previously mentioned, the film's titular mecha are barely present within it.

Aside from the opening scene of the film, the scene of their destruction, and the final conflict of the film in which the reunited SV2 assault Tsuge's headquarters in their Patlabors while under heavy fire from a duo of automated security robots, the Patlabors are only ever seen when revealing the current states of the lives of the SV2's Labor pilots (most humorously with SV2 chief Patlabor pilot Oota being shown as a Patlabor training instructor, who berates his students for their reliance of the Patlabors' targeting systems instead of their own eyesight and instincts). The robotic beings that served as the cornerstone of nearly the entire conflict of the first film have been demoted to a secondary role, paving the way for the increasingly political and humanist conflict between Gotoh, Nagumo, Arakawa and Tsuge. As Christopher Bolton states in his discourse on the phenomenology of anime:

The Ekstors [note: the unmanned Labors guarding Tsuge] are eventually defeated by cutting their remote control cables and then blocking the radio signals from their human operators, in effect turning Tsuge's jamming strategy against his own machines. In order for the police forces to see through their own electronic counter-measures, they must abandon their labors' special sensors and use their naked eyes [note: as Oota encourages his students to do earlier in the film]. When Nagumo activates the jamming, her labor's electronic displays dissolve into static, while her face, hidden until now, is revealed. She turns off her now useless data-visor, and her pilot's chair rises on elevators out of the labor's stomach cockpit so that she can see outside. As she joins the battle, her face is framed in the window of the machine's giant head, stressing the human heart or soul at the core of the good labors, in contrast to Tsuge's soulless Ekstors and unmanned airships.¹⁴

Also worth noting in regard to Oshii's discourse on the coming advent of transhumanism (and one of the instances in which it could be argued that humanity is blatantly not presented as the ideal of his early work) is the continued presence of animals within both films. An established animal lover who often uses them to create metaphor within his work (or, in the case of his favourite breed of dog, the basset hound, often simply inserts them into the film as a directorial trademark), Oshii places animals in

significant roles in both films with regards to their central conflicts (something which would reach both an apex and a complete ideological subversion nearly a decade later with his likening of mankind to beasts in *Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade*). In *Patlabor: The Movie*, the image most commonly associated with Hoba is that of birds, as it is ultimately revealed that they are drawn to the sounds inaudible to humans that Hoba uses to trigger the activation of the Babel virus (which is what ultimately leads Asuma to discover Hoba's plot), while in *Patlabor 2*, dogs and birds are commonly associated with Tsuge and his actions, as they are not only the first to react to the sounds of the mobilizing JSDF vehicles, but also appear to be the few creatures in the film unaffected by the illusion of modern peace mentioned by Tsuge (which lends particular note to the fact that when he is apprehended by Nagumo, she finds him amidst an enormous flock of seagulls, which disperse and fly away upon her approach). Anderson also makes particular note of this, stating that:

For all its consistent association with the character of Tsuge, animal life thus seems to represent a surviving form of organization and perception not yet drawn into the fierce demands of social reproduction largely enforced by the forms of technology and altered perception more predominantly featured in the film [...] Oshii seems to offer the seagull, the fish, and the dog as animals that have avoided abjection by what Tsuge at least appears to consider the pathological mediation of contemporary Japanese experience. Oshii's work thus raises the issue of speciesism, the role of the animal in sustaining or challenging humanism and the possibility of challenges to this mode of thought from the subject position of nonhuman animals. The film thus in part seems to actively champion a mode of mutual empathy and cobelonging it depicts as characterizing the behavior of nonhuman animals as an ideal to be aspired to by human animals, and that would have positive consequences for all life forms, including other humans. Rather than arguing that animals are much more human than previously realized as more liberal animal-rights activists would have it, the film on the contrary uses the behavior of animals as a criterion by which to judge human behavior and find humans seriously wanting.¹⁵

III. 11: Animals as a Mitigating Presence

In conclusion, what makes the *Patlabor* franchise significant to the examination of Oshii's discourse regarding the human condition is the fact that, unlike his *Ghost in the Shell* franchise, which would offer a much more definitive contemplation of the possibilities that open up with the advent of transhumanism, it is a franchise dominated by ambivalent speculation. Though it is a franchise with roots in the highly-prominent genre of mecha anime and was quite clearly created in the wake of a time in which mecha anime was more prevalent amongst the medium than seemingly ever before (and is even named after the mecha depicted throughout the series to boot), *Patlabor* eschews the conventions of the genre by presenting technology not as a triumphant means through which to overcome adversity, but also as a potential source of danger, a way in which people can live far beyond their regular life, and finally, a metaphor for those who feel their lives and efforts have been forgotten in the increasingly technologically-reliant world of the films.

However, the re-examination of what it means to be human in a world fueled by the advancement of technology would soon be examined again by Oshii, but where

ambivalence and speculation ruled the attitudes of the *Patlabor* films, now would come a message of inevitability, transcendence, enhancement, and ultimately, acceptance.

Chapter 2 – “It Is Time To Become a Part of All Things”: Accepting Transhumanism

As the years progressed through the 1990s towards a new millennium, an increasing number of significant technological advancements began to take shape worldwide. The most notable of these changes came about with the decommissioning of the National Science Foundation Network (NSFNET) by the United States government in 1995, which successfully removed the final restrictions on the commercial use of a revolutionary new technology that had been steadily growing in scale since the 1960s and had recently expanded not only to academic communities worldwide, but also to small-scale public distribution. Colloquially known as “the internet”, this advancement caused resounding change to human life as it is known, permanently affecting the ways in which humans work, access information, obtain luxuries, and above all else, maintain their daily lives.

The rise of the internet was accompanied by other large-scale developments as well. In the field of entertainment, home video was growing steadily as a means for people to access theatrical content in their own living rooms, while video games grew from something of a novelty in the 1970s and 1980s into a full-blown financial juggernaut, with home video game consoles and arcade machines becoming increasingly prevalent as one of the most popular forms of personal entertainment available.

With humanity’s reliance on technology such as personal computers increasing drastically throughout the majority of the 1990s, the philosophical question of where our increasing technological dependence would lead us as a species began to take further root in the consciousness of scholars and storytellers alike. While the literary movement of cyberpunk had spent the majority of the 1980s weaving fantastical tales of humans

replacing parts of their bodies with artificial enhancements, and of a world in which everyone was simultaneously linked to one another via the invisible yet omnipresent force of cyberspace, the truth of the matter was that mankind was moving in that direction far faster than anybody could have predicted even a decade prior. In short, transhumanism was quickly moving from the realm of the theoretical to becoming our own reality.

The notion of transhumanism had existed in popular fiction long before starting to become a reality due to technological advances; the aforementioned literary genre of cyberpunk (itself a subgenre of science fiction) was one of the earliest progenitors of the notion through its stories of technological augmentation, artificial intelligence, and the lines between man and machine becoming increasingly blurry as the two began to undergo a transhumanist fusion into something more. Originating with the publishing of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (Gibson, 1984), a novel which not only provided the foundation for the genre's themes, but served

as an inspiration for a number of multimedia properties (such as video games and roleplaying games) as well as, most significantly, the creation of the modern internet, cyberpunk went on to define much of the technological landscape as we know it. In fact,

III. 12: The origin of cyberpunk, and a primary influence on transhumanism.

much of the modern-day terms used for computer programs, digital security measures, and general web browsing were coined from Gibson's work.

While the genre began to lose steam into the 1990s due to a saturated market (culminating in the publishing of Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (Stephenson, 1992), a novel that celebrated the genre's excesses while simultaneously parodying them), film and television spent much of the 90s further exploring the potential relationship between human and machine, culminating in films such as *The Lawnmower Man* (Leonard, 1992), *Johnny Mnemonic* (Longo, 1995), and ultimately, *The Matrix* (Wachowski, 1999). Much like the literature that inspired them, these films were notably different than much of the science fiction that served as their predecessors; deeply cynical and philosophical where science fiction was once wistful and hopeful for the future, these films focused on where humanity's growing obsession with its integration with technology would lead it, with the majority of them coming to the conclusion that this new technological reliance would ultimately spell certain doom for the human race.

Given this trend towards transhumanist speculation in media at the time, it is perhaps unsurprising then that anime as a medium would also embrace this new fascination. In fact, anime was much better poised than most of its peers to begin speculating on the subject, as the very foundations of anime are rooted in man's relationship with technology. From a simple story of a young boy being reborn as a robot in *Astro Boy* (Tezuka, 1963), to the star-faring space-opera shows such as *Space Battleship Yamato* (Matsumoto, 1974) and ultimately to the mecha anime craze best-known in the West because of *Mobile Suit Gundam* (Tomino, 1979), anime's formative years were defined by stories of humans achieving previously unreachable goals due to

assistance from a mechanical force (as Oshii himself began to explore with the *Patlabor* franchise).

Much like the motion picture industry, the 1990s saw anime take a turn for the philosophical in terms of examining the growing inter-dependent relationship between man and machine, with a particularly noteworthy example of the subject's seeping into existing anime genres appearing in the middle of the decade in the form of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. At first glance, *Evangelion* projects many familiar tropes of the mecha genre; a group of teenagers are forced to pilot humanoid robots in order to defend Earth from an alien threat (known in the franchise as "Angels") while simultaneously struggling with their own respective neuroses and traumas.

However, the transhumanist nature of anime in the 1990s ultimately rears its head in a substantial way once the show reaches its midway point; the titular giant robots are revealed to be crafted from the bodies and souls of the loved ones of their pilots, the Angels are identified as alternate forms that humanity had the potential to take on during the dawn of creation, and the ultimate goal held by those who created the Evangelions is to use them in order to bring about Instrumentality – a posthuman state in which humanity fuses into one constant being devoid of pain and suffering. In short, the events of the story have been a perpetual transhumanist examination of the human condition and where the way that humanity exists as a species will ultimately lead us.

Evangelion serves as a reflection of a then-newfound fascination in anime: the fascination with where humanity would ultimately end up as a species due to a newfound interest in the ever-expanding transhuman tendencies explored by the human race. Science fiction shows such as *Serial Experiments Lain* (Nakamura, 1997), *Video Girl Ai*

(Nishikubo, 1992) and *Macross Plus* (Watanabe, 1994) examined the possibilities of artificial human life created either as a sentient artificial intelligence or as a genuine clone of a human being, while cyberpunk anime such as *Armitage III* (Sato, 1995), *My Dear Marie* (Mochizuki, 1996), and *Gunnm* (AKA *Battle Angel*) (Fukutomi, 1993) depicted futures in which humanoid cyborgs, completely artificial beings crafted in the image of humanity, have begun to become as commonplace as flesh and blood humans, thus forcing world powers to ultimately question what the true distinction between what constitutes a human and what does not had become. This especially harkens back to the cyberpunk literary movement, as Ruh explains:

The Japanese interest in cyberpunk is an intriguing cultural reversal, as many American cyberpunk authors incorporated Japanese words or cultural concepts in their works, most notably Gibson in his book *Neuromancer* (1984), one of the best representatives of the cyberpunk literary genre. By incorporating such references, Japan was made to be the battleground on which the conflict between antiquated tradition and technological modernity would play out in the popular consciousness.¹

The advent of the transhuman in anime is important to note because this subject would soon become relevant to Mamoru Oshii's films in a particularly large way. While the director had previously taken an ambivalent and distanced perspective on the subject throughout the *Patlabor* franchise, his next project would instead ask a much more pertinent question: when faced with an inevitable conclusion such as the integration of technology within humanity (as Oshii himself described during his TIFF talk), will humanity lose all sense of self within a world that has advanced past its comprehension, or is this integration, in fact, the ultimate next step in human evolution?

2.1 *Ghost in the Shell* and Questions of Humanity

Much in the same way that the *Patlabor* franchise acted as a notable example of the mecha genre while simultaneously deconstructing it to feature a more humanist message, so too does Oshii use *Ghost in the Shell* as a means to provide his own personal commentary on the issues commonly explored by the cyberpunk genre, and in particular, to offer a more speculative, even optimistic take on the interaction between man and machine than that offered in *Patlabor*.

III. 13: Masamune Shirow's *Ghost in the Shell* Manga.

While *Ghost in the Shell* is not the first anime to be based on one of manga author Masamune Shirow's manga series (it was preceded by the aforementioned *Appleseed*, *Dominion Tank Police*, and *New Dominion Tank Police* (Furuse, 1993)), it is significant in that it was the first of these adaptations to differ drastically in tone from its original source material. While the original manga of *Ghost in the Shell* is a procedural police drama set in a cyberpunk future (a theme that would later be evoked in the television adaptation of the franchise, *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* (Kamiyama, 2002), which Oshii did not direct but rather acted as a screenwriter and creative director for), Oshii's adaptation of the franchise is a stark and meditative affair that remains less focused on the development of its plot, and moreso on an examination of the world and characters that it presents.

Set in the then-distant future of 2029, *Ghost in the Shell* presents the viewer with a version of the modern world that has become firmly rooted in the concept of the transhuman. Humanity is now able to augment their bodies with cybernetic limbs and enhancements, with those who can afford it often opting to have their entire bodies replaced with a cybernetic one, including an artificial “cyber-brain” that is able to retain a person’s “ghost,” which is described in the film both as simply as their personality, memories and emotions, and as complex as their very soul.

However, with the increasing number of cyborgs in the world, so too has the rate of cybernetic crime increased, and when a hacker known simply as “The Puppet Master” begins leaving a trail of crimes in his wake, going so far as to hack into peoples’ ghosts and alter their very memories, it falls to Public Security Section 9, a division of Japan’s Public Security organization formed nearly entirely of cyborgs and devoted to battling cybercrime, to track down the Puppet Master and determine what his motivations are.

At the centre of the film is Major Motoko Kusanagi, Section 9’s lead operative who sports a state-of-the-art cybernetic body that has been optimized for infiltration and combat, and it is through her interactions with her coworkers and the world at large that much of the discourse added to the franchise by Oshii is brought to the forefront.

From the outset of the film, Kusanagi’s cybernetic form is given a considerable amount of focus. Following an opening action scene in

III. 14: The beauty of creation.

which she demonstrates both her new body's heightened physical capabilities and its ability to blend in with its surroundings via an integrated cloaking system, the film transitions into the past for the opening credits sequence. The credits play overtop of a montage of Kusanagi's artificial body being created for the first time, accompanied by the performance of a traditional Japanese wedding march (which becomes relevant to the film much later, once Kusanagi encounters the Puppet Master), and it is this scene that first presents Oshii's more speculative approach to the notion of transhumanity than that which is found in the *Patlabor* films.

III. 15: Transhuman Birth

When contrasted with the “evil” Type Zero Patlabor or the malevolent omnipresence of the Hyper Operating System in *Patlabor: The Movie*, or even the titular robots of *Evangelion*, which are depicted as a horrific melding of human flesh and otherworldly technology, the introduction of Kusanagi's cybernetic form is thoughtful and serene. The sequence moves through every stage of her form's synthetic birth; from the conception of its design on a computer screen, to the construction of its mechanical skeleton, to the ultimate overlaying of it with the artificial skin, hair, and breasts that

transform the cybernetic shell from a simple human surrogate to the recognizable form of Kusanagi herself. Cavallero elaborates upon this, stating:

This [opening sequence] dramatizes the cyborg's concurrently organic and technological assemblage, seamlessly harmonizing the two dimensions in order to evoke their inextricable connection. The major [sic] is first portrayed as an abstract set of digital data. She next takes the shape of a minimalistic anatomical frame, as various implants are inserted into the skull area [note: as seen in the above photo] so as to programme the cyborg's functions. The character then proceeds to assume incrementally more realistic – and hence more overtly human – physiological attributes: her flesh-encased body floats in a fetal position within a vat filled with a substance reminiscent of amniotic fluid and is eventually ejected into the world as a full-fledged adult.²

The title sequence is important to note due to the fact that it embodies the middle-ground transition of the integration between man and machine that transhumanism is most notable for. The construction of Kusanagi's body is immediately recognizable as a surreal and alien process to the viewer, as modern technology has currently come nowhere near the point in which humans can be artificially created in the same manner, but the calmness of the scene brought about by its deliberate pace and traditional Japanese score paints her body's birth not as something inhuman and to be feared, but rather something fascinating and intimate. It is one of the few times in the film that Kusanagi is presented in any form of vulnerable state as a result of her cybernetics, and the tone of it ultimately sets the stage for Oshii's direct examination of the transhuman condition that permeates the rest of the film, opting not for a cautioned examination of the importance of remaining human, but rather questioning whether humanity is truly the ultimate stage of our species' evolution.

Kusanagi's role as the centre of the film's discourse on transhumanism does not end with the opening sequence however, as nearly every one of her interactions with both her coworkers and with the world surrounding her reveals something of Oshii's

newfound speculation on the transitional forces of technology. Interestingly enough, following the speculative opening credits sequence, much of the film's early discourse may seem to take on a cynical tone towards transhumanism that puts it slightly more in line with *Patlabor*, as throughout the film, Kusanagi expresses a growing detachment with humanity due to the nature of her cybernetic existence. This can be seen through her interactions with her partner Batou, a fellow cyborg (although with nowhere near as advanced as cybernetic shell as that used by Kusanagi), that remains a more humanistic foil to Kusanagi's growing cold detachment from humanity throughout the film.

One of the major examples of the growing disparity between these two characters' perceptions of humanity comes with Kusanagi's attitude towards her own body; specifically the lack of awareness she shows towards presenting her naked form to others in two key scenes. The first happens immediately following a chase sequence in which, in order to apprehend a suspect in the Puppet Master case, Kusanagi is forced to shed her clothes in the middle of a public area in order to use her stealth equipment to turn invisible and chase him down. Kusanagi stands motionless atop the suspect upon his apprehension, paying no mind whatsoever to the fact that she is completely nude, and it is only when Batou instinctively places a coat overtop of her torso that she even appears to be aware of her current state of undress.

III. 16: Apathetic Nudity

The second incident occurs when Batou retrieves Kusanagi from a deep-sea dive that she has undertaken, after which she begins to shed her diving suit in favour of her regular clothes, showing no awareness whatsoever of her nudity despite Batou making an effort to look away and preserve his own sense of modesty. This scene also features one of the major instances in which Motoko directly philosophizes on the nature of her own fleeting humanity, stating that

There are countless ingredients that make up the human body and mind, like all the components that make up me as an individual with my own personality. Sure I have a face and voice to distinguish myself from others, but my thoughts and memories are unique only to me, and I carry a sense of my own destiny. Each of those things are just a small part of it. I collect information to use in my own way. All of that blends to create a mixture that forms me and gives rise to my conscience. I feel confined, only free to expand myself within boundaries.

This expression of confinement adds further context to the aforementioned opening sequence, as Ruh explains that:

That Kusanagi is subject to control is shown during the opening sequence, which illustrates her assembly. The process of constructing Kusanagi indicates her confinement within her own body. Her organic brain is scanned and placed into a casing that is in turn enclosed by a mechanical skull. Her artificial musculature is covered by a metal skin and coated with a synthetic epidermis. Finally (although

this is not explicitly shown), she is inserted into a hierarchy in which she has little choice but to participate, as the government can use her body as a prison for her mind. However, Kusanagi is able to find release, not by overcoming the confines of the body, but rather through the further blurring of the mind/body and organic/artificial dichotomies.³

Additionally, Kusanagi's detachment is preceded by another example of one of the potential dangers of *Ghost in the Shell*'s version of transhumanism. This is seen in the latest victim of the Puppet Master's ghost-hacking; a garbage man who leads several members of Section 9 on a city-wide chase due to his cyber-brain having been forcibly implanted with the idea that his wife and child are in danger. When interrogated by the police after being apprehended, the victim slavishly latches onto the notion that he needs to see his wife and child, showing a picture to everybody in the vicinity that reveals the ugly truth: the picture depicts just him walking, and the memories he has of his wife and child have been completely falsified. Unlike the technological presence seen in other works of cyberpunk such as *Neuromancer*, in which, despite the work's dystopian themes, mankind is only further made more extraordinary through cybernetic enhancement, this is a true instance in which the advancement of the human race through integrated technology has exposed humanity to a nightmarish threat, one that can strike silently and without visible symptom until the damage has already been done.

III. 17: Proof of Tampered Memory

In keeping in line with *Patlabor*, Oshii does use several elements of the characters of *Ghost in the Shell* to serve something of a warning to the increasingly technologically-dependent world to whom the film was released, and this warning is one of the loss of identity. Between Kusanagi's own detachment from humanity and the forced detachment from reality inflicted upon the garbage man, however, the threat of technological advancement has the potential to be both one of an apocalyptic disaster as witnessed through the efforts of Hoba in *Patlabor: The Movie*, as well as that perceived by Tsuge of mankind losing perspective of the efforts and sacrifices of soldiers in *Patlabor 2*, only this time it is the importance of an individual's humanity that is being lost.

However, while Oshii does present several aspects of the transhuman world of *Ghost in the Shell* as negative, to view the film as a condemnation of the melding of man and machine would not only be as false as it would to view the same of *Patlabor*, but would also be to fall into the film's trap, as it ultimately builds toward a climax that revels in the possibilities that its transhumanist world has brought about.

For starters, Kusanagi's fleeting attachment to humanity, despite being perceptible as a negative element of the transhumanism at work in the film's world, ultimately puts her in line with much of the philosophy behind the concept of transhumanism that has been viewed by many scholars on the subject as being ultimately positive. In her influential text *A Cyborg Manifesto* (Haraway, 1983), technological scholar and self-professed "Postgenderist" Donna J. Haraway posits the concept of the cyborg as an equalizing factor within society, beginning by stating that Western patriarchal traditions such as colonialism and naturalism (which are positioned against the concept of the cyborg) "have all been systematic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals... all [those] constituted as others."⁴ Cyborgs, in her opinion, do away with these practices, as with the blurring of lines between natural and artificial brought about by the 20th Century, so too does the cyborg blur the lines between (traditional Western visions of) human and inhuman, men and women, and even human and animal. As Haraway states,

The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense...⁵

In essence, Kusanagi's growing detachment from humanity has less to do with technology robbing humanity of its identity, and more to do with it providing humanity with a means to escape traditional social and gender roles that have been defined due to the pervasive influence of Western patriarchy. Haraway ultimately states that "Cyborgs might consider more seriously the partial, fluid, sometimes aspect of sex and sexual embodiment. Gender might not be global identity after all, even if it has profound historical breadth and depth,"⁶ something which places Kusanagi's unwillingness to

acknowledge her nude form in the presence of her outwardly male partner not as a sign of her becoming less than human, but rather growing beyond the traditional definitions of humanity in favour of something better (thus moving ever closer to the state of the posthuman, the ultimate goal of transhumanism). Oshii himself makes reference to this notion through Kusanagi's dialogue, as during one of her conversations with Batou regarding her cybernetic form she quotes the Book of Corinthians, stating that "When I was a child, my speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child. Now that I am a man, I have no more use for childish ways." In short, the "childish ways" that she refers to is the antiquated notion of humanity that people such as Haraway (who several critics have disagreed with since the publication of *A Cyborg Manifesto*, but Oshii ultimately sides with) present as a problem to which transhumanism is ultimately the solution, and thus does it come to pass that what may be seen as one of the major weaknesses of the transhumanist world of *Ghost in the Shell* is revealed to be, in fact, one of its greatest strengths.

However, while Kusanagi's questioning of the validity of her own humanity is what establishes Oshii's transhumanist slant early-on in *Ghost in the Shell*, what truly cements these concepts is when she finally encounters the Puppet Master directly. Revealed to be an artificial life form self-described as "a living, thinking entity that was created in the sea of information" who speaks with a male voice despite inhabiting a female cyborg shell, the Puppet Master informs Kusanagi that it has actively sought after her in order to combine his consciousness with her own, as due to being confronted with the limitations of its own quasi-human existence, it cannot achieve the advanced, posthuman form that it seeks, stating that

I refer to myself as an intelligent life form because I am sentient and I am able to recognize my own existence, but in my present state I am still incomplete. I lack the most basic processes inherent in all living organisms: reproducing and dying. [...] Life perpetuates itself through diversity and this includes the ability to sacrifice itself when necessary. Cells repeat the process of degeneration and regeneration until one day they die, obliterating an entire set of memory and information. Only genes remain. Why continually repeat this cycle? Simply to survive by avoiding the weaknesses of an unchanging system.

III. 18: The Puppet Master Revealed

Clearly a reference to the methods of reproduction found within traditional humanity, the “unchanging system” mentioned by the Puppet Master also refers to the definition of humanity itself, something that its very existence calls into question both in the world of the film, as well as in Oshii’s message to the audience. Even when confronted by government agents stating that it lacks proof of its own existence as a living, thinking life form, the Puppet Master simply asks “And can you offer me proof of your existence? How can you, when neither modern science nor philosophy can explain what life is?” Ultimately, the Puppet Master’s very existence as a being within the world of *Ghost in the Shell* gives physical manifestation to Oshii’s own questioning of what defines being human in an increasingly technological world, far removed from the Othering of technology from humanity found in *Patlabor: The Movie*. The Puppet Master

further solidifies this during his conversations with Kusanagi, stating during a key moment that

It can also be argued that DNA is nothing more than a program designed to preserve itself. Life has become more complex in the overwhelming sea of information. And life, when organized into species, relies upon genes to be its memory system. So, man is an individual only because of his intangible memory... and memory cannot be defined, but it defines mankind. The advent of computers, and the subsequent accumulation of incalculable data has given rise to a new system of memory and thought parallel to your own. Humanity has underestimated the consequences of computerization.

The pro-transhumanism message presented here by Oshii ultimately comes to a head during the film's climax. As both the Puppet Master and Kusanagi lie side by side with the majority of both of their cybernetic forms utterly destroyed by government forces and a team of snipers en-route to eliminate the pair, the Puppet Master makes its final attempt to convince Kusanagi to join their consciousnesses together. It is at this point that Batou, one of the few remaining embodiments of traditional humanism left in the film, attempts to sever the link between the two and stop the process, only to have his efforts thwarted by the Puppet Master's hacking abilities. The last force for humanism ultimately fails in its attempt, and even when Kusanagi asks for a guarantee that she will be able to keep her original personality (and thus what little remains of her humanity) after the merger, the Puppet Master simply replies "There isn't one. Why would you wish to? All things change in a dynamic environment. Your effort to remain what you are is what limits you."

Once again, the Puppet Master has become a physical manifestation of Oshii's own transhumanist message in the film, and as the two cyborgs are ultimately "reborn" as one consciousness (complete with being encased in the cybernetic body of a young child), the new combination of Kusanagi and the Puppet Master utters the same quote from Corinthians as earlier in the film. The childish ways have given way to those of an adult, and in combining their consciousnesses (and giving further significance to the playing of the traditional Japanese wedding piece during the opening credits), the two have shed the limitations of humanity and achieved true transhumanism.

III. 19: Kusanagi Reborn

Interestingly enough, however, the film ultimately chooses to keep its philosophy rooted solely in musings on the journey which mankind has embarked upon through the advent of the current technological world, as opposed to other works of speculative science fiction which opt to further examine the end result of this transitional period. This is evidenced by the simple fact that Oshii opts to conclude the film with Kusanagi's reawakening; aside from her commenting to Batou that she is neither Kusanagi nor the Puppet Master anymore, no further mention is given to her new existence as a being of pure information or to what she intends to do now that she has achieved this state. The

question of this is left completely up to the viewer, and so it is that *Ghost in the Shell* remains a transhumanist text for all intents and purposes, with Oshii opting to force the viewer to speculate on the ultimate outcome of the transhumanist future that he feels lies in store for humanity.

2.2 *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* and Man as Machine

Released nearly a decade after the first film to international acclaim (including being the only Japanese animated film to date to be nominated for the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival), *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (Oshii, 2004) is a sequel to *Ghost in the Shell* in every sense of the word. Not only does its story continue on after the events of the first film, but the film also acts as a means for Oshii to further emphasize the transhumanist themes of the first one, albeit this time through a completely different perspective within the story due to the fact that not only has Kusanagi exited her role as the main character, but aside from a few hints at her presence throughout the film, even her continued existence is only theorized by the rest of the cast.

This time, the story is centred around Batou as he and Togusa, a new recruit to Section 9 that had a minor role in the first film, investigate a series of murders which consistently involve a particular series of sex-androids as the culprits. Apparently quite emotionally impacted by Kusanagi's transformation and disappearance, Batou has begun to express a similar detachment with humanity, to the point that Section 9 Chief Daisuke Aramaki comments that "He reminds me of the Major before her disappearance." As Sharalyn Orbaugh states in an analysis of the film:

Batō [sic] in *Innocence* is depicted similarly [to Kusanagi in the first film]: we see him lose a flesh-and-blood arm, and have it replaced – as the majority of the rest of his body has already been – with a mechanical prosthetic. Like Kusanagi, his body is shown to be just a functional shell, not an "authentic" foundation for

selfhood. Batō shows little emotion through most of the film; his obviously prosthetic eyes enhance the impression that he lacks conventional affect.⁷

In terms of Oshii's examination of the human condition within his films, *Innocence* retains an unsurprisingly similar perspective towards transhumanism as the original film, though this time around, the film's message is mired substantially less in subtext and is made thoroughly obvious through much of the film's exposition, as well as through the interactions between the characters. However, it is important to note that he again chooses not to delve into an examination of the ultimate posthuman state that the transhumanism of the film's world appears to ultimately be striving towards, as although Kusanagi ultimately makes an appearance towards the end of the film (in spirit rather than in form, in keeping with her ascension to a new level of existence achieved at the end of the previous film), she disappears just as quickly as she appeared.

In keeping with the themes explored in the previous film, this time Oshii makes blatant reference to *The Cyborg Manifesto*, albeit less to comment on whether or not the traditional view of humanity is worth maintaining and moreso to question whether there truly is a difference between the human and the transhuman. Early on in their investigation of the sex-android murders, Batou and Togusa encounter a coroner for the local police force named Doctor Haraway (in an obvious reference to the text's author), whose sole role in the film appears to be to inform the two investigators, both of whom maintain that the divide between man and machine is vast, that their views may not be as concrete as they believe. After stating that the first captured sex-android attempted to commit suicide before being shot, and being questioned regarding her choice of words by Togusa (as the term "suicide," in his mind, only truly applies to sentient, organic beings, whereas cyborgs would be "self-terminated" instead), Haraway reprimands him, stating

Yes, if you assume that there is a clear distinction between man and machine. [...] These past few years, we've been seeing a spike in robot-related incidents. [...] If you ask me, I think it's because humans discard their robots. You know, when they don't want them anymore. When the new models come out, people buy the latest and greatest, some of the discarded ones end up on the streets... where they gradually deteriorate from lack of maintenance. The robots just want us to stop treating them as disposable. Humans and robots are different. But that sort of faith is nothing more than the recognition that humans aren't robots, which is on the same level that white is not black. Unlike things like industrial robots, pet androids and [human surrogate] gynoids... weren't designed with utilitarianism and pragmatism in mind. Why did we feel the need to create them in man's image? In an idealized image, at that. Why does humanity go to such lengths to create these reflections of itself?

Haraway continues after pausing to ask Togusa if he has any children, commenting that

Children have always deviated from the human norm. That is, if we define a human as something that has a fixed identity and acts in accordance to its own free will. What, then, are children, those early-stage humans who exist in a state of chaos? Internally, they clearly differ from humanity, yet they have the shape of humans. The dolls that little girls use when they play "mommy" aren't merely a surrogate for a child or something to practice on. Perhaps these girls aren't practising raising children. Rather, perhaps playing with dolls is much the same as raising children. [...] In other words, child rearing is the quickest method of realizing that oldest form of dreams, the act of creating an artificial human.

Batou even contributes to the debate by stating that "Descartes didn't differentiate between man and machine, organic and inorganic life. There was a doll that looked just like his daughter Francine, who died at age five. He named it after her and lavished it with love." Although the comment outwardly appears to be a simple story to relate to Haraway's commentary on the blurred lines between a doll and a child, the remark on differentiation is important due to the implication of Descartes' most famous quote, "I think, therefore I am." This implication effectively summarizes the entire sequence, as the ultimate point being argued by the fictional Haraway, by Batou, and ultimately by Oshii, is that the divide between man and machine becomes substantially less obvious when examined under Cartesian philosophy, as not only is the act of conscious

thought no longer unique to humans (as evidenced by the sex-android's attempt to take its own life), but there is also the fact that, much to Togusa's dismay, the act of building artificial robotic beings in the image of humanity shares much in common with the act of rearing children.

These views are further reinforced by the character of Kim, a hacker with both ties to the murders and a perpetual fascination with dolls, who, when confronted by Batou and Togusa, makes noticeably similar statements to those made by the fictional Haraway. Kim argues that

The 18th Century “man as machine” theory has been resurrected by cyberbrains and prosthetic body technology. Ever since it became possible to externalize memory through the use of computers, man has been aggressively mechanizing himself in order to expand the upper limits of his abilities as a living creature. It's a manifestation of the desire to overcome Darwinian survival of the fittest, and to break free of the evolutionary rat race through sheer strength of will, as well as the desire to outdo the natural world that gave birth to humanity itself.

Simply put, according to Oshii, the transhumanist expansion into the fusion of man and machine has not simply come about due to the rapid expansion of technology, but rather out of an age-old desire to stretch beyond the confines of traditional humanity, something cited both by *The Cyborg Manifesto* and by both Kusanagi and the Puppet Master in the original film.

III. 20: The Proactive Batou and Ineffectual Togusa

Togusa himself is also worth discussing in terms of Oshii's discourse on the transhuman as well, particularly due to his being promoted to a major character in this film. Togusa is an anomaly in the world of the *Ghost in the Shell* films, as with the exception of a cyberbrain issued to him by Section 9, the rest of his body remains organic, and in the first film, when questioning Kusanagi regarding her request to have him transferred to Section 9 from his position in the police force, his humanity is what she cites as the primary reason. She explains that "If we all reacted the same way, we'd be predictable, and there's always more than one way to view a situation. What's true for the group is also true for the individual. It's simple: Overspecialize, and you breed in weakness. It's slow death," effectively placing Togusa as a force separate from the department's array of combat-ready cyborgs.

However, despite Kusanagi's assertion of the need for a varied perspective within the group, the fact remains that throughout both films, Togusa, despite playing an active role in most major events and ultimately becoming a primary character in *Innocence*, remains largely ineffectual in his line of work when contrasted with the capabilities and efforts of his cyborg partners. While in the first film he is the first to suspect another government organization's involvement with the creation of the Puppet Master (and even this can be attributed more to his time in the police force than to his humanity), throughout *Innocence* he is consistently shown to be a handicap both to Batou and to their investigation, having to be saved by the cyborg on more than one occasion from things that Batou is able to dispatch or solve easily through his cybernetic functions. Even when the two of them are trapped in a false virtual reality by Kim, it is the cyborg-minded Batou (with a bit of implied assistance from Kusanagi) and not the supposedly

alternative-thinking Togusa who is able to pull the two of them from the illusion.

Cavallero adds that “Togusa, too, is rendered authentic by his imperfection – specifically, his haunting sense of vulnerability,”⁸ which acts as another handicap to his involvement of his and Batou’s police work.

Ultimately, what Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell* films demonstrate is that over time, the director’s attitude towards the melding of man and machine has undergone some significant changes. Where technology was once an external force to be questioned and possibly even feared in *Patlabor: The Movie*, or when it was used as a metaphor for the soldiers forgotten by society in *Patlabor 2*, the attitude soon shifted towards questions regarding what being human in an increasingly-technological world truly means, or whether or not traditional humanism may in fact be an impediment to humans in terms of their own evolution.

Even when contrasted against the majority of other transhumanist and cyberpunk anime, which largely elects to focus on questioning whether man and machine can co-exist in the same world with one-another, *Ghost in the Shell* and *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* dive headfirst into the realm of the transhuman, arguing that not only is the intersection of man and machine inevitable, but that, in keeping with the theories of individuals such as Descartes and Haraway, it may be cause for humanity to re-evaluate what is truly necessary to retain in our own identities and what is keeping us from achieving the heightened existence of the posthuman. Not only that, but Oshii argues that perhaps the lines between man and machine are ever-dwindling, with mankind maintaining a perpetual obsession with the artificial recreation of life, with the constant recreation of inanimate objects in our own image bearing a stark similarity to the raising

of children. In short, the films demonstrate a departure from Oshii's stark humanist views into something more philosophical, reflexive, and in many ways optimistic.

However, while the *Ghost in the Shell* films demonstrate the aforementioned cautious optimism Oshii demonstrates towards transhumanist issues, his later films would eschew direct transhumanist commentary in favour of the use of the topic to comment on another subject that has existed as a presence within each of his previous films: the failures of modern society, both Japanese and global.

Chapter 3 – “We Are Wolves Disguised As Men”: Transhumanism and Society

The transhumanist message of Oshii's animated work would come to take a different turn during the director's later work, as unlike the *Ghost in the Shell* franchise, whose subject matter directly begs an examination of transhumanism as a concept, films such as *Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade* and *The Sky Crawlers* see the director turning instead to issues that he feels pertain to modern-day society and using transhumanism not as his primary subject, but rather as a metaphor for the political and social struggles within both Japan and the world as a whole. While this may be indicative of a similar use of the subject as the one found in *Patlabor 2*, in which the plight of soldiers was reflected in the use of advanced mechanical weapons, what distances the aforementioned two films from Oshii's earlier work is the fact that for the most part, technology is not used to indicate mankind's movement towards the future, but rather a regression towards the ills of the past.

3.1 The Kerberos Saga and Animators Filming Live Action

It is first important to note that a substantial reason for the differences that *Jin-Roh* exhibits when contrasted against Oshii's other animated work lies in the difference in its origins, due to it being part of an ongoing series helmed by Oshii himself. After gaining a level of recognition during his early career through the direction of films such as *Ursei Yatsura 2: Beautiful Dreamer* (Oshii, 1985), a spinoff of a popular romance anime which he worked as an animation director on, Oshii would come to release something different before his next mainstream success with *Patlabor*: a radio drama.

This drama, *Waiting for the Red Spectacles* (Oshii, 1987), is unique amongst Oshii's work in that it looks to the past rather than the future. Taking place in an alternate

timeline in which Japan has evolved under German occupation following World War II (as opposed to the real-life American occupation), the drama's plot centered around the trials and exploits of the Special Armed Garrison (also known as both the "Special Unit" and as "Kerberos," an alternate spelling of the Greek monster Cerberus, whose likeness adorns the emblem of the Garrison), a fictional branch of the Tokyo police devoted to suppressing terrorism in the nation's capital while clad head-to-toe in plated combat gear meant to evoke the appearance of German shock troops (and featuring red-tinted thermal goggles, hence the name of the story).

Despite its humble origins, *Waiting for the Red Spectacles* soon gave way to an ongoing multimedia series that would ultimately come to be dubbed the "Kerberos Saga" in 2004, consisting of several manga series, novels, additional radio dramas, and most significantly, two live action films; *The Red Spectacles* (Oshii, 1987), and *StrayDog: Kerberos Panzer Cops* (Oshii, 1991), the latter of which received a theatrical release in Japan. These are important to note as Oshii is one of many anime directors who have gone

III. 21: Advertisement for *The Red Spectacles*

on to direct live-action features, including such notable peers such as *Evangelion* director Hideaki Anno, who directed two live action features, *Love & Pop* (Anno, 1998) and *Ritual* (Anno, 2000) in the late 90s and early 2000s, and *Akira* (Otomo, 1988) director

Katsuhiro Otomo, whose sole live action film *World Apartment Horror* (Otomo, 1991) was released the same year as *StrayDog*.

While the live-action efforts of his peers were ultimately commercial failures both domestically and internationally, Oshii's early live-action Kerberos films garnered enough success (with *StrayDog* being officially invited to the Yubari International Fantastic Film Festival) for the director to continue making live-action features intermittently between his animation projects, such as the experimental *Talking Head* (Oshii, 1992), and the cyberpunk action films *Avalon* (Oshii, 2001) and *Assault Girls* (Oshii, 2009). While none of these films have achieved the same level of international acclaim as his animated works, many of them went on to receive several awards at various festivals, and, perhaps more importantly, many of them demonstrate Oshii's distinct interest in the cinema of other cultures, as several of them were primarily filmed outside of Japan.

In short, the Kerberos Saga is significant when discussing Oshii's work as it marks the beginning of a side to the director's career that, while not always viewed with the same level of reverence as his animated features, remains a key part of his creative output that not only relates his works to that of his peers, but also demonstrate a level of success in a medium that many of said peers failed to achieve. However, the true significance of the Kerberos Saga regarding its contribution to Oshii's ever-changing depictions of the human condition is the fact that he would ultimately return to animation for the saga's third and final theatrical release, *Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade*, and while the film remains similar in tone to the live-action films that preceded it, it represents one of the first major metaphorical questions posed by Oshii regarding transhumanism: when

does moving beyond traditional humanity result in a social and political regression instead of an advancement, and what is the price of giving a select few power over the many?

3.2 *Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade* and the Pack Mentality

Taking place before the events of *The Red Spectacles* and *StrayDog*, *Jin-Roh* finds the Special Unit still in its prime, before the eventual dissolution of the organization through the efforts of the Japanese government depicted in the two live-action films. Set amidst a series of riots that echo the real-life student riots of the 1960s that occurred throughout the country, the film centres on the ongoing conflict between the Special Unit and The Sect, an ensemble of small terrorist organizations that have unified into a single focused group, with the nation's capital as its primary staging grounds.

III. 22: Kazuki Fuse and Kei Amamiya

When Unit member Kazuki Fuse comes face to face with one of The Sect's bomb carriers, a teenage girl dressed in a red cloak, she detonates the device rather than allowing herself to be captured, sending Fuse to a disciplinary hearing and removal from active duty due to post-traumatic stress disorder. While on leave, he meets and begins to date Kei Amemiya, who claims to be the sister of the girl who killed herself in front of

Fuse, but is ultimately revealed to be a former terrorist who has been blackmailed by members of Japan's Public Security Division in order to lure Fuse into a public scandal that will discredit both him and the Special Unit.

Jin-Roh is unique amongst the films analyzed here in that it is the sole one not directed by Oshii himself. The film was in fact directed by Hiroyuki Okiura, a colleague of Oshii's who had worked in the animation department at Production I.G during the production of both *Patlabor 2* and *Ghost in the Shell*, with Oshii still acting as the screenwriter and producer for the film. However, given his aforementioned roles in the film, as well as the fact that the entire Kerberos Saga is his brainchild, it is safe to say that the film is more the result of Oshii's efforts than Okiura's, who to date only has one other directorial credit to his name. In a series of interviews conducted around the time of the film's completion (which Oshii dominates in terms of screen time despite not being the film's director), he even states that he later "felt it was unfair to Okiura to be asked to work on a project that was [Oshii's] own work in so many ways"¹ (though he also states that, while he regrets not directing it himself, Okiura's film was ultimately a success, and that, unlike many films, "it succeeded in moving [Oshii] emotionally"²). This especially comes to light when examining the themes of the film, as it maintains Oshii's signature commentaries not only on Japanese society as a whole, but on the nature of the human condition in general.

Initially, *Jin-Roh* does not appear to be an examination of transhumanism, especially when contrasted against the blatant transhumanist speculation found in *Ghost in the Shell*. As previously mentioned, the film takes place against a backdrop of an alternate version of the real-life student protests that occurred throughout Japan during

the late 1960s, only this time with the populace rebelling against the presence of the Special Unit and its strong-arm approach to law enforcement and counter-terrorism, as opposed to the real-life protesting of both the presence of the American military in the country, as well as the presence of Socialist factions within its government. Indeed, the film can be analyzed almost entirely based on its representation of the political turmoil facing Japan at the time, a theme that, were it the centre of this discussion, would liken the film to something more akin to the cynical message of the *Patlabor* films, and one that one could speculate holds a deal of personal significance to Oshii, who would have been a teenager during the time of this civil unrest.

However, the truth of the matter is that the film does ultimately draw the subject of the transhuman into its discourse on both Japanese society and on humanity as a whole, albeit in a significantly different way than what is expected of the concept. Following their initial meeting, Kei gives Fuse an item that she says was important to the girl who committed suicide in front of him: a copy of *Rotkäppchen*, the original German version of the *Little Red Riding Hood* fable (as in the world of the Kerberos Saga, Japan had been occupied by the Germans).

III. 23: *Rotkäppchen*

Rotkäppchen is significant to the plot of *Jin-Roh* in that not only does it foreshadow the film's final moments, but it ultimately serves as the film's link to the transhuman, in that it initiates the film's recurring theme of the presence not of technology, but of wolves. The story of Little Red Riding Hood ultimately being eaten by the wolf that she had spurned on the path to her mother's house is initially made most obvious by the film's imagery, as not only do both Kei and her supposed sister wear red cloaks during their encounters with Fuse, but the Protect Gear armor worn by Fuse and the rest of the members of the Special Unit (which is the only piece of technology present in the film that is arguably more advanced than anything found within modern day military technology, indicating a presence of the transhuman), covers every part of their flesh, with their eyes being covered by thermal goggles that emit an unnatural red glow, giving them more the appearance of beasts than of real humans.

III. 24: A Beast Before The Moon

However, the wolf metaphor is much more significant than simply being a parallel to a set of armor, as it ultimately defines the nature of not only the film's characters, but of the society that they populate (and one that Oshii is providing direct commentary on throughout the entire script). This can most noticeably be seen in two key scenes in the film: a nightmare sequence that Fuse has during the film's midpoint, and the final sequence of the film, in which Fuse reveals himself to be a member of the Wolf Brigade (an obvious allusion to the story in and of itself).

Ill. 25: Fuse Amongst the Wolves

Although several moments of the film leading up to the nightmare sequence features narration in the form of the characters reading directly from *Rotkäppchen*, it is this sequence that first gives credence to the element of transhumanism in the film. In the nightmare, Fuse finds himself chasing Kei through the same sewers in which he pursued her sister in the opening of the film while a pack of wolves gives chase, eventually overtaking him and devouring Kei. This scene is intercut with images of Fuse sitting amongst the pack of wolves atop a snow-capped mountaintop, as well as images of him savagely gunning down Kei in his Protect Gear but with his mask removed, ultimately

culminating in a shot where Fuse screams out for Kei, in which his face is overlaid and eventually replaced with the face of a wolf.

III. 26: The Fate of Kei

While initially appearing to simply be an analogy for the characters it depicts, the nightmare sequence is significant because it reveals the greater political message in Oshii's script, one in which in attempting to become something beyond human, the film's metaphor of transhumanism has in fact led to a social regression, to the point of humans becoming nothing more than beasts. As web-based anime reviewer Bennett White comments,

If we let go for a moment the fairy tale aspect and focus on the wolf theme, we can extrapolate that Fuse is a member of a pack, a tightly-knit group of like minds. As part of the Special Unit, he has to destroy all that seeks to threaten and destabilize society, or the pack. In other words, those that seek to change it. The terrorist girl and Kei represent the need for change in society, violent and destructive as it may be, for the betterment of all. Kei even wistfully says how nice it would be to uproot and relocate someplace, far away from the established. Fuse, on the other hand, represents Japan's society as a whole; conformist by nature, unwilling to break from the pack because of the security it offers and a feeling of belonging, and [willing to] strike down all that threaten to change that. During the time the film was released, the main political party in Japan, the Liberal Democratic Party, had held power mainly unopposed since 1955. Perhaps Fuse's inability to break away from the Special Unit and embrace the change that Kei offers is a criticism of Japanese society disguised as an obvious allegory for a

children's fairy tale, and the dream sequence is a reflection of Fuse's internal conflict between the need to belong and the allure of change.³

Fuse himself gives credence to this analogy, as when Kei asks him what led him to joining the Special Unit, he replies "It's hard for me to explain, but it was like I finally found a place where I belong," and the idea of the pack mentality becomes all the more apparent with the revelation of the conspiracy to disgrace the Special Unit. With its orchestration by other divisions of the Japanese government, including Public Security and the regular police force, and especially with the conspiracy being lead by Henmi, a former Special Unit applicant and Fuse's only friend in the entire film, it is made obvious that to this pack of conspirators, people such as Fuse and Kei are only pawns in the greater pack war going on within the government itself.

III. 27: Fuse and Henmi: At the Mercy of the Pack

If examined through this lens, the film takes on a condemning tone towards the nature of Japanese society as a whole, using transhumanism as a metaphor for the fact that those that have embraced the themes of *Jin-Roh*'s world (and of society at large) have indeed moved beyond traditional humanity, but rather than move towards a new level of heightened existence as Kusanagi does in *Ghost in the Shell*, they have devolved

into little more than wolves battling over claimed territory, victims in the crossfire be damned. In fact, the very nature of the Kerberos themselves alludes to this, as Ruh elaborates upon:

Another allusion to myth and legend given in the film is the name given to the Special Unit of the Capital Police: Kerberos. The word “Kerberos” is a Japanese version of the word “Cerberus,” a creature from Greek mythology that stood guard at the gates of hell. Appropriately enough for Oshii [given his love of dogs], this creature is a three-headed dog. This mythological allusion is indicative of both the ferocity of the Special Unit and an indictment of Japanese society. As the original Cerberus stood watch over hell, so does the Kerberos unit stand ready to protect society; Oshii is drawing parallels between hell and the maelstrom of confusion and political infighting that marks Japanese society in the story.⁴

This theme of the pack mentality is cemented during the aforementioned second key scene of the film, in which, after rescuing Kei from a trap laid out for him by the conspirators and fleeing to the underground sewers where he first pursued the terrorists, Fuse is revealed as a member of the titular Wolf Brigade, a counter-intelligence faction of the Special Unit with operatives placed throughout the government in order to seek out any who threaten the Unit and dispose of them accordingly. Their leader, Muroto, who was one of the members of the Public Security tribunal that Fuse appeared before after failing to prevent the terrorist girl from detonating her bomb, also reveals to Kei that they had been in contact with him since before the two of them met, and that her involvement with the conspirators was well-known, both to them and to Fuse.

As this is explained, the members of the Wolf Brigade begin to help Fuse don his Protect Gear in preparation for their upcoming ambush of the conspirators, and when Kei asks Fuse if Muroto’s explanation is true, Fuse simply stares at her and does not reply, as the final part of his Gear, the red-eyed mask, is placed over his face, effectively finalizing his transhumanist conversion from man to beast. Muroto claims as much by stating to Kei

that “Now you see the real Fuse. We are not men disguised as mere dogs. We are wolves disguised as men,” and as Fuse leaves in pursuit of the conspirators, he adds “Only in the tales that humans tell do the hunters kill the wolves in the end.”

The latter turns out to be true as well. Fuse successfully hunts down the conspirators that have infiltrated the sewer system, ultimately cornering a wounded Henmi at a dead end, who fires upon him while exclaiming “What’s the difference anyway, between you and me? You’re human too, aren’t you Fuse?” Henmi’s grenade bounces harmlessly off of Fuse’s Protect Gear, Fuse now being completely shielded in his technological beast skin, and Fuse ultimately riddles Henmi’s body with bullets, the wolf’s domination over the hunter fiercely and uncompromisingly affirmed. With the conspirators dead, Muroto asks Fuse to eliminate Kei, the sole remaining person who could disrupt their plans, and as Kei tearfully sobs Little Red Riding Hood’s final lines into Fuse’s arms, Fuse shoots her, with Muroto concluding the film with a comment of “And then the wolf ate up Little Red Riding Hood.”

Ill. 28: “Mother, what big teeth you have!” – Kei Amamiya

This scene is also significant to Ruh's (brief) analysis of *Jin-Roh*, as he uses it to also present a potential alternate take on the events of the film. He states that:

While this interpretation of the relationship between *Jin-Roh* and the "Little Red Riding Hood" tale may be the most obvious, it is not the only one possible. The version of "Rotkäppchen" recounted in the film mentions the girl having to wear iron clothes. When coupled with the image of Fuse in his Kerberos armor, this allusion could point to Fuse as Little Red Riding Hood. We learn that, prior to the time portrayed in the film, Fuse had been lured into the Wolf Brigade, which had taken all that the young man had to give: his loyalty, his honor, and his soul. The only time Fuse shows any real emotion is when he is forced to shoot Kei at the end of the film; the wolves led him into a trap from which not even love could escape.⁵

What can be gathered from these events within the film is that *Jin-Roh* takes on a substantially different take on the concept of transhumanism than Oshii's previous work, as rather than highlighting the theoretical state as the next step in human evolution, it uses the concept of the desire to become something more than human as a metaphor for the fact that those who posit themselves above humanity may in fact simply be lowering themselves to the level of beasts, ones whose inter-personal conflicts ultimately bring about nothing but suffering to those who come into contact with them. The theme of an ongoing pack war within the government itself between the forces of tradition and the forces of change is a constant theme found in the rest of the Kerberos Saga, as is the bestial imagery bestowed upon members of the Special Unit as well, such as in *StrayDog*, a title which refers to the protagonist Inui, one of the last surviving members of the Unit who finds himself without anywhere to go in a world that no longer has a place for beasts such as him. In this case, transhumanism has not signaled the dawn of the new, but rather the ongoing war between the new and the old.

Interestingly, however, Oshii also seems to comment on the hopelessness that is experienced by those who do not conform to the newfound transhumanity found in a world such as that as in *Jin-Roh*, most

III. 29: The Inevitability of the Transhuman

notably during the scene in which Fuse is forced to kill Kei. As Kei's body falls to the ground and Fuse stands in stunned silence, the camera shifts to reveal a member of the Wolf Brigade with a gun trained upon Fuse, who lowers it on Muroto's orders after the two confirm that Fuse has carried out his orders. In a brief few seconds, Oshii has posited that when faced with a society such as that of *Jin-Roh*, the only alternative to not allowing oneself to embrace this bestial new humanity is to die at the hands of those who have. Upon reflection, this is actually depicted throughout the entire film; between the terrorists at the outset of the film, Henmi and the conspirators, and Kei herself, every character that has sought to maintain their humanity and to progress the world towards any particular change has been killed by those who have sought to retain their semblance of a pack, with Fuse himself largely remaining the perpetrator in nearly all of these deaths. The final shot reveals that had he not allowed himself to devolve to the same level as the rest of the Special Unit (and particularly of the Wolf Brigade), he would have been eliminated the same as the rest, as even those perceived as a threat to the superior transhumanist state of Kerberos must be eliminated at all costs. Cavallero shares this perspective, as she explains:

This dismal finale dispassionately proclaims that Fuse was committed from the start to the enactment of a pre-established script and was never, therefore, at liberty to steer the course of events in accordance with individual predilections or desires. The film is thus dominated throughout by the ghastly specter of a sealed destiny that allows no leeway whatever for consolatory escape routes.⁶

This finality of the presence of the transhuman is something that Oshii himself has commented on. When asked during his extended interview and Q&A session at TIFF why his representations of the integration of technology and humanity are often dystopian despite the fact that he previously stated the importance that it happen, Oshii's comment, perhaps the most telling comment of the entire evening at that, is simply: "I never said that adapting to technology would make humans happy; it's just that it's something we have to do. Maybe there was a time where adapting to it did make humans happy, but not anymore. Technology will not change, so humanity must change instead."⁷ It can thus be argued that *Jin-Roh*'s alternate take on the transhuman ultimately reflects his greater perception of the concept as a whole, as the comment regarding the need for humanity to change lies at the very core of the Kerberos Saga.

It is possible that Oshii ultimately subverts the final point here throughout the rest of the Kerberos Saga, as its ongoing storyline ultimately concludes with the dissolution of the Special Unit and either the arrest or death of those who cling to its ideals, but even then, it could be argued that the director continues to represent posthumanism as something destructive and in opposition to the prevailing humanist force of change. Ultimately though, the fact remains that where *Ghost in the Shell* presented a thoughtful and speculative glimpse at where humanity may ultimately led through integration with technology, *Jin-Roh* posits that transhumanism is more than simple technological

integration: it is a state of mind and desire that has already been achieved within society, and it is a state to be feared, not celebrated.

3.3 *The Sky Crawlers* and the Failures of Society

Oshii's latest animated film, *The Sky Crawlers*, is unique amongst the majority of his animated films in that it does not fall into a particular trend or subgenre within anime itself (unlike the mecha *Patlabor* series and the cyberpunk *Ghost in the Shell* franchise), nor does it exist within a continuity contained within his own body of work (unlike *Jin-Roh* and his Kerberos Saga). Adapted from the first novel in a series by author Hiroshi Mori, *The Sky Crawlers* tells of an alternate version of human history in which armed conflict between countries has been eliminated completely, but in order to appease a human populace that cannot comprehend a world without war, two enterprising corporations, Rostock and Lautern, stage an ongoing series of aerial battles between fleets of fighter planes.

Initially fought by squads of human fighter pilots, the conflict changes completely with the introduction of the Kildren, artificially-created humans who do not age past adolescence and cannot die without being physically killed. The Kildren are then produced exclusively as disposable pilots for ongoing battles, with the expectation that none of them will live long enough to question their own existence or attempt to break the endless cycle of violence.

While much of the information regarding its world and its characters is slowly revealed over the course of the film, *The Sky Crawlers* does not take long to establish itself as a transhumanist anime. The story, which is centered around Yuichi Kannami, a Kildren newly recruited to Rostock's Area 262 squadron after three of their pilots are

shot down in combat, immediately demonstrates that the Kildren themselves are a source of much of the tension and alienation to much of the populace. Soon after meeting his commanding officer, Suito Kusanagi, a cold and calculating pilot who has taken charge of the squadron, Kannami asks her if she is a Kildren herself, a question that is met with silence and a cold look, but little else.

This scene is the first in which the term “Kildren” is used and it does much to establish the prevalent tone of the film with regards to transhumanism. Simply put, the Kildren themselves represent the complete surpassing of human capabilities given their near-immortality, but due to the fact that they are bred with a single purpose and are not expected to live past adolescence, to them, transhumanism is as much of a trap as it is an achievement. Much of the interactions between the film’s characters elicit this fact, with Kannami and Kusanagi’s relationship being the particular highlight of this.

From the outset of the film, Kannami is meditative and inquisitive about the nature of his own existence, a quality not often attributed to the Kildren (and one which causes Kannami to stick out amongst his peers). In particular, he dwells on wanting to know more about the former pilot of his plane, a Kildren known as Jinroh Kuita, a subject which nearly everybody is reluctant to discuss with him, especially Kusanagi. The reasoning behind this is what eventually leads to one of the film’s biggest revelations regarding the Kildren, which is the fact that their personalities can be replaced if their bodies are kept intact. Kannami is a new personality implanted in the former body of Jinroh, who was not only Kusanagi’s lover but also demanded that she kill him in order for him to escape the never-ending cycle of violence that Kildren pilots are subjected to.

Kusanagi, on the other hand, represents a completely different facet of the transhumanist issues faced by the Kildren. A Kildren herself (which confirms Kannami's suspicions), it is revealed early on in the film that she and Jinroh had a child together, one whose existence is kept an open secret amongst the crew of Area 262. When approached about the subject by Kannami, Kusanagi simply states "When I look at that girl, I hate myself sometimes. She's going to catch up with me before long," in reference to the fact that, as a Kildren, Kusanagi will never age, even as her daughter, born through regular biological means, ages like a normal human being. More than this, however, Kusanagi struggles with her near-immortality throughout the entirety of the film, as due to the fact that she has survived working as a fighter pilot and now works an administrative position for the group, she will continue to live even as her colleagues continue to die during the repeated, ongoing attacks between Rostock and Lautern.

The picture painted by these two protagonists (and by Oshii himself) is that in the universe of *The Sky Crawlers*, those who have achieved a state of transhumanism, specifically the Kildren, have done so at the complete expense of their own personal identity. Kannami spends his film being plagued not only by his fleeting, retained memories from his life as Jinroh, but also by the memories of his former life held both by Kusanagi and by those who came to know him by that personality. Similarly, Kusanagi spends the film haunted by her memories of Jinroh and of having performed a mercy killing on him, as nearly every time she spends time alone with Kannami, the interaction devolves into her making sexual advances on him while simultaneously pointing a gun to his head and demanding that he take it and kill her, unable to cope both with having killed her lover at his own request and with the cycle of conflict and death never ending

for the Kildren. Even when their colleague Yudagawa is killed in battle, the two are reminded once again of the artificiality of their own identities, as his replacement, Aihara, bears an identical resemblance to the fallen pilot, along with retaining many of his mannerisms.

III. 30: Déjà-Vu

This lack of identity is similarly expressed by certain characters within the film as well, particularly with the appearance of Midori, a supposedly human pilot who is recruited to the squad after a major aerial strike between Rostock and Lautern. Midori, after coming to know both Kannami and Kusanagi and the history between the two, not only informs Kannami of the possibility of his previous life as Jinroh, but then breaks down in tears at the thought that for all she is aware of, she may too be a Kildren. Citing the fact that she has nothing but fragmented memories of her childhood and thus may never have actually had one, Midori highlights that the appearance of the posthuman Kildren in the world of *The Sky Crawlers* has brought the entirety of human existence and the concept of memory into question, not unlike the questions of identity faced by Motoko Kusanagi in *Ghost in the Shell*. However, her breakdown also highlights the fragility of human existence as well, as even though Midori may in very well be a true

human and not an artificially-created Kildren, the fact that she cannot truly know due to a lack of memories emphasizes the fleeting nature of human memory itself, something which is already well-established in the modern world due to the presence of medical conditions such as dementia and Alzheimer's disease. This builds upon Oshii's initial examinations of memory in a transhumanist context found in *Ghost in the Shell*, as one of the Puppet Master's ghost-hacking victims is also forced to confront the fact that his memories have been altered and that he is not the person that he believes himself to be.

However, the social implications of the nature of Kildren is what truly lies at the heart of *The Sky Crawlers*, as Oshii himself has expressed that just as the characters in the film are forced to perpetually live in the present (given they have no concept of the past and little promise of the future), so too is the film meant to provide a commentary on the world at the time of the making of the film. During a pre-screening discussion of the film at TIFF, Oshii states that he made the film "for people of the modern world, people who are stuck not knowing what the future holds."⁸ Expanding upon this, it becomes clear that the Kildren are in fact representative of Japanese youth, ones who thanks to the political and social climate that they are born into (with more on this subject to come), are unable to make use of their past in order to plan for a better future. Instead, they are confined to the present, forced to live day by day thanks to what Oshii describes as "the recession of the modern world,"⁹ stuck in a never-ending cycle that they are expected to perpetuate until their ultimate death, much like the Kildren themselves.

Taking these comments into account, it becomes clear that the Kildren themselves are a reflection of what Oshii perceives to be the failures of modern society, and this comes further to light through another subject expressed by their presence; specifically,

the never-ending cycle of war and peace that is perpetuated by mankind. An inherent theme of the film due to the fact that the very battle being fought between Rostock and Lautern is fought not over any real dispute of territory or ideals, but rather simply to keep the world more palatable to a human populace that cannot fathom functioning without any of the aforementioned disputes, the pilots of the two corporations, and especially the Kildren, are inherently victims of the un-evolving presence of human nature. Late in the film, Midori reveals that the Kildren were born out of genetic experiments meant to improve the human fighter pilots fighting on both sides, demonstrating that, to the corporations that manufacture them, the Kildren are nothing more than pawns in an ongoing game that seemingly has no end.

This fact is well-known to Kusanagi especially, who has been exposed to the managerial side of the ongoing battles, and when a group of tourists begin to cry over the body of a fallen pilot early in the film, she chastises them, screaming “Enough is enough! He’s not a poor boy! Don’t pity him! How dare you insult him with your pity!” In her mind, the fallen pilot is a victim in the ongoing conflict meant to appease the very same populace who mourn and pity the fallen, living completely unaware that the war between Rostock and Lautern is a lie. In this instance, Oshii begins to draw parallels between the plight of the Kildren, who are forced to kill one another in order to protect the populace at large, and someone such as Tsuge from *Patlabor 2*, whose entire motivation for his treasonous actions was to remind the populace of what is faced by those who defend them every day. Ruh elaborates upon this, stating:

This scene works well because it is the exact opposite of the tour group scene [immediately before]. In the former, war is shown to be interesting and almost like a game, even though it is acknowledged that what the pilots are doing is important to maintain world peace. In the latter, however, the everyday fighting of

the Kildren is shown to have real consequences, and Kusanagi gets upset because the civilians who are so quick to accept their suffering also use their deaths as a kind of cathartic emotional release. Even death does not free the Kildren from their proxy roles.¹⁰

The examination of the never-ending imposition of humanity on the transhuman Kildren is further reinforced by the recurring, seemingly unknowable presence of the pilot simply known as the Teacher, Lautern's leading ace who has yet to be shot down.

III. 31: The Teacher

Every encounter that the Rostock pilots have with the Teacher's plane emblazoned with his signature black jaguar insignia results in at least one of their deaths, to the point that Kusanagi pursues him during her sorties to the point of a personal vendetta. When asked about this by Kannami, Kusanagi reveals that the Teacher is not only her former commanding officer, but that he is also an anomaly among the fighter pilots: a human adult that has survived all of his sorties. In this sense, the Teacher ultimately comes to embody the repression of the transhumanist Kildren (and thus, according to Oshii, the modern-day youth) by human society as a whole, and his presence is perpetually a looming reminder of the fact that the Kildren pilots are expected to die as demanded by the human race. In other words, to be transhuman (IE to be a young person born into the modern world) is to be less than human, much in the same way as *Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade*, where to be transhuman is to become a beast. As Ruh states:

The Teacher is a character from two of Hiroshi Mori's other books in the same series as *The Sky Crawlers*. Bringing the character into the film leads the conflict between generations to sharper relief, as before his introduction, all of the other adults shown had been either civilians, mechanics, or command officers. They are responsible for the running of the world, but they are content to sacrifice the youth (or a certain subsection of them) to satisfy their need for the spectacle of war.¹¹

However, unlike the more cynical and ultimately depressing *Jin-Roh*, in which the co-existence of humans and transhumans signal death for both sides, *The Sky Crawlers* ends on a more hopeful note for the future of the transhuman Kildren. After learning the truth of his former identity from Kusanagi and regaining his memories from his previous life as Jinroh, Kannami declines his superior's demand to kill her, stating that she needs to keep in living in order to break the cycle of violence and death faced by the pilots. By allowing her to live and pulling her from her suicidal thoughts, Kannami has shown Kusanagi the true benefit of her own position as a Kildren not forced to fight; the fact that she will have an infinite amount of time to find a way to end the ongoing conflict and change society to the benefit of both humans and Kildren alike. In short, he has taken Kusanagi's greatest burden and transformed it into her greatest strength, demonstrating that the transhuman has truly surpassed the human.

Ill. 32: “You have to keep living.” – Yuichi Kannami

Thus it is that Oshii posits through his metaphorical transhumanist discourse in the *Sky Crawlers* that while the youth of today are born into a society that has failed them, so too do they have the power to overcome this and lead the world to new and improved horizons. Even after the film ends on a seemingly depressing note, where Kannami is ultimately killed in battle by the Teacher, rendering him another youth torn apart by modern society, an additional scene follows the credits where his replacement, another Kildren named Hiragi (whose face is not shown but who bears a distinct resemblance to Kannami in his mannerisms and voice), is given a warm warm greeting by Kusanagi, in direct opposition to the cold greeting that Kannami met, who smiles and ends the film with a comment of “I’ve been waiting for you.”

What ultimately makes *The Sky Crawlers* fascinating to examine in terms of Oshii’s work is that while its issues and theories are rooted in the transhuman, as previously mentioned, it manages to use the subject to examine many of the same issues expressed in his other films that have been previously discussed. *The Sky Crawlers* examines the same disconnect between the public and armed forces as that expressed in the *Patlabor* films, the same question of memory and of the human existence found in the

Ghost in the Shell films, and even offers a similar commentary on human society to that of *Jin-Roh* through its similar use of transhumanist themes. It serves as the film that ties these themes together, presenting itself as a cumulative effort of all of Oshii's work up until this point (as at the time of writing this document, it remains his most recent animated film), and demonstrating that his previous messages are as applicable to his current work as they were to that of his earlier career, turning the whole of his animated films into one cohesive body.

In conclusion, what makes Oshii's examination of the transhuman in his later body of work unique is the fact that unlike his films which tackle the subject directly, in these films, the presence of a transhuman element is actually used primarily as a metaphor through which Oshii analyzes the ills of modern society. Whether it's in the members of the Special Unit in *Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade* being represented as wolves in order to comment on the pack mentality prevalent within Japanese society, or the presence of the Kildren as a commentary on the victims of a modern society that expects nothing of them but to fulfill their roles within it and then die in *The Sky Crawlers*, the transhumans of these films are significant because they are a foil through which Oshii is able to discuss and criticize modern society, as opposed to the speculative fiction of something such as *Ghost in the Shell*.

Ultimately, perhaps the true importance of these films is that they serve as both an emotional and philosophical counterpoint to his more speculative work, as while *Ghost in the Shell* gazes into the future with a sense of wonder at the possibilities to come, *Jin-Roh* and *The Sky Crawlers* serve as a reminder that even if humanity is ultimately able to transcend its traditional notions of itself and advance to the realm of the transhuman, this

transformation will not be enough to distance the human race from the deeply-rooted issues in its society that are more akin to those found in *Patlabor*. Even when the body and mentality of humanity has evolved past a traditional notion of what it currently means to be a human being, Oshii demonstrates that ultimately, due to our ingrained fears, desires, aspirations and general need to belong to something bigger than ourselves, true advancement into the next step is ultimately impossible, and in one form or another, we will forever simply remain only human. As the Puppet Master states in *Ghost in the Shell*, our effort to remain what we are is what limits us.

Conclusion

Mamoru Oshii's body of work as a whole remains one of the most cerebral and philosophical within modern anime, a fact reflected by the continued popularity and endurance of his films among both the anime fan community and within academia. While many choose to examine his films in terms of his regular use of several concepts and themes, be it religion, politics, the human condition, or even sexuality, the fact remains that much of his use of these themes is tempered by an overall recurring use of transhumanism, both as a subject and as a lens through which to examine the aforementioned subjects.

When taken in with his assertion that technology is something that humanity can no longer live without, it becomes all the more obvious that to examine his perceptions of transhumanism from a purely positive or negative stance (usually by examining just one of his films aside from the rest as tends to be done by those who examine his work) is to miss the point of his transhumanist themes entirely.

In keeping with his assertions of the necessity of integration with technology despite it not necessarily being a net positive change for humanity, so too do his films reflect this general questioning nature of what happens when humanity proceeds down a path that leads to us becoming something more than we are, and it is through the examination of the films used for the previous chapters of this document that this fact has come to light.

At the outset of his examination of the subject, his work on the *Patlabor* franchise demonstrates an obvious and consistent worry about the dangers of the technological advent then facing humanity at the time, best represented by the ongoing conflict between

Hoba and HOS in *Patlabor: The Movie*, as well as the increasing industrialization of Japan (and Tokyo in particular) that threatens to remove everything. However, both that film and, to a greater extent, *Patlabor 2: The Movie*, use transhumanism as a means to comment on an increasing concern about the disregard for the value of human life facing both Japanese society and society as a whole at the time. The destruction of the SV2's Patlabors by Tsuge's insurgent forces, as well as the ever-present shadow cast over the conflict of the film by Arakawa and his desire for technological insurgency, represent Oshii's own concerns for the value of the presence and lives of Japanese soldiers during peacetime, reflecting a society that the director feels has lost a sense of what it means to face open armed conflict. In this instance, transhumanism is ultimately used as a pro-human message, demonstrating what we risk losing in our pursuit of technological superiority.

Following this, Oshii's work on the *Ghost in the Shell* franchise presents a more speculative approach to his examination of transhumanism, examining what it truly means to integrate oneself with technology, both positive and negative. In the titular film, the character of Motoko Kusanagi may outwardly appear to represent a cautionary tale regarding transhumanism in a similar way to that found in *Patlabor*, as her constant questioning of her own humanity in the face of technological expansion simultaneously echoes our own. However, through Motoko's interactions with the Puppet Master and her ultimate ascension to an evolved state through sheer technological advancement, she demonstrates Oshii's aforementioned assertion that integration with technology is something that humanity must ultimately embrace in order to continue its evolutionary path, demonstrating that the transhuman is ultimately destined to become the next stage

of being truly human. *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* further emphasizes this through the blurring of the lines between cyborg and human, using Batou's interactions with hackers, repurposed cyborgs and ultimately Kusanagi herself to represent the dangers of remaining human in an inhuman world, while the once-competent Togusa is used to further illustrate this by becoming effectively useless in his role, his humanity now a burden where it was once viewed as an asset.

Finally, *Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade* and *The Sky Crawlers* demonstrate Oshii's use of transhumanism not as a means on commenting on humanity's integration with technology, but as a commentary on the ills of modern man that plague the world even today. *Jin-Roh* presents a version of 1960s Japan in which transhumanism has meant not an advancement but a regression, where man has devolved to the level of beasts in order to find security in a pack, the greater impact of this on society as a whole be damned. In essence, transhumanism is used not as a commentary on where it is that humanity is headed, but rather the dehumanizing effect that the Japanese political system can have upon its citizens, down to its protagonist, who is ultimately revealed to have metaphorically become more wolf than man, ultimately just being a cog within a greater machine, while those who do not fit in are ultimately removed. It is a warning against repeating the mistakes of the past, for it threatens to undo the achievements of human society.

The Sky Crawlers, however, represents transhumanism as a means to comment on neither the past nor the future, but rather the present. This film uses the premise of a world in which armed conflict has ended to tell a story of transhumanist beings who are forced into an endless cycle of pointless conflict without being allowed to lead regular

lives in order to discuss what Oshii views as modern society's failure with regards to up and coming generations. The Kildren bear all the essential elements of humanity without being shackled to the inevitability of aging, and yet their entire purpose in life is to relive the same cycle of conflict and violent death in order to appease a world which cannot find a way to function without the presence of war. Oshii himself has explained that the film represents the plight of modern-day youth, forced by the decisions of those in control into an aimless life of never-ending repetition and hedonism as a means of escape, and it uses transhumanism both as a criticism of this as well as a means to end on a hopeful note, as it is ultimately the Kildren's longevity that will allow them to overcome society's failures and allow them to change things for the better.

With all of this in mind, it becomes all the clearer that, as stated before, to simply examine *Ghost in the Shell* as Oshii's primary foray into transhumanism is to miss the point of his body of work entirely. His is a series of films whose core principles and messages are all heavily influenced by an exploration of not only what it means to truly be human, but also what it means when humanity is either improved upon or brought down to the level of beasts. Beyond even that, Oshii uses transhumanism not simply as a speculative concept, but as a means to comment on what the director perceives as the ills and failings of society both Japanese and global, using the age-old fiction tradition of commenting on the present by looking to either the future or the past. Transhumanism is not a theory to Oshii; it is an inevitability.

III. 33: “It Is Time To Become a Part of All Things” – The Puppet Master

In conclusion, transhumanism as a concept goes beyond simply the *Ghost in the Shell* franchise, and moreso than that, it goes beyond a simple link between his animated films. It is the most integral element to Oshii’s films, heavily influencing his political and social allegories and thus to examine an Oshii film is to examine a transhumanist film, regardless of whether or not it features cyborgs who question the nature of humanity itself, a fact that has been lost upon much of the analysis of his films performed by others, to the detriment of all who interact with his work.

However, it ultimately remains best to forgive this transgression among those who have ignored Oshii’s recurring transhumanist themes. They are, after all, only human.

Notes

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