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Fantasy Chronotope in Two Animated Children's Films: Walt Disney's *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (2001)

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore *fantasy chronotope* as exemplified in the complex spatio-temporal configuration in children's fantasy films. The notion of *fantasy chronotope* is revisited to conceptualize the way *space* and *time* can interrelate through the in-depth analysis of two portal-quest fantasy films: Walt Disney's *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and Hayao Miyazaki's (2001) *Spirited Away* (2001). The theoretical starting point is to examine the representation of the *Alternative World* and to articulate the aesthetics of animated children's films as well. The researcher adopts a comparative/theoretical method to question spatiality in visual media and to analyze *spatial practices* undertaken by fictional/female narratives within multiple locations. Moreover, Japanese anime has not been studied adequately compared to its North American counterparts such as Disney especially in terms of ethnic/national or gender politics encoded in anime images. The study seeks to establish the two animated films as *high fantasy* films by presenting a fresh view on *fantasy chronotope* to examine fantasy—as a genre—not designed or intended to express escapism and childishness because it is simply unrealistic. The study sheds light not only on the significance of animation as a medium that has been considered too trivial for serious research, but also the current study offers a better understanding of how Japanese visual culture has brought about potentially crucial changes in the way the Western perceive Asia.

Key words: Anime; Media theory of animation; Chronotope; Portal-quest fantasy film; Children's literature

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to explore *fantasy chronotope* as exemplified in the complex spatio-temporal configuration in children's fantasy films. The notion of *fantasy chronotope* is revisited to conceptualize the way *space* and *time* can interrelate through the in-depth analysis of two portal-quest fantasy films: Walt Disney's *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and Hayao Miyazaki's (2001) *Spirited Away*. The theoretical starting point is to examine the representation of the *Alternative World* and to articulate the aesthetics (visual codes and grammar) of the animated children's films as well.

Portal-quest fantasy enables the female heroines in the selected animated films to enter unfamiliar worlds full of adventures, noble quests and extraordinary beings and occurrences. The study is an attempt to place an appealing genre under a critical thought to investigate the research questions below:

- What is the relation between children's fantasy fiction and *portal-quest* theme?
- What are *low* and *high* fantasies and what are the differences between *primary* and *secondary* worlds in fantasy fiction?
- How can *fantasy chronotope* be revisited in children's fantasy?
- How to read American animation and Japanese anime?

The researcher adopts a comparative/theoretical method to question spatiality in visual media and to analyze *spatial practices* undertaken by fictional/female narratives within multiple locations. Moreover, Japanese anime has not been studied adequately compared to its North

American counterparts such as Disney especially in terms of ethnic/national or gender politics encoded in anime images.

Fantasy fiction utilizes a number of textual devices as manifested in the selected animated films:

- Creating a sense of vastness to replace the primary world
- Depicting a large number of characters and complex plot lines
- Deploying cyclic plot structure
- Foregrounding a narrative frame that unites timeless mythic patterns with contemporary individual experience

In *Empires of Imagination* (2005), Alec Worley regards magic as "a key word in the definition of fantasy" (Worley, 2005, p.10). She explains that "magic fuels fantasy, manifesting as miracles, mysterious forces or inexplicable events, none of which can be ascribed to the laws of rationality, nature or science" (Worley, 2005, p.10).

Within the realm of *cinefantastic*, the study seeks to establish *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and *Spirited Away* (2001) as *high fantasy* films. The two animated films —as the study attempts to explore—never rationalize the impossible. They resist any form of closure or definiteness to highlight the *transgression* of boundaries from the actual to the imaginable. In his "Introduction" to *Historical Dictionary of Fantasy Literature and Arts* (2005), Brian Stableford calls *high fantasy* "immersive" which "adopts the much more difficult task of substituting an entire fantasy world for the simulacrum of the real world that readers usually expect to discover when they embark upon the task of immersing themselves in a novel" (Stableford, 2005, p.xlviii). The findings of this study can hopefully contribute to the field of children's fantasy film by presenting a fresh view on *fantasy chronotope* to examine fantasy—as a genre—not designed or intended to express escapism and childishness because it is simply unrealistic. In *An Introduction to Children's Literature* (1994), Peter Hunt regards children's literature as "an important 'system' of its own, not as a lesser or peripheral part of 'high' culture" (Hunt, 1994, p.7). He explains that children's literature is "powerful" and "such a power cannot be neutral or innocent, or trivial" (Ibid., p.3). What is more, the study sheds light not only on the significance of animation as a medium that has been considered too trivial for serious research, but also the current study offers a better understanding of how Japanese visual culture has brought about potentially crucial changes in the way the Western perceive Asia.

1 *FANTASY CHRONOTOPE* REVISITED: VISUALIZING THE "THIRD SPACE"

1.1 Definitions and Perspectives

Fantasy enables us to enter worlds of *infinite possibilities*
(Italics mine, Mathews, 2002, p.1)

The Latin word *phantasticus* means "to make visible", that is, fantasy as an image-making faculty or a mental image (*Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*, 1995). Fantasy fiction does not give "priority to realistic representation" (Jackson, 1993, p.13). From a thematic point of view, fantasy exhibits "the sense of individuality that comes from making things *strange and luminous with independent life in a fantastic setting*" (Italics mine, Manlove, 1983, p.ix).

Children's fantasy film represents a fascinating arena through the deployment of mystique, magic and the supernatural Fantasy—as a genre—can be synonymous with imagination, a non-realistic mode foregrounding non-rational events, places and beings. Fantasy fiction is "a release from habitual assumptions, thus, providing a vantage point from which new possibilities can be realized" (Apter, 1982, p.6). In *Fantasy; The Liberation of Imagination* (2002), Richards Mathews describes it as "a type of fiction that evokes wonder, mystery or magic — a sense of possibility beyond the ordinary, material, rationally predictable world in which we live" (Mathews, 2002, p.1). This "impossible" in fantasy is an essential violation of reality or a sharp "break from mundane reality" (Mathews, 2002, p.2).

Furthermore, fantasy fiction is heavily influenced by oral tradition. Rosemary Jackson traces the history of fantasy back to "ancient myths, legends, folklore, and carnival art" (Jackson, 1993, p.95). This highlights the fact that "there are no pure genres, and fantasy is no exception" (Mathews, 2002, p.5). Generally speaking, *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) is a celebration of the rural idyll and the longing for lost past as depicted in the realm of dreams or mental locations while *Spirited Away* (2001) is an emblem of the fusion between ancient and contemporary Japanese culture and traditions. Yet, two female protagonists—Alice and Chihiro—embark on epic fantasy journeys fighting evil wizards, monsters and other enemies.

Fantasy fiction has "a symbiotic relation" (Timmerman, 1983, p.50) with reality and "its conventionalized representation, depending on it for its existence and at the same time commenting upon it, criticizing it and illuminating it" (Zanger, 1982, pp.126-7). To make sense of fantasy fiction, it is necessary to create "hints to reality and what is familiar" (Hunt, 2005, p.170). In other words, fantasy provides a room for a subtle critique of current conditions in the real world underscoring both the good and the bad side of humankind by contrasting the reality we live in with another enchanting and magical one. Thus, fantasy fiction is multi-genre understood in opposition to realism or to narrative events that are impossible according to the laws of nature.

1.2 Theorizing "Third Space" Fantasy

In broad terms, the prominent Russian Critic, Mikhail Bakhtin, defines chronotope as the "the intrinsic

connectedness of temporal and spatial relationship that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.84). In *Third Space* (1996), on the other hand, Edward Soja envisions *space* as "a creative recombination and extension of both the 'real material world' and the 'imagined' representations of spatiality" (Soja, 1996, p.6). The *"Third Space"* is a *fictive space* that moves beyond the oppositional binaries of the real and the false. The point is that the *"Third Space"* is not wholly imaginary as contrast to "consensus reality". With this rationale, the study seeks to investigate the irrational and integrate it within a wider realm of analyzing *fantasy chronotope* as being ideologically constructed. *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) is not simply about a girl's adventure in a strange and unreal world. It addresses contemporary issues and explores the realm of the unconscious. "Post-war fantasy", Peter Hunt writes, "comments about the present state of civilization" (Hunt, 1991, p.41). It has been the task of the fantasists "to wrestle with the great complexities of existence – life, death, time, space, good and evil—and a child's struggle to find its place within these awesome concepts" (Egoff, 1981, p. 80). *Spirited Away* (2001) relies heavily upon a vast array of beings from the Shinto religion as well as Japanese folklore to question Japan's dramatic growth into a materially affluent nation. Miyazaki's themes are "globally consequential issues that include: The conflict between nature and human technologies, human greed and capitalism (consumerism), gender issues and the influence of globalization" (Cavallaro, 2006, p.2).

"Fantasy combines and inverts the real", Rosemary Jackson postulates, "but it does not escape it" (Jackson, 1993, p.20). In this sense, the distinction between the unreal and the real becomes problematic and the descriptions like childish and escapist—as being the main characteristics of fantasy—denigrates it. The current study rebuts such an assumption that fantasy does not initiate sophisticated thinking; on the contrary, "the world of fantasy matches our world in reality. It is not a dream world, a never-never land" (Timmerman, 1983, p.45).

The fantasy genre is divided into two classifications; *high* fantasy and *low* fantasy. These two criteria are interrelated, yet each refers to a particular setting or world governed by its laws. *"Other World"* or "*Secondary World"*, Stableford argues, is intended "to allow the reader to move directly into a wholehearted heterocosmic creation without warning or guidance" (Stableford, 2005, p.xlviii) and this *'Other World'* is not "accessible by ordinary means: It does not exist on the same plane or in the same time as our own" (Atteber, 1986, p.12). This foregrounds the motif of *portals*—open possibility of movement. Maria Nikolajeva, in *The Magic* (1988), states that "the door is the most important *passage fantaseme* in fantasy" (Italics mine, Nikolajeva, 1988, p.76). Bakhtin says of the threshold chronotope that "it can be combined with the motif of encounter" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.248). In terms of the notion of *Third Spac*, rather than seeing *portals* as a barrier between separated spaces, it can be a *Third Space* metaphor of the door that "offers the possibility at any moment of stepping out from the limitation of isolated separate existence into the limitlessness of all possible directions" (Simmel, 1999, p.174).

The *portals* can allow both the "*outside in*" and the "*inside out*". Herein lies "the *fluidity* of movement between spaces that are open and porous, that is, the boundaries between reality and the *Other World* become more elusive and the passage often subtle" (Italics mine, Nikolajeva, 2003, p.154). Thus, the magical device—representative of a number of possibilities for movement into *Third Space*—is not a portal that separates the real from the unreal, but a significant moment of movement that initiates *spatial practice* to take place. Therefore, fantasy can be a social practice and spatial awareness is not about a nostalgic glance to the past, nor is about a hypothetical future. It concerns itself with "the presentness of childhood" (Walkerdine, 2004, p.96) to blur "the line between childhood as an unfinished and adulthood as a finished state" (Ibid.).

1.3 Why Animation? Disney vs Ghibli

The intriguing question that poses itself: why animation? In *Animation, Genre and Authorship* (2002), the animation theorist, Paul Wells states that "animation is arguably the most important creative form of the 21st century [and] it is the *omnipresent pictorial form of the modern era*" (Italics mine, Wells, 2002, p.1). Animation challenges the child reader's expectations of what is normal or real, bringing up extraordinary events or journeys appropriately housed in dreams or in the unconscious. The art of animation is like a magic trick to problematize reality.

Howard Beckerman's *Animation: The Whole Story* (2003) outlines the development of animation shedding light on its visual techniques. Animators make multiple layers of background images and adjust the speed at which they move. Ink and paint have been the standard for animation from the first Disney animation until a few years ago, when the film industry has focused on digital 3D animation productions. Traditional/Classical animation is ink and paint in which frames are hand-drawn relying on the use of a storyboard. The storyboard is laid out as a cartoon strip portraying some of the frames in the story based on script which contains the dialogue recorded before the animation itself has begun. The voice recording is done in advance so that the animation can be adapted to speed movement. Briefly, animated films are created on "frame-by-frame" basis: "Animation is more of a hand rather than a photographic job but maintained the frame-by-frame approach" (Wells, 1998, p.10).

Animation engages the child viewer in the moment of storyline, immerses him/her in the flow of sounds and words, places and landscape, bodily movements and gestures. Animation constructs a dreamlike world, a high-tech visual space in which adventure and pleasure meet in a fantasy world of possibilities. Wells believes that animation defies "the realistic representation of live cinema" and "it can easily depict different states of consciousness, such as fantasy, dream and memory" (Wells, 2002, p.49). Disney's images are considered icons of American culture. Disney's aesthetics, ideologies and technology have been known as "Disney's style" that many artists across the globe strive to emulate. The reason for this popularity is the sense of non-realism in the animation productions. They depicted comical and unrealistic events and the audience sought an escape from the brutal reality of the World War II.

In the "Introductory Overview" of his *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (2008), Mark MacWilliams shows the historical development of Japanese anime initiated by Ozamu Tezuka, the Japanese equivalent to Walt Disney and the *Father of Manga* and *God of Comics*. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Japanese graphic artists started to feel the influence of the American newspaper comic strips. Japanese cartoonists produced their own newspaper comics, which eventually have led to the development of the modern Japanese *Manga*, as it has come to be known and Japanese artists have experimented with animated motion pictures and the anime industry has started growing from this point on. Anime's success can be credited to the dedication of Japanese artists' understanding of moving pictures to be more than simply entertaining children—the complexities of human emotion and the boundaries of time and space are explored creating dynamic and appealing anime. The most significant fact is that Disney has started working with Studio Ghibli to bring all of Studio Ghibli's masterpieces to American audiences.

Studio Ghibli was founded by Hayao Miyazaki (1941-) and Isao Takahata in 1985. The word *Ghibli* means—as stated by Miyazaki himself— "hot wind blowing through the Sahara Desert, which was used during the World War II by Italian pilots referring to their scouting airplanes"[1]. He decided to take this word for the Studio name. He also comments: "Let's blow a sensational wind into the Japanese worlds of animation!"[2]. Miyazaki has been nicknamed the "Walt Disney of Japan" (MacWilliam, 2008, p.48). He has brought "Japanimation" (Lamarre, 2009, p.ix) into the mainstream culture of America. Animation has long been associated with Disney, yet for the last twenty years, anime has emerged on the global stage with remarkable success to rival the Disney Empire. Imamura Taihei, a leading Japanese motion picture critic, states that "traditional art must be the foundation of a truly Japanese animated cartoon" (Taihei, 1953, p.217). Within the postcolonial context, anime can counterbalance the hegemony of American animation in Asia and in the world showing that globalization of popular culture does not necessarily imply homogenization. Anime's appeal worldwide expresses "socio-cultural and national concerns that bear no relation to the American context at all" (Wells, 2002, p.3). In this sense, anime is a national, cultural form and a sign of resistance to American cultural hegemony.

2. *ALICE IN WONDERLAND* (1951): A VISUAL/SPATIAL ADAPTATION

According to Wikipedia, *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) is an American animated musical fantasy film and the thirteenth in the Walt Disney Animated Classic Series. This Disney movie is based on Lewis Carroll's books—*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), yet, "the film is not only considered the best movie adaptation of Carroll's novels, but also one of Disney's great classics"[3]. Disney told *The American Weekly* in 1946: "No story in English Literature has intrigued me more than L. Carroll's Alice"[4].

Walt Disney (1901-1966) appreciated childhood and hated patronized and inferior treatment of children. He purchased the rights to the Tennial Illustrations in 1931and registered the title with the Motion Picture Association of America in 1938. World War II interrupted the production and in June 1947 a fully animated feature was released (*A Companion's Guide to Alice in Wonderland: 60th Anniversary Edition*, 2011—Blu-Ray)[5] with its modernist style of 2D animation and condensed storyline. The film was initially criticized for being too "Americanized" and was a box office failure" (Thomas, 1976, pp.220-221). Nevertheless, it became popular in the 1960s and is now hailed as an excellent way to introduce the stories to children notably one of the biggest cult classics in the animation medium.

Disney visualizes Alice's changes in size, speaking animals, weird creatures with the aid of cartoon animation. Animation acts as the perfect medium of a fantasy film. Cartoon animation—in my contention—can be analyzed within *The Theory of Adaptation* (2006) as studied by Linda Hutcheon. She argues that "some media and genres are used to *tell* stories; others *show* them; and still others allow us to interact physically and kinesthetically with them" (Hutcheon, 2006, p.xiv). With this rationale, animation is the creation of movement and it transports emotions visually, a point explained

[1] http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/ghibli/history
[2] Ibid.
[3] http://en.wikipedia.org/Alice_in_wonderland_1951_film
[4] http://disneywikia.com/wiki/file;American_weekly_1946
[5] http://www.avclub.com

by Robert Stam *in Literature through Film: Realism, Magic and the Art of Adaptation* (2005): The process of adaptation can be attained through "reading, rewriting, critique, translation, transmutation, metamorphosis, recreation, transvocalization, resuscitation, transfiguration, actualization, transmodalization, signifying, performance, dialogization, cannibalization, reinvisioning, incarnation, or reaccentuation" (Stam, 2005, p.25). He also insists that the cinema "as a technology of representation" is "ideally equipped to magically multiply times and spaces, it has the capacity to mingle very diverse temporalities and spatialities" (Ibid., p.13).

Hutcheon's scheme for dealing with adaptation is intended to answer the questions of the *what, who*, *why, how, when* and *where* which she believes to be "always a good place to start" (Hutcheon, 2006, p.xiv). She adds that the adaptation of a story often entails a change of medium and therefore a change of possibilities of expression—"communicational energetics" (Hutcheon, 2006, p.34). Disney Studio infused the work with bright colors, memorable characters, and catchy songs following the dream-like nonsensical journey. Cartoon animation —as a visual narration—exhibits new possibilities of telling or retelling stories and leads to what Hutcheon calls "the running amok of adaptation" (Ibid., p.XI). She explains that adaptation is "framed in a context, *a time and place*, a society, a culture, it does not exist in a vacuum" (Italics mine, Hutcheon, 2006, p.142). Alice, in the adapted version, is a non-princess film offering a new outlook of what means for a girl to grow up into an adult. She appears sweet in her pinafore, but she transgresses the confines of her bourgeois nursery through fantasy. Alice's surrealist curiosity shakes the stability of the nineteenth century bourgeois fiction of childish innocence, thereby; fantasy and animation have been integrated to act as a critique. In *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature* (1990), Hunt writes that post-war fantasists "began to explore the potential of fantasy to deal with the kind of problems children inevitably faced as part of the process of growing up; fear of separation, loss, sexuality, death and anger" (Hunt, 1990, p.41). To contempt modern education, a mockery of schooling is launched in Alice's the most popular quotation: "What is the use of a book without pictures or conversation?" The infuriating character of the Caterpillar is a satire on an old schoolmaster. Therefore, the fantasy journey offers Alice an opportunity to step out of the stereotypes and limitations of a restrictive environment.

To examine Disney's influence on the story and style of the 1951 Adaptation, it is worth shedding light on the Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein's analysis of Disney's animation which offers an alternative world in which a system of rigidity is fiercely contested and questioned. Eisenstein refers to Disney's use of *"plasmaticness"*, a term means two things" first, the protean quality of "*the protoplasm"*, or the organic substance that is capable of assuming any form, and second, "*the elasticity*" of drawn figures that can stretch, squash or twist into impossible contortions (Eisenstein, 2006, p.94). Disney's animated film exhibits both dimensions of *"plasmaticness"* (fluidity of identity and malleability of form) since inorganic objects and animals dance to rhymed tunes, stretch and twist their shapes and resist the laws of nature. Eisenstein shows a utopian affirmation of the therapeutic function of Disney's animation to escape from the rigidity of life under capitalism. In other words, he believes that the Americans who suffered under the Fordist system of regimentation would desire *"plasmaticness"* actualized by malleable and protean quality of animated images on screen.

Finally, Disney's visual adaptation enhances memorable *"phraseological images"* to depict a space of logical improbability such as the famous grin of the Cheshire Cat, the White Rabbit with a watch and in his waistcoat and the Doodle. The physical rules of space are also interrogated as Alice shrinks, grows and finds herself suddenly in new locations. The Walt Disney Company has a prestigious history in the entertainment industry since its inception in 1923. Walt Disney spent much of his life creating a world of fantasy filled with characters that have become American's cultural icons.

2.1 Contextualizing Alice's Spatial *"Rupture"*

"Fantasy worlds", Vladimir Gopman argues, "lack geographical and temporal specificity—events occur in relative reality, 'somewhere and at same time'" (Gopman, 2001, p.1161). Many theories regard fantasy as "the outlet for the exclusions and taboos, the estrangements and alienation of bourgeois society" (Lang, 1974, p.2). Similarly, Jackson uses "cultural constraint" to refer to the oppressive power of "capitalist and patriarchal order" (Jackson, 1993, p.176) and "bourgeois ideals" (Ibid., p.35). *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) is a visual discourse of resistance of the unconscious mind to these ideals. The fantasy heroine undertakes a quest—she goes through ordeals and adventure. The plot is put into indefinite "other" time and locations since Alice's adventures begin with the insight into the inner world and the state of mind of the character.

To turn the episodic nature of Alice's wanderings into a filmic structure, Alice's surrealist curiosity is the prime mover and the cause of suspense. The animation relies on a chase pattern that leads Alice to strange places until she returns to the world of reality. To my mind, the 1951 visual adaptation can be analyzed within the notion of "*ontological rupture*" (Fowkes, 2010, p.2). The notion of "*ontological rupture*" is compelling in fantasy genre whose uniqueness lies in its ability to separate itself from a sense of mimesis by utilizing visual narrative and iconographies that *rupture* a representational relationship with reality and establish something new. The "*ontological*

rupture" is visually crystallized in the famous scene in which Alice follows the White Rabbit into the big hole to be in a strange location where everything is suddenly different; it is a *rupture* that occurs through a break in space.

Spatial *rupture* focuses on Alice's physicality positioning her as "potential predator, prey or equal" (Murphy, 2010, p.21). Alice's body is in a state of flux, reacting to environmental, not only moral, changes. She is unafraid of animals the same size as herself such as the Caterpillar or the White Rabbit, but she is frightened of the Cheshire Cat because of his "very long claws and many teeth". As Alice progresses through wonderland, she becomes aggressive and less tied to conventional morality visually illustrated in snapping at the Duchess and the Queen of Hearts and finally dismissing the entire population as "a pack of cards". Wonderland is a place of human superiority over animals. Alice is forced to adapt her behavior to her place within the predator/prey physical hierarchy. This foregrounds the understanding of size and power relations to control her encounters with the wonderland.

The spatial focus of *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) can be investigated within "*a strange hesitancy*" – an aesthetic trope at the core of its appeal. A key aspect of fantasy seems to embrace a lack of certainty and fixity. The fantasy appeal of *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) does not exist within simplistic terms such as escapism or wish-fulfillment, but as a complex *hesitative process*. The spatial focus of the film is caught in an ethereal duality, unfixed and oscillating between the dullness of reality and the trauma of the transcendence. Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* (1974) — a philosophical inquiry into the nature of homeliness—states that at the heart of the institution of home lies a spatial relationship established by the mind in which imaginative constructs are forged to comfort oneself with "the illusion of protection" (Bachelard, 1974, p.5). Alice follows the White Rabbit to break her sense of boredom, then, she becomes obsessed with returning home after her weird encounters in Wonderland. This marks a crucial device in the film's fantastic *spatial hesitancy*.

As the film oscillates between the real and the wonder in terms of space, it also thematically oscillates between "the virtues of magic and the virtues of the homely" (Bachelard, 1974, p.5)—to use Bachelard's phrase. Alice's fantasy journey fails to be a protective environment: her real world remains off-screen, but Alice's memory of her real life marks her intrinsic sense of protective space in order to survive. The Wonderland needs the material/real world to be supremely magical, so too the material/real world needs the Wonderland to be infused with the qualities of home. Through these overlapping thematic considerations, the film maintains its oscillating spatial focus, and thus, better establishes its sense of the fantastic. For Bachelard, home is not just a place of comfort or shelter, but also a crucial site for the imagination as, by allowing a protective sense of space, the home allows its dweller a realm to dream safely: "If I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: The house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace" (Ibid., p.6).

Consequently, the fantasy child viewer is invited to watch *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) not as an abandonment of the rules of reality in favor of a daunting imaginative future, but instead, as a safe abandonment of reality within the world of fantastic space. In other words, the joys of the fantasy genre seek to present strange, otherworldly iconographies without leaving a comforting sense of the everyday world fully behind—its aesthetic joys of oscillation are manifested in the lack of fixity making the genre's appeal, thereby, it is so hard to define fantasy genre in a clear-cut manner. Therefore, my hypothesis is to present an understanding of this oscillation by contextualizing this appeal not as a simple transcendence from the known to the unknown, but as a hesitant relationship; unfixed and somewhat *ethereal spatial* relationships. It is this quality of fantastic spaces that has allowed the film to become such a successful contribution to the fantasy genre: grounding the transcendence with an acute sense of the temporal and by infusing its Wonderland with the purpose of better understanding of reality.

3. MIYAZAKI'S *SPIRITED AWAY* (2001): A JAPANESE ANIME

The English translation of the film's original title literally is *Sen and the Mysterious Disappearance of Chihiro*. *According to Studio Ghibli Wikia, Spirited Away* got the Golden Berlin Bear Award at the 2002 Berlin International film Festival, and claimed the best animated Feature category at the Oscars in 2003. It is the first "anime" film—a distinct film genre of Japanese origin—to win an Academy Award[6]. Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*— released 2001 in Japan, 2002 in the U.S. —and the American English-dubbed version in 2003—has brought anime to a new level of respectability internationally. According to the Internet Movie Database (IMDB), this anime is ranked number 54 among the top films all over the world and number one in the animated film category. The film cost 19 million dollars—a huge amount of money for a Japanese animated feature and it has been hailed as the first non-American film in history to have brought in 200 million dollars at the box office worldwide[7].

Despite being nicknamed *the Walt Disney of Japan*, Miyazaki's approach to fantasy and his worldview are significantly different from Disney's. It is worth referring

[6] http//www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/ghibli
[7] http://www.imdb.com

to the definition of "anime" to have an understanding of Miyazaki's worldview as exemplified in *Spirited Away*: "The very term anime comes from the Latin root for "soul" (anima), which also provides the root for the word animism, a form of religion based on the worship of nature and ancestor spirits" (Mazur, 2011, pp.320-321). Miyazaki's anime is a new perception to refute the assumption that "Disney is an ideology, the canon" (Bell et al., 1995, p.2). Miyazaki's multiple narratives stand in sharp contrast to the linear Disney's narrative. Miyazaki does not appreciate the recent forays into virtual reality or video games that simply create an alternate reality to make audiences oblivious to issues in the real world. Miyazaki explicitly expresses his dissatisfaction with Disney:

> Media products should have mass appeal but, simultaneously, they should intellectually stimulate the audience. I dislike Disney animation, because the audiences have a Disney fantasy in the same condition as when they entered it. This is an insult to the audience. (Miyazaki, 1996, p.102)

He continues: "To make it possible for the audience to get through reality, by letting them release repression from their daily lives and offering them a space where they can discover aspirations, innocence and self-assurance inside themselves" (Ibid.). For him, fantasy experience is an attempt to create a fictional space anchored in reality filled with the ambiguity of human nature to encourage children to face challenges without falling into nihilism or escapism despite the bleakness of some aspects of the 21st century. This view of the child's fantasy experience is endorsed by the Japanese clinician, Yamanka Yasuhiro, who acclaims "*Spirited Away* as a source that may return energy back to today's children because they have been overprotected from reality of unpleasant and complicated issues" (Yasuhiro, 2002, p.37). Miyazaki's female child heroine is described as being an "active independent" and this is "unusual for most fairy tales, particularly in Japan where active protagonists are almost exclusively male" (Napier, 2005, p.155). Miyazaki questions fixed gender roles and conventional thought as "a way of subverting patriarchal agendas" (Wells, 1997, p.23) as he himself puts it. Like Alice's England, Chihiro's Japan is a place of rigid class structures in male-dominated society and the portal-quest theme in *Spirited Away* is visualized through the mysterious tunnel and the haunted town leading Chihiro and her parents to the land of the spirits inhabited by gods and monsters and ruled by the greedy witch Yubaba.

3.1 *Spirited Away* (2001): A Postmodern Fantasy Space

The dissolution of Chihiro's identity within herself—as the original Japanese title suggests—is a postmodern trope in the Japanese anime. Animation theorist, Paul Wells states—in his *Understanding Animation* (1998)—that "metamorphosis is the ability for an image to literally change into another completely different image" (Wells, 1998, p.69). Metamorphosis is a visual strategy to create fluid linkage of images through animation itself rather than through editing. What is significant is that "metamorphosis can resist logical development and determine unpredictable linearity (both temporal and spatial) that constitutes different kinds of narrative construction" (Ibid.). With this rationale, postmodernist fantasy eliminates clear-cut boundaries between fiction and reality to rebut any single narrative voice and questions fixed unequivocal worldview.

The female protagonist—a little ten-year-old girl—is with no special powers, but with human abilities and the internal transformation of Chihiro from a whiny girl into a confident, strong and resourceful one is a metaphorical journey of self-discovery and personal growth. Symbolically, Miyazaki describes contemporary Japan as being a country that has lost integrity and is confused in its identity: a deteriorated condition because of the encroachment of capitalism, materialism and choking pollution. Chihiro works in a spa - which is a resort for spirits, gods and supernatural creatures to relax- in order to free her parents from a curse. She is renamed Sen by Yubaba, the powerful evil witch who runs the spa, as part of her employment contract. The transition from childhood to adulthood is a marvel to behold. Chihiro undergoes a series of adventures and in her encounters; she finds inner strength and establishes a new identity in this strange world. In this sense, the fantasy realm can be a period of "seclusion" during which the protagonist is "submitted to ordeal by initiated seniors or elders" (Turner, 1981, p.154) as a crucial passage into adulthood. This is "magical there-and- back-again adventure" (Nikolajeva, 2000, p.134) that marks the protagonist's maturation and inner liberation.

The film is rich with animated mise-en-scène as manifested in the extensive deployment of setting, lighting manipulation, kinetics, symbols and motifs through visual cues. It is the interplay of the elements of mise-en-scène that evoke "changes of several kinds: movement, color differences, balance of distinct components and variations in size" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004, p.208). For example, the metamorphosis of Chihiro's parents into pigs is a visual motif implying the theme of greed. This negative transformation is a subtle criticism of the parents' piggish behavior while eating the gods' food in the abandoned park. Moreover, Chihiro's unrealistic large tears after the loss of her parents are visualized in a close shot depicting the frontal line of her face. Tears function as a way of purification and cleansing and after this piggish transformation, Chihiro starts physically to dissipate into the air urged by Haku/Dragon/Boy to eat a small red berry to regain her solid shape advising her to get a job in the spa. Throughout this fantasy space, Chihiro is forced to function on her own, therefore, "it is only in the fantasy world of the bathhouse that Chihiro

begins to receive proper nurturance" (Napier, 2006, p.307), even more important, this nurturance is "intimately connected to a culturally specific food" (Ibid.). The serene scene of Chihiro's eating rice balls—a staple of Japanese culture- embodies emotional/moral depth after the scene of the big tears. The rice balls help her regain her energy and work hard in the bathhouse. Metaphorically, the intake of the red berry and later the rice balls signifies the urgent need to internalize old cultural values, heritage and history.

The arrival of the Stink god—a smelly customer- is a highly dramatic moment. Chihiro is given the unpleasant task of cleaning the god's huge filthy body. On getting rid of a whole body of pile garbage, she discovers that he is a River spirit polluted by all the rubbish which people throw into the river. The scene is described as "obvious ritualistic aspects—Chihiro as the "new girl" is forced to deal with the nasty duty at which she succeeds greatly earning the support of her bath attendants and helping to develop her own confidence symbolized by the gift of the River god—a pivotal phase of her maturity and personal growth. This successful act of purification is "an exercise in recognition and correct identification" (Ibid., p.302) and it is apparent that the revolting guest—from whose body erupted a huge amount of trash—does not need a mere bath, but seeks freedom from the pollution of modern waste. He undergoes a metamorphosis from a stinky god to a Dragon-like long River spirit and it is Chihiro who liberates him to restore his rightful self. Cinematically, the cleansing process of the Stink god is accompanied by the waving of the Japanese flags.

Chihiro receives a magic dumpling from the River spirit as a reward for freeing his filthy/polluted self. As she grows morally and psychologically, she uses it to save the injured Haku/Dragon/Boy by feeding him half a dumpling. She also throws in the second half into the open mouth of No-Face—who has no voice and only a big mouth symbolic of blindness to the substantial values of life. No-Face—a wandering god-chases Chihiro luring her with his gold, but she refuses to take any gifts. No-Face has no identity of his own, but borrows other identities by devouring them. On spitting all the food and people he has previously engorged, he is restored to his normal size and behavior. Chihiro's noble mission is foregrounded by saving old generation from the greed and materialism that have inflected modern Japan: "Only the imagination, filtered through traditional Japanese customs and ethics, can offer any possibility of cultural recovery and personal redemption to a humanity trapped in the waste land of the real" (Napier, 2001, p.183).

Finally, *cultural recovery* forms the heart of the film signified in the moral/emotional growth of Chihiro. She has transformed from her earlier dependent self to a courageous, resourceful and quick-witted young girl. This sets juxtaposition between Alice and Chihiro: Alice's return marks no true transformation which Chihiro undergoes. Alice's fantasy space is only a dream or a travel to a wondrous space within the realm of the unconscious, but Chihiro's fantasy space is elusive blurring the boundaries between reality and other world.

3.2 The Bathhouse: A Grotesque Signifier of Modern Japan

Spirited Away incorporates a patchwork of references that serve to locate it in a particular setting and to tie it into a specific tradition of ideas. "*Spirited Away*", Andrew Osmond writes, "refers to at least three different times: the present, the 1980s bubble era and through the setting to the Taisho period" (Osmond, 2008, p.12). The car of Chihiro's father "spirited away" and abruptly stops at a spooky uninhabited Theme Park. The abandoned Theme Park went bankrupt during the bubble economy when the Japanese economy had a breakdown—as Chihiro's father tells his daughter. Chihiro's parents can be identified as part of this generation, but Chihiro's rejection of the food in the Theme Park signifies her inner strength which will help her in the coming trials in the bathhouse.

Chihiro and her parents depart the mortal world and cross the realm of the spirits: the old Torii gate leans—signifying the spiritual separation between the holy and the profane—against an old tree surrounded by numerous deserted houses heaped as if they were garbage. This is the forsaken Japanese heritage corrupted by the culture of materialism and consumption. A colorful bathhouse looms in the distance separated by a wooden bridge. Literally, Chihiro is "spirited" to an old bathhouse, but her ultimate conquest of the bathhouse marks her maturation and personal growth.

Kate Mathews—in "Logic and Narrative in *Spirited Away*" (2006) —ponders that Chihiro has undergone a character metamorphosis expressed visually in her apt handling of the space. There is

> the bathhouse is laid out according to an "upstairs down stairs" hierarchy. There are its lower levels, containing operators, where Chihiro first gains entry; there are its mid-levels, where customers and employees interact; and there are its upper levels, containing Yubaba's rooms, the center of power. (Mathews, 2006, p.138)

Mathews elaborates that the film uses "repeated interactions between Chihiro and space" to signify *character development*; "by showing her traversing the same spaces multiple times, it allows us to see her changing response in particular growth in her courage and resourcefulness" (Ibid.). There is the "precarious staircase" Chihiro at first descends with terror to enter the bathhouse. Chihiro has to climb down the flight of stairs to enter the bathhouse. Her fear is visible in every movement she makes until one of the wooden steps breaks under her weight causing her to rush down the rest of the steps. Next morning, she will climbs the same flight of

stairs to see her transformed parents and this takes place after her interview with Yubaba to get the job. Her ascent up the stairs exhibits her confidence and lack of hesitation. Chihiro's stamina is depicted through the suggestive use of the mise-en-scéne: The first scene is set in the dark of the evening while the second happens during the early morning hours, just after sunrise. Moreover, she descends the stairs in her modern clothes, but ascends them in her new traditional wear. The energetic, rhythmic and vertical walk stands in contrast to "the diagonal horizontal line of the staircase as she steps down into the unknown dark alone" (Ibid., p.138).

The bathhouse is *culturally hybridized space* offering a potentially wide range of perspectives and reflecting a multifaceted representation of Asia (Japan) in relation to the West. Yubaba is a caricatured image of the West and signifies Japan's negative outlook on 'Western' values. Yubaba's jewelry stands for the undesirable consequences of capitalism and materialism. The double personality of the twin sorceress—Yubaba and Zeniba—is highly significant. Both sisters come from the same ancestors; one is evil and the other is the opposite, but with equal magic power. This ambiguity signifies cultural/historical confrontation between what is ancient and what is modern, thus, *Spirited Away* is the best example of the Japanese *'mosaic'* that combines Asian and Western culture: "Miyazaki's Japaneseness transcends temporal and territorial boundaries" tending towards "commonalities rather uniqueness" (Yoshioko, 2008, p.272). There is also the depiction of the huge black Monster No-Face- who is a signifier of the consuming appetite, but a transparent figure distinguished only by his Noh mask found in the traditional musical theatre in Japan. No-Face's gluttony is a strong reflection of Western materialism and avariciousness.

Bō -Yubaba's baby boy- is absurdly big, gigantic and unhealthy. He consumes almost nothing but sweets and candies-typical Western food stuff. Bō's consumption of Western food symbolizes his mother's quest to become part of the West. Bō is kept wrapped up in a pile of soft pillows in his room which is explicitly Western Style. Yubaba—an epitome of the Western tenets—believes that the inside of his room—the West—is safe and the outside—the bathhouse—is dangerous, therefore, her attempt to keep him in such a safe Western atmosphere makes him clumsy, spoiled, inept. Bō's body is a space of chaos when he is turned into a tiny mouse by Zeniba. This shrinkage of his body connotes the collapse of the Western inept image. The baby boy is saved by Chihiro who is a metaphor for Japan to question its modern image as "a paradise of capitalist materialism". She is depicted to undermine the Oriental stereotype of Japanese women as docile and submissive. She acts as a catalyst to subvert the Orientalist view of the East Asia through gender representations. Sen/Chihiro accomplishes many difficult tasks: To break the spell cast on Haku and helps him remember his name and true identity. The image of the powerful Orient is also depicted in Haku/Dragon/Boy whose Asian masculinity is dramatized through a stern-looking white dragon—a symbol of East Asian nobility and dignity. Chihiro liberates the Stinky god, No-Face, Bō and finally rescues her parents. Chihiro's strength is obtained from the rice balls offered by Haku, the advice and warmth of Kamiji and Zeniba, the boat ride from her bathhouse mate Lin, thereby, she transcends all modern capitalist values that Yubaba advocates.

Finally, *Spirited Away* is set in two different worlds: a modern Japan where Chihiro and her parents live and the mysterious world inhabited by strange spirits and gods. The Bathhouse is a significant *cultural* space where the characters wear a Kimono, sleep on mates on floor, bow when greeting each other and eat their meals out of bowls with chopsticks. The Bathhouse is also a *hybridized* space where all imaginable shapes and sizes inhabit a supernatural setting beyond the normal sense of reality mirroring a multiplicity of views—a space embraces ambiguous and *hybridized* identities. For example, Yubaba and Zeniba do not represent fixed opposites of good versus evil, but represent an impure and pure reality that causes severe disharmony. Kamiji—old man with spider-like arms-toils day and night to supply hot water to gods. Chihiro and Kamiji represent functional members of society as selfless in contrast to No-Face. A *plurality* of perspectives embraces all the strange "Others" that Chihiro encounters. Chihiro herself does not identify herself in opposition to others, but as one of the spirited world.

CONCLUSION

Transformation and metamorphoses are the essence of Miyazaki's film. Japanese myth often uses shape-shifting bodies which reveal themselves as facades concealing a deeper reality. Miyazaki is not fond of computer imagery and draws thousands of frames himself, thereby, the illustrations are richly textured. Japanese anime—as opposed to Disney's animation—is less committed to a complete realism of motion. Miyazaki's use of the hand-draw (Cel-animation) technique gives imagery sleekness through the use of its curved lines. Comparing Chihiro to Alice makes sense in that she has stumbled into a strange, exotic world where normal logic does not apply and her experiences teach her much about the world she normally inhabits. The common link between the two masterpieces is the ability to hold the connection cross fantasy and reality. The portal-quest fantasy genre adopted in both films works well to present "unquestionable moral paradigm in the fictional world's social structures" (Mendlesohn, 2008, p.13). A comparison of approaches taken by Miyazaki and Disney not only identifies some

distinctive characteristics of Miyazaki's anime, but may also reflect his view of Japan in relation to its *Western* "*Other*". Miyazaki's conscious self-positioning in opposition to Disney is *ideology*: Disney's *universality* acknowledges *homogenization* while that of Miyazaki acknowledges *heterogeneity*. Anime, for Miyazaki, is "more than a medium for children or a commercial form of entertainment" (Hu, 2010, p.123). What distinguishes Miyazaki's anime from other animation industry personnel is the way he regards himself as "a social and cultural filmmaker" (Ibid.).

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