Identity as Monstrosity in Contemporary Japan: Crises of the Fluctuating Self in *Spirited Away, Paprika,* and *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*

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Introduction

Monstrosity is a concept that encompasses a wide range of the weird and mysterious: the grotesque, the unnatural, and the supernatural. It warps familiar reality, and in its peculiar representation of the world, evokes an uneasy feeling of the odd and the bizarre. Monsters are figures of ambiguity, the unknown, beings of change and doubt that lead us to question the reality and definition of those around us, our surroundings, and even our own identity. They are an undeniable Other, and yet, they are something that humans create and propagate themselves, begging the question of where it is inside us, whether it might be an unease within ourselves and society, from which these monsters spring. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen describes in his seven theses on monster culture, "Monsters are our children. They can be pushed to the farthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world and in the forbidden recesses of our mind, but they always return.… These monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place.… They ask us why we have created them."[1]

Japan has a rich history of monster and supernatural culture that spans from pre-war folktales and traditions to a contemporary boom in depictions of the fantastic in popular anime (animation) and manga (comics). Japanese monsters, interchangeably referred to as either *yōkai* or *bakemono,* grew to such a level of popularity in the late twentieth century that it set off a Yōkai Boom, a fascination with all things supernatural that continues to today. This was a period during which the renewal of interest in folklore led to the "rediscovery" of the *yōkai* as a pop-culture icon[2] as they exploded in the media, in television, movies, comics, and even in scholarship and museum exhibits.[3]

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1 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 20.

2 Michael Dylan Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 163-4.

3 Gerald Figal, *Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan* (Durham: Duke

From *Godzilla* to *Pokémon,* monsters have infiltrated the culture of Japanese contemporary society. Particularly, the rise of interest in *yōkai* can be seen in the popularity of such works as Miyazaki Hayao's animated films *My Neighbor Totoro, Princess Mononoke, Spirited Away,* and also popular animated television titles like *Doraemon, Pokémon, Dragon Ball,* and Shigeru Mizuki's *Gegege no Kitaro*, tales of fantasy and monsters which come out of a long tradition of Japanese *yōkai* culture.[4]

Japan has a long history of animism which provides a strong predisposition for acceptance and association with the supernatural. Such beliefs were common, and the source of innumerable folktales. In the late nineteenth century, Yanagita Kunio, the pioneer of Japanese folklore study, made great efforts to investigate and collect these stories, eventually cataloguing the greatest collection of Japanese folktales, among which is the *Tōno Monogatari* (The Legends of Tono, 1910).[5] Along with the foundation of *yōkaigaku*, the study of *yōkai*, by Inoue Enryō in the late nineteenth century, this gave rise to other serious scholars in the field, including Komatsu Kazuhiko, a cultural anthropologist who writes on monster culture, and the link between "times of crisis" and the appearance of monsters in different modes of art.[6]

This passion for *yōkai* reveals a culture entranced by the allure of the fantastic and the monstrous. The question that inevitably arises when looking at the explosion of *yōkai* culture in Japan is that of what type of role, and what kind of significance this Other has. In other words, we might ask what monstrosity represents and offers to people, and what that then reveals about

University Press, 1999), p. 8.

4 Kazuhiko Komatsu, *Yōkaibunka Nyūmon* (Tokyo: Serika Shobō, 2006), pp. 9-10

5 Takayuki Tatsumi, *Full Metal Apache: Transactions Between Cyberpunk Japan and Avant-Pop America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 71-72.

6 Figal, p. 22.

society. From the boom in popularity of *yōkai*, it's clear that there is something that people identify with in the aspects of the monster and the other world. In his study which traces how *yōkai* reflect changes in cultural paradigms, Michael Dylan Foster describes the nature of *yōkai* as such:

> [T]he yōkai represents an admixture of weird corporeality with something … mysterious: yōkai bridge the intangible and tangible, spiritual and material, phenomenon and object. The mysterious is oriented toward what is beyond explanation, often beyond description: amorphous, confused, disturbing, or exciting, the pandemonium of the darkness with its uncontrollable, unseen forces.[7]

The notion that these features of the monstrous, so indefinable, transformative, and unknown in nature, have risen so high in popularity in society is intriguing. It reflects feelings of such uncertainty in society itself. That is namely, an uncertainty of identity that is expressed through these modes of monstrosity. It suggests a sense of indefinability, and changeability of the self, a fluidity of identity that has risen in the postmodern age.

Looking at the monstrous evokes a sense of the weird within oneself, and immersion in these worlds exacerbates such feelings of the strange. Contemporary tales of being thrown into these realms of the supernatural, and subsequently losing oneself in the process are particularly common in Japanese animation, which often portray events of a fantastical nature, whether it be depictions of metamorphoses, dream-like other worlds, or futuristic technology. Critically examining works that utilize bizarre other-worlds of monstrosity reveals a tendency to dwell on issues of the self in such contexts, ultimately suggesting a society in the midst of a crisis of identity. Three such films which encapsulate this crisis are Miyazaki Hayao's *Spirited Away*

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7 Foster, pp. 24-25.

(*Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*, 2001), Kon Satoshi's *Paprika* (2006), and Oshii Mamoru's *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (*Innocence,* 2004).

Each of these three films addresses issues of identity in varied fantastical contexts. They emphasize different qualities of *bakemono*, whether it is in an otherworld of *yōkai*, a subconscious dream world, or a technology driven cyborg future. In turn, they raise distinct concerns about the nature of the self and identity. All three films, however, reveal that aspects of the monstrous, such as the tendency towards changeability and the state of ambiguity, are becoming an undeniable part of the individual's struggle to define personal identity. They suggest that ultimately the postmodern contemporary world is not stable or strictly definable, but is just as freely fluctuating as these constructs of monstrosity that are used to represent the characters and other worlds of these films.

Chapter One

Transformation as Monstrosity:

Searching for Identity in Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*

Transformation, or alternatively, changeability, is one of the most prevalent traits of the monstrous; it is the quality of change from one state to another, a process representative of the in-between, resisting strict definition. The term transformation is often used in the context of physical metamorphosis, but in the context of this paper will be used more generally to refer to anything undergoing change. The defining aspect of transformation is this transition, a form of deception in which the change in appearance or quality is the deceiver, and the perceiver is the deceived. This quality of the monstrous is one which warps, or hides, its true nature. It impedes, and even prevents, the understanding of the real identity of a thing.

Michael Foster raises a similar concern in his discussion of the nature of Japanese *yōkai*. With such constant changes, he asks, how can we determine that any "thing" remains the same "thing"?[8] As a trait of the monstrous, transformation has long been associated with *yōkai* in Japan; the Japanese word for monster, *bakemono,* itself literally means "changing thing," a term "not limited to shape-shifting things;…signify[ing] a wide range of strangely formed, anomalous, or supernatural creatures." [9] Instability of form, he further explains, is characteristic of *yōkai:* "*Yōkai* are shapeshifters: the instant they are pinned down and labeled, they transform into something different."[10] Their nature is to evade definition; they are fluid, multi-faceted existences which embody our fears and capture our minds. We are constantly searching for a means to define them. In broader terms, Foster describes *yōkai* as being

8 Foster, p. 21.

9 Foster, p. 6.

10 Foster, p. 29.

> …variously translated as monster, spirit, goblin, ghost, demon, phantom, specter, fantastic being, low-order deity, or, more amorphously, as any unexplainable experience or numinous occurrence. I intentionally leave the definition open-ended, for the history of yōkai is very much the history of efforts to describe and define the object being considered. Because the meaning of the word changes with each attempt to limn its parameters, at the heart of this study are questions of signification and language. How do we talk of something ambiguous, continually shifting, a constant presence that is forever absent? How do we describe the mysterious body always on the verge of discovery, the apparition already disappearing into the mist?[11]

Kazuhiko Komatsu similarly finds that the term *yōkai* lacks clear definition. He notes that to both scholars and to people in general, the meaning of word *yōkai* is uncertain, "*ayafuya.*" "That is to say, the word *yōkai* defines a type of phenomenon or existence to which the adjectives of mysterious, odd, strange, and eerie are applied."[12] Furthermore, he sees the very nature of this uncertainty to encompass the wider meaning of the word *yōkai.*[13]

As something that hampers clear definition, transformation evokes a certain nature of uncertainty, instability, and ambiguity that often exhibit themselves in crises of identity. This means that the transformative quality of monstrosity is indefinable, unstable—a subversive cause for the fluctuating of identity, which *Spirited Away* conveys through an elaborate construction of the otherworld and supernatural characters.

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11 Foster, p. 2.

12 Komatsu, p. 10. Translated from the Japanese: "*Sore wa, moji tōri ni rikaisureba, shinpi teki na, kimyō na, fushigi na, usukimiwarui, to itta keiyōshi ga tsuku yōna genshō ya sonzai, ikimono wo imishiteiru*."

13 Komatsu, p. 10. The following continues after the above quote: "*Watashi no kangae de wa, kore ga 'yōkai' no motto hiroi imi de no teigi de aru*."

Miyazaki Hayao's *Spirited Away* (*Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi,* 2001) is a creation of a manifold world that subtly blends together a concern for the threatening numbness of contemporary times with the mystique of traditional Japanese architecture and spirits. It creates an otherworld that lies virtually suspended in-between in time and space, a world that is defined (or rather eludes definition) by merit of its embodiment of constant change and temporality through moments of vanishing, reappearance, and transformation. It is a world where everything is temporary, either because it is touched by magic, or because it may simply disappear or be taken away at a moment's notice by the spirits that inhabit it. Nothing can be presumed to be what it is in Miyazaki's spiritual world; it is a place where people and creatures are not what they seem. Physical appearance can change in an instant, names are forgotten, and identity is lost and found, as Chihiro experiences when she loses her name and begins to lose herself. In another sense, perhaps identity was absent to begin with, as with the character of No Face. In an atmosphere of enchantment and imagination, *Spirited Away* brings to the surface the issues that lie at the core of defining the self and individual existence, such as who we are, and what defines us. This search for identity in the midst of constant change is one which reveals fluidity of self, imbued with qualities of the monstrous which escape our own understanding.

The film is the story of a young girl named Chihiro, initially an unconfident and passive youth, who reluctantly follows her parents into an abandoned amusement park. At nightfall, it transforms into a lively home of *yōkai* and spirits. Unable to escape and faced with the task of finding some way to free her parents, who have been turned into pigs, Chihiro is transported to the spirit-inhabited world of Yubaba's bathhouse. There, although monstrous creatures of deceiving and fluctuating appearances are everywhere within sight, it is self-identity which

undergoes the most drastic transformations. This is inner turmoil expressed through changeability and fleetingness of form in the spirit world.

One of the very first opening scenes to the film is the passage into the otherworld, which captures the sense of separation from reality and a foreboding of the mysterious that permeates the rest of the work. It introduces an atmosphere of mystification and transformation, qualities of the monstrous that lay the foundation for Chihiro's identity crisis. Chihiro and her parents are on their way to a new home when they happen upon the abandoned amusement park, which at night transforms, trapping them inside. This frame of the story, moving into a new home, and for Chihiro, a new school establishes a setting between end points. In the other realm they are waylaid midway on this journey, essentially frozen in a moment of transition.

Chihiro and her parents first happen upon the park entrance after a whirlwind car ride through the forest, which acts as a passage to a separate plain of reality, one abound with spirits and the unknown. The combination of harrowing speed, the inability to see ahead through the forest, and the shouts of Chihiro and her mother in panic create a high strung atmosphere and a sensation of being out of control. For both the viewer and the family, there is a feeling of uncertainty as to where they will stop. The immediate future is unknown; the path ahead of them remains obscured. This sequence suggests that change can happen in an instant, leaving one blind, unsure of the destination, but just holding on for what is to come. Such an atmosphere of uncertainty is the world in which Chihiro loses her identity, a hint at that the nature of the self is something that remains equally indistinct, evading definition.

The frantic car race ends as they nearly run into a statue that stands blocking the path: a squat, serene looking *yōkai*-esque figure that is reminiscent of the animistic tradition of Japan and a symbol of the spirits that have been forgotten by the development of the mountainsides.

With this figure of animistic worship, Miyazaki infuses the postmodern present with the spirit of the premodern past, a sign that the traditions and values of the past are still relevant. Perhaps such worship has been recently overlooked as this statue has (set far back into the woods and covered with moss) but it is still an important aspect of Japanese identity and culture that has managed to continue until today, and remembering this spirit of animism is important to maintaining identity in the present. The statue stands like a guardian to the other world, in front of an ominous red wall with a single, unadorned tunnel as an entrance, a perfect picture of a spirit guide, suggesting that Chihiro's coming journey for her identity is an echo of a larger search in Japanese identity alongside the surviving spirit of animism. The feeling of the rush of the car ride contrasted to the sudden and imposing appearance of this entrance provides a jolt that heightens the suspicion of approaching the unknown, an unknown that Chihiro will soon discover is a path to a different reality, one which eludes all her previous understanding.

Chihiro protests strongly against going into the tunnel of the red building, a sign of her present unwillingness and fear of what lies beyond. She runs to the car, stamping her feet in fear and agitation, and is framed on the screen standing side by side with the mysterious statue that guards the entrance (see fig. 1.0). This juxtaposition of the two, with Chihiro on the right and the statue on the left, emphasizes marked differences between the two figures: Chihiro stands taller and skinnier, a girl frowning and pouting, while the statue sits squat, covered in moss, arms folded, and showing a serene, mysterious grin on its face. It is a symbol of the disparity between their two worlds, and the change that Chihiro is about to come up against. As Chihiro slowly turns to look beside her, and there is a cut to the profile of the statue and its two faces: one looking towards the tunnel that will lead to the otherworld, and the other towards the car, a path

back to reality and ordinary life. She stands in-between, at a crossroads of these two worlds

pulling her in different directions.

The imagery of the statue suggests of a multiplicity of identity. That is, the presence of two faces, two selves, in one. The statue's faces look in different directions, implying a division of self within the body, a conflict of identity. Chihiro's proximity to the statue suggests the fact that she, too, might have some similarities with this strange statue. Her alarmed reaction upon noticing the two faces (she flinches and hurries away) indicates discomfort and fear of this notion of multiple identities, foreshadowing her own crisis. She and her parents then enter the tunnel, crossing the final boundary, stepping into the world of the abandoned amusement park, a

relic of the rapid growth of the Japan's bubble period in the 1980's, abandoned when the economy crashed.[14]

Spirited Away maintains a theme of transition in terms of space and time in the sequence of the amusement park's transformation into a mysterious realm of spirits. Thomas Lamarre insightfully comments on how Miyazaki constructs his worlds, in a way which emphasizes unpredictability and mystery, both at a compositional and narrative level:

> Miyazaki clearly prefers animetism over cinematism. He favors the sliding sensation of speed…Compositionally as well, he often turns to the slippery staircase, the canted deck, the tilting plane, and then gives you a sideways impression of falling, slipping, careening. At the level of narrative, too, Miyazaki avoids reaching a destination or conclusion coming full circle…Even his stories tend to move laterally, sideways, diagonally.[15]

An architect of the imagination, Miyazaki constructs the spirit otherworld as a secluded and mystifying place. It lies hidden from the eyes of the known world, but is yet within it: a contradiction. It is the unknown hidden within the known, perhaps mirroring an aspect of the self which lies buried within the individual.

The amusement park's transformation into the spirit realm at sunset exemplifies not only the quality of changeability, but also suspension in a state between dream and reality. Such an indeterminate time and place between two extremes is evocative of the notion of "twilight," as Figal refers to it. The time between the setting of day and the fall of night, it is a "figure of transition and ambiguity," when it becomes difficult to discern surroundings and the identities of

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14 For more on the amusement park as a symbol for Japan's economic recession, see Susan J. Napier's article, "Matter Out of Place: Carnival, Containment and Cultural Recovery in Miyazaki's Spirited Away," The Journal of Japanese Studies 32.2 (2006): 287-310, Project MUSE, Web, 21 Jan. 2011, <http://muse.jhu.edu/>.

15 Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009),p. 42.

others.[16] *Yōkai* are traditionally associated with this period categorized by ambiguous visibility, a time when the spirits are most likely to come out.[17] Traditionally, travellers along a dark road would call out to any indistinguishable figure to confirm that it was not a being from the otherworld, and the question they would use to ask another's identity is where the Japanese word for twilight, *tasogare*, is derived.[18]

Miyazaki's spirit world is both a literal and figurative twilight, coming to life at this time between day and night, between dream and reality. This twilight adds a presence of ambiguity and transformation that defines the state of things in the otherworld, and establishes a setting in which even identity is unstable. It creates a world where everything is thrown into question and nothing is as it seems: things are changing and have the ability to travel or transcend space in any manner of ways, to appear and reappear, or even disappear completely. It is the transformative nature of the world that keeps the viewer and Chihiro guessing, and which creates this encompassing body where the laws of permanence, singularity, and all the usual rules of physics are jeopardized. With the creation of this questionable world, the issue for Chihiro becomes one of retaining one's own identity. Soon she begins to lose her own identity, just as she has lost the understanding of the world around her.

One of the most vivid depictions of this concept of twilight-inspired impermanence is as the abandoned amusement park comes to life at night, signaling a change from a forgotten permanent reality to a lively, impermanent otherworld. As night falls, Chihiro bolts down a set of stairs through a road lined with stalls as the horizon of darkness cascades across the sky. She races the encroaching darkness and the lighting of the lanterns, which progresses as she passes

16 Figal,p. 17.

17 Figal, p. 5.

18 Figal, p. 3.

by. The haste of the scene emphasizes a rapid, chaotic transition that conveys a striking mood of unease, fear, and uncertainty. The dramatic fall of night in this short moment is imbued with the character of transformation, heralding the coming of darkness that is so traditionally filled with the unseen and monstrous.

This mood is further expounded upon when mysterious shadows suddenly appear in the abandoned restaurant stalls. Eerie, semi-transparent hands reach out, figures which convey a sense of impermanence and mystery. With no clear facial features or definite body structure (they are only vaguely humanoid and seem to have no skeletons), they are figures that evoke a certain alarm in their obscurity. They appear out of thin air, right in front of Chihiro as she sprints away in panic. In the twilight, the appearance of the shadowy spirits in the stalls and on the streets is made all the more ominous. This scene, combining an awareness of change with the fear of monstrosity, is also, fittingly, the moment where Chihiro begins to lose herself.

After running as far as she can and finding that a huge lake has suddenly appeared, leaving her no escape, Chihiro crouches down into a fetal position. She tries to convince herself that it's all a dream, repeating, "*kiero, kiero*," (disappear, disappear) to the world around her. Ironically, in the midst of her mantra, what begins to disappear isn't the monstrosity of her surroundings, but herself. Her body begins to turn translucent, disappearing as if it never existed, conveying not just a loss of identity, but a danger of fading away completely. Her desperate repetition of "*kiero*," and "*Yume da. Yume da. Samero, samero,*" (It's a dream. It's a dream. Wake up, wake up) conveys a fear of change, but also a strong resistance towards it. The transformation of the spirit world is upon her in a way that she now can't escape, and she is immediately overwhelmed when faced with this crisis of her own disappearance.

She clearly tries to distance herself from the changes around her, but it is by denying the changing world that she puts herself in danger of vanishing completely. She has to become a part of the spirit world herself by consuming food from it, or she will fade away. The mysterious boy Haku offers her such a thing, and upon consuming it she becomes solid once again. In this scene, Chihiro's physical body, an important basis from which the self is normally defined, is cast into doubt. It is a struggle which depicts an evident parallel between identity, or even more extreme in this case, existence itself, and visibility. Whether the transparency is a manifestation of a deeper fear of disappearing, that is, losing agency in society, she has to struggle to maintain her identity, implying a weakness of the self.

Chihiro's faltering existence here, her literally fading identity, is expressed through a play between the visible and invisible that becomes a motif of change throughout the film. At this moment, in addition to Chihiro's transparency, there is a ferry of spirits that docks nearby, all of whom lack bodies and are merely identified by identical floating masks. As soon as they step on land they become visible, and this ease with which the seen and unseen switch places once again evokes the association between changeability and indefinability. The fact that Chihiro is becoming invisible while the spirits are becoming visible is a complete inversion of normal expectation, generating doubt with regards to the stability of the world and the self. Chihiro's identity at this moment is unstable, an effect of being confronted with the unsettling unseen and unknown.

After Chihiro regains solidity, Haku leads her through the amusement park to an enormous traditional Japanese style bathhouse, into the world of strange, mysterious, and distinctly inhuman creatures with which she will spend the coming days. They come in all shapes, sizes, and species. Yubaba, an old witch with a head as large as the rest of her body, is in

charge of the bathhouse, and Chihiro is told to go to her for a job. This leads to the moment when Chihiro loses her name, which holds the key to her memory, identity, and ability to return to the real world. The name, just as the physical body, is another typical parameter used to define the self, and its theft by Yubaba takes this away from Chihiro as well, and she becomes Sen.

Stealing names is Yubaba's method of controlling people, symbolizing a loss of free will. Without her name, Chihiro begins to forget who she is, and without her identity, she is powerless to escape the bathhouse. Loss of identity is thus equated with helplessness. As time goes on her true name becomes a symbol for her strength and courage and her ability to take action for herself. Yubaba's identical sister Zenaba enforces this idea, telling Chihiro that her real name is beautiful, and that she must be careful to protect it. Such a declaration emphasizes the significance of one's true name, and consequently true identity. She is in effect telling Chihiro to cherish herself.

We have thus far been bombarded with visuals of strange creatures and transitions between the visible and invisible. The first instance of physical metamorphosis, however, is when Yubaba flies off her balcony into the darkening sky, morphing into a bird. She does so seamlessly, and the animation is incredibly smooth as her cloak forms into her wings and her protruding nose becomes her beak. This image of physical transformation, and the implication of it has on the nature of self-identity, is a larger motif expressed in the character of No Face.

No Face in particular is an example of the struggle for identity conveyed through physical transformation of voice and body, as well as demeanor. His name alone is indicative of an absence of identity, and his physical appearance is also a representation of his invisibility in society. As per the name, his face is a literal mask, presenting a relatively blank expression. His

body is nothing more than a large black cloak, and his lower body disappears into the air. No Face hardly ever speaks, at most making grunting or moaning noises. All of this contributes to an image of loneliness, solitariness, and social isolation, the epitome of an existence whose presence goes unnoticed. Ignored by all the other spirits, No Face is just such a figure of alienation. The first time he appears, he is standing alone against the railing of the bridge to the bathhouse, the only one unmoving amongst the lines of spirits filing into the building. He is seen only for an instant, a vision of a mysterious figure on the outside looking in.

It is interesting to note that No Face's identity crisis is a different form from that of Chihiro's: Chihiro deals with a *loss* of identity, whereas No Face deals with an *absence* of it. Chihiro's issue is centered more around the possibility of her losing agency in society, and a fear of change, whereas No Face represents an alienation and estrangement from society. From the beginning his identity is nonexistent.

No Face's condition is exacerbated by the fact that he relies on the reactions of others to validate himself, a character who raises the question of to what degree we define our own identity based on others' perceptions of us. No Face's faint and inaudible presence is only acknowledged by Chihiro, and as a result, he comes to define himself by her approval of him. Searching for acknowledgement from Sen, No Face offers her herbal soak tokens when she is looking for a way to clean the Stink Monster that has come to the bathhouse. In what becomes a recurring affair, he misinterprets what she wants, overdoing the situation by giving her a whole bucket full of tokens, which she quickly chastises him for. This exchange portrays No Face's unfortunate habit of misinterpreting emotions, a sign of inability to communicate and connect with others properly. In the struggle to establish connections, he only ends up desperately

overcompensating in response, which further ostracizes him and contributes to the insecurity and instability of self.

The culmination of No Face's identity struggle is shown in his physical transformation, which is the catalyst to the change of his demeanor. His metamorphosis is grotesque and accelerated, a representation of identity gone out of control, turning monstrous in the struggle to find the self. His transformation and resulting rampage occurs after the river spirit is cleaned, while the rest of the bathhouse is in high celebratory spirits from the gold that was gratefully bestowed on them as payment. No Face, in contrast, sits alone in a tub in the dark gloom after the baths have closed; he is a picture of loneliness and isolation. A frog wanders in, and No Face lures the frog closer with a handful of materialized gold, not saying a word. In an instant a tentacle-like arm shoots out, choking the frog around the neck and pulling it into a mouth that appears under his mask. No Face's whole body convulses as he gulps the frog down, a disturbing action evoking disgust and fear in the viewer.

Immediately thereafter, No Face gains the frog's voice, and grows legs that look suspiciously amphibian in nature. The change in his character is drastic: whereas before he was a shadowy, nondescript presence, now with the nasally, unique voice of the frog, and a solid, distinct body, he is hard to ignore. The moment after the change, he perches atop of a wall on his frog legs, talking down to another bath attendant and dropping gold from above. This change in positioning, from his usual place standing in the background in a corner or along a wall to a place of elevation, accentuated by a low camera angle, evokes an aura of power and influence. Along with his possession of a voice and solidification, all of these facets indicate a change in his character and identity into that of one who is greedy, powerful, and manipulative.

In No Face's subsequent monopolization of all the bathhouse and its services, it becomes evident that his construction of self is based on consuming and subsequently copying others. He eats gluttonously, giving away gold because he knows the spirits in the bathhouse will respond to it. His nature is that of a creature that takes on, or literally, consumes, the identity of others in a search for his own. As if he has no identity of his own, he consumes as if that will make him whole—whom he wants to be. However, by the end of it he is just turned into a monstrous, huge mass, black and bulbous and grotesque. He is quartered in a room strewn with leftovers of food, and moves on all fours in a shape reminiscent of a spider. His attempts to consume his way to a

solid identity only end up in making him twisted and grotesque, a consequence of selfish materialism (see fig. 1.1).

Despite the attention and worship he earns from the heaps of gold he gives the bathhouse workers, Chihiro remains the only one he wants to please; she is the only one who can grant him acknowledgment and confidence. When he sees her, he loses his voice and reverts to grunting softly, and Chihiro's refusal of his offering of gold and her disapproval of his selfish behavior launches him into distress. It is clear that he doesn't understand why Chihiro is not pleased by what he has to give her, as he lashes out from pain and loneliness. When she asks about where he came from and whether he has any parents, he goes into further anguish, crying out himself for the first time that he's lonely, a desperate wail for companionship. The true issue with No Face lies not in his lack of power over others, but in his loneliness. He represents a misapprehension in society that material goods will provide happiness and peace of mind, as opposed to meaningful relationships that help to build a solid self-confidence.

No Face's main struggle is that of trying to find a place to belong, and someone to understand and recognize him in a way that might offer him a stable identity. The physical transformations that he goes through contribute to a representation of his emotional struggles, his grotesque metamorphoses depicting the instability and uncertainty of the concept of self. He clearly has no firm grasp on his identity; at first it is arguably absent, and then it is violently fluctuating. His state of confusion is an expression of the attempt to assert identity and the struggle to finding meaning for the self in a material driven world. It is only when No Face forgoes all materialism and superficial pursuit of influence and power (having been under the false assumption that it would grant him happiness and security in himself) that he seems truly comfortable. After he reverts back to himself, having regurgitated all the things he has consumed as a result of the medicine Chihiro feeds him, he is calm, content, and mature.

No Face's identity crisis is resolved with the realization that he was pursuing superficial means of recognition, and thanks to the support of Chihiro, he is able to stabilize and find a level of contentment in himself. Chihiro herself likewise shows that she matures through the course of these adventures, demonstrated by her handling of No Face, as well as her courageous rescue of Haku and the restoration of her parents to their true identity. She demonstrates that the true means for regaining identity are her actions. Regaining her name is an important symbol of her identity, but her active choices are most important to her sense of self. Even after she regains her name from Haku, he stresses that she must be sure to take care of it from then on. In other words, she has the responsibility to look after herself, to take care of her identity, to cherish and to understand it. Through her maturation and growth in self-confidence, she regains her true identity and protects her name, proving that being able to come to an understanding of the self resolves such identity crises.

By utilizing acts of transformation and the depiction of a world that lies in-between time, space, and reality to convey the development and search for identity, *Spirited Away* suggests a struggle against the instability and indefinability of the self in contemporary society. It is increasingly hard to find one's identity and retain it, as seen in Chihiro, who fights to hold onto her identity, and No Face who tries to find his. *Spirited Away* depicts the self as something which often escapes our own understanding, and the mystery of it, the transformation of it, turns identity into its own monster, emulating the nature of the *yōkai*. The concept of transformation, being necessarily in a state of flux, problematizes how any given object or being is understood or defined, and thus the concept of self proves not to be as well-defined as we take it to be. As these transformations suggest, identity in contemporary society, and the means by which identity is defined, is something changing. The portrayal of these crises of identity by way of qualities of

monstrosity and the unknown demonstrates a troubling level of uncertainty of how to deal with issues of the self.

Chapter Two

Mind as Monstrosity: Dreams and Identity in Satoshi Kon's *Paprika*

If the body is unstable, as observed in Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*, where it is vulnerable to fleeting changes such as disappearance or transformation, then surely the mind, an intangible part of the self, is a safe haven from such monstrosity. The mind belongs exclusively to the individual, after all, and only the individual has access to his or her own thoughts. However, it should also be taken into consideration that within one's own mind there remain unknown aspects that cannot be consciously accessed. The mind—our own thoughts—typically considered that which we have control over, may actually, in its unexplored depths, be its own monster. No individual possesses complete knowledge of their own core consciousness, and thus it is problematic to say that we are ever consciously in control of the entirety of our own minds,

which is a frightening thought.[19] While it is comforting to think that the mind is a place of respite from monstrosity, where the self can be assumed to stay the same self, it is often the case that the subconscious has a way of its own, and it is from here that our own monsters are born.

The connection between monsters and the mind has been suggested by the scholar Inoue Enryō. Well-known for pioneering the field of *yōkaigaku*, the study of *yōkai,* in the late nineteenth century, he identified three types of psychological monsters by the way people come into contact with them. The first are those which come from the outside, and the second are those which are experienced through a medium. The third type are those in one's own mind.[20] *Yōkai*, as with all monsters, are a product of people's own imaginations created in order to explain both natural and unnatural phenomena. Inoue equates *yōkaigaku* most closely with the field of psychology, because of his belief that eighty to ninety percent of all monsters come from operations of the mind.[21] From this it's possible to see that our mind, which creates these monsters, must have the potential for monstrosity within itself. Monsters are expressions of fear and unease regarding the unknown, supernatural phenomena of another plain of existence. As Komatsu also writes, *yōkai* are born from feelings such as fear (*kyōfu*), anxiety (*fuan*), and mystery (*shinpikan*), a result of mysterious experiences stimulate people's imaginations.[22] If our own minds are the origin of such monsters, it implies that our mind is itself a form of monstrosity, or at least possesses the qualities of it.

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19 *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), Murakami Haruki's novel about a man who's consciousness is split between two worlds, poses the similarly pointed question: "Properly speaking, should any individual ever have exact, clear knowledge of his own core consciousness?" p. 114.

20 Figal, p. 50.

21 Figal, p. 49.

22 Komatsu, p. 11: "*Kono imi ryōiki no yōkai wa, kyōfu ya fuan, shinpikan nado kara umidasareta mono de aru. Kōshita kaii taiken ga hitobito no sōzōryoku wo shigeki shi, kyōfu ni nezashita samazama na imeji wo takusareta monogatari ga katari dasareru koto mo atta*."

Perhaps the best window into the subconscious is the dream, from one point of view a creation of the subconscious that can be seen as a twisted transformation of reality born in the mind. It is a world of unreality and illusion, the image of a subversive, mystifying atmosphere with the power to affect one's perception. Such an atmosphere blends together nonsense and confusion with an unsettling veneer of familiarity, which *Paprika* takes advantage of to the fullest extent. Dreams take what we know, or what we assume we know, and morph and deform it. In dreams, we find ourselves in a world where imagination and reason are conflicting. "…[T]hings considered unreasonable in the waking world are not considered unreasonable in a dream; one thinks of them as having reason. That is to say, because it's a reason the reason of which is out of place, it's a 'reason outside of reason.'"[23] Dreams go beyond the confines of ratio and reason, and imagination becomes madness, an illogical, chaotic, and monstrous atmosphere. The central contradiction of the dream lies in the fact that although it originates from within one's own mind, it is beyond one's ability to control, implying that a part of the mind, the self, is mysterious and unknowable—perhaps the part that monsters come from.

Satoshi Kon's *Paprika* (2006), a step away from the traditional, magical feel of Miyazaki's constructed fantasy realm of *yōkai*, presents a mind-bending representation of the subconscious mind in a chaotic yet brilliant dream world. What the world of *Paprika* does is warps the everyday, knowable real world with the unconscious, imaginative dream world, using the mind as the primary means of confusion and chaos. An uncontrollable product of the subconscious, and yet an unmistakable part of the self, the dream and its unique atmosphere are utilized to explore contradictions and conflicts of identity and hidden aspects of the self. When the source of the monstrosity—chaos and unreality—originates unconsciously within our own

23 Figal, p. 65.

minds, as it does in *Paprika*, it implies that there is a piece of the unexplored subconscious monstrous in and of itself. *Paprika* thus depicts the mind as something which has the potential to act without our knowledge and without our own control. It is an expression of an inner, monstrous self, conveying an image of a society that is uneasy with confronting its own identity, and also distanced from the understanding of it.

In *Paprika,* it's often assumed that the world is chaotic, confusing, and even completely senseless at times. Household objects come alive in a parade of nonsense, an elevator travels from a jungle to a train robbery scene, and people appear—not as themselves—but in different bodies and different personalities. It is a world of dreams, a crossroads of reality and imagination, where the subconscious stirs up images of the uncanny and throws not only reason and reality into question, but also one's confidence in stability and identity. The plot of *Paprika* is centered around a piece of technology known as the DC-mini, a device which allows people to enter not only their own dreams, but also the dreams of others. The DC-mini is stolen and its capabilities misused, the culprit using his own dream to connect and spread to others' subconscious like a virus, driving his victims insane in the process. His dream consumes more dreams, growing ever larger, until its size grows so out of hand that the dream begins to affect reality directly, eventually morphing into it. When the dream, depicted as a parade of nonsense, eventually breaks out of the dream world onto a city street, the passers-by suddenly morph into objects (a *daruma*, a cell phone, a lucky cat statue) and join in, saying and doing all manner of nonsensical things.

It is in the midst of this that the police chief Konakawa, finding himself unable to concentrate on a particular homicide case at work, seeks out psychological therapy. In the hopes that the method of dream analysis by the DC-mini will allow him to understand what might be

affecting his ability to work on the case, he allows his mind and dreams to be entered into and probed by Paprika. Paprika herself is a product of the subconscious: the alter ego and dream persona of the reserved and levelheaded scientist, Akiko Chiba.

The struggles of Konakawa present an image of a society in which there is an unease with confronting issues of one's own identity and self; one in which people are estranged from aspects of their own identity and the ability to understand themselves. As a result of this unease, issues pertaining to the self are perceived as a kind of monstrosity, and are expressed as such. It implies that one's own identity, in a sense, is seen as monstrous. Konakawa exemplifies this, as someone who has been running from his past and himself, and who now suffers from unsettling dreams. He has suppressed the memory of the death of a friend, along with his own guilt at simultaneously abandoning him and his own personal creative aspirations by giving up on a film they had been directing in mid-production. He is someone who understands neither his dreams nor himself—an average man who, because of his unease with confronting a part of his identity, finds himself struggling to concentrate on his work. He is trying to uncover a hidden part of himself in order to understand his problems and the emotions that hold him back. This pursuit brings him into a world of confusing images and even more bewildering events, among which he has multiple encounters that challenge his identity and sense of self.

The opening scene of the film establishes Konakawa's confusion with regards to identity and presents a world of chaos in which dreams have an influence as strong as reality. It begins with a circus, a setting that represents qualities of the bizarre and nonsensical, which define the overall atmosphere of the film and encompasses the perplexity and mayhem that is to follow in the world of dreams and the subconscious. A lone miniature sized car drives up under a spotlight, out of which steps a purple haired clown (in actuality three times too large to have fit

inside the vehicle) who announces, in English, “It’s the greatest show time!” This segues into the grand opening of the show: a colorful parade of circus performers, animals, and flying acrobats coming out from all angles. This is the world of Konakawa’s dream, although the viewer is not made aware of this until the police chief awakes at end of the sequence. In effect, this encourages the blurring of dream and reality, twisting perception and making the characters and viewer challenge their own presumptions and logic. This sensation grows throughout the film to the point that neither the audience nor the characters know what is dream and what is reality, making it seem as if the dreams of our subconscious have the power to control our senses.

In this scene the location and identity of the character are at stake, fueled by a developing confusion as to who is who. Konakawa’s first appearance is as a security guard patrolling the stands. He is searching for a runaway criminal when he turns to speak to another individual whose identity is unclear. A colorful clown mask adorns the back of their head, which is presented as their face when they answer Konakawa cryptically. This image of the mysterious figure with mismatched faces combines images of a mask and costume makeup, devices whose purpose is to confuse or hide identity. The reverse in the positioning of the mask has a similar distracting effect, overall conveying a dissonance between appearance and real identity that continues as a theme throughout the film.

The exchange with the unidentified mask is interrupted as the circus ring leader calls out, shifting attention to the curtained object in the center of the stage. The fabric is whisked away to reveal Konakawa himself inside of a cage, which suddenly throws everything into mayhem. It creates a jarring shift in point of view as the focus of the frame shifts from the security guard in the shadows of the audience, previously assumed to be Konakawa, to the man in the cage. The

identity which both Konakawa and the viewer previously understood to be *him* has been completely switched. Now in the cage, the police chief is depicted cowering behind the bars, and looking out with frantic eyes into the audience seats, so dark that it is impossible to identify any faces. The image looking out into the audience that the viewer is shown pans erratically back and forth, a movement which mimics the movement of Konakawa's eyes and contributes to a feeling of panic and anxiety. The frame comes to focus on the form of the security guard, his body now illuminated by the spotlight, but with his head and shoulders quite ominously left in shadow. Such an image maintains his invisibility, conjuring fear and confusion regarding the unknown identity.

Konakawa can only stand and watch as the audience suddenly rises up in a mob and stampedes toward him. They are depicted as a threatening horde, and people completely surround him, a sea of arms clawing desperately to reach him through the bars of the cage. The distressing idea about this moment is not only their violence, but the fact everyone is an identical copy of Konakawa (see fig. 2.0). Aside from the shock of being immediately confronted with innumerable identical versions of himself, Konakawa is constricted and immobile, helpless and

at the mercy of those who are, at least in some way, part of himself.

The police chief's dream is filled with images of multiple conflicting identities which, as distressing and confusing as they seem to be to both Konakawa and the viewer, imply a clear unease with the issue of self. The events in the dream reveal that the police chief's perception of self, at least on the subconscious level, is distorted to such a degree that he is threatened by his own image. This lies not only in the physical threat from the violence of the mob, but the threat on the psychological level, which comes with the shock of coming face to face with such challenges of identity and the turmoil it produces, as with the erratic panning of the dark audience as he cowered in the cage. The distress is further emphasized by the underlying fact that Konakawa's dreams are out of his conscious control, which suggests a part of his mind, his self, has the capacity to act unknown to him. The subconscious mind is what has generating such monstrous, troubling scenarios, implying that a fear of the self is imbedded on a psychological level. For Konakawa, the doubt and insecurity regarding his identity is derived from his subconscious, mostly as a result of guilt from memories and feelings that he has suppressed.

The scene which most effectively illustrates the influence of buried emotions leaking into dreams is when Konakawa chases an unknown criminal down a long hallway, arriving a moment too late to stop a murder. We are shown through Konakawa's point of view the victim falling to the floor in exaggeratedly slow motion, conveying the emotional shock of the police chief. There is the emotional shock of death, but more than that, the victim is a symbol of his own failure and of his own guilt and regret. Failing to save the victim in time has left a lingering impression on him, which he felt deeply as a reflection on his own helplessness. In the background while Konakawa is preoccupied, an indiscernible figure who is presumably the murderer turns to escape through the exit door at the far end of the hallway. Konakawa tries to run after him, but is impeded as the floor begins to swell up and down, beginning to unravel and then fall away from underneath him completely. Konakawa struggles desperately to run but he cannot. Again this impresses a feeling of helplessness and symbolizes a suppressed feeling in his subconscious of doubt in his own abilities. He stumbles, wavering, and the hallway is comes unraveled, looking just like the loose end of a film reel. Left freefalling, on screen he fades into transparency, disappearing just as the rest of the world is, completely into white. The line, "*Tsutzuki wa dōsun da yo?*" (But what about the rest of it?) is left echoing accusatorily in the blankness, an ominous voice which suggests another task Konakawa has abandoned to failure.

On one level, this scene is representative of the homicide case that Konakawa is unable to solve, but on another level, it is an expression of his suppressed feelings and a negative perception of himself. Particularly, Konakawa deals in the film with the guilt regarding the memory of an old friend and partner, who is also a symbol for the dream career that the police chief gave up. In high school, they had been working together to direct an amateur film, when seemingly out of nowhere Konakawa quit mid-production and gave up completely on his

aspirations to film production. Despite Konakawa quitting, his partner went on to film school, but in a short time fell ill and passed away.

The deeper implications of this memory are depicted when the dream of the victim in the hallway recurs later in the film, but with a twist. This time, as the police chief looks to the falling figure, smoke starts to rise from his gun. From Konakawa's point of view, the camera shows the gun in his hand, and then cuts to a view of the victim. The body falls in slow motion from the top of the screen, so that the face enters the frame last, generating suspense regarding the victim's identity. This time the face is visible, and it's Konakawa's own. The frame quickly zooms up to Konakawa, and then in sequence cuts from his dead body to a wide shot of the hallway, and then to a close up of his face. Konakawa asks in a state of confusion to the air, "*Ore ga ore o koroshita?*" (I killed myself?). The hallway begins to swell and he falls and fades again just as before. The animation zooms out to show Paprika watching his entire dream on a movie screen, and then proceeds to cut back and for the between the two a couple of times. The technique of sudden and clean shifts in point of view keeps the viewer in a state of confusion as to what is what, wondering where a character is in relation to anything else at a point in time.

Dreams are an expression of our subconscious, buried feelings, perceptions, and desires. The fact that Konakawa sees himself as the murderer shows that he is carrying a significant amount of guilt which he is not consciously aware of. The realization that Konakawa is the victim, murderer, and pursuer of the culprit is a paradox which reveals discomfort in his self-perception and with his own identity with regards to how he feels about himself for abandoning his partner and the film. When Paprika discusses with him why he might have killed himself, she uses the phrase "*mou hitori no jibun*" (other self), which makes a noticeable connection with Konakawa and stirs him to remember his partner. The memory of his friend is not only a source

of guilt, but a personification of his feelings of loss and regret at not having continued to pursue his creative passion. Examining it this way, in one sense his partner represents the person that Konakawa could have been had he continued to direct films, the “other him,” and so the dream is indicative of the suppressed fear Konakawa has that he killed himself, or a part of himself, when he gave up on his dream. He continues to refer to his partner as “*mou hitori no ore*” (the other me) a further suggestion of lingering regret for not continuing to pursue his passion for film making.

Konakawa’s dreams convey a conflict of identity through multiple representations of the self, while the character of Paprika, on the other hand, conveys a conflict of identity through the fragmentation of self. As opposed to the multiplicity and double imagery that categorizes Konakawa’s dreams, she is an example of a single self that has split into parts, two pieces of a whole. A separate persona, Paprika is the dream world personality of the psychologist Akiko Chiba. Even so, their characters could not be any more different: Paprika is a spontaneous, easy-going, adventurous red-head, and Chiba is a straight-laced, critical-thinking, stern scientist. In his portrayal of these two women, Satoshi Kon conceives of a view of the self which has opposing components, hidden aspects, and alternate personalities which illustrate suppressed levels to our own identity that are beyond one’s control.

The character Paprika is an example of dichotomy and fragmentation in identity, raising the concern that a part of one’s self may have the potential to act without conscious control. Paprika lies latent inside Chiba’s mind, with the power to act independently only when awakened in the dream world, where she seems to have infinite control. She can transform at will, from a sphinx to a mermaid, to a fairy, to a butterfly, among others. She can fly, travel into others

dreams to change things and help them, as she does for Konakawa. All of this, she does with no direction at all from Chiba.

She is also marked as an entity opposite that of Chiba—a reflection of another self banished to live in a different realm. She is visually marked through images which portray her as a copy and stress mirror-like qualities: a printed image, a reflection, and a projection. The mirror image and similar projection motifs, which represent a world identical to our own but opposite in orientation, are weaved throughout the film, emphasizing Paprika's state as an extension of Chiba's identity and the fragmentation between these two opposite halves. She is in essence part of the original, but also a separate entity in her own right. The opening montage of the film shows Paprika in many forms of this motif as she travels across the city, hopping and flying through images: the logo on the side of a truck, billboards, a computer screen, and even the design on a t-shirt. She is even shown as a film image projected along a wall as she skips down a hallway.

Reflection is used to depict a duality of self: the existence of two contrasting aspects in one. It also reveals the hidden piece of self to the viewer, and is effective in portraying double-ness of identity. One scene shows Paprika in a restaurant, smiling politely at two men who have interrupted her from her food. The row of mirrors behind her comically shows a sequence of her souring expressions, while her outward countenance is still polite and pleasant (see fig. 2.1). In this instance, reflection is used as a device to convey to the viewer that Paprika is hiding her true feelings behind a façade. In a later scene, Paprika herself is depicted in Chiba's reflection along a windowed hallway. Paprika, just as she locked away her own soured expressions and annoyed feelings in the restaurant, is similarly hidden away in this manner by Chiba. Inside, Paprika is a part of her, but one that Chiba holds back.

The fact that Chiba and Paprika are two fragmented parts of one whole mind is evidence of Chiba having rejected a part of her own identity, denying the part of herself that is Paprika and suppressing her to her own subconscious and dreams. In other words, Paprika has been pushed back into Chiba's subconscious to the extent that she can only appear in dreams. Chiba also displays discomfort and discontent with her alter-ego, which associates a fear towards the existence of the other self. When Chiba investigates some troubling or dangerous connection to the dream world, Paprika is always there to warn her counterpart of danger that originates in the dream world. Paprika appears over her shoulder to warn her when Chiba goes to inspect the apartment of Himuro, a fellow scientist suspected to be the culprit behind the aggressive dream and abuser of the DC-mini. Chiba curtly answers, "*Anata no deban jyanai no*" (This isn't your cue), conveying distaste and suggesting that the input of her counterpart is unwelcome. Paprika appears like this a number of times more, one of which is when Chiba is looking for Himuro's body in an abandoned amusement park, and she warns Chiba that there is something ahead. Again, Chiba's response is not very appreciative, in fact ignoring her completely. Her reactions imply an innate desire and impulse to suppress this unfamiliar part of the self, and an overall uneasiness with embracing unknown parts of the self.

Despite Chiba's cold attitude towards her counterpart, Paprika is still an indivisible part of her. Paprika may be suppressed inside Chiba's mind, but it is also telling that she displays the ability to appear momentarily near Chiba in reality, to warn her counterpart of danger that originates in the dream world. It is only briefly, and Paprika is a fleeting, translucent presence, clearly part of another world, but the connection with Chiba is close enough to allow her to show herself and warn Chiba of danger. This ability to communicate illustrates how although Paprika is a separate personality, she is in essence still a part of Chiba, or possibly Chiba is a part of her. Whichever the case, they are two halves of the same whole.

The importance of the tie between Chiba and Paprika is portrayed the most intensely when it falls under the threat of being snapped. No matter how much one may have suppressed or pushed a part of oneself away, the horror of being actually separated from it is unbearable agony, as depicted in the scene when Paprika falls captive to Okita, a fellow scientist who became a traitor and allied himself with the Chairman. Paprika is immobile, a vulnerable victim pinned to the table by her butterfly wings. Okita leans in and runs his hand sensuously along her torso. He places his hand below her stomach, and presses until it slips in underneath her clothes and skin. The outline and bulge of his hand is visible as it begins to move up, crawling like an insect, tearing her skin in its wake. The chilling animation of Okita's hand crawling under Paprika's skin and the violent separation of Paprika from Chiba is grotesque and frightening. While Paprika begs and cries out, he literally tears the skin off of her as if she was a costume, to reveal the naked body of Chiba. This method of removal of Paprika, incredibly invasive, sexual, and violent, is overwhelming and reminiscent of sexual rape, an indication that the separation of the two is unnatural. Chiba lies unconscious, a sign of the trauma that she has psychologically

gone through. The grotesque violence of this scene suggests that it is the separation, the rejection of the self that is the most monstrous.

Chiba's discontent with Paprika and her constant attempts to suppress her imply an inherent urge to suppress a part of the self that is not understood. This suppression, however, is what is ultimately monstrous. The separation of the two is depicted as not only negative, but cruel, and it is through accepting that there are multiple facets to identity and embracing them that the confusion can be eased. This is evinced by that fact that it is joining together at the climax of the film into one body that Chiba and Paprika restore reality. Chiba and Paprika need to combine to defeat the chairman in a conquest over the never ending dream world, accepting opposing parts of the self to bring together the whole. Here for the first time, when dream and reality are merged, Chiba and Paprika truly share the same space.

In *Paprika*, the dream world reveals inner, unrealized emotions, providing a window to hidden parts of the self. Paprika takes the emotional issues of its characters and demonstrates through the confusion of a psychologically unsound dream world that these self-crises, and the monstrosities and warped-ness of their dreams are inherently related to suppression of identity. Konakawa's multiple identities reflect that he is lacking in the understanding of himself and his emotions, and Chiba has pushed a part of herself so far away as to create a subconscious alter-ego, but ultimately it is only by overcoming this separation of identity and accepting all of oneself that stability can be regained and chaos calmed. The monstrosities of dreams are what we create ourselves, which in *Paprika* are fed by one's own unwillingness to confront the self, depicting that individual identity is of a fluctuating, multi-faceted nature. Using dreams, the subconscious of the mind, as a stage for identity reconstruction in the midst of chaos, the film ultimately conveys monstrosity as a product of the psychology of the mind, and thus of our self.

Chapter Three

Other as Monstrosity: Technology and Identity in

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

Monstrosity encompasses the weird, the frighteningly unnatural, and the constantly changing. It is rife with the eerie and grotesque, everything from which we ordinarily desire to disassociate ourselves from—a notorious Other. But as observed so far in *Spirited Away* and *Paprika*, these traits of monstrosity are used as a vehicle for expression of the self, which presents a contradiction of the internal and the alien that cannot be ignored.

The traits of the monster establish it as an abnormality—a conception which is identifiably and fundamentally Other. Monsters are "not simply products of the imagination but…cultural constructs of the threatening Other that may, inexplicably and with no warning, appear in our midst."[24] The contradiction of monstrosity lies in the fact that while this "threatening Other," is considered to be something which is alien and distant, it is an expression of the internal. Monsters are an existence which we push away and recoil from, and also, under Komatsu's classification of *yōkai*, a type of supernatural existence that people cannot control.[25] And yet, they are "products of the imagination," conceptions which originate from within our own self. Cohen addresses this contradiction in his seven theses of monster culture: "The monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us. In its function as dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond—of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within."[26] In other words, all of our conceptions of the "distant and distinct," are actually those of the near and intimate which are discarded out of fear. After all, that which scares us most about the monstrous is that which is most familiar. Perhaps what is the most frightening about monstrosity is the dawning

24 Foster, p. 22.

25 Komatsu, p. 11: "…*ningen ga seigyo dekinai chōshizen* (supernatural) *teki sonzai toshite no yōkai*…"

26 Cohen, p. 7.

realization that it represents an Other which we reject and shun but which is still a part of ourselves, a fear which Oshii Mamoru's *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (hereafter *Innocence*), sequel to *Ghost in the Shell* (*Kōkaku Kidōtai*, 1995), brings to life in an imposing, industrialized world of technology and cyborgs.

Innocence is about the tie between consciousness and identity in the midst of a conflict between the human and the artificial. It takes place in a technologically advanced future, across a dark urban landscape inhabited by cyborgs and cybernetically modified humans. Life is transformed to such an extent that it is nearly impossible to find a human who has not been mechanically modified, in either the body or mind. In this setting, Oshii opens a dialog between the technological Other and human identity, leading to a confusion of the two in such a way that it questions the very means by which we define identity. The most basic aspects of the self are cast into doubt—the assumption of our humanity, memories, and body. This conjures a sense of uncertainty not simply with self-identity, but with identity as a human, revealing a latent anxiety in the contemporary self.

The film begins with a textual preface that speaks of a technologically fused future where the state of the body and mind cannot be assumed:

> In human time, when most human thought has been accelerated by artificial intelligence and external memory can be shared on a universal matrix, Batou, an agent of the elite section 9 Security Force and a being so artificially modified as to be essentially cyborg, is assigned, along with his mostly human partner, Togusa, to investigate a series of gruesome murders.
>
> Time has passed since Batou's original partner, Major Motoko Kusanagi, cybernetically enhanced to such a degree that only her "ghost" remained human,

> disappeared into the Net. Since then, Batou has wondered where her ghost might be and if the major will ever return…[27]

In this future, not only has the human body become the subject of mechanical evolution, but memory and the mind have also become subject to this technological "enhancement," made possible thanks to the advanced development of cyborg technologies and artificial intelligence. Oshii's *Innocence*, set in a world where the line between human and technology is nearly indiscernible, ultimately shows that the Other is not so different from ourselves as we would like to believe. The cyborgs and cybernetic technology of *Innocence* are an unsettling challenge to the human to reevaluate their own identity, raising a cloud of doubt and insecurities. With the body and mind essentially infiltrated by the artificial Other—technology—a dissonance arises within which the characters and viewer are forced to critically examine the conception of the self, and specifically within that, the Other in relation to the self. *Innocence* ultimately shows that the Other is not so easily divorced from self-identity, and thus suggests that the rejection of the Other is a rejection of the self.

Innocence is constantly blurring the lines between human and cyborg. Along with the film's portrayal of mechanically modified humans, cyborgs are conversely modified to possess their own souls, called "ghosts." Despite their similarities, humans maintain an anxious fear of the cyborg, discriminating against them and marking their Otherness. The ever increasing fusion between the cyborg and human, however, shows that the Other is closer than ever. Perhaps at some point the two will become completely interchangeable, and the human will become the cyborg, the feared, monstrous Other, and the cyborg will become the human. When such a point comes, there is a possibility that no one will even be able to tell.

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27 *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence,* dir. Oshii Mamoru, Bandai Entertainment, 2004. English translation.

The blur between the natural and artificial is a motif of the film, a foundational theme which Oshii builds into the setting and imagery. The sprawling high-tech urban world, a "dystopian vision"[28] of dark streets, artificial light, and a net of skyscrapers portrays the typical city as a community that has been overrun by technological advancement. Human life is bounded by the structures of the city. Buildings seem to have grown to uncontrolled heights, expansions wherever they could fit, as if to meet demands for progress. As a small flock of birds flies against the background of this electronic metropolis, a juxtaposition of the artificiality of the arrays of steel skyscrapers with a breath of natural life evokes a lyrical awareness of the simultaneous discord and junction of the Otherness of technology and familiarity of the natural.

The most poignant evidence of the shadowy crossover between human and machine, however, are the characters in *Innocence*, mixtures of the cyborg and human to differing degrees. At the height of cyborg advancement, they distort the line between the human and technology. Susan Napier similarly points out the connection between this artificial modification of the body and the sense of self in the film's prequel, *Ghost in the Shell*, very similar in subject matter to *Innocence.* "*Ghost in the Shell*…shares…a fundamental concern or even unease with the body and thus, implicitly, with identity itself."[29] The main character of *Innocence,* Batou, is one example of such an alteration of the body. He looks human but is described in the preface as "a being so artificially modified as to be essentially cyborg." Batou's limbs are prosthetics, he has a cyberbrain, and there is a particular emphasis on his digitally modified eyesight. A number of times throughout the film the viewer is shown the world through Batou's eyes, a view which provides an obviously digitalized picture of the surrounding area, as if one were looking through

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28 Susan J. Napier, *Anime: From Akira to Howl's Moving Castle* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 105.

29 Napier, *Anime: From Akira to Howl's Moving Castle,* p. 115.

a scanning device. There is one particular reading that shows up on screen when Batou zeros in on an object; it indicates whether something, or someone, is biologically alive (see fig. 3.0). The necessity for such a reading is a sign that visual appearance cannot be taken for granted. The

most basic level of identity, whether something is alive or not, cannot be so simply determined.

At another point, Batou's brain is maliciously hacked in a convenience store, causing his vision to malfunction, which leads him to attack the people around him and cut off his own arm. The vision of the world through Batou's point of view is pixelated and grainy, a picture skipping in and out, as if one were watching television through a bad reception. The replacement of

human eyesight with electronic technology raises the possibility that the senses can be replaced with the artificial, and if so then the ability to know anything falls into question. The basis for which we understand reality, and as a result identity in relation to it, can no longer be simply determined if we cannot assume exclusive control of our senses. The general question here is what it is to be human when the body does not exist. As Susan Orbaugh likewise notes, "…both films [*Innocence* and its prequel *Ghost in the Shell*] raise questions about what is necessary to produce (post)human selfhood and emotions (do they require "genuine" organic material? do they require a body?)…" [30]

In general, the level of human appearance varies greatly throughout the film. The most cybernetically modified body in the film belongs to the hacker, Kim, who seems robotic even compared to pure cyborgs. It is impossible visually to tell that he used to be human. Kim, who believes that a doll's complete lack of consciousness makes it a perfect existence, has attempted to modify himself to become as close to that ideal as possible, and managed to transplant his "ghost" into a completely robotic body. Thus, Kim appears as a vision of artificiality. An array of wires connect to the back of his head, his skin unnaturally gray, and his jaw hangs open like a ventriloquist dummy's. His voice is hollow and computerized, a lifeless, eerie tone.

The potential for the extent of these modifications is nearly endless. Body parts are gradually replaced with cyborg prosthetics, even to the extent that all that remains of the human is the "ghost," the soul or emotion. Such is the case with Major Kusanagi, who in her lack of physical body transcends the normal bounds of determining human identity. Batou speaks of how the only things she owned were her brain and her ghost, and she wasn't even too sure that she had those. Her body was made of prosthetics and a cyberbrain that belonged to the

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30 Susan Orbaugh, "Emotional Infectivity: Cyborg Affect and the Limits of the Human," *Mechademia* 3 (2008): 150-172, Project MUSE, 18 Aug. 2010 <http://muse.jhu.edu/>, p.155.

government, and even her memories were not her own property. At the end of *Ghost in the Shell*, Kusanagi gives up all of her physical body and is able to exist without one in the "net," a type of omnipresent information network. This raises larger questions of what it then means to be human; how one identifies the self becomes reconstructed around the concept of the ghost. Orbaugh cites an interview with Oshii that illuminates this line of thought. The body, which is in "a process of disappearing," as well as memory, which can be "fabricated and transferred," (as seen later in Innocence) "cannot function as the foundation for selfhood."[31] What this does is demonstrate that the definition of the self has become in this moment unclear, raising significant doubts as to one's ability to know something.

Such modifications, through blurring the human and machine, invite the Other to mix with our perception of the self. Individual identity, and in this case, specifically identity as a human, is typically thought to be something which originates within, something that cannot be influenced from the outside, and yet *Innocence* challenges this presumption. The mechanical, the Other, has the ability to become a part of the body of the human, and thus in one sense, impose a redefinition of identity. In addition to this, the most prominent forms of artificiality in the film, cyborgs, dolls, and cyber-prosthetics, are all humanity's own attempts to replicate their own existence, further narrowing the gap between the Other and the human. However, ironically, this replication of the human is what raises the fear, as Kim says, that "the human phenomenon is fundamentally devoid of meaning and purpose,"[32] that humans can be broken down into simple, mechanical parts. Suddenly, it becomes a tangible fear that humanity may be just as much a machine as the things it creates.

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31 Orbaugh, p. 160.

32 Oshii, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*. From the Japanese: 「つまり人間という現象は本来、虚無に属しているのではないかという疑惑。

Togusa experiences this shock under the illusions Kim shows him when he is trapped inside the hacker's mansion. Kim changes the appearance of his own robotic body to be a replica of Togusa, speaking cryptically of an "uncertainty that maybe something that appears to be alive actually isn't, and that something that appears not to be alive actually is."[33] Seeing himself as a complete cyborg sharply focuses on the fear of turning into the Other, as well the realization that the distinction between the identity of biological and artificial beings is easily misread. The possibility of turning into the artificial, the doll, is frighteningly close.

At another point during the illusion, Togusa himself is shot. Then, in the moment when he looks down to see the bloodstain, his chest splits open, displaying the parts of a mechanical doll, a symbol of the fear that the human body is just the same as a doll's parts, the deeper implication of which is that human existence is just as meaningless, lifeless, and replaceable as that of a doll. This fear of being made up of such mechanical parts is a fear that our own identity is constructed on false pretenses, that the human existence is a formula that can be replicated, just like artificial. With Togusa, the most human character in the film, confronting the image of himself in a body just as artificially modified as Kim's, everything is thrown into a harsh perspective, making the fear that the human body is nothing more than parts all the more present and tangible for both Togusa and the viewer, who can identify the closest with the "most human" member of the investigation team.

While humans in *Innocence* are, to varying degrees, edging farther and farther towards complete mechanization, the depiction of cyborgs portrays the artificial as becoming more and more human. In fact, the very opening sequence of credits, for instance, depicts the creation of a cyborg in a manner reminiscent of a human birth. Submerged in liquid, the cyborg is curled into

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33 Oshii, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*. From the Japanese:「外見上は生きているように見える物が、本当に生きているのかどうかという疑惑。その逆に、生命の無い事物がひょっとして生きているのではないかという疑惑。」

the position of a human fetus resting in the womb. Such imagery deliberately confuses the line between the natural and artificial. It implies a union between the two, suggesting that they are becoming more and more entwined, and eventually might become one and the same, thus compromising assumptions of what it is to have a human identity.

The possession of a ghost has always separated the "real" humans from the cyborgs. However, the viewer and the characters are made to question even this assumption, and begin to doubt the absoluteness of one's ghost. There is a process known as "ghost dubbing," through which human ghosts can be replicated and put into cyborgs. During the process, the number of times a ghost is copied slowly deteriorates the original, eventually turning the human who was the owner of a particular ghost into a doll-like, soulless existence. This implies a fluidity of identity, between which the Other can become a human, and a human the Other. In the film, a collection of sex robots, called gynoids, are the recipients of such dubbed ghosts. They are almost human, but what is apparent, however, is that they possess at least one human characteristic: the ability to commit suicide. It is the tragedy of the gynoids which make them the most human, and the violent and bloody portrayal of their destruction at the hands of Batou portrays a lonely existence. These gynoids are a symbolic Other, an army of cyborgs that, beyond their humanoid appearance, should have no human traits. However, through their tragedy, Oshii is able to portray them sympathetically. The gynoids are cyborgs which can experience death and destruction; they share human tragedies and are beings with which we find ourselves, in spite of an uneasy awareness of their artificiality, able to sympathize. They are figures that, as Susan Napier puts it, convey the "powerful sense of the corrosive loneliness of the human condition," that permeates *Ghost in the Shell,* and *Innocence* as well.[34]

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34 Napier, *Anime: From Akira to Howl's Moving Castle,* p.106.

Batou and Togusa are investigating a string of these gynoid suicides, which are tied to a series of murders. The gynoids have been reported to have been killing their masters, after which every single one of them has committed suicide. Batou witnesses one such suicide. As the gynoid destroys herself, she cries for help, plaintive and desperate: "*tasukete, tasukete*" (help me, help me). She tears her own skin open at the chest, a horrifying image of self-mutilation. The skin stretches like thin elastic, and then breaks, in the process popping open the mechanical compartments in her chest (see fig. 3.1). This image of the cyborg crying out for help as it destroys itself evokes a sense of a deep loneliness, the most powerful representation in the film of the pain and ache of human emotion, contained in a non-human Other.

The most tragic image of the gynoids, however, is when Batou and Togusa infiltrate their manufacturing plant to stop their production. Preparing to fight the incoming threat, the gynoids are pictured rising out of their pods from the floor of the facility, evoking the image of an army preparing to battle. The fight scene that follows is rife with images of destruction and massacre, but the majority of the violence is not portrayed with shows of blood and flesh, but rather of cyborg bodies torn open and ripped apart, yielding the same tragic feeling as a massacre on a battlefield would. The same grief and lamentation that would be felt from seeing the remains of

flesh and blood bodies is conveyed by the gynoids' slumped, lifeless forms, torn limbs, and clumps of wire and gears. Batou leaves the plant a battered wasteland scattered with broken mechanical parts, a vision both dramatic and disturbing.

After the battle, the frame stills on one particular image of a wrecked gynoid, evoking a lyrical sense of the devastation (see fig. 3.2). A few slots on its chest have broken and opened, revealing the gears inside, while sections of skin on their face and shoulder have torn off. Blood is splattered on the gynoid's shoulder and spread across her face, in one image combining and paralleling the death of the human and the cyborg. The bright red of the blood is striking against the white skin of the cyborg, an image of twisted beauty. This vision of tragedy evokes a sobering awareness of devastation, a powerful image of melancholy lyricism that equates the death of a cyborg to the loss of a human life. The cyborg, the denied and estranged Other, is in this moment equal to a human.

Innocence uses the existence of the technological Other to confuse our understanding of human identity, urging a reevaluation, even redefinition, of the conception of the self. The film takes this theme beyond the physical body, however, raising the possibility that the mind—our own memories, senses, and consciousness—can be manipulated as well. The fear that the mind

may even be artificial and thus broken down into mechanical parts like the body, leaves virtually no stable basis from which to define one's own identity.

Batou and Togusa find themselves in such a predicament, trapped inside the mansion of the hacker, Kim, in an oppressive, mind-bending, virtual maze of illusion. Their brains are "hacked," meaning that the signals of their minds are being manipulated, including their senses, memories, and possibly even their own thoughts. Thrown into a mental loop, the investigators are repeatedly brought back to the entrance of the mansion, walking through the rooms to find and confront Kim for a total of three times. The catch lies in the fact that it's impossible for neither the characters nor the viewers to tell that the world that Kim creates in their minds is false, save for the clues left by Kusanagi, who from the Net is able to hack into Kim's program and change the surroundings. In this situation, the Other has become something which can infiltrate the mind and memories, threatening our security in our own consciousness.

The mansion itself is a menacing symbol of their mental imprisonment, projecting an atmosphere of apprehension that is felt by those trapped inside. The building's imposing presence emphasizes Batou and Togusa's loss of control—a loss of control of the situation, their minds, and consequently their own realities. The mansion stands at the end of a long, narrow walkway that stretches across a wide body of water. It is presented as the focal point of the whole landscape, a perfectly symmetrical, powerful presence at the end of a wide expanse. The building's positioning and stature seem to draw everything from the surrounding area into it, a visual metaphor for how it draws in the minds of the investigators.

Inside the mansion as well, its overwhelming grandiosity categorizes it as a realm that is separate and distinct, essentially a realm of the Other. In the wide atrium that Batou and Togusa first enter into, everything is elaborately decorated in shades of gold and bronze. The bold

architecture, complete with vaulted ceilings and grand staircases, is reminiscent of the European Gothic, designed to inspire awe and power. With a slow, circular pan, the viewer is given a sense of the overwhelming, eerie atmosphere of the place, and Batou and Togusa seem diminutive in comparison. The stark contrast between the impressiveness of the mansion and the wary figures of Batou and Togusa conveys the fact that they do not belong in the mansion, identifying them as intruders from a separate world. The suppressive imagery of the mansion articulates the futility of the victim, minds at the mercy of an alien power.

The rooms of the mansion are filled with mysterious illusions, which further evoke a sense of unease and a foreboding of the world of manipulation that they have unwittingly entered into. For example, in the dining room there is an image of a seagull on the ceiling, flying against a blue sky. Absolutely flawless and life like, it gives both Batou and the viewer pause. Then the image slowly zooms out, like a picture coming into focus, or as if reality were readjusting, and the nooks and lines in the wall and ceiling become apparent. This illusion of reality is a precursor to the virtual world that Batou and Togusa are about to be pulled into, one in which everything is a trick shown to their minds by the hacker Kim. Such illusions emphasize the idea that the senses and mind can be deceived, making reality suddenly something subjective. The mansion leads to a world where all observation, all assumptions, are false, thus undermining stability and inviting disorder.

Batou and Togusa are trapped in this world of deception in a loop of time that keeps resetting. This cyclical pattern is suggestive of confinement—confinement and manipulation of the mind, a contortion of reality and the senses. This is enforced in the hypnotic image of the cup of tea that Togusa is served in Kim's room. The cream in the liquid swirls around slowly as a close up of the cup lingers on screen, a hypnotizing vision of a never-ending loop. It is

suggestive of the state of their minds, caught in a closed circle and floating around as unconsciously as the cream in the current of Kim's virtual world.

It is clear that Batou and Togusa are simply playthings in this maze-like mansion of the hacker. What they see are manipulated illusions, and their minds become avenues for their own destruction at the hands of Kim. The Other has infiltrated the mind—infiltrated and completely dominated it—showing that in this world nothing is constant or certain; if the mind can be hacked, then what basis of reality is there from which to define one's existence? More than that, what one assumes to be an essential piece of self-identity is proved in this case to be susceptible to, or maybe a part of, the Other.

The moment in which the virtual maze is broken and their minds are freed is similar to the flipping of a switch. As if the mind were a machine, it is suggested that parts of it can be turned on and off. The film portrays this with a sudden cut to indicate a shift in time, or rather, a shift from illusion back into reality. One moment Togusa's face is shown in profile, when suddenly the frame freezes. Like a jolt, the scene shifts just slightly: Togusa is still frozen there with the same expression, but the lighting has changed. This immediate change is simple and instantaneous, as if pressing button A, for instance, will have effect B. For a long moment, Togusa stands frozen perfectly still, face blank and hand stopped halfway to the teacup he is still holding. He is still drinking the tea which swirled around so ominously before, a remnant of the cyclical trap.

Brain hacking raises a number of concerns regarding how we define the self, among which are whether we can count on memory or experiences, whether the mind is mechanical, and the concern that the Other can infiltrate the inner most recesses of our thoughts and senses. If technology can affect the mind like this and change the conception of reality such that it is nearly

impossible to even know that one has entered into an illusion, it undermines the ability to know anything—reality, others, or the self. The manipulation of both the physical senses and memory that Batou and Togusa are subject to validates the fear that the Other—in this case, technology—can infiltrate our mind and our self, and change, even become a part of, our identity.

In the face of physical modifications of the body and cyborgs which display human qualities, the boundary between the artificial and the human is obscured. Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* challenges its viewers to accept the fact that the Other is not as distant an existence as we would like it to be, and on the contrary may even represent something from inside the self. In *Innocence,* the usual constructs of identity, the body and mind, can neither be trusted nor taken for granted, raising the question of what it is to be human when one can no longer count on such means of definition. Certainly the fact that such issues of identity are portrayed through these distortions is indicative of a deeper insecurity in human identity. These are issues of the self being rejected, taking on the form of our own monsters. Such portrayal of the Other, the monster, is not alien, but speaks to a denial of something within, an unease with confronting issues of our own identity.

Conclusion

In the imagination of the monstrous, whether alternate worlds of fantasy or undisclosed corners of the subconscious, where memory wars with the corporeal for meaning, is a world that is unknown and unidentified. It fluctuates and metamorphoses without any clear form, a place where one can become someone, or something, completely different. There is something about the qualities of these temporal other worlds, the way they are fluctuating and fleeting, that is innately unsettling, and in them, the concept of the self is no longer a secure constant, but rather a construct that is likewise susceptible to change.

Whether it is in the mind, as in Oshii Mamoru's *Innocence*, in our dreams, as in Kon Satoshi's *Paprika*, or in a supernatural world of *yōkai,* as in Miyazaki Hayao's *Spirited Away*, these worlds represent parallels to our consciousness in reality, and become a plain of discourse for the struggle to define one's identity. In these films, the traits of what is typically considered to be monstrosity are used as vehicles to explore crises of personal identity, in the process reflecting the doubts of a society in which people are often uncomfortable with, or lack understanding of, their own identity. They present the viewer with an image of a fluctuating self that is just as indefinable to us as these worlds of monsters, a window into the struggles of an increasingly fluid and indefinable individual identity in postmodern Japanese society.

Perhaps the struggle with identity and failure to understand the self depicted in these films is a reflection of the consequences of an ever increasing consumer and material driven contemporary society, one which promotes superficial attachments and a type of hyper-individualism of self-absorbed worlds. There is the fact that "some commentators see…an

increasingly narcissistic tendency among Japanese youth to dwell in their own mental worlds of private emotion and memory."[35] A growth in materialist fantasy worlds might be a sign of a life becoming more and more alienating, and making it harder to come to terms with oneself in reality.

Cultural anthropologist Ann Allison has suggested a trend in Japanese society towards "intimate alienation" which involves people engaging more in solitary activities.[36] She writes: "Life, in this millennial Japan, occasions an even greater degree of solitarism, atomism, and disconnection from support systems….Further, not only is more time spent in 'mediated transitions,' but more of everyday life is mediated by constructed realities that are increasingly engaged as a solitary activity."[37] Social phenomena such as *hikikomori*, "social 'shut-in[s],'"[38] individuals who stay in their homes and refuse to go out, and *otaku*,[39] a term generally applied to fantasy and hobby enthusiasts often indulging in sub-cultures of anime and manga, also indicate increasing isolation and a tendency towards immersion in constructed realities. Whatever the term, it has been noted that through material constructed realities, people are possibly changing the way they construct communication and relationships, which may thus warping the understanding of their own identity:

35 Napier, *Anime: From Akira to Howl's Moving Castle,* p. 290.

36 Ann Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p. 71.

37 Allison, p. 84.

38 Allison, p. 82.

39 In *The Anime Machine,* Thomas Lamarre defines otaku as "a set of activities related to constructing personalized worlds amid the media flows exemplified in anime," p. 109. Alternatively, for more on the relationship between otaku and postmodern identity, see Hiroki Azuma's *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). His general definition of otaku is as follows: "[S]imply put, it is a general term referring to those who indulge in forms of subculture strongly linked to anime, video games, computers, science fiction, special effects films, anime figurines, and so on," p. 3.

> …[P]eople increasingly seek 'life' in material things: objects that become the conduit for various forms of communication, intimate relationships, and arousals. Integral as it is to millennial capitalism, this passion for material goods that are invested with the power to animate the lives, identities, and communication and communication networks of their possessors must be examined seriously.[40]

Dependence on virtual and material worlds to define one's identity creates detachment from the self, perhaps leaving us in a position where we are no longer able to differentiate between the object and our identity, and resulting in the identity crises portrayed in these films.

Perhaps we are losing our identity, like Chihiro, or never had a sense of it, like No-Face. Perhaps we suppress a part of our identity that we can't accept, like Konakawa or Chiba. Or perhaps we have completely lost touch with what makes us human, as in *Innocence.* The basic assumptions regarding our own reality are thrown into question, such as the belief that we will not spontaneously disappear, that we are not in a dream, or that our memories and bodies are our own, which shakes the very foundations of existence. Whatever the case, these films portray worlds in which characters are struggling to define their own identity, and the unsettling qualities of monstrosity through which these films operate suggest it is not something that is possible to simply define. They suggest that changeablility and transformation are becoming a part of how people see the contemporary self, and these buried issues of monstrosity that hint at an unease with how society constructs identity, and how the individual views their own self.

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40 Allison, p. 86.

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