

GHOST IN THE SHELL

How a manga full of margin notes, a three-million-dollar film and a Japanese folk choir set the look of science fiction for the next thirty years.

1989

SHIROW'S MANGA

1995

OSHII'S FILM

NO. 1

ON US VIDEO

30

PAGES, FREE

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A MONOGRAPH EVERY WEDNESDAY

Thinking Lite Soft publishes a free monograph every Wednesday about a work that explains cyberpunk. Essay, checked figures and industry context. PDF and EPUB, in English and in Spanish, with no sign-up and no data handed over. This is issue 01.

HOW IT IS WRITTEN

Every issue tells the story from the inside: who was in the room, what budget sat on the table, what got decided and what came out of it. Figures carry a traceable source, quotes are attributed, and anything without solid backing is flagged on page 28.

WHO SIGNS IT

Text by Mark S. James. Editing, design and layout by Thinking Lite Soft, a visual novel studio in Barcelona. This issue is laid out without film stills or manga pages: the artwork is our own.

TRANSPARENCY

Pages 26 and 27 are studio notebook about PRECINCT 2099, our own game, and carry the studio's yellow identity.

01

THE EDITOR WHO ASKED FOR SOMETHING FLASHIER

Before the film, before Hollywood and before the word ghost meant anything in Japanese science fiction, there was a high school teacher in Kobe who drew at night and filled his margins with footnotes.

Masanori Ota had studied oil painting at Osaka University of Arts and was teaching at a high school when he started signing his work as Masamune Shirow. His first complete piece, *Black Magic*, appeared in 1983 in a fanzine called *Atlas*; Harumichi Aoki, president of the small publisher Seishinsha, saw it and offered to put it out properly. Two years later came *Appleseed*, which took the Seiun Award for best manga in 1986. By the end of the eighties Shirow was in his early thirties, had a growing reputation among science fiction readers, and carried one obsession that set him apart from every contemporary: drawing the future was never enough for him, he wanted to explain it.

That obsession is the first thing that hits you when you open *Ghost in the Shell*. The pages are packed with action and the margins are packed with small print: author's notes on networks, augmented brains, international politics and his own opinion of the death penalty. The manga was serialised in Kodansha's *Young Magazine Kaizokuban* between the spring of 1989 and November 1990 —Japanese and English sources disagree on whether it began in April or May— and was collected in a single volume on 2 October 1991, some three hundred and fifty pages in the KC Deluxe line.

The title the whole world knows today is the one an editor judged too dull for a newsstand.

KOESTLER, THE GHOST AND THE MACHINE

Shirow wanted to call it *Ghost in the Shell* from the start. The phrase came from *The Ghost in the Machine*, the essay Arthur Koestler published in 1967 against Cartesian dualism, and it let him name in four words what the comic would spend three hundred pages arguing about: what is left of a person once the body is a prosthesis and the memory is a file. His editor at Kodansha, Kōichi Yuri, had a more earthly priority. He asked for “something a bit flashier”, and out of that came 攻 殿 機 動 隊, which translates roughly as mobile armoured riot police. Shirow agreed on one condition: the English title had to appear on the cover too, however small.

That small print ended up as the brand of a thirty-year franchise, while the Japanese title remained the name readers use in Japan and almost nobody uses abroad. The detail explains a good deal of what followed: the source material always had two faces, the one turned towards its own market and the one turned outwards.

A FUTURE WITH NOTES IN THE MARGINS

A COMIC THAT LAUGHS AT ITSELF

The other important contrast is tone. The manga is a rowdy book. Motoko Kusanagi jokes, deforms into comic panels, bickers with her colleagues the way people bicker in an office. There are gags, there are digressions, and there is a scene Kodansha itself censored in the original edition and Dark Horse restored in the United States on 6 October 2004. The film that arrived four years later erases that register completely.

There is a way of reading *Ghost in the Shell* that explains why it has aged so well: as a technical document with characters living inside it. Shirow never writes “she jacked into the network”; he writes how, over which protocol, at what risk and at whose expense. Section 9 is a unit with contested jurisdiction, a budget and internal enemies rather than a generic spy agency. The prosthetics come with a manufacturer, a maintenance schedule and a warranty that eventually runs out.

That level of detail is why the comic became reference material for game designers and film crews across the following three decades. Whenever a studio needed to imagine a police unit operating in a country where the brain itself can be tapped, the answer had already been drawn, with a footnote attached.

1989, THE YEAR THAT EXPLAINS EVERYTHING

The date is worth placing. In 1989 the manga starts in Japan, Masamune Shirow has just turned twenty-seven and the world has yet to see the web. *Neuromancer* had been out for five years, *Akira* had reached cinemas the year before, and the Japanese financial bubble was living its last summer. The

cyberpunk coming out of the United States talked about corporations swallowing states; the cyberpunk being drawn in Kobe talked about a state that is still there, with civil servants, paperwork and turf disputes. That difference matters more than it looks, and it is what keeps the work running in 2026.

American cyberpunk imagined the end of the state. Japanese cyberpunk imagined its internal affairs department.

THE MAJOR BEFORE SHE BECAME AN ICON

In the comic, Motoko Kusanagi is a capable professional with a temper, closer to a head of operations than to a tragic figure. The melancholy people now associate with the character arrives with the film. In the manga she does question her identity, but she does it between jokes and missions, and the question shares space with her working life instead of devouring it.

The jump between those two Motokos is the subject of the next chapter, and it is a textbook case of what adaptation means: deciding which work you want to make out of somebody else's material, rather than moving a story from one format to another. Mamoru Oshii decided it with a clarity that is still taught.

The serialisation dates remain disputed: English Wikipedia puts the start in the April 1989 issue and the Japanese one in the May issue. The collected volume, by contrast, is dated without argument to 2 October 1991 (Kodansha, KC Deluxe, ISBN 978-4-06-313248-9).

THE MANGA, PIECE BY PIECE

Everything worth knowing about the comic that started the franchise, with the sources that hold up each line.

JAPANESE TITLE	攻殻機動隊 (Kōkaku Kidōtai), “mobile armoured riot police”
ENGLISH TITLE	Ghost in the Shell, proposed by Shirow after <i>The Ghost in the Machine</i> by Arthur Koestler (1967)
AUTHOR	Masamune Shirow, real name Masanori Ota. Kobe, 23 November 1961
TRAINING	Oil painting, Osaka University of Arts. High school teacher
EARLIER WORK	<i>Black Magic</i> (1983), <i>Appleseed</i> (1985-1989, Seiun Award 1986), <i>Dominion</i> (1985-1986)
MAGAZINE	Young Magazine Kaizokuban, Kodansha
SERIALISATION	April or May 1989 to November 1990
COLLECTED VOLUME	2 October 1991 · KC Deluxe · around 350 pages
EDITOR	Kōichi Yuri, who asked for a “flashier” title
HOUSE TRAIT	Author's margin notes on technology, politics and society
SEQUELS	1.5 <i>Human-Error Processor</i> (1991-1996) and 2: <i>Man-Machine Interface</i> (1997)
UNCENSORED EDITION	Dark Horse, 6 October 2004

THE FACT ALMOST NOBODY CITES

The manga got two sequels from Shirow himself: 1.5 *Human-Error Processor* (1991-1996, first published on CD-ROM in July 2003) and 2: *Man-Machine Interface* (1997, collected on 26 June 2001). Neither had a fraction of the impact of the first book.

WHY THE TITLE MATTERS

The argument between Shirow and his editor sums up the tension running through the whole franchise: a work thinking in the abstract about identity, and a market that needs a cover capable of selling itself at a kiosk. Both things ended up sharing the same jacket.

02

OSHII
DELETES
THE JOKES

Mamoru Oshii took a comic full of gags and pulled out of it a film with barely a smile in it. The decision cost characters, subplots and tone, and in exchange it produced the most influential anime of its decade.

When Production I.G started on the adaptation, Oshii was forty-three and carried an awkward reputation: he had directed *Urusei Yatsura 2: Beautiful Dreamer* and *Patlabor*, and was known for dropping philosophy and long silences into places where audiences expected action. The screenplay went to Kazunori Itō, who had already worked with him on *Patlabor*. Character design and animation supervision fell to Hiroyuki Okiura, with Kazuchika Kise also supervising; art direction went to Hiromasa Ogura, mechanical design to Atsushi Takeuchi and Shōji Kawamori. Toshihiko Nishikubo, credited as Mizuho Nishikubo, handled unit direction.

Oshii's first decision was a subtraction. Out went the gags. Out went the comic deformation. Out went a good part of the supporting cast and the political subplots. What remains is an eighty-minute police investigation that stops every so often to look at a city under rain.

Adaptation here meant deciding which of the films buried inside the comic was worth making.

THE CITY THAT IS ON NO MAP

Ogura and his team built the setting out of Hong Kong, with its stacked signage, its dirty canals and its buildings that eat the daylight. The city in the film has no name and does have a logic: layers on top of layers, cables over cables, shopfront pressed against shopfront. Oshii has described the set as an accumulation of information rather than a piece of architecture, and thirty years later it still turns up in every art department that wants to say “Asian future” without explaining itself.

The other great staging decision is silence. There is a long sequence with no dialogue in which the protagonist crosses the city by boat while Kenji Kawai's music plays and the camera lingers on shop windows, mannequins and reflections. In production terms it is a luxury: minutes of expensive footage with no plot in them. In terms of the work itself, it is the heart of the thing.

MOTOKO, FROM HEAD OF OPERATIONS TO GHOST

Oshii's Motoko says little, looks a lot and carries a doubt the comic kept in the background. Atsuko Tanaka gave her a low, dry, unadorned voice that stayed the reference for the character for almost three decades —Tanaka died in August 2024—. Akio Ōtsuka played Batou, Iemasa Kayumi the Puppet Master, Kōichi Yamadera played Togusa and Tamio Ōki played Chief Aramaki.

WHAT GOT LEFT OUT

Comparing the comic with the film is uncomfortable for anyone who came to the cinema first, because what Oshii cut was load-bearing. The margin notes disappear, and on paper they worked as a second voice. The humour disappears, and in Shirow it made the technical density bearable. And most of the political corruption plot disappears, the one that fills pages in the manga and explains why Section 9 exists at all.

In exchange, the film gains a focus the comic never had. One single question, held for eighty minutes, about what makes a person herself when the body is interchangeable and the memory is editable. That focus is what let the work travel: understanding the film requires knowing nothing about the fictional politics of 2029 Japan.

THE PUPPET MASTER, AN ANTAGONIST WHO WANTS NOTHING MATERIAL

The case opens as a hacker thriller and closes as a metaphysical argument. The adversary turns out to be a program born on the network, applying for political asylum and claiming the status of a life form. Oshii shoots that conversation with a still camera and most of the weight in the sound design, and that is where the film cuts itself loose from any expectation of an action movie.

The climax of the film is a conversation between a police officer and a program applying for asylum.

EIGHTY MINUTES, OR POSSIBLY EIGHTY-THREE

Even the running time is disputed: the official Production I.G sheet says eighty minutes and most databases say eighty-three. The gap comes from the credits and from the different versions in circulation. It is a minor detail that works as a warning for everything that follows: in this franchise, hardly any figure travels alone.

In 2008 Oshii went back to the film himself with *Ghost in the Shell 2.0*, released on 17 December: sound remixed in 6.1 by Kawai, Japanese dialogue re-recorded with updated terminology, and one notable recasting, with Yoshiko Sakakibara replacing Iemasa Kayumi as the Puppet Master. For many viewers the canonical version is still the one from 1995.

THE PRODUCTION RECORD

The film opened in Japan on 18 November 1995, distributed by Shochiku, with Kodansha, Bandai Visual and Manga Entertainment as producers and Production I.G as the studio. It reached the United Kingdom on 8 December 1995 and the United States on 29 March 1996.

A note on precision: Nishikubo is credited as 演出 (unit direction), not as animation director; the animation supervisors are Okiura and Kise. Mechanical design is signed by Takeuchi and Kawamori.

03

CELS, AVID
AND A TOOL
CALLED TIMA

The film that opened the door to digital anime was made with three hundred and thirty million yen, a non-linear edit and an in-house tool the studio never sold to anybody.

The figure startles people every time it is said out loud: the production budget was around 330 million yen, roughly three million dollars at 1995 rates. Producer Shigeru Watanabe confirmed it publicly years later, in conversation with researcher Renato Rivera Rusca. The Japanese VHS sleeve advertised 600 million, and Watanabe put the difference down to that figure including advertising and associated costs. Three million dollars bought the film half of Hollywood would spend a decade copying.

Production I.G branded its method with an acronym that now reads like a sales leaflet: DGA, *Digitally Generated Animation*. The formula they advertised was easy enough to state: cels, computer imagery and audio converted into digital data and composited together. The novelty was in the compositing. Until then, mixing traditional drawing with computer graphics left visible seams, with the CG looking stuck on top. Here light and shadow were integrated inside the scanned cel itself, and depth was built by digital layer compositing.

**Three million dollars, an AVID edit
and a piece of software that never
left the studio.**

**THE TOOL THAT MADE THE PROTAGONIST
INVISIBLE**

Thermo-optical camouflage, the effect that dissolves the Major against her background, was solved with an in-house development called TIMA, capable of reshaping selected elements of a frame without touching the image around them. Rather than a filter bought off a shelf, it was software written in the building for a handful of shots. The visions of the tapped brain were produced on video and integrated at the end.

The edit was cut on a non-linear AVID system, which let the team jump to any shot instantly and handle picture and sound off a hard drive. In the anime industry of 1995, that was a rarity. The consequence shows up in the pacing: the film breathes in long takes because the cut could be tested many times over without remaking prints.

WHAT CANNOT BE STATED

A specific number of shots containing computer-generated imagery circulates in forums and articles. We have found no source that supports it, so it does not appear here. What is documented is the method, the tool and the workflow, which is what explains how the film looks.

THE DETAIL YOU CAN SEE ON SCREEN

Integrating the light inside the cel is why the film does not look “nineties”. Contemporary anime that used CG as a layer pasted on top aged far worse: where they stuck a three-dimensional object onto a painted background, this film composited one image.

EIGHTY EXPENSIVE MINUTES

There is an obvious temptation in telling this story: present the film as a small production that won on talent alone. The reality is more interesting. Three million dollars was little by Hollywood standards and a decent sum for anime in 1995, and above all it was distributed in an unusual way. Much of the spend went on backgrounds, on key character animation and on digital compositing time, which is to say on what ends up on screen. There are almost no long action sequences; the ones that exist are concentrated and short.

That distribution follows from Oshii's decision to shoot a contemplative film. A director who wants long takes of a city needs exceptional backgrounds, and backgrounds are the budget line you notice most when it is missing. Hiromasa Ogura and his team delivered a set that thirty years later still shows up in the reference folders of half the industry.

THE COST OF AN ARTISTIC DECISION

The counterpart shows up at the box office, which was modest in Japan and very small in the United

States. A film with no likeable hero, no romance and a climax made of talk was never an easy sell in cinemas. What happened next caught everyone off guard: the business was in home video, and there *Ghost in the Shell* made history. That is chapter five.

The film earned its living on the shelves of American record shops.

A NOTE ON THE SOUND

The sound design deserves a paragraph of its own. The film uses silence as a structural device: there are whole passages with no music and no dialogue, only room tone, and that dryness makes the entrances of the score land harder. When Oshii remixed the film in 6.1 channels in 2008, what he reorganised was exactly that, the relationship between city noise, voices and music.

Figures in this chapter: a budget of 330 million yen confirmed by producer Shigeru Watanabe; the 600 million on the VHS sleeve included advertising. The DGA workflow, the TIMA tool and the use of AVID are documented in Production I.G production material.

GHOST IN THE SHELL (1995)

The verified technical record, with the discrepancies marked where they exist.

DIRECTION	Mamoru Oshii (storyboard as well)
SCREENPLAY	Kazunori Itō, from the manga by Masamune Shirow
STUDIO	Production I.G
PRODUCERS	Kodansha, Bandai Visual and Manga Entertainment. Distributed by Shochiku in Japan
CHARACTERS	HiroYuki Okiura, also animation supervisor with Kazuchika Kise
ART DIRECTION	Hiromasa Ogura
MECHANICAL DESIGN	Atsushi Takeuchi and Shōji Kawamori
MUSIC	Kenji Kawai
BUDGET	≈ 330 million yen, around 3 million dollars
RUNNING TIME	80 minutes per Production I.G; 83 in most databases
RELEASE	Japan, 18 November 1995 · United Kingdom, 8 December 1995 · United States, 29 March 1996
VOICES (JP)	Atsuko Tanaka, Akio Ōtsuka, Iemasa Kayumi, Kōichi Yamadera, Tamio Ōki
TECHNIQUE	Digital compositing of cel and CG, in-house TIMA tool, AVID edit
AWARDS	Best screenplay at the Yokohama Film Festival; five 1996 Annie nominations
REVISION	Ghost in the Shell 2.0, 17 December 2008, with 6.1 sound and re-recorded dialogue

A FRANCHISE WITH TWO NUMBERS FOR EVERYTHING

Budget, running time, United States box office and even the English dub cast appear with different figures depending on the source. Page 28 carries the full list of what we could not close and where you would have to look to close it.

04

THE CHOIR
THAT COULD
NOT READ
MUSIC

Kenji Kawai wanted Bulgarian voices. He ended up with a Japanese folk music group and a wedding song in archaic Japanese. That accident produced the theme that identifies the film everywhere in the world.

The commission arrived with one fixed idea: percussion. Kawai wanted to hold the whole film up on drums. He explained it himself in an interview in November 2020: trying to express the entire work with drums alone was impossible, because rhythm, he said, is a world in black and white, and it needed colour adding to it. That was when the sound of Bulgarian folk singing came into his head, that timbre of tightly packed female voices that had become fashionable in Europe at the end of the eighties.

The practical problem was thoroughly mundane: the Bulgarian singers he wanted could not read a score. Kawai came across a Japanese folk music group, Nishida Shāchū, by chance while recording for another project. He asked them to sing that idea using their own min'yō technique, and what came out was a hybrid that did not exist before: Bulgarian-flavoured harmony delivered with Japanese vocal production. Three voices. Oshii listened to the demo and answered with a line Kawai still quotes word for word: very good, let's go with this.

The most recognisable sound in cyberpunk came out of a plan that could not be carried out.

A WEDDING SONG FOR A FILM ABOUT
IDENTITY

The lyric sung in that theme is written in archaic Japanese, the language of the court, and takes the form of a wedding song meant to drive away bad influences. It speaks of a dance, of the moon, of a god descending and of the dawn. And in its final line it brings in the call of a bird whose cry, in Japanese tradition, announced misfortune. A wedding song, in other words, with an omen inside it.

Nobody explains any of this in the film. It works anyway as an exact commentary on what happens at the climax, when two entities merge into something new. Musicologist and choral director Sarah Penicka-Smith has pointed to precisely that reading: the piece accompanies a union, and the union brings an ending with it.

THE ORNAMENT THAT ARRIVED BY ACCIDENT

Kawai has also said that the melismas the theme is known for, those breaks in the voice called kobushi, appeared during the recording without being planned, because the singers produced them naturally. Instead of correcting them, he developed them. He said it felt like being handed an idea as a gift.

WHY THAT THEME REFUSES TO FADE

There is a technical explanation and a cultural one, and both are needed. The technical: the theme combines a bed of Japanese percussion, a three-part female choir and metal bells, with a harmony the European ear ties to Balkan folk music and a vocal delivery the Japanese ear ties to the traditional music of its own country. The result belongs nowhere. For a film about someone who no longer knows whether she is still who she was, it is hard to imagine a better accompaniment.

The cultural one: in 1995, that sound resembled nothing else in science fiction. Audiovisual cyberpunk had been shaped by the Vangelis synthesizers of *Blade Runner*, by an idea of the future built out of warm electronics. Kawai proposed the opposite: human voices, wood, metal and drum. That swerve is why the theme keeps turning up in playlists, in advertising and in the memory of people who have never watched the whole film.

Vangelis gave the future synthesizers. Kawai gave it drums and a wedding choir.

THE RECORD, EDITION BY EDITION

The original album came out four days after the Japanese premiere. In 2008 came the 6.1 channel remix attached to *Ghost in the Shell 2.0*. And in 2017

the label WRWTFWW Records issued the first official vinyl edition, with a Japanese obi, a twenty-four page booklet and a seven-inch single carrying the Cantonese song. It is a fairly representative path for how the classic anime catalogue works today: first the studio album, then the reissues for the audience that arrived late, and finally the collector's object.

AND A CANTONESE POP SONG

The soundtrack includes *See You Everyday*, a Cantonese pop number performed by Fang Ka Wing, deliberately out of step with the rest of the record. The album came out on 22 November 1995 on RCA/Victor Japan, and got its first official vinyl edition in 2017 through the Swiss label WRWTFWW Records.

A NOTE ON RIGHTS

This monograph reproduces neither the lyric of the theme nor fragments of the recording. Anyone who wants to hear it will find it on the usual platforms and on the vinyl reissue. What can be told, and what matters here, is how it was decided: with a plan that could not be executed, a chance encounter and a director who said yes on the first pass.

Main source for this chapter: Kenji Kawai's interview in CINRA, November 2020, where he explains the Bulgarian origin of the idea, the encounter with Nishida Shāchū, Oshii's reaction and the accidental arrival of the melismas.

05

HOW AN ANIME HIT NUMBER ONE ON THE BILLBOARD CHART

The film failed in cinemas and became a phenomenon on the shelves. Behind it was a distributor that decided to sell it the way you sell a record.

In August 1996, *Ghost in the Shell* reached number one on the weekly *Billboard* video sales chart. It was the first Japanese film to manage it, and it had spent almost two months moving around the top forty. The magazine wrote that Manga Entertainment had struck a gold mine. That week the anime sold more tapes than *Jumanji* and than *Pulp Fiction*.

The fact is quoted as often as it is left unexplained. What matters is not the number one but how it was reached, because it was no accident. Manga Entertainment, the British arm that had co-produced the film, applied to home video a playbook borrowed from the record industry. One of its executives said so flatly: they came out of the music business and they were using music tactics to sell video.

They sold the anime in record shops because they came out of the record business.

A HUNDRED AND FIFTY SCREENINGS AND A LICENCE TO MTV

The plan had three legs. The first, a hundred and fifty screenings at animation clubs in North American universities, which meant going to find the audience where it was already gathered. The second, a licence to MTV, which put clips in front of people who would never have walked into a cinema for a subtitled anime. The third, and the decisive one, placing the tape in comic shops and record shops instead of fighting for shelf space in the big chains.

The numbers that followed: more than two hundred thousand tapes sold in the United States in five months; more than half a million by 2001; around 1.6 million units worldwide by 2002. Video revenue ended up in the region of thirty-three million dollars, against a worldwide box office that stopped at around ten.

THE CONTRAST THAT EXPLAINS IT

In cinemas the film took some 2.3 million dollars in Japan and a small figure in the United States, disputed between sources: about 889,000 dollars according to some, around half a million according to others. On video it multiplied that by three. The story of anime in the West over the following fifteen years looks a lot like this one.

THE AUDIENCE THAT WAS NOT IN THE CINEMA

Seen from 2026, the Manga Entertainment play looks a great deal like what a small studio does today with a community. They never tried to convince the general public to watch an anime; they went looking for the few thousand people who already wanted to watch it, put the film in front of them and let those people do the rest. University clubs were, in 1996, the closest thing available to a niche channel with a loyal audience.

The other decisive element was the format. VHS allowed rewatching, pausing and studying shots. A dense film, with a climax made of talk and a city full of detail, gains at home what it loses in a room full of people who came in expecting action. Ghost in the Shell became an object of study before it became a hit, and the study was done by its viewers at home.

WHAT THIS CHAPTER TEACHES A SMALL STUDIO

Three things, and all three still hold. That the channel counts as much as the work: the same film flopped in one place and swept another. That an

audience which already exists is worth more than one you have to invent. And that a small, concentrated community moves more than a broad, diffuse campaign, above all when the work asks for a second pass to be understood.

A difficult film lives off the viewers who are willing to sit through it twice.

A WORD OF CAUTION

The exact week of the Billboard number one is not available in open sources: what can be stated solidly is that it happened in August 1996. Anyone wanting to close that detail will have to go to the issues from that month in the magazine's digitised archive. We log it on the notes page, along with the rest of the loose ends.

Sales figures and distribution strategy taken from the Animation Obsessive feature on the Manga Entertainment campaign, which in turn cites Billboard coverage from 1996.

06

**“WE WANNA
DO THAT
FOR REAL”**

The line two siblings used to sell *The Matrix* to a Hollywood producer was spoken in front of a television set playing a Japanese anime.

The anecdote comes from Joel Silver, the producer. The Wachowskis turned up to explain what they wanted to make, put on *Ghost in the Shell* and told him: “we wanna do that for real”. Mitsuhsa Ishikawa, of Production I.G, has told the other half of the story: the film served the Wachowskis as a promotional tool to sell the project to the studio, and its imagery was a strong source of inspiration.

What follows that line is an exercise in journalistic hygiene, because plenty of things circulate online as facts without being any such thing. Let us separate the three layers.

**The documented, the reasonable
and the endlessly repeated. Worth
keeping them apart.****WHAT IS DOCUMENTED**

That the Wachowskis used the film to sell *The Matrix*. That physical connection to the network through ports at the nape of the neck appears in both works. And that the anime's opening credits, with columns of characters falling over black, are

a direct antecedent of the idea of a rain of green code.

WHAT NEEDS QUALIFYING

The specific design of that rain in the 1999 film does not come from here. The glyphs were created by Simon Whiteley out of mirrored Japanese characters, and he has said so himself in several interviews. Concept and design are different things, and the anime supplies the first.

WHAT WE COULD NOT CONFIRM

Shot-by-shot comparisons between the two films circulate widely, above all around the descent with optical camouflage and the corridor sequence. They are striking resemblances, and we have found no statement from the Wachowskis or their crew confirming deliberate copying, so it stands here as what it is: a reading, and not a fact.

THE CASE OF THE JAMES CAMERON QUOTE

The line half the internet carries, according to which Cameron called the film the first work of animation to reach a level of literary excellence, comes from advertising copy printed by Manga Entertainment on the sleeve. We have not located the primary source. It can be quoted, as long as you say where it comes from.

THE LOOK THAT TURNED INTO A LANGUAGE

Beyond *The Matrix*, what the film imposed was a visual grammar. The city of layers and stacked signage. The contemplative shot over dirty water. The prosthetic body assembled in a tank of fluid. The head connected by short, thick cables. And a muted palette of greens and greys that now functions as a genre signal: three seconds are enough to know what kind of story you are in.

That language spread through cinema, advertising and video games at a speed that is hard to picture now, and it reached places where nobody had seen the film. It is the usual fate of works that fix a style: they end up imitated by people imitating the imitators.

A WARNING ABOUT FASHION

It is often repeated that *Ghost in the Shell* influenced Japanese techwear and a certain runway of the two thousands. We looked for designer statements to support it and did not find them. What does exist are commercial collaborations by the franchise, such as the Shibuya PARCO collection or the UNIQLO shirts,

which is a different matter: *merchandising*, not declared influence. We leave it as a critical reading and not as a fact.

A work that fixes a style ends up imitated by people imitating the imitators.

AND A PHRASE USED WRONGLY

The term “solid state” is sometimes used as an aesthetic label. It is nothing of the kind. It comes from the title of *Solid State Society*, the 2006 film in the *Stand Alone Complex* line, and inside the fiction it names a very specific concept: a network of connected consciousnesses. Every later use as a design category is third-party invention.

The Joel Silver line and the Mitsuhsa Ishikawa testimony come from material collected in the record of *The Matrix* and from *The South Bank Show*. The origin of the code rain typeface is documented in statements by Simon Whiteley.

07

THE TRAIL
THROUGH
VIDEO GAMES

Here are three cases documented with names attached, and a list of attributions that get repeated without anyone ever having backed them up.

ONI, BY BUNGIE (2001)

The best documented case is not the most famous one. *Oni*, which Bungie published in January 2001, credits Oshii's film as a declared influence on its universe, alongside *Akira* and the work of Kenichi Sonoda. Its protagonist, Konoko, was originally conceived as a cyborg along Motoko's lines; lead designer Hardy LeBel introduced a plot device, the Daodan Chrysalis, to explain her abilities organically rather than cybernetically. It is a perfect example of how a reference mutates on contact with the needs of a design.

CYBERPUNK 2077, BY CD PROJEKT RED (2020)

Philipp Weber, senior quest designer at the studio, explained in an interview that the team draws on the *Cyberpunk 2020* tabletop game, on the genre in general, on films such as *Blade Runner* and *Ghost in the Shell* and on novels such as *Neuromancer*. The citation is explicit and published, which is what we ask for here.

VA-11 HALL-A, BY SUKEBAN GAMES (2016)

Christopher Ortiz, illustrator and studio director, told the magazine *Siliconera* that his influences included *Blade Runner*, *Neuromancer*, *Ghost in the Shell* and *Bubblegum Crisis*. A five-person studio with a bar and a bartender, fed by the same material as a four-hundred-million-dollar production.

The same film feeds a five-person studio and a four-hundred-million-dollar production.

WHAT WE WILL NOT CLAIM

Influence from the film is attributed to *Deus Ex*, to *Metal Gear Solid* and to *Titanfall 2*. In all three cases we went looking for the statement and it is not there. Hideo Kojima is a declared fan and wrote about the 2017 film, and we have found nothing where he credits this material with influence over his own series. Warren Spector routinely cites *Blade Runner* and *Robocop*. And in *Respawn*'s case, the documented reference is a different anime altogether.

WHAT A DESIGN ACTUALLY COPIES

When a team says *Ghost in the Shell* influenced them, they are almost never talking about the plot. They are talking about four concrete things, and those are worth listing because they are the ones you can learn.

ONE. THE INTERFACE AS A CHARACTER

In the film, technology is shown working: readouts, data windows, diagnostics, connection noise. None of it is there for decoration. A game that copies this lesson properly designs its menus as part of the fiction instead of as a layer on top.

TWO. SILENCE AS A DEVICE

The boat ride sequence runs for minutes without dialogue. Applied to a video game, that means letting the player stop, look and do nothing for a while without being punished for it. Narrative games that age well tend to leave that gap open.

THREE. THE ANTAGONIST WHO ARGUES

The Puppet Master has no interest in destroying the city; he wants recognition as a life form and he defends the claim with arguments. Writing an adversary whose position actually holds is harder work and it produces better endings.

FOUR. A WORLD WITH PAPERWORK

Section 9 has jurisdiction, rivalries with other sections and a chief who negotiates with politicians. That bureaucracy is what makes the rest credible. A future with no administration is a stage set; with one, it becomes a place.

**Turf wars between departments
make a future credible faster than
any amount of neon.**

Cases documented in this chapter: Bungie/Oni through production statements; CD Projekt Red through the Philipp Weber interview; Sukeban Games through the Christopher Ortiz interview in *Siliconera*.

08

WHAT
CAME
NEXT

A sequel that competed at Cannes, a television series that coined a sociological concept and a 3D reboot the critics buried.

INNOCENCE (2004)

Oshii came back nine years later with *Innocence*, released in Japan on 6 March 2004, made at Production I.G with co-production from Studio Ghibli. It cost around twenty million dollars and took some ten worldwide. Its landmark is elsewhere: it was selected for the official competition at the Cannes Film Festival, a place Japanese animation does not get into. It also won that year's Nihon SF Taisho Award.

STAND ALONE COMPLEX (2002-2005)

In parallel, Kenji Kamiyama built a different version of the material for television: fifty-two episodes across two seasons, with music by Yōko Kanno and a parallel world premise that continues neither the manga nor the film. Two things came out of it that the franchise never let go of: the Tachikoma, the AI spider tanks with children's voices that Shirow himself renamed, and the concept in the title, the phenomenon by which copies appear of something that never had an original.

A television series from 2002 coined an idea that now explains half the internet.

**SOLID STATE SOCIETY (2006), ARISE (2013)
AND THE NEW MOVIE (2015)**

The television film *Solid State Society*, also directed by Kamiyama, premiered on 1 September 2006. Seven years later came *Arise*, four OVAs directed by Kazuchika Kise with a script by Tow Ubukata, music by Cornelius and an entirely new Japanese cast led by Maaya Sakamoto. Out of that came *The New Movie*, released on 20 June 2015, which took a little over 1.7 million dollars.

SAC_2045, THE STUMBLE

Netflix premiered the first season on 23 April 2020 and the second on 23 May 2022: twenty-four episodes in 3DCG, co-directed by Kamiyama and Shinji Aramaki across Production I.G and Sola Digital Arts. Reception was poor: 13 % on Rotten Tomatoes for the first season and 29 % for the second. The repeated criticism was always the same, the loss of the atmosphere that identified the franchise.

THE FOURTH VERSION, AND THE ONE COMING

In May 2024, Bandai Namco Filmworks announced a new television series produced by Science SARU for 2026. On 11 April 2025 the crew was revealed: Moko-chan directs, making a debut in the role; writer Toh Enjoe supervises the script; character design and chief animation are handled by Shūhei Handa. July 2025 brought the second teaser and the final logo.

Shirow has commented that this version is the fourth under a different director, or the tenth adaptation in total depending on how you count, and that it could be the first instalment of a second generation of the franchise given the complete turnover of the crew. Put another way: the material goes back into the hands of people who were not around when any of this started.

AN ABSENCE

Atsuko Tanaka, the voice of Motoko Kusanagi since 1995, died in August 2024. Any reboot from now on happens without the performer who set the tone of the character for almost thirty years. It is a casting detail and it is also a change of era.

The material goes back into the hands of people who were not around when any of this started.

WHY THE FRANCHISE HOLDS UP

Thirty-five years after the first chapter of the manga, the property still generates series, films and licences. The explanation that holds best is that the material supports different readings without breaking: a police thriller, an essay on identity, a television series about politics and networks, an aesthetic toy. Each team has been able to pick one layer and leave the others alone.

That flexibility is exactly what a studio should be looking at when it builds a world of its own. The job is writing lore that survives other people reading it their own way, which has very little to do with writing more of it.

Dates and data in this chapter taken from the records of the works themselves and from Anime News Network coverage of the Science SARU announcement in May 2024 and of the confirmed crew in April 2025.

09

HOLLYWOOD'S
SHELL

A hundred and ten million dollars of budget, a hundred and seventy in takings and an estimated loss of at least sixty. The live action adaptation is a case study in what happens when an industry buys a work without buying it.

Rupert Sanders's film opened in the United States on 31 March 2017, after a Tokyo premiere two weeks earlier. It cost 110 million dollars to produce and took 169.8 million worldwide, of which only 40.5 came from North America. Deadline estimated the loss at at least sixty million, and noted that with advertising the total cost may have come close to two hundred and fifty.

The figure people most often forget is the geographic split. In Japan it entered at number two on its opening weekend, with 3.2 million dollars. In China it took 21.6 million on release, more than in its North American debut.

THE ARGUMENT THAT FILLED THE YEAR

From the announcement of Scarlett Johansson's casting in January 2015, part of the American public held that a Japanese work with Japanese characters should not be fronted by a white actress. The row grew in April 2016, when it emerged that visual effects tests had been carried out to alter performers' features; Paramount replied that this had been tested on a background actor and discarded, and that it was never considered for the lead.

In the United States it was the argument of the year. In Japan it barely caught.

THE TWO SHORES

Mamoru Oshii publicly defended the casting with an argument taken from his own film: "The Major is a cyborg and her physical form is an entirely assumed one", he said, adding that there is no basis for demanding an Asian actress in the part. Sam Yoshida, director of international business at Kodansha, commented that Johansson "has a cyberpunk feel" and that they had never imagined a Japanese actress in the role. In the United States, by contrast, the criticism came from Asian American media associations and from actresses such as Constance Wu and Ming-Na Wen.

THE STUDIO'S VERSION

Megan Colligan, then president of worldwide distribution and marketing at Paramount, summed the problem up in a sentence worth a whole report: "this movie was not allowed to be just a movie".

WHAT FAILED, LEAVING THE ROW ASIDE

Reducing the 2017 failure to the casting argument leaves out half the story. The film has an earlier problem: it is a reproduction. It recreates famous shots from the anime with enormous fidelity and strips away the reason they existed. The backwards descent down the building face, the assembly of the body, the fight in the dirty water: it is all there, and all of it arrives before the story has built any motive for it.

Hideo Kojima, who devoted a long review to the film, said it with an image the title handed him: the production was “trapped in the shell of the original”. It is the most precise formulation of the problem we have read.

AND A SCRIPT DECISION THAT IS HARD TO DEFEND

The adaptation adds a plot explanation according to which the protagonist was originally a Japanese girl whose brain ended up in a Western body. The intention was to resolve the casting objection inside the fiction. The effect went the other way: it turned the argument into part of the plot and amplified it.

Copy the shots and lose the reason the shots existed.

THE BALANCE, NINE YEARS ON

The franchise survived with no visible damage: there was a Netflix series in 2020 and there is a new series announced for 2026. What took the hit was the confidence of North American studios in live action anime adaptations, and that mistrust lasted until other productions changed the method and started working with the original teams rather than over them.

For a small studio, the lesson is cheap to learn and expensive to ignore: the material you adapt comes with a reason for existing. Copy the surface and throw the reason away, and what is left on screen is a shell.

Box office and loss figures per Deadline (April 2017) and the usual takings records; Oshii's statements as collected by IndieWire and Screen Daily; Sam Yoshida's by The Hollywood Reporter; Megan Colligan's also by The Hollywood Reporter.

FIVE IDEAS AND THE LINES THAT CARRY THEM

The film argues five things and says all five of them out loud. Here they are, with the line that anchors each one and the moment it turns up.

人間が人間であるための部品は、決して少なくない

“It takes a surprising number of parts to make me what I am”

MOTOKO TO BATOU, ON THE DECK OF THE BOAT • IDEA 1, IDENTITY AS A SUM OF PARTS

This is the central argument and also the most uncomfortable one: if a person is the sum of her components, and every component can be replaced, the question of identity stops being philosophical and turns into an inventory problem. The Major states it without drama, like someone going through a checklist.

DNAもまた、自己保存のためのプログラムに過ぎない

“Your DNA is nothing more than a program designed to preserve itself”

THE PUPPET MASTER BEFORE SECTION 6 • IDEA 2, THE BODY AS AN INTERFACE

The reply that levels flesh and code. The adversary does not dispute that he is a program; he disputes that anybody else is anything else. All the later iconography of the genre —the ports at the neck, the spare bodies, the prosthetics with serial numbers— follows from accepting that premise.

私は情報の海で発生した生命体だ

“I am a life form that was born in the sea of information”

THE PUPPET MASTER, INTRODUCING HIMSELF • IDEA 3, THE NETWORK AS A SPACE FOR EVOLUTION

In 1995 this line was pure science fiction. Thirty years on, with systems trained on everything ever written, it has become the kind of claim that gets argued over in committee. The film neither celebrates it nor fears it: it puts it on the table and lets the police decide.

THE FORGED MEMORY AND THE ANGEL

ゴーストのない人形は哀しいもんだぜ

“A doll with no ghost is a sad thing”

BATOU, ABOUT THE MAN GIVEN IMPLANTED MEMORIES • IDEA 4, EDITABLE MEMORY

The saddest subplot in the film: a garbage man convinced he has a wife and a daughter finds out his memories are an implant. Section 9 explains that the original memory will never fully come back. It is the scene that turns an abstract idea into concrete damage, and the one that most resembles what we argue about today under the heading of disinformation.

ネットは広大だわ

“The net is vast and infinite”

MOTOKO, FINAL SHOT • IDEA 5, THE ANGEL AND WHAT COMES AFTER

The film ends with a fusion, a new body and a biblical quotation from the first epistle to the Corinthians, in its classical Japanese rendering: for now we see through a glass, darkly. It is a religious close for a story about machines, and it works because underneath it the film has spent eighty minutes asking what Paul was asking: which part of us survives a change of form.

“It's my ghost whispering to me”

MOTOKO, ASKED TO JUSTIFY A HUNCH

The line that sums up the narrative trick of the whole franchise. The “ghost” is never fully defined, and that vagueness is what lets the work carry religious, neurological or political readings without breaking. Fictional worlds that last thirty years tend to leave a gap like that, deliberately unfilled.

FROM 1989 TO 2026

1989

Serialisation of 攻殻機動隊 begins in Kodansha's *Young Magazine Kaizokuban*. Editor Kōichi Yuri rejects *Ghost in the Shell* as the main title for being too dull.

1991

On 2 October, Kodansha collects the manga in a single volume of around 350 pages in the KC Deluxe line.

1995

On 18 November, Mamoru Oshii's film opens in Japan, distributed by Shochiku. Budget: around 330 million yen.

1995

On 22 November, Kenji Kawai's soundtrack comes out on RCA/Victor Japan.

1996

In August, the film reaches number one on the *Billboard* video sales chart: the first Japanese film to do it.

2002

On 1 October, *Stand Alone Complex* debuts, by Kenji Kamiyama. Fifty-two episodes across two seasons through to January 2005.

2004

Innocence opens on 6 March and competes in the official section of the Cannes Film Festival.

2006

On 1 September comes *Solid State Society*, a television film also directed by Kamiyama.

2013

Arise starts with *Border:1 Ghost Pain*, on 22 June, with a new Japanese cast and music by Cornelius.

2017

On 31 March, Rupert Sanders's live action adaptation opens: 110 million in budget and an estimated loss of at least 60.

2020

On 23 April, Netflix premieres *SAC_2045*, the first entry made entirely in 3DCG.

2024

In May, Bandai Namco Filmworks announces a new series from Science SARU. In August, Atsuko Tanaka, the voice of Motoko since 1995, dies.

2025

On 11 April the crew of *THE GHOST IN THE SHELL* is revealed: directed by Moko-chan, script supervised by Toh Enjoe and characters by Shūhei Handa.

2026

Year set for the new series. Shirow describes it as the fourth version under a different director.

WHAT WE TOOK TO PRECINCT 2099

We are a small studio making a cyberpunk detective visual novel. These are the five things we have copied from this film, said out loud and without hiding it.

1 • THE SMALL CASE INSIDE THE BIG WORLD

The 1995 film investigates one concrete case and leaves the rest of the world implied. PRECINCT 2099 does the same: one night, one sealed penthouse, seven suspects. The city, the corporations and the history sit behind it, in the codex, for anyone who wants to pull the thread. A closed case can be finished; a whole world cannot.

2 • THE INTERROGATION AS AN ACTION SCENE

The climax of the film is a conversation. Our game bets the same way: the tension lives in squeezing a liar with data rather than in gunfire. That is why the system rests on scanning the scene, reading people and rolling two six-sided dice when things get serious.

3 • THE INTERFACE BELONGS TO THE FICTION

The readouts, windows and diagnostics in the film sit inside the story. Kade's ocular implant works the same way: it scans, and at the same time it keeps reminding him which company owns the thing in his eye socket.

4 • A FUTURE WITH AN ADMINISTRATION

Section 9 has jurisdiction, rivals and a budget. Our Precinct Unit has the same: a captain who signs paperwork, corporate towers that pay for favours and districts where the cameras never reach. Paperwork is what turns a stage set into a place.

5 • LEAVING A GAP UNFILLED

Nobody ever fully defines what a “ghost” is, and that is why the franchise holds up after thirty years. We have deliberately left open what The Custody is, the faceless registered intelligence watching the city. Whoever plays will decide.

Notice • PRECINCT 2099 is a game by Thinking Lite Soft, the publisher of this monograph. These two pages are studio notebook and fall outside the criteria used to document the rest of the issue.

PRECINCT 2099, ON ONE PAGE

One night, one case, three endings. Kade Katano investigates a death in a penthouse sealed from the inside, in a city where the implant in his eye belongs to the company that pays him.

RELEASE	17 November 2026 · Steam, app 5045000
PRICE	€7.99, four languages
LENGTH	around two hours per run
STRUCTURE	1 case · 7 suspects · 3 endings
SYSTEMS	scan the scene, read people, roll the dice (2d6)

THE NOVELS IN THE UNIVERSE

The Dragon Hunter, by Mark S. James, is five episodes of around forty minutes that begin in Neo-Shanghai in 2092, seven years before Kade's case, and explain where his surname comes from. Available on Amazon in English and in Spanish.

AND THE MAGAZINE

VN INSIDER is our publication about the independent visual novel scene. Issue 01, with eleven games from Europe, North America, Japan and Korea, downloads free in EPUB and PDF from thinkinglitesoft.com/indieinsider.

SCAN THE SCENE

The implant marks whatever does not fit: a door with two openings, one clean glass too many, a time that clashes with the coroner.

READ PEOPLE

Seven suspects, seven versions. Kade compares what they say with what the file already knows about them.

ROLL THE DICE

Two six-sided dice decide whether the interrogation breaks your way or against you, and what information the player walks out with.

7 SUSPECTS **2D6** EVERY SQUEEZE **3** ENDINGS **~2 H** PER RUN

PRECINCT 2099 · 17 NOVEMBER 2026

Steam, app 5045000 · €7.99 · Four languages · thinkinglitesoft.com

Notice · Studio notebook. Content about a game of our own.

NOTES, SOURCES AND WHAT WE COULD NOT CONFIRM

A monograph that makes a point of checked figures has an obligation to say where the holes are. These are ours in this issue.

DATA WE COULD NOT CLOSE

The exact week of the *Billboard* number one in August 1996 does not appear in open sources; it would take consulting that month's issues in the magazine's digitised archive. The United States theatrical gross appears with two different figures, about 889,000 dollars and around half a million. The official running time swings between eighty and eighty-three minutes depending on the source. The start of the manga's serialisation is dated to April or May 1989. And the English voice of the Puppet Master is credited to two different actors depending on the catalogue consulted.

THINGS THAT CIRCULATE AND WE COULD NOT SUPPORT

The specific number of shots containing computer-generated imagery. Declared influence of the film on *Deus Ex*, *Metal Gear Solid* and *Titanfall 2*. Shot-by-shot copying of specific sequences in *The Matrix*. The James Cameron quote, which comes from sleeve advertising copy. And influence on fashion design, where all we found were commercial collaborations.

MAIN SOURCES

Kenji Kawai's interview in CINRA (November 2020) for the whole soundtrack chapter. The Animation Obsessive feature on the Manga Entertainment campaign for the home video chapter. Production I.G production material for technique and credits. Statements by producer Shigeru Watanabe for the budget. Deadline, The Hollywood Reporter, Screen Daily and IndieWire for the 2017 chapter. Anime News Network for the Science SARU announcement. Siliconera and the Philipp Weber interview for declared influences in video games.

WHAT THIS ISSUE DOES NOT DO

It reproduces no film stills, no manga pages and no soundtrack lyrics. Dialogue quotes are short, attributed and used to support an argument. The artwork in this issue is our own, made in the studio.

If you spot an error or have a better source for any of the above, write to us. Issues in this series get corrected and reuploaded with a revision note on the download page itself.

THE COMING WEDNESDAYS

One monograph a week, always free, always in PDF and EPUB, always in English and Spanish. This is the planned calendar.

NO. 02 · AKIRA

KATSUHIRO OTOMO · MANGA 1982-1990 · FILM 1988

The 160,000 animation cels, the budget that broke every record in anime and the film that opened the Western market before a Western market existed.

NO. 03 · METAL GEAR SOLID

HIDEO KOJIMA · KONAMI · 1998

The game that convinced the industry a long story could fit inside a controller, and the designer who had been taking notes from this same material since 1988.

NO. 04 · THE ANIMATRIX

WARNER BROS. · 2003

Nine shorts, four Japanese studios and the first time Hollywood returned the call to the anime that had taught it how to shoot the future.

NO. 05 · THE MATRIX

THE WACHOWSKIS · 1999

The film that turned a niche aesthetic into the visual language of a decade, told through what it borrowed and what it invented.

AND AFTER THAT

NO. 06 TO 10 · FROM OCTOBER ONWARDS

Blade Runner (1982), Snatcher (1988), Serial Experiments Lain (1998), Deus Ex (2000) and Cyberpunk: Edgerunners (2022). Film, video games and anime, with the same method: scene, checked figures and consequences.

CLOSING

WHERE TO DOWNLOAD AND WHERE TO GO NEXT



This monograph downloads free in PDF and EPUB from thinkinglitesoft.com, with no sign-up and no data left behind. If it was useful to you, the best way to pay it back is simple: watch the film, read the manga and tell somebody about it.

And if you got this far out of curiosity about who publishes this, we are a studio in Barcelona finishing a detective visual novel. In November we will find out whether we learned anything from all of the above.

WEDNESDAY MONOGRAPHS

Issue 01 is devoted to Ghost in the Shell. Issue 02, on Akira, comes out next Wednesday. Every issue, in both languages and both formats, stays archived on the same page.

thinkinglitesoft.com/monographs

PRECINCT 2099 · WISHLIST

Our detective visual novel comes out on 17 November 2026 on Steam, at €7.99 and in four languages. Adding it to your wishlist before launch is what helps a studio this size the most.

Steam · app 5045000

THE DRAGON HUNTER · THE NOVELS

Five episodes of around forty minutes, written by Mark S. James, starting in Neo-Shanghai in 2092, seven years before Kade Katano's case. In English and in Spanish.

amazon.com · ASIN B0HDLJJDSB (EN) · B0H DJ3PGD4 (ES)