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**Environmentalism without Guarantees: the Spectral and Scatological Politics of Displacement in Miyazaki's *Hayao's Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi***

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There is a moment in the 2001 anime hit *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi (Spirited Away)* that I can only describe as haunting: it is the moment when Haku, teenage reiner to the crafty madame Yubaba, finally recalls his true identity as the spirit of a river now filled in to make room for apartments. Haku has been in Yubaba's service for as long as she has held his full name in her possession, yet 10-year-old protagonist Chihiro breaks the witch's spell when she remembers that Haku is more precisely the Kohaku River, into which she once fell when much younger. This is undoubtedly the narrative climax of the film: in breaking the spell, Chihiro not only releases Haku from bondage, but also ensures that both she and her parents will safely return to the human world. Yet what is haunting about the surfacing of Haku's identity is not its emotional impact, but the way in which director Miyazaki Hayao – long recognized for the ecological subtexts of his films<sup>1</sup> – reorganizes our conception of what the film is 'about' via his very tangential and fragmentary allusion to environmental destruction. Chihiro's remark about the filling in of the river Kohaku is no more than an aside, yet it bespeaks a world with which modern viewers are intimately familiar: a disenchanted world in which people and nature are routinely uprooted in the name of profit and progress.

Moreover, these familiar elements appear within an aesthetic and generic realm to which, at first glance, they seem largely anathema. Commentators have almost unanimously described Miyazaki as a fantasist and his films as paragon of imagination, a characterization applied no less frequently to *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*, hailed by one reviewer as the heir to a tradition of films "so finely detailed" and with "character designs so unique ... [that] at times it seems as if the director is funneling his dreams directly onto the screen" (Alter 79). Given the otherwise fantastic terrain of the film, the fleeting reference to filled-in rivers and housing developments thus seems oddly banal, a dingy fragment of contemporary urban existence that jars with the vivid coloring of Miyazaki's imaginings. In a movie whose ostensible theme is the spectral, the economic and ecological loom as formal specters, the uncanny real of a mythical world – out of place because familiar.

Cultural theory has recently revisited notions of the uncanny and the spectral as useful sites for thinking through Western knowledge and power structures in an era of "post"-ness. Avery Gordon, for example, argues for a mode of sociological inquiry that takes haunting as "a constitutive feature of social life" (22), one that necessitates an alternate "politics of accounting" attuned to the very real, material effects of what is ordinarily unaccounted for (18). Similarly, Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx: the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* envisions a historical ethics of spectrality centered around what Derrida terms the *revenant*: that which has been rendered anterior to narratives of progress, but which returns within the present as a material force or political urgency that demands response. As Wendy Brown states it, once "materialism, periodicity, and objectivity ... [have] been slain by the exposure of their untenable predicates" (46), the ghostly becomes an idiom for speaking the exclusions

<sup>1</sup> For instance, Miyazaki's first film, the 1964 *Kaze no Tani no Nausicaa (Nausicaa of the Valley of Wind)*, garnered the accolades of the World Wildlife Fund for its conservationist ethos (Schilling 1997: 32).

of power and history: what is absent but present, there but not there.

As I hope to expound in this essay, all of these political implications inhere within the uncanny moment at the climax of *Sen*. Yet there is another element of the film that gives even the textual density of this moment additional mass: namely, the film's repeated visual tropes of gross over consumption and explosive excretion. From the transformation of Chihiro's gluttonous parents into pigs to the scatological spectacle of the Stink Spirit, motifs of eating and excreting recur throughout the film. How, then, should we connect these two prominent features of *Sen* – the spectral figuration of ecological destruction on the one hand; and on the other, the repeated motifs of literal spectators eating, shitting, and puking? In this paper I would like to take up this question via the politics of spectrality briefly outlined here, exploring Miyazaki's textual and biographical engagement with the problematic of representing – and thus critically accounting for – the displaced ecological and human costs of global capital. In order to represent what has been destroyed and is hence no longer present, *Sen*, I argue, figures ecological violence as outside of and anterior to narrative: a prior trauma we glimpse only imperfectly through its uncanny return as a set of textual effects – both momentary allusions to the “real world” and repeated scatological imagery. Both of these effects engage in a kind of literalization, a re-enactment of the global capital flows responsible not only for human and ecological displacement, but for the placement of Miyazaki's films within a transnational nexus of critical and popular renown. In this way, the text stages a critical encounter with the conditions of its own production and consumption.

To the extent that this staging is not unique to *Sen*, but in fact recurs throughout Miyazaki's oeuvre, I attempt in this paper to undertake a two-pronged analysis, focusing in the first section on the film's internal dynamics and in the second on Miyazaki's biography as a filmmaker in shifting relation to historical materialism. A third discussion that I lack space to fully develop here concerns the relations of global capital in which the text circulates as an object of transnational distribution and consumption – particularly the market forces that, within the last couple of decades, have shaped Japanese animation (or anime) as a genre “co-produced” (and by extension co-consumed) in both Japan and the West (Napier 22-23; Lent 4). While the present paper will primarily focus on the textual and the biographical, I want to stress that this approach can only be preliminary: ultimately, the larger question remains of how these recently emergent global markers for anime relate to the specific national and historical contexts in which particular kinds and modes of representation – ecological, scatological – gain symbolic currency.

### Middle of Nowhere/Nowhere to Shop

Most popular reviews of *Sen* make no mention of Miyazaki's references to ecological and economic violence, unless it is to contrast *Sen*'s apparent lack of these elements with previous Miyazaki films. Variety reviewer Derek Elley, for example, states that *Sen* has “no eco-message hammered home, no dark violence and an overall lighter, more fantastic feel. ... If the movie has a message, it's simply that you need to know who you are and hold fast to your identity” (72). This identification of *Sen* as a bildungsroman narrative is by and large the consensus among critics – though it is by no means a misguided one, given the film's focus on Chihiro's transformation from petulant child to self-assured young woman. However, what this consensus overlooks is that from the first, Miyazaki frames his coming of age story in terms of a messy dialectic between the historical world of capitalist modernity and the fantastic world of nonhuman enchantment, such that what might appear to be a politically ingenuous narrative is both centered and

disrupted from within by the contemporary economic and ecological realities of post-bubble economy Japan.

The film opens, for example, with Chihiro lying prostrate across the backseat of her parents' moving vehicle. We can see from the tree-lined hills that roll past the window of the car – a spacious Audi four-door – that Chihiro and her parents are moving to a location somewhere outside of the city, an expository detail confirmed by the shopping bags filled with the family's possessions that compete with Chihiro for backseat space. Like the Audi, the shopping bags mark not only Chihiro's intermediary position between city and country, old and new, but her family's comfortable economic status as well. And indeed, as one of the first lines of dialogue in the film, Chihiro's mother Yugo murmurs, looking out the window, “This really is in the middle of nowhere. I'm going to have to go to the next town to shop.”<sup>2</sup> Here Miyazaki contrasts modernity – metropolitan social and physical location – to the “emptiness” of rural landscape: with nowhere to shop, it follows that they are in the middle of nowhere.

Yet another key moment early on in the film establishes this new space not simply as an absence of the modern, but as the *presence* of something else, an-other kind of time and place altogether. As the car turns off the highway and onto a tree-canopied road that is little more than tire tracks, Chihiro points out a cluster of small house-like structures ringing the trunk of an enormous tree, which Yugo informs her are “shrines. Some people think little spirits live there.” Thus the new space in which Chihiro's family finds itself is not merely the absence of modern urban consumption; it also contains the presence of the enchanted and mystical. Miyazaki presents Chihiro's family as literally moving from the disenchanting space and time of modern capitalist consumption to a space and time pervaded by a sense of animate otherness.

However, neither the movement nor the opposition it seems to sustain is a clean one. In several places, the extratextual political and economic world reveals itself, disrupting the centrality of the enchanted and fantastic. One of the clearest instances of this occurs when, having taken an exploratory side trip through a mysterious tunnel en route to their new home, Chihiro and her parents emerge onto a windswept plain dotted with vacant buildings that Chihiro's father Akio conjectures are part of “an abandoned theme park”. “They built them everywhere in the early 90s,” he explains to an unsettled Chihiro: “Then the economy went bad, and they all went bankrupt. This must be one of them.” It is tempting to read Akio's “must be” as an instance of rationalization, evidence that Chihiro's perspective on her family's surroundings is the more authentic and perceptive one – and thus that Miyazaki's critique of capitalist consumption operates within a romanticist or even primitivist framework, in which the falsity and corruption of the modern adult world belittles the purer, more authentic reality of nature and childhood. Yet this reading obscures the more radical possibility that the story literally *does* take place in a theme park abandoned in the wake of economic recession. Present only in trace form, this uncanny detail suggests the political dimensions of the spectral world that Miyazaki conjures, its evocation of the unseen human externalities of boom and bust capital.

<sup>2</sup> All dialogue is quoted from the English-dubbed VHS version of *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*, released in the United States in 2001 as *Spirited Away*. While I am not unaware of the politics of my decision to read an English-dubbed version of the film (discussed among fan circles as more “Americanized” than its subtitled counterpart), I also recognize that the very conditions of my material access to the film are made possible by the interests of the Disney Corporation, a U.S. company, in maintaining a position of economic dominance. To that degree, questions of “authenticity” as it pertains to translation format and viewer position seem a far hairier matter than the debates surrounding “subbing” and “dubbing” would suggest. However, my decision to go with the subtitled version of the film was ultimately decided by a much less abstractly material consideration: irregular access to a DVD player and the necessity of repeated screenings meant that the subtitled VHS format was much more practical.

A similar trace detail in the same scene points to the specifically environmental costs of this speculative economy. Observing the remains of a constructed creekbed, Akio comments aloud to Yugo and Chihiro that the absent themepark owners were "planning to put a river here." An uncanny sister to the filled-in river we encounter at the end of the film, the abandoned river and its absentee planners suggest a possible connection to the urban planners Chihiro later implies are responsible for the residential development that has displaced the river Kohaku. And given that the premise of the film is Chihiro's move to a new house in what looks to be a suburban neighborhood, one can only wonder if the alternate universe into which Chihiro's family mysteriously stumbles does not in fact function allegorically, symbolizing an unseen and unaccounted for nonhuman realm whose destruction sustains the apparent affluence of urban sprawl and real estate speculation.

Trace elements such as these undeniably locate Chihiro's coming of age within the specific geographical and temporal context of post-bubble economy Japan. Tomo Machiyama suggests as much in an essay published in the anime and manga fanzine *Animerica*, noting numerous parallels between the bathroom that serves as *mise-en-scene* for much of film and the poorly regulated sex industries in which many Japanese women have been forced to find work following the collapse of the bubble economy:

Japan's economy has been in decline for more than a decade now. The unemployment rate is as high as it's ever been. Especially for women, getting a decent job is extremely difficult because of traditional sexual discrimination. A Japanese girl has to have the guts to do anything, to work in any occupation[.] They have to pay the price for their parents' generation. During the 80s, the generation that Chihiro's mom and dad belong to enjoyed the hedonism of the bubble economy without conscience, just like pigs (12).

This is, of course, no mere figure of speech. In the sequence of scenes whose ultimate outcome is Chihiro's employment at the bathroom, Akio and Yugo follow the scent of cooking food into a seemingly empty marketplace, where they help themselves to a buffet-style layout of lavishly-arranged dishes despite the admonitions of a distraught Chihiro. "Don't worry," Akio calls back as he piles his plate high: "You've got daddy here. He's got credit cards and cash." Resigned to their resolute heedlessness, Chihiro wanders off to apprehensively explore her strange environs; while gone, night falls and the marketplace suddenly comes to life, its stalls bustling with the shadowy presence of formerly absent attendants. Frightened, Chihiro races back to where she left her parents, only to find that they have been transformed into slavering pigs, their eyes wild and rolling.

In an interview conducted after the 1997 Japanese release of *Mononoke Hime* (*Princess Mononoke*), Miyazaki has theorized human-nature relations in a way that foretells the later metamorphosis of Yugo and Akio in *Sen*: "In the past," he states in this interview, "humans hesitated when they took lives, even nonhuman lives. But society ... changed, and they no longer felt that way. As humans grew stronger, I think that [they] became quite arrogant, losing the sorrow of 'we have no other choice'" ("Interview" par. 59). While Miyazaki may be speaking in universal terms here, we can also read his statement as a reference to the shortsighted instrumentalization of the nonhuman natural world within contemporary Japan, particularly during the affluent years of the bubble economy. Here the key development for Miyazaki is not the taking of other lives, but more precisely a loss of *hesitation* – the sorrow or ambivalence that attends one's knowledge that it is ultimately necessary to kill to survive. The transformation of Chihiro's parents into pigs

seems to be a similar staging of this historical loss. Akio and Yugo turn into pigs not because they eat too much, but because they eat without hesitation and out of a sense of entitlement. Unable to sense the presence or prior claim of the spirits who populate the empty marketplace, they compulsively take without asking, just as earlier they were helpless to resist the allure of a world to whose enchantment they were oblivious.

If *Sen* is a bildungsroman story, then, it is one narrativized in terms of an unstable dialectic between fantasy and history whose ruptures reveal the human and ecological losses effaced from perception within a textual and social economy of speculation. Yet in contrast to her father's speculative logic of credit – the purchase from future generations in order to satisfy present desires – Chihiro personifies an alternate representation of growth, one that moves recursively and self-reflexively rather than inexorably and unhesitatingly forward: a principle of change rather than mere expansion. Halfway between childhood and adulthood, she occupies an intermediate and self-critical third space from which she is able to negotiate the world to which her parents succumb. For this alternate model of growth not only critiques reification and disenchantment; it also suggests an alternate epistemology. Able to hesitate, and thus able to look backwards in the moment of looking forward, Chihiro embodies a way of knowing that is open to the presence of those her parents cannot sense. Capable of such perception, she can speak to spectators – those who have been wounded out of historical "necessity", dispossessed by the unidirectional linearity of progress.

### The Gift of Refusal as the Gift of Laxative and Emetic

If on the formal level of the text Miyazaki literalizes the displacement of the river Kohaku by engaging in a figuration of displacement, another kind of literalization takes place through characters such as No Face and the Stink Spirit. In a visual language that is concrete to the point of scatology, these two spirits re-enact on a narrative level the flows of money and desire responsible for the originary act of ecological violence at the absent center of the film. Significantly, these are also the primary scenes in which Chihiro engages in her communicative encounters with spectators. Through relations of gifting that invoke highly graphic scenes of lancing and purging, Chihiro interacts with both No Face and the Stink Spirit via a kind homeostatic communication that allows the bodies of the two spirits to literally express what they have painfully accumulated.

This is perhaps clearest in Chihiro's encounter with the Stink Spirit, a river god so weighted down with filth and debris that it inches toward the bathroom on a trail of its own exudate, fetid gases bubbling from its pores. Because no one will attend to the spirit in this foul condition, the task of drawing its bath falls to bathroom underling Chihiro – renamed *Sen* after selling her name to Yubaba in exchange for employment – who sets upon the job resolutely if not willingly. Yet Miyazaki seems to equate her clumsy perseverance with a special kind of perception or vigilance. When a slip on the edge of the mud-slick tub sends her headfirst into the sludgy bathwater, the Stink Spirit uses the opportunity to gently direct her toward a sore spot on its body. Here Chihiro discovers something protruding from the spirit's oozing side – the handlebar of a bicycle – and a collaborative, heave-ho effort ensues among the bathroom workers to remove the offending blockage. Their efforts finally successful, a torrent of accumulated sludge and rubbish spews forth from the beleaguered god: old barrels and toilets, fishing rods and tackle, a bedframe. Finally restored to its original dragonlike form, the spirit rockets out of the bathroom after leaving behind a scattering of gold for the bathroom workers and an unusual gift for Chihiro: a medicine ball with apparent purgative properties, as

we see when a curious Chihiro later samples the river spirit's medicine and immediately begins to gag and choke.

This purgative gift is the catalyst for yet another scene of figurative emesis, in this case involving No Face, the Noh mask-wearing spirit whose seemingly benevolent offerings disguise a predatory appetite. Reprising the scene of enticement that drew Akio and Yugo into the spirit world, No Face repeatedly lures his targets by secreting gold nuggets from his palm and then diverting those hasty enough to accept – an interesting and paradoxical gesture in that it inverts the notion of gifting that Derrida sees as central to a historiography of spectrality. As Derrida argues, speaking to ghosts requires a form of justice that escapes the finite justice of reparation or redistribution meted out within an exchange economy. Like the past's claim on the present, this justice is supplementary and non-calculative: a gift offered "over and above the market, off trade, without exchange" (26). For this reason gifting contains within it both a radical relation to otherness and an alternate accounting of history.

The gifts that No Face gives, on the other hand, are surplus offerings concealing an uncontrollable desire to incorporate and destroy the other. Yet if the particular gesture of gifting that No Face enacts does not correspond to Derrida's understanding of gifting as an incalculable form of justice, this is because the excess No Face represents is that of the revenant rather than the supplement. As a displaced effect of ecological trauma, he returns to narrative to literally re-enact the economic conditions of his displacement. And so he eats compulsively, his appetite increasing as his body swells. The gift of No Face, then, disguises a *demand for refusal*, a demand for the one who hesitates before taking; and who, in that moment of hesitation and refusal, can speak with him on equal terms.

For this reason he clamors for Chihiro, who has consistently declined his offerings, and whom a panic-stricken bathroom staff sends to deal with the havoc No Face's monstrous appetites have caused. Face to face with Chihiro in the room to which Yubaba has confined him, a grotesquely swollen and arachnid No Face again attempts to lure Chihiro with presents – "Come closer," he coos; "What would you like?" – yet as before, Chihiro politely declines:

CHIHIRO: I would like to leave, sir. I have some place I need to go to right away, please. You should go back to where you came from. ... Don't you have any friends and family?

NO FACE: No – no. I'm lonely. I'm lonely!

CHIHIRO: What is it that you want?

NO FACE: I want Sen. I want Sen! Take the gold – take it!

CHIHIRO: Are you going to eat me?

NO FACE: Take it!

CHIHIRO: If you want to eat me, eat this first. I was saving this for my parents, but I think you'd better have it.

Upon saying this, Chihiro feeds to No Face the purgative given to her by the river spirit, and No Face immediately becomes violently ill. "Sen, what did you do to me?" he croaks, giving chase to her throughout the bathroom in between spells of vomiting. Yet by the time he emerges panting from the bathroom, No Face has disgorged

everything and everyone he has swallowed, in the process returning to his former shape and state of preverbal restraint. Thus we see that in both this scene and the one in which Chihiro removes the bicycle from the side of the Stink Spirit, Miyazaki imagines the act of speaking to specters as a gift of refusal that effectively functions as a gift of homeostasis. This makes sense if we recall that Chihiro embodies a principle of self-transformation that critiques the logic of accumulation and expansion; if the Stink Spirit and No Face literalize a generational ethos of credit or speculation, Chihiro symbolizes a form of growth that is circular and self-corrective. As such she occupies an epistemological space that is open to the revenant – the return of the unaccounted for – without needing either to externalize it or to fear being eaten herself. Capable of distinguishing between wants and needs, she allows both No Face and the river god to literally express the toxic sedimentation their bodies have accumulated; taking up the ethical demand of the past upon the present, her gift of refusal is the gift of laxative and emesis.

### From Narrative to Trauma

In an interview with *Animerica*, Miyazaki has commented upon the figure of the Stink Spirit, affirming the idea that the spirit is the literal incarnation of the ecological destruction he references indirectly throughout *Sen*. Asked whether he felt it was "important to show revolting things" in his film, Miyazaki responds:

I occasionally volunteer along with others of my neighborhood to clean a river near my house, and I see it filled with polluted muck and all kinds of garbage, including bicycles, tangled fishing line and rusted fishing hooks and tackle. I created the story of the "Stink Spirit" based on my own experience. ("*Animerica* Interview" 9)

Here again we see the dynamic between ecological trace and scatological repetition, and in a broader sense the dynamic between the textual, the economic, and the biographical. Lived experiences of pollution here surface within narrative not directly or thematically as an explicit anti-modern or environmentalist message, but instead figure formally and indirectly – as fragments, remainders, repetitions.

*In Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth has provided perhaps one way to think about this mode of representing historical experience, stating that in the "bewildering encounter with trauma ... we can begin to recognize the possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential (that is, no longer based on simple models of experience and reference)" (11). Caruth sees as unproductive the debate between a poststructuralist rejection of history as narrative – that is, as a set of past experiences that we can directly represent and reference – and a neo-empiricist position that argues in response that to reject a narrative account of history is to close off "direct access to others", or even our own, histories.... and hence [to lose]... any means of making political and ethical judgments" (10). Intervening in this debate, Caruth claims that a theory of trauma offers "a rethinking of reference... aimed not at eliminating history, but at resituating it in our understanding.... precisely permitting history to arise where *immediate understanding* may not" (11). In other words, the notion of trauma provides us with an alternate mode of referencing history, one that is recursive rather than narrative or progressive. This is a model that acknowledges that our understanding of past events is never total or complete and hence is always to some degree inaccessible to us. Yet this model also acknowledges that even as the past remains partially inaccessible, it nonetheless continues to affect and speak to the present. A notion of history as a recursive rather than a linear movement in time thus gives us a way of responding ethically to experiences of historical violence that we may not have caused, but which we

nonetheless inherent affectively and politically.

Like Derrida's conceptualization of spectrality, Caruth's concepts of trauma and indirect referentiality help us to understand how Miyazaki figures the historical in *Sen*. To develop this idea further, however, I would like to move from looking at specific ecological and scatological representations *within* the text to comparing representation itself across texts. Looking at *Sen* as a film in dialogue with other films in Miyazaki's oeuvre, we can see that the movement away from narrative modes of representing ecological destruction – and toward a more indirect referencing of the same experience – roughly corresponds to a shifting relationship to historical materialism within Miyazaki's own biography as filmmaker. In tracing this biography, we see that the structure of displacement and repetition in *Sen* arises from a potentially productive ambivalence regarding the relationship between human agents and the forces of history, and hence between the politics of hope and despair.

In a magazine article on Japanese movies published in 1988, Miyazaki writes that all of his movies emerge from and return to this sense of ambivalence, which is "the same [as] the bindings from which my audience wishes to be freed. ... [Thus] I have no choice but to go back to my starting point time after time" (par. 54). This starting point is arguably the 1984 release of *Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind* – a film based on Miyazaki's own manga of the same title, and which established both Studio Ghibli and Miyazaki's reputation as "anime auteur" (Kenji 50). *Nausicaä* relates the story of a post-apocalyptic earth threatened by a miasma of toxic fungus called the *fukai* (or "sea of corruption") and by the Ohmu, a species of enormous dome-shaped insects. A princess of one of the remaining human settlements, Nausicaä studies the Ohmu and slowly comes to the realization that their presence – even as it threatens human existence – signals the self-regulatory functioning of the planetary ecosystem.

The politics of *Nausicaä*, and of subsequent films that engage with human-nature relations, in large part emerged from Miyazaki's relationship to Marxism. Indeed, Miyazaki's entire career as manga artist and animator has arguably been bound up in this relationship; he met partner Takahata Isao, for example, through his involvement with union activism while both animators were working at Toei Animation. In commenting on this partnership, fellow anime director Mamoru Oshii has stated that at Studio Ghibli "the art and politics were... much the same thing"; according to Oshii, "for [Miyazaki and Takahata], making a movie is still a kind of extension of the union movement." (qtd. in Horn 19).

Facetious though Oshii's comments undoubtedly are, Miyazaki expresses this same idea more earnestly in a speech given at a 1988 Japanese film festival, in which he relates the ethical obligations of animation as an artistic form by way of his own memories of World War II. Airplane manufacturers who prospered from wartime production at a time when many others were starving, Miyazaki's family was lucky enough to own a gasoline-engine truck in which they were able to escape the U.S. firebombing of Utsunomiya in July of 1945. Miyazaki, then four years old, recalls leaving at night for the countryside with his parents, brothers, and uncle; as they left he remembers hearing a neighbor of his – a woman with a young daughter – ask his parents for a ride, a request the elder Miyazaki refused. Although the woman and her child survived, Miyazaki recollects growing up with tremendous guilt that his parents had refused to assist the woman and that he himself had remained silent. In his speech, *stopping the car* thus becomes a metaphor for the power of filmmaking to enable not only a settlement of one's personal arrears, but a radical confrontation with the violent exclusions of history itself. Returning once more to the night of his family's escape from their burning city,

Miyazaki says:

If there had been a kid who could say "please let her ride," I think maybe a mother and a father would have stopped the car at that moment. I mean, if I'm a parent and my kid says so, I think I would do so. There were many reasons that [my parents] couldn't do that. If [they] had stopped the car, more people might have come and created more confusion. I understand that well, but I still wish I could've said so then. ... [But] [even if I [could have] satisfied] my conscience by doing so, how about the issue of the munitions industry? Or, comparing the issue of some being burnt by the air raid and some not and the issue of, for example, Japan as a nation doing many horrible things such as massacres in China, the Philippines, or other countries in South East Asia, I have to conclude that the Japanese as a whole were perpetrators, so the problem isn't that simple. But after all those years, I realized that I wanted to make an animation with a kid who can say, "please stop the car" in such a situation, not giving up [just because] humans can't say so after all. ("A Speech" par. 36-37)

Thus Miyazaki sees animation, with its unique capacity for invention and fantasy, as possessing the ability – and in fact the political and ethical obligation – to imagine otherwise. Paul Wells has described this feature of Miyazaki's films as a kind of "iconic re-definition", in which animation serves as a "language of difference": a "reworking of what [have] become... culturally charged iconic images fixed in [their] meanings" (24). The creation of alternate worlds and possibilities allows the animated film to respond to the demands of the past by re-imagining the past – thus giving not only voice, but response to those who have been excluded from the moving vehicle of history.

Yet the hopeful populism expressed in this speech neither is nor can be the end of the story. Voiced one year before both the collapse of the Soviet Union and the burst of the bubble economy of 1980s Japan, Miyazaki's understanding of history is complicated by the fact that he would ultimately break with Marxism – or, more precisely, its notion of progress, the inexorable movement forward toward cataclysmic social change. After this break, and after 13 years of laborious and intermittent work on the *Nausicaä* manga, he would complete the series with a rejection of the idea that nature is wholly benevolent and gentle, a halcyon plenitude in proper relation to which humans can themselves achieve wholeness or perfection ("Now, After Nausicaä" par. 2; "At the Shore" par. 4).

Even after this break, however, Miyazaki's films were no less ecologically aware or politically engaged. Three years after the conclusion of the *Nausicaä* series, Miyazaki wrote and directed the epic *Mononoke Hime* (*Princess Mononoke*), the first Studio Ghibli film to exhibit in U.S. theaters following the 1996 distribution deal between the Walt Disney Corporation and Ghibli's parent company Tokuma Publishing.<sup>3</sup> A post-Berlin wall *Nausicaä*, *Mononoke* is a period piece in which Miyazaki imagines the landscape of medieval Japan as the crucible of modernity, its lush arboreal landscapes the battleground between forest spirits, local lords, and the forces of early industrial production. As such, we might view *Mononoke* (along with the hopeful materialism of *Nausicaä*) as narrative stagings of Miyazaki's critique of modernity and its accompanying myth of progress. Whereas *Mononoke* takes the disenchantment and reification of nature as its literal theme – the climax of the film the beheading of forest god Shishigami – *Sen* references this history indirectly: it appears as a trace on the horizon of the text: in the moment that Chihiro remembers Haku's previous identity as the now-interred Kohaku River.

<sup>3</sup> The wonderfully extensive *Nausicaä.net* contains an excellent 'factual' resource concerning this deal, which is available at <<http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/disney/>>.

## Environmentalism without Guarantees

If the trauma that repeats throughout Miyazaki's entire body of works can be summed up as the problem of inherited suffering – a human and ecological debt acquired through the heedlessness of previous generations – then what distinguishes *Sen* from previous Miyazaki films is its replication on the level of the *individual* text of the very mechanisms of displacement and return that result in a repetition of themes across texts, lives, societies. In other words, where previous films were themselves narrative reenactments of some original traumatic experience (the literal failure of one's parents to stop the car) *Sen* makes visible on both formal and thematic levels the ways in which displaced events and realities later return to consciousness and social life as real, material effects or forces. Moreover, the film suggests a mode of historical accounting which is open to this return, which engages with what has been lost to the forces of history and capital without ontologizing that loss or fearing the possibility of being devoured by it. The shift from narrative to trauma, then, testifies not to the end of Marxism, but to the beginning of what Wendy Brown calls "postprogressive" history (146) and Stuart Hall "Marxism without guarantees" (57). It is precisely this sense of moving beyond any kind of assured teleology that Derrida advocates in *Specters of Marx* – but in this breaking away from also returning, at the same time, to the original radicality of Marx's project: not the scientific delineation of the process leading to the "necessary consequences of revolution", but rather the possibility of "a mode of theoretical thinking" that functions "as radical transformation of itself" (34). This is an epistemology open to the demands of ghosts, a historical knowledge of the present able to see the temporal absences – future and past – that sustain its very presence: and on that basis to bear the unbearable weight of the other's pain, the suffering one has inherited yet not caused.

To live and act without guarantees; to act without the security of teleology: it is significant that although by the end of the film Chihito's safe restoration to the human world is certain, we know nothing of Haku's fate. Will he continue to remember his identity as the river Kohaku after Chihito leaves the world of the bathhouse: and if he doesn't, will he ever find his way home? Or will Yubaba's spell continue to bind him, trapping him within a fantasy world that assumes prior disenchantment and displacement? *Sen* does not resolve these questions, and given the return to modernity at the film's conclusion, a simple or happy resolution seems unlikely. Yet if the movie has a clear political message, it is that this inability to ascertain is necessary if we are to remain open to our effect on both human and nonhuman others. As Miyazaki stated in an interview conducted after the conclusion of the *Nausicaa* manga series, "I don't know what would happen if I planted grass and cleaned up the river. Will it lead to [a] future? No, it wouldn't. But if I don't do anything, nothing will happen" ("At the Shore" par. 7-8). Action, then, must lie between the horns of teleology and fatalism – between a belief in certain perfectibility and certain apocalypse. Likewise, hope must be other than the forward-moving vehicle of an insatiably expansive logic. *Sen* ultimately suggests that, if it is to exist at all, hope must be a recursive force: a return to the site of trauma bearing the willingness to "suffer with those whom you care about" (par. 1).

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