LEIDEN UNIVERSITY

The Grass is Greener in the Countryside

An Analysis on Furusato and Fear of Identity Loss in Contemporary Japanese Society as Seen in Pom Poko and Kairo

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21/12/2020

Foreword

Writing my thesis during a pandemic and the quarantine that ensued was not exactly how I envisioned my final semester(s) at university to go, and yet here we are. As I write this (September 2020, for posterity), we have been plagued by COVID-19 for about six months. It is a rather cruel irony, writing about a film that is well-known for its depiction of isolation whilst sitting alone in my apartment, waiting for the restrictions on "normal" life to be lifted. Or, rather, waiting for a solution to the problem, simultaneously wondering how "normal" life will ever be normal again. One might almost ask themselves if we have found ourselves in our own version of *Kairo*. Times are strange.

This has been quite the project to research. The process was, admittedly, quite rocky. Not that eagerness was an issue, no – perhaps we should blame the pandemic for it all (I jest, but only slightly). Either way, this was an incredibly interesting project to undertake too, but I could not have done it without the boundless enthusiasm of my supervisor: Dr. Michael Crandol. His excitement about this subject made me even more motivated to do this, and I would like to thank him wholeheartedly for his amazing support.

Of course, there are others: I would also like to express my warmest thanks to my parents and my boyfriend Kevin (the latter also helped me edit!) who have not only supported me academically, but emotionally as well (not to mention they have continuously been subjected to my rambling about the films and theories that are discussed in this thesis). They may have looked at me with puzzled faces time and again, but they have always been there for me. They might have kept me sane in more ways than they could ever know.

Last but definitely not least are my friends, both online and in "real life", who have enriched my life in so many ways. I may not have come to certain insights about my research if I had not run certain ideas by them. And, perhaps even more importantly: if I needed a break, a funny conversation or a nice day out (whenever it was possible and responsible before/during the pandemic, obviously), I could count on them too. Thank you, everyone!

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Introduction

Although J-horror and Studio Ghibli films are vastly different, they have some striking similarities: theyboth deal with motifs such as folklore and spirits, and engage with similar social anxieties of turn-of-the-millennium Japan. Both genres depict these fears in seemingly opposite ways, which makes it interesting to take a closer look at them.

Japanese horror or simply "J-horror" is an umbrella term for horror fiction works originating from Japan. In this thesis, the term refers to cinema specifically: these films often feature supernatural themes, such as ghosts or *yōkai* 妖怪(a variety of supernatural creatures and entities).

Studio Ghibli, on the other hand, is an animation studio founded by directors Takahata Isao and Miyazaki Hayao in 1985. The studio is best known for its whimsical animation films such as *Spirited Away* (dir. Miyazaki Hayao, 2001) or *My Neighbour Totoro* (dir. Miyazaki Hayao, 1988). Striking themes in Ghibli films are stories set in the countryside and/or in nature, featuring folklore creatures, nostalgia, loss, and finding one's place in life.

In this thesis I will explore the impact of *furusato* – nostalgia towards a countryside hometown (this will be elaborated upon in the first chapter) – on contemporary Japanese society, and how the fear of identity loss is expressed in two entirely different genres through case studies.

Studio Ghibli films are known for featuring *furusato* themes and *Pom Poko* is no exception; this film revolves around a group of magical Japanese raccoon dogs, also known as *tanuki* – technically *bake-danuki* 化け狸 (supernatural *tanuki*) – losing their countryside home to post-war urbanisation. It is a fitting case study because it deals with loss and longing for the past, focusing on the *tanukis*' mourning and their desperate attempt to stop the urban development from invading their habitat even more. The *tanuki* have to find their place in a modernising Tokyo: they are a metaphor for the Japanese people.

J-horror film *Kairo* on the other hand, depicts the absence of *furusato* in a dystopia haunted by ghosts travelling through the Internet; *furusato* "exists" as the absent Other. The world is quite literally dead, everyone is isolated from each other despite technology that should allow people to stay connected, and there is no "hometown" or safe place to go to. *Kairo*'s focus is the loss of community and identity in a world filled with technology; *Pom Poko* emphasises the importance of community, but loss connects these films.

This thesis presents a new angle to the discussion of *furusato* and the anxieties surrounding loss of Japanese contemporary identity by juxtaposing and comparing these two aforementioned films; *furusato* as an absent Other in J-horror, especially when comparing it to Ghibli, is something that has not been written about before. There is a lot of theory on *furusato* itself and the role of related themes, such as nostalgia, in Studio Ghibli films; there is some theory on identity in J-horror as well. However, combining the two and relating it to *furusato* and identity anxiety is a new perspective I hope to explore in this thesis through research of both said theory and two case studies.

The foundation and starting point of the sources used for this research is Marylin Ivy's book *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*. Ivy analyses different cultural examples that rely on "vanishing": they are not gone yet, but rather kept on the edge of disappearing, like a ghost of the past in modern Japan. This book also addresses the anxiety about loss of identity and how the concept of "vanishing" plays a part in containing these fears. I will apply Ivy's theory to my research about *furusato* and, by extension, the chosen case studies.

Of course, other sources and literature will be used as well to support my hypothesis and my supporting arguments; furthermore, not only the content of the case studies will be analysed, but their cinematography as well.

The question this research will be based on is the following: "How are anxieties about the loss of traditional identity and *furusato* articulated in diverse genres of contemporary Japanese film, using *Pom Poko* and *Kairo* as case studies?"

Finally, the hypothesis that will be assumed is that *Kairo* is the nightmarish flipside of *Pom Poko*: if *Pom Poko* depicts a world where *furusato* can live on somehow despite being in danger of disappearing due to technological advancements, *Kairo* depicts a world where *furusato* is completely vanished and therefore horrific. By doing this, both films convey the anxiety of losing one's traditional Japanese identity in contemporary Japanese society. *Furusato*, or lack thereof, represents traditional Japanese identity in these case studies.

Definition of *furusato*

Background information

Furusato 故郷 literally means "old home" or "hometown"; the term is often used to refer to the countryside or *inaka* 田舎. It was popularised by the song "*Furusato*", composed by Takano Tatsuyuki and Okano Teiichi in 1914. The lyrics are about the singer reminiscing about their childhood. They mention their desire to return to their hometown someday, implying that they are currently somewhere, perhaps far away, that does not look like their *furusato* at all. The lyrics (translation provided by the author) do not mention a specific town or place, but it is evident that it is a place in the countryside, surrounded by nature:

Usagi oishi ka no yama	*I chased rabbits in its mountains*
Ko-buna tsurishi ka no kawa	*I fished for small carps in its rivers*
Yume wa ima mo megurite	*Even now I dream of it:*
Wasure-gataki furusato	*(My) unforgettable hometown*
Ika ni imasu chichi-haha	*How are you, mother and father?*
Tsutsuganashi ya tomogaki	*Are my friends in good health?*
Ame ni, kaze ni tsukete mo	*Even (when I soak) in the rain, in the wind*
Omoi-izuru furusato	*I remember my hometown*
Kokorozashi o hata shite	*When I accomplish my goals,*
Itsu no hi ni ka kaeran	*Some day I will return*
Yama wa aoki furusato	*To my hometown where mountains are green*
Mizu wa kiyoki furusato	*To my hometown where the water is pure*

Furusato is a concept that is inseparable from strong emotions, mainly rooted in nostalgia and warmth – even when *furusato* does not refer to one's actual hometown (Morrison, 2013: 2). This is important to note; although *furusato* seems to be a memory of the past, this is not entirely true. Technically, *furusato* can be

any so-called “home of the heart”, which is not bound to time or even place. Since the notion is based on emotions for the most part, *furusato* does not point to somewhere specific, much like the song.

Furthermore, *furusato* is seen as an antithesis to urban life as it centres strong social bonds with one’s family and community, as well as tradition and modesty (Schrerer and Thelen: 11). McMorran lists some other aspects too:

> “Based on an idealized past marked by co-operative agricultural production (Robertson 1988; Creighton 1997), *furusato* heritage can be said to consist of three key aspects, all of which are considered absent from city life, yet crucial to Japanese national identity: (1) a proximity to nature; (2) an architectural cohesiveness and familiarity; and (3) a sense of co-operation and community” (339).

In contemporary Japanese society, it is mostly the thought of *furusato* that is kept alive through means of, for example, domestic tourist programmes and popular media. While *furusato* is still mainly a personal feeling, these parties do influence it.

The concept of imagined nostalgia

Nowadays, *furusato* has largely become an imagined nostalgia; for most people, there is “nowhere to be nostalgic toward” (Robertson: 497). Since this nostalgia is mostly fed by external sources and romanticised views rather than personal experience (as is mentioned above), it is imagined. Even people born and raised in big cities can long for the countryside for example, experiencing what can be called a “spiritual” *furusato*. People lost their *furusato* roots after periods of industrialisation, urbanisation and mass migration to cities, causing them to not be able to “return home” anymore – this, among other developments in post-war Japanese society, eventually lead to loss of that cultural identity (Morrison, 2013: 23).

Nevertheless, the continuing sense of nostalgia indicates that something is absent or lost, even though most people in contemporary Japanese society have not personally experienced this “originary loss” (Ivy: 22). Because certain aspects of tradition are kept on the brink of “vanishing” – not entirely gone, yet not mainstream or deemed “tainted” by modernity–there is a feeling that they represent

a “lost”, more authentic Japan that is almost forgotten. *Furusato* is a way to revive that feeling of authenticity: with *furusato-zukuri* 故郷作り (“hometown-making”), fuelled by nostalgia for nostalgia (Robertson: 499), people in contemporary Japanese society can reshape *furusato* by literally recreating that idealised countryside.

Although there is not one single *furusato*, many towns have claimed to be the “*furusato* of Japan” (Ivy: 104). Ivy dedicates a chapter to the town of Tōno, revered for its importance in folklore history because it is the setting for Yanagita Kunio’s famous *Tōno monogatari* 遠野物語 (The Tales of Tōno), a collection of folklore legends published in 1910.While these particular stories are rather gruesome, the framing of this folklore as traditionally Japanese allowed Tōno to be romanticised, “reinterpreted” and even seen as an investment of sorts to ensure its continued status as *furusato*: new events are created for the public and the town now mostly relies on income from this *furusato* tourism because agriculture is not as lucrative anymore (108-117).

Ivy mentions that “Tōno is the self-proclaimed folktale and folklore *furusato*” (105) due to the influence of the *Tōno monogatari*. Furthermore, she states:

> “The civilisation and enlightenment movement of the Meiji period started almost entirely with systems imported from the West, and coincided with a Westernization process. Modern scholarly disciplines were also imported from overseas, but folklore studies is notable among the few disciplines which were created and which achieved independence within Japan. Folklore studies became a scholarly system via *Tōno monogatari*. Tōno is the birthplace of Japanese folklore studies, even now is the Mecca of folklore studies, and is the spiritual homeland of the Japanese” (114).

Thus, Tōno’s status as *furusato* is reinforced due to it being of great importance to folklore studies or *minzokugaku* 民俗学, because this discipline was created in Japan and preserved in an age of “vanishing” native scholarly disciplines and thus traditional identity – that is, it was able to survive and thrive in a period of westernisation and overseas influence.

In the *Tōno monogatari*, and by extension in Japanese folklore, *yōkai* play an important part. These creatures are often animal-like beings, with famous

examples being the *kappa* 河童 – which Yanagita has written about – and the *tanuki*. However, *yōkai* can appear as humanoid apparitions and even as "haunted" objects. They are of particular interest to the discussion of *furusato* and nostalgia because they are seen as icons of the traditional. In the case of the *Tōno monogatari*, Yanagita describes Tōno as "a nonmodern otherworld where tengu and kitsune and kappa are still conceivable" (Foster, 2009: 140). By choosing this setting, Yanagita plays into the rural aspect of *furusato*. Tōno is portrayed as a lost – or vanished – Japan, evoking feelings of (imagined) nostalgia.

However, *yōkai* do not only have connections with imagined nostalgia, but withtraditional (national) identity as well. Foster comments:

> "In Japan, as elsewhere, the folkloric project is always intimately engaged with questions of identity. For Yanagita, yōkai such as the hitotsume-kozō [一つ目小僧, lit. "one-eyed child"] provide a key to accessing this identity: their ubiquity affords evidence of a past shared by common ancestors. The reality of this past may be unattractive, but as part of a collective experience it is also an essential part of the modern Self. The existence of yōkai as a trace of this communal history identifies the Japanese as Japanese" (2009: 147).

Yōkai are framed as a representation of a "real", authentic Japan. They, too, are vanishing, and their stories must be discovered and shared before they disappear: they are relics of a shared past predating modernisation and westernisation. This emphasises the image of *minzokugaku* as non-western and *yōkai* as part of a mystical *furusato*.

The average person will not be nostalgic for places such as Tōno specifically, as *furusato* is not bound to one place. Rather, they will be nostalgic for the unknown and seemingly "untouched", for the mysterious and vanished past where one could find *yōkai* wandering about like Yanagita describes in the *Tōno monogatari*. Thus, the transmission of stories adds to *furusato* and the concept of imagined nostalgia.

While Yanagita is deemed the father of *minzokugaku*, the transmission of supernatural stories has a long history preceding his *Tōno monogatari*. In the Edo period, *kaidan* 怪談 (ghost stories) were very popular, especially in the form of the

parlour game *hyakumonogatari kaidankai* 百物語怪談会 ("gathering of one hundred ghost stories"). The participants of the game had to tell one hundred *kaidan* – topics included urban legend-like encounters with *onryō* 怨霊 (vengeful spirits), *yūrei* 幽霊 (ghosts) and other monsters – enabling them to summon spirits if they completed the game.

While the *hyakumonogatari kaidankai* was supposedly once played as a test of courage among warriors, it eventually became a recreational pastime. Because of the game's popularity, *kaidan* were often gathered, printed, and published as books. This provided the means for further spreading of these stories. While the storytelling events allowed for *yōkai* and *onryō* stories to be exchanged, books "came to function as repositories of yōkai-related data" (Foster, 2009: 54); they served almost like an encyclopaedia. As a result of this, even lesser-known *yōkai* were recorded and thus saved from vanishing; this made *yōkai* more tangible. The extensive documentation of these *yōkai* was more than likely a foundation for Yanagita's *Tōno monogatari*, *minzokugaku*, and therefore a part of *furusato* and imagined nostalgia.

Furusato in contemporary Japanese popular media

Society uses several ways to keep *furusato* alive in contemporary Japan: one such thing, as was briefly mentioned in the subchapter above, is tourism. In the 1970's and 1980's, there were two prominent programmes: Discover Japan and Exotic Japan, respectively. Their main target was young women and the goal was for them to (re)discover what it meant to be "Japanese".

Having said that, popular media influences *furusato* tourism as well: it is not unheard of for fans of certain shows or *anime* to visit important, real-life places shown in orimportant the series. One such example is named by Greene: the rural town of Sakaiminato, old home of *manga* artist Mizuki Shigeru who created *GeGeGe no Kitarō* ゲゲゲの鬼太郎, has become a destination of "emotional pilgrimage". Titular character Kitarō, a one-eyed *yōkai* boy reminiscent of Yanagita's *hitotsume-kozō* (Foster, 2009: 166) (figure 1 and 2), lives in GeGeGe Forest where many other *yōkai* dwell. He protects humanity from evil *yōkai*, but wants humans and good *yōkai* to live together in harmony.

Figure 1: A *hitotsume-kozō* from Masayoshi Kitao's *Bakemonochakutōchō* (夭怪着到牒), circa 1788. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Masayoshi_Hitotsume-kozo.jpg. Uploaded by Tobosha.

Figure 2: Kitarō from *GeGeGe no Kitarō*. Cover of the 2013 Drawn & Quarterly English translation of *GeGeGe no Kitarō* stories. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Kitaro_cover.JPG. Copyright: Mizuki Shigeru. Uploaded by Theo's Little Bot.

Mizuki combines his own original characters with traditional *yōkai*. Folk tales are sometimes referenced in the *manga* as well. The focus on folklore and *yōkai* in *Kitarō* resulted in the popularisation of these creatures and stories. Consequently, Mizuki is considered an important figure in the *yōkai* genre. He essentially saved many *yōkai* – and thus a part of *minzokugaku* and traditional Japanese identity – from completely vanishing by collecting stories about them and drawing them. Foster compares Kitarō to Mizuki: "Kitarō also serves as a corollary to Mizuki himself, struggling to protect yōkai and the (super)natural world from fading into irrelevance" (2009: 167). Because of the *yōkai*s' survival and popularisation, they hold a place in contemporary popular culture to this day: well-known franchises such as *Pokémon* ポケモン and *Yo-Kai Watch* 妖怪ウォッチ have based a good amount of their creature designs on monsters and mythology. These creatures, which are the main attraction of the franchises, are ultimately linked to tradition, proving that *yōkai* are far from vanished.

In honour of Mizuki, a street was opened Sakaiminato donned with statues of several characters in the series (figure 3). Because *Kitarō* has been a childhood staple for many – the *anime* adaptation has been renewed every decade since the *manga* came out in 1968, meaning that the franchise literally spans generations – Greene notes Sakaiminato has both the rural setting and the "emotional safety" to become a kind of man-made *furusato* (336), perhaps even the product of *furusato-zukuri*. Thus, the warmth of a childhood memory is enough to create a contemporary *furusato*: the sense of community comes from sharing the love for a piece of popular culture.

Another example of contents tourism is given by Schrerer and Thelen: they argue *asadora* 朝ドア(morning dramas) broadcast by the NHK parallel the philosophy of Discover Japan, some series focussing on the "urban woman as a 'discoverer' of a rural, rustic world which symbolises her own 'native' Japaneseness" (11). The shows provide a place to project an ideal reality: the countryside is seen as the perfect setting for this. Furthermore, theyserve as a way to remind its audience – mainly women – of traditional Japanese values (Schrerer and Thelen: 7). Consumers of *asadora* were encouraged to visit the filming locations of these series to experience the "true" *furusato* feeling like they had seen on television.

In conclusion, people are mainly influenced by popular media regarding their image of *furusato*. The media stimulates "performing" *furusato* as well: when consumers visit the places in the shows they watch, they shape their perception of *furusato*. To quote Morrison: "(…) it is possible to say that the present conceptualization of *furusato* has not been *experienced*, so much as it has been *learned*" (2013: 19). In this case, people "learn" through the media.

Figure 3: Sakaiminato JR Station (JR 境港駅), ft. *Kitarō* statues. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:JR%E5%A2%83%E6%B8%AF%E9%A7%85_Sakai-Minato_Sta._-_panoramio.jpg. Original photographer: iloverjoa.

Anxieties about identity

When an American fleet led by Matthew C. Perry arrived in Japan in the mid-19th century and the country once again "opened" after a period of being virtually closed off from foreign influence, the government pushed for quick development and westernisation. This period was called the Meiji Restoration and it was, in a sense, a way for the government to avoid possible colonisation. Therefore, the formation of the modern Japanese nation-state is effectively inseparable from the threat of being dominated by the colonising powers Europe and America (Ivy: 4). Rea argues that since this period of development, Japanese "identity and tradition have been intertwined" (647). Because the countryside is perceived as a place where tradition is preserved, *furusato* is part of an identity that is the antithesis of not just urban life, but of western influence and globalisation as well. In that sense, cities are often seen as "Westernized, artificial, and cultureless" (Morrison, 2013: 11). Thus, modernisation and internationalisation can be seen as a threat to vanishing traditions, and by extension to identity.

After World War II, Japan was once again thrown into a period of rapid urbanisation.The population in the countryside dwindled due to mass migration to the city, making people lose their connection to the countryside and their *furusato*. By losing this connection, people lost part of their cultural identity. Moreover, U.S. forcesimplemented several changes during their occupation of Japan after the war, such as a constitution that reduced the emperor to a ceremonial symbol rather than a figure of power. Once again Japan was under western influence – Guarné argues Japanese society behaves like a postcolonial society in some ways because it was built to withstand the threat of colonialism (109). This, combined with further loss of the countryside, was also a catalyst for anxieties about losing one's "real" Japanese identity: what if all old tradition is lost? This anxiety is where Ivy's notion of vanishing comes in again: *furusato* earns its status because it is perceived to be lacking in society to the point where it is almost gone. Therefore, it is feared that when it does disappear, it – and the traditional identity associated with it – may be irrecoverable.

Furusato in Studio Ghibli films

Escape to the furusato: countryside and aesthetic

Studio Ghibli is not just an animation studio in the public eye anymore: it is an icon. Miyazaki Hayao and the late Takahata Isao officially retired in 2014, but the studio has not entirely ceased production. The importance of its three most active decades' worth of works is nevertheless undeniable as Ghibli films and aesthetics are still known and loved to this day.

Furusato themes are often seen in Ghibli films, especially in the works of Takahata. The most obvious example is his film *Only Yesterday* (1991); Taeko, the main character, is a woman in her late twenties working at a company in Tokyo. She has lived in Tokyo her entire life, but still expresses a longing for the countryside, even as a child: in a flashback, a young Taeko asks her mother if they can go to the countryside during the holidays, like Taeko's classmates do. However, her mother comments they have nowhere to go to as they have no relatives living there. As Taeko notes herself in the narration, her family has lived in Tokyo for generations. Thus, she is a relatable protagonist for many people in contemporary Japanese society. She has practically no connection to the countryside, and has therefore never experienced the "typical", traditional *furusato*.

However, Taeko decides to go on vacation to a small rural area in Yamagata where she helps on a farm. She finds love, a way to reflect on her childhood memories, and eventually a home – when driving around the countryside with love interest Toshio, he comments on the landscape being a result of the cooperation between farmers and nature. Taeko feels this is the reason why she feels like she has found her *furusato* in this place and even calls the landscape *natsukashii* 懐かしい (nostalgic); both of these terms have a deeply emotional load and are regarded as typically Japanese words that cannot be translated (Napier, 2001: 223-224). By using these words, it frames the landscape as typically Japanese as well. Additionally, what is striking about this dialogue is how this *furusato* was a community effort but perhaps most importantly, nature was respected too. This shows some of McMorran's *furusato* criteria that were noted in the first chapter – a proximity to nature and strong social bonds within the community – which further reinforces the *furusato* feeling for Taeko. This is perhaps why she calls it *natsukashii* despite having spent little time in the area.

On the topic of identity, Taeko makes a very clear transition in her life. While

she experiences feelings of nostalgia throughout the film, she eventually discovers what she really wants and quite literally leaves her younger self – her past – behind. She finally finds somewhere to feel at home, and by finding this home, she finds herself as well. It is a moment of catharsis; not only for Taeko, but for the audience as well, especially those that relate to Taeko and her experiences. In this sense, the film is very similar to the goals ofDiscover Japan, Exotic Japan, and even *asadora* that were mentioned in chapter 1.Taeko discovers her own "Japaneseness" and finally feels fulfilled.

Of course, this is only one example of *furusato* and identity in the Ghibli oeuvre; Miyazaki's films feature them as well. For instance, *Spirited Away* is set in a world of forgotten identities (Swale: 418), filled with magical creatures; a world that is not even remembered – at least not by the adults – when the film ends. Both the characters' identities and the magical world of *Spirited Away* are thus "vanished".This particular detail is almost reminiscent of *Kairo*, which highlights the vanishing of identities as well.

The motif of forgotten or vanished identities is especially interesting in *Spirited Away*: Haku, who warns Chihiro that she must not ever forget her name lest she forget who she is, turns out to be the spirit of Kohaku River. He does not remember this, however. According to Chihiro, the river was drained and "things" were built on top of it. Thus, the natural environment was destroyed for the sake of development, which is a theme relating to both environmentalism and the loss of *furusato* due to urbanisation. This issue is specifically present in *Pom Poko* as well, which will be discussed later.

Napier calls the themes of longing for the past the elegiac mode: this refers to "a mood of mournfulness and melancholy, perhaps mixed with nostalgia" (2001: 31). She links this to Ivy's concept of vanishing, because stories using this mode focus on the transience of things – there is often a sense of mourning, and the mode tends to show elements of the natural world because seasonal change represents transience well.

Pom Poko: the curious case of the tanuki

In the film *Heisei Tanuki Gassen Ponpoko* 平成狸合戦ぽんぽこ, henceforth referred to as *Pom Poko*, a group of *tanuki* try to build a resistance against an urban development project that destroys their countryside habitat. As the humans keep

building, the *tanuki* keep losing their living space, and they have trouble finding enough food to keep themselves and their families fed. Conflicts arise until the *tanuki* decide to try stopping the development in order to save their home. The ones that are able to learn shapeshifting try to sabotage and frighten the humans, but to no avail. Eventually the *tanuki* decide to send out some messengers to seek out elders from other places in hopes to get their help; after a few years, one of the messengers comes back with three revered elders from Shikoku. In Shikoku, supernatural forces – and therefore the *tanuki* – are respected and even worshipped. The elders devise a plan to haunt the town with a *yōkai* parade similar to the *Hyakki Yagyō* 百鬼夜行 ("Night Parade of a Hundred Demons") (figure 4 and 5).

Figure 4: One part of the *tanukis*' *yōkai* parade.

Figure 5: "Hyakki Yakō" by Kawanabe Kyōsai, collected in British Museum, image scanned from Timothy Clark, Demon of painting: the art of Kawanabe Kyōsai, p.64. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hyakki_Yako.jpg. Uploaded by K.C. Tang~commonswiki.

In this seven-minute scene, the *tanuki* shapeshift into various *yōkai* icons, some of which seem to come straight out of famous *ukiyo-e* 浮世絵 (traditional Japanese woodblock prints). *Ukiyo-e*, an art form regarded as typically Japanese, often showed recognisable images: landscapes, famous actors, and *yōkai*, for example. However, due to the rapid westernisation during the Meiji restoration and the spread of photography, the tradition of *ukiyo-e* printing all but ended. It is a vanished form of Japanese art.

This is not the only time the *tanuki* assume the form of a *yōkai* to scare the humans, however; at the start of the film, one of the *tanuki* changes into the faceless *yōkai noppera-bō* のっぺらぼう to scare a policeman (figure 6). The *tanuki* tend to frame the *yōkai* as grotesque or scary in order to repel humans, which is somewhat reminiscent of the use of horrific creatures in J-horror films and supernatural encounters one could hear about during a *hyakumonogatari kaidankai*.

Thus, the deliberate choice of the *tanuki* changing into the *Hyakki Yagyō* and other familiar *yōkai* as depicted in *ukiyo-e* and *kaidan* is an attempt to remind the people of Tokyo of their shared, vanished past: a past before modernisation and

westernisation, similar to what is illustrated in Yanagita's *Tōno monogatari*. By doing so, their goal is to provoke not only a feeling of fear, but a sense of *furusato* and nostalgia as well.

The initial scare tactics and the parade fail to affect the citizens, however, because their connection with *furusato* has vanished and because the parade was claimed to be a promotional stunt by local theme park Wonderland. Driven to desperation by this failure, the *tanuki* are once again divided. Some of themresort to eco-terrorism, which gets them killed by the police. One of the elders starts a dancing cult with several other *tanuki*; they sail away on a ship, never to be seen again. A few *tanuki* even appeal to journalists taking interviews, trying to convince the humans to stop the construction that is destroying the *tanukis*' home. However, nothing works, and a group of the remaining *tanuki* decide to conjure one last illusion: they shapeshift the urban landscape to the rural landscape it once was. This reminds them – and some of the older residents – of what the area looked like before urbanisation; they are overcome with emotion when they see what has been lost, which breaks the illusion.

Figure 6: A *tanuki* changing into a *noppera-bō*.

The film ends with some *tanuki* deciding to shapeshift and living life as a human, like *kitsune* 狐 (spirit foxes) did before them. The others that cannot shapeshift have either moved to the countryside, or live in the small parks that have been created in the city after the *tanukis*' media appeal. Still, they have to fight to survive by dodging traffic and eating out of trash cans.

The *furusato* themes in this film are very present. The *tanuki* represent traditional Japan and *furusato* itself because they are *yōkai*: remnants of a vanished, traditional Japan. Thus, they are native icons trying to win their own wars rather than needing – or being threatened by – "outsiders" (Ortabasi: 256). In fact, the "outsiders" who pose a threat are the Japanese working on the development project: their presence interferes with the community. The *tanuki* and the humans are two opposing societies: where the tanuki live in harmony with nature and try to protect it, the humans disturb nature and are disconnected from it (Thelen: 44).Post-war development is threatening the *tanukis*' livelihood and literally destroying their *furusato*. The main theme in this film is loss, as this is another one of Takahata's elegiac *anime*: *Pom Poko* deals with loss of home, loss of life even, but mostly the loss of a traditional way of living.

The *tanuki* are clearly framed, literally and figuratively, as a tight community. A sense of community and co-operation is the third important *furusato* characteristic as listed by McMorran, the first one being "proximity to nature", and the second one being "architectural familiarity and cohesiveness".

Pom Poko often shows that the *tanuki* have a strong bond with each other. Shots do not usually show a *tanuki* alone or outside their group. In fact, the shots of the *tanuki* are generally rather crowded (figure 7). These shots are often long shots, which also capture the male characters' distinctive *tanuki* scrotum. While this brings some comedy to the film – which suits the *tanukis*' overall personality of being mischievous jokesters – it is also a quintessential *tanuki* feature, giving them their traditional physical appearance, similar to how they were depicted in the Edo period (Thelen: 37).

A fair amount of scenes in the film prove the strong interpersonal connections of the *tanuki* and their willingness to work together; for instance, when they are being trained by the elders, they need to work together closely to transform into something big (figure 8). They are all part of a collective, which shows their sense of community as well. Their social hierarchy is rather traditional too: they hold elders in high esteem for their wisdom, and they are loyal to each other and those who are of greater social standing within the group.

Figure 7: The *tanuki* come together to discuss when they will start sabotaging humans.

Figure 8: Various *tanuki* forming the tip of a tail; right after this shot, the camera pans to reveal a gigantic dragon.

However, not every scene involves a crowd: romantic interactions for instance, such as the ones between Shokichi and Kiyo, are more personal to set a mood of intimacy. They are responsible for the new generation of *tanuki* – their own little slice of *furusato*. The *tanuki* decided to be abstinent until they eliminated the threat of the humans; having children and letting the community grow means that there is more at stake for them. With Tama Hills gone, Shokichi and Kiyo's children will likely grow up with little to no knowledge about the *tanuki* community and the *furusato* of their family, apart from what their parents will tell them. This is representative of people in contemporary Japanese society, and once again shows Ivy's concept of vanishing. As was explained in the first chapter, those living in urban areas especially have not experienced the *furusato* ideal themselves. They are taught and told about it, as will likely happen with the *tanuki* children as well. Having said that, it is unknown what has happened – or will happen – to the cubs, as they are never mentioned again after one family montage. In the final scene some other (unknown) cubs can be seen, however. Like the people of contemporary Tokyo, their *furusato* roots and traditional identity will vanish.

Not only the *tanuki* and their interactions set the mood during the film, the landscape does as well. At the start of the film, there are some establishing shots of Tama Hill that show the main source of conflict and anxiety for the *tanuki*: urban development. In this scene, the loss of farmland and forest in favour of housing is compared to a huge insect gnawing random patterns in the land. This is visualised in the frames shown in figure 9: first, an excavator is digging chunks out of a hill, with a time lapse of houses being built on the sides. After this, there is a close-up of a leaf – representing the land in the aforementioned metaphor – with tiny machines literally gnawing random patterns. It shows that change is happening on every scale, big or small, and that nature is heavily affected. Furthermore, it shows exactly what the *tanuki* are scared of as well: losing their *furusato* to a modern world where there is no place for them – the "traditional" – anymore.

Figure 9: A visualisation of the humans' urban development.

Therefore, in a sense, McMorran's two other *furusato* aspects – proximity to nature and architectural familiarity – go hand in hand. Tama Hills was a typical rural *furusato* at the start of the film. It was a largely natural environment with no high, densely packed buildings, making the landscape cohesive and familiar – even homely or *natsukashii* just like Taeko describes the countryside in *Only Yesterday* – and close to nature. This vanishes due to Tokyo's urbanisation: because of the destruction of nature due to construction work, the city is further removed from 1nature as well. Furthermore, Tokyo's "new" architecture – skyscrapers and similar buildings – cause the landscape to look less cohesive and familiar. This architecture is not traditional and may look colder or more impersonal; the landscape is altered by the amount and the height of the buildings, giving it an unnatural look and providing less personal space outside.

Just like the *tanuki*, the landscape transforms. The season changes several times throughout the film, which was earlier mentioned as a symbol of transience. In one striking scene, the film uses a panning shot that morphs the scenery in front of the eyes of the audience instead of the usual somewhat spontaneous transitions (figure 10). With the change of the seasons, times change as well; life goes on regardless, and it does not stop for the *tanuki* to grieve all their losses (Lack et al: 175). Once again, this dials back to the vanishing: the tanuki, their *furusato* and their old way of living are in the process of being forgotten due to modernisation, and only after their media appeal are they taken into account (albeit a bit too late). At this point, most *tanuki* had to adapt to contemporary society by turning into humans, essentially leaving their traditional life and part of their identity behind. This suggests the overarching anxiety in the film became reality, but this is not entirely true; even when divided, the *tanuki* remain a community in some way. Whenever they get the chance, they will drop their salaryman farce to party together (Thelen: 45) – they have not yet lost this part of their identity despite their *furusato* being lost. This becomes especially clear when Shokichi, now a "human", encounters his good friend Ponkichi and they dance into the night as *tanuki* once more. It is revealed they are not dancing in an open field, but rather on a golf course (figure 11). Their small patch of "nature" is entirely formed and sculpted by humans.

Figure 10: The season changes to spring.

Figure 11: The *tanuki* dancing on a golf course.

The *tanuki*, in this sense, are a metaphor for the Japanese people. They, too, have vanished *furusato* roots and like the *tanuki*, had to adapt their life and identity to the quickly changing Japanese society. Even though humans are framed as a threat in this film, ultimately these people actually represent modernisation and the vanishing of nature and traditional identity.

Ponkichi breaks the fourth wall and speaks directly to the audience during the final scene, asking people to be more considerate of nature and the animals. There is a bittersweet tone to all of this, however, because Shokichi had no way of knowing whether his friends were still alive (which is clear when he is overjoyed to see them), nor can their safety be guaranteed in the future.This is not directly voiced, but the images of *tanuki* run over by traffic do imply that the danger will always be there as long as the group lives in the city – maybe even more so when Tokyo develops more.

At the end of the film, right before the *tanuki* admit their defeat, the year is drawing to an end: the leaves have fallen of the trees and the colours of the landscape are dull, grey and dark as opposed to the vibrant greens earlier in the film. The time of the *tanuki* and their traditions is over, and they know this. They have been driven to desperation, and their environment seems to reflect this. This is when they pull their final trick, which was mentioned earlier: changing the city back to the countryside, their old *furusato* (figure 12). This elicits strong emotional responses from people and *tanuki* alike, and in that small moment they are connected through their feelings. However, the spell breaks and the *tanuki* become realistic animals once more. The audience no longer sees them in their full anthropomorphic form until Shokichi finds his friends. The *tanuki* generally turn into realistic animals when they are seen by humans, after all, and they have seemed to lose some of their “magic” after losing Tama Hills and every last bit that was left of their old home (figure 13). Those who cannot shapeshift appear as regular animals now, simply trying – and sometimes failing – to survive.

Figure 12: A woman seeing a familiar face when the *tanuki* transform the landscape.

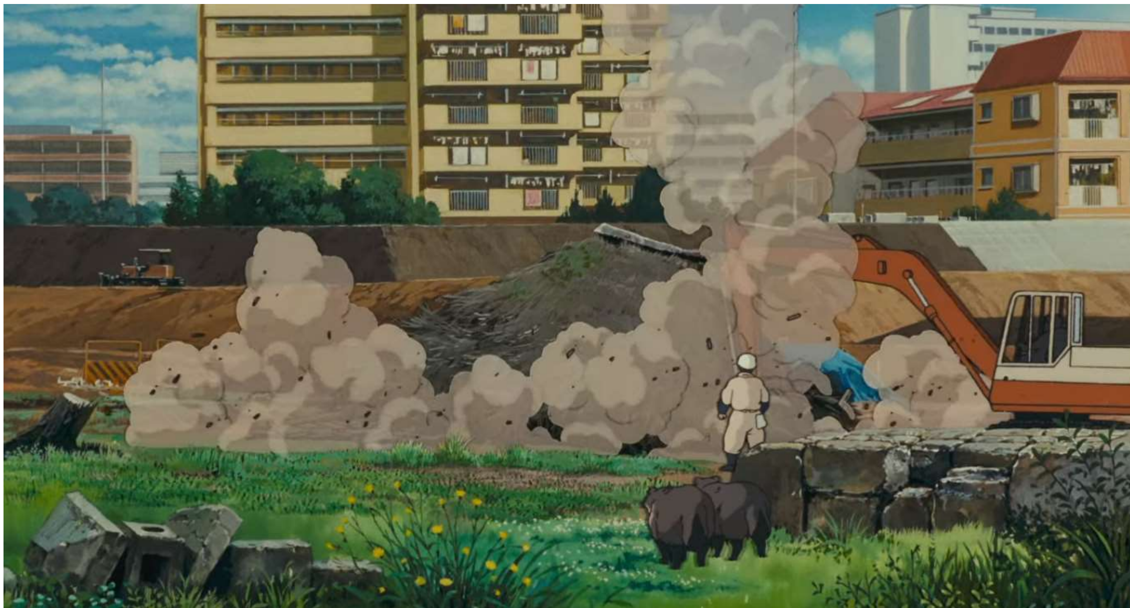

Figure 13: A temple is destroyed while the *tanuki* watch.

The events in the films are shown from the perspective of the *tanuki*, including narration, which makes the audience share in the anxiety of losing Tama Hills. By creating an emotional attachment to the fate of the *tanuki* and by extension, the fate of Tama Hills, the audience develops some *furusato* feelings of their own. The viewer possibly relates to the *tanuki* as well in terms of identity anxiety. In those moments, the viewer *becomes* the *tanuki*, which is the intention of the metaphor discussed before: the *tanuki* represent the Japanese people.

What is worth noting is that this story focuses on the *tanuki* on the outskirts of Tokyo specifically; as the elders from Shikoku said, they are respected where they live. Shikoku is known as a spiritual place, rather isolated from urban areas as an island and free from developments. Thus, it is suggested that the people in the city have lost their spirituality as well; while the *tanuki* in Tokyo are vanishing, those in Shikoku, a place where people co-exist with nature, the supernatural and tradition, are thriving. In fact, Shikoku is a spiritual *furusato* to many (Japanese) people, famous for its 88-temple pilgrimage.

In conclusion, *Pom Poko* depicts the loss of traditional identity through a traditional icon: the *tanuki* serve as relatable protagonists, a symbol of *furusato*, and as a part of nature that is not taken into account in the humans' development plans. By taking the audience on a journey through the *tanukis*' life, losses, and failed plans, the viewer is able to see themselves in this story too.

Furthermore, the emphasis on landscape and nature reinforce the image of the traditional countryside *furusato*; its destruction is a loss for both the *tanuki* and for humans, even though the latter may not directly realise that yet. The loss of *furusato* and traditional identity is also demonstrated by a loss of spirituality and respect for the supernatural: they are all but forgotten, which is part of the reason why the *tanuki* are in danger. After all, it is revealed that the *tanuki* of Shikoku do not face these problems.

Finally, the fate of the next generation of *tanuki* living in Tokyo is similar to that of the people in contemporary Japanese society in terms of cultural identity: they will not grow up in the countryside and their connection with *furusato* will vanish, just like what happened to the humans. *Furusato* is what connects the humans and the *tanuki*: when the *tanuki* shapeshift the scenery, several humans are touched as well. Therefore, the *tanuki* are not only representative of a lost way of life, but of people who have lost their *furusato* in the past too.

***Furusato* as absent Other in J-horror films**

One Ringu to rule them all: technology and identity

J-horror is a genre that embodies everything *furusato* is not: it dismantles the familiar,stars wrathful ghosts rather than benevolent spirits, and isusually set in urban areas.While J-horror is relatively not as easily categorised as Ghibli, both have been very prominent in Japan at the turn of the millennium. They have both left great impact on Japanese popular culture as well, being influential genres in their own right.

In terms of defining J-horror, Kinoshita quotes Kurosawa Kiyoshi who states that J-horror "in which everyday objects like the telephone and videotapes generate terror [are] in fashion" (103). Kinoshita herself defines J-horror like so (104):

> J-horror specifically refers to a group of relatively low-budget horror films made in Japan during the late 1990s, such as the *Ringu* cycle. A closely knit network of filmmakers and critics, including Kurosawa, has been involved in the production of those films. Aesthetically, J –horror films concentrate on the low-key production of atmospheric and psychological fear, rather than graphic gore, capitalizing on urban legends proliferated through mass media and popular culture.

Therefore, going by these two definitions, this introduction will consist of a discussion about *Ringu* リング (dir. Nakata Hideo, 1998), a film using technology as a medium for ghosts: so-called "techno horror". This subgenre is relevant to this particular research: after all, technology and modernity are connected, and modernity is linked to the loss of *furusato* as well as identity anxiety.

Furusato is an absent Other in these films; because *furusato* and everything that comes with it is vanished, the J-horror world is cold and horrific. It poses a stark contrast with the Ghibli world which is often built on *furusato*, romanticisation and feelings of nostalgia. Due to this, it is the nightmarish flipside of the Ghibli ideal: where there is always a home to be found in Ghibli films, J-horror is void of such comfort. However, *furusato* is implicitly present in J-horror films exactly because it *is* absent.

Themes in J-horror can revolve around anxiety about identity and/or critique on contemporary society. It shows the audience what the world *could*

become when *furusato* is vanished, especially when the focal point is technology in subgenres like techno horror. Since technology has become – and is still becoming – more important and prominent in contemporary society, peoples' lives have been changing rather rapidly as well. With yet another period of modernisation – and globalisation for that matter, meaning more "outside" influence – come more anxieties.

Technology undermines McMorran's three *furusato* characteristics: it makes interactions more impersonal and superficial because communication usually takes place online; this thwarts the building of a personal community in one's direct environment. Furthermore, technological advancements often go hand in hand with urbanisation, meaning that residents of cities tend to lose their proximity to nature. Bigger, higher buildings are constructed to house more residents – architecture is less cohesive, and people tend to keep to themselves more because they often do not know who their neighbours are (thus building no community). When this happens, the status and role of *furusato* go further than just vanishing: it is practically dead, and the main characters of these J-horror films are completely alienated from it.

Possibly the most well-known, most influential Japanese techno horror – and possibly the most well-known J-horror film in general– is *Ringu*. The story of *Ringu* revolves around a curse placed on a video tape by a vengeful spirit named Sadako; seven days after someone watches the tape, they will die a gruesome death. The only way to prevent this is to show the tape to someone else within those seven days, essentially handing over the curse to the next person. A never-ending, unbroken cycle must be created if one wants to survive; just like a ring. By doing so, the victim becomes the "perpetrator", handing over Sadako's revenge.

In *Ringu*, reporter Asakawa Reiko investigates the tape after her cousin falls victim to the curse and dies mysteriously. When she herself watches the tape and realises she is in danger too, she asks her ex-husband Ryūji for help. The two examine the tape and even unveil the mystery behind the curse. However, their young son Yoichi watched the tape and was thus exposed to the curse during an unguarded moment, urging Reiko and Ryūji to work even faster to try and break said curse. They think they succeed after discovering the vengeful Sadako's body and Reiko does not die, but Ryūji still ends up being killed; it hits Reiko that she is free from the curse because she copied the tape for Ryūji and showed it to him. To save Yoichi, she calls her father to ask for a favour and drives to his house with the tapes and a VCR.

An interesting detail in *Ringu* is that there is a lot of countryside to be seen. Reiko's father lives in the countryside, and Izu Ōshima – the island where Sadako's corpse lies and the curse started – has a lot of natural landscape as well. While the locations, especially the paternal home, may indicate some form of *furusato*, it actually only strengthens the absence thereof. After all, Sadako and her mother were ostracised by their community, which resulted in both of their deaths. This makes Sadako a symbol of loneliness, as she was therefore doomed to be left for dead in the well (Balmain, 2006).

Although *furusato* is mostly connected to a place or a feeling, there is a connection with the mother as well. The mother is considered a home, and *furusato* can allegedly not exist without motherly love (Morrison, 2015: 61). Because *Ringu* is a maternal horror as well, Yoichi's relationship with his mother Reiko is relevant to the themes in this film too: Reiko is not a "traditional" mother, as she apparently raises Yoichi mostly alone but is often seen prioritising her work over her child.Yoichi gets cursed at his grandfather's home while he was unsupervised, familial bonds proving not enough to have protected him in the first place. Reiko in particular is coded as Yoichi's main caretaker; even though he tells his mother he knows about the tape, she is unable to shield him from the curse (McRoy: 85-86).

Morrison makes two points regarding motherhood and *furusato* in two different works: she notes that the image of *furusato* becoming more abstract paralleled the "dissolution of the traditional family structure" (2013: 23) among other things. However, women in this traditional family structure – Morrison specifically speaks of the Meiji and Taisho period, the Meiji period being important in the development of the concept of *furusato* – often had trouble finding idealised sentiments in their home life, and thus *furusato*, because home and family equalled work and even oppression (2015: 81). Due to the difficult relationship between the mother and *furusato*, the absence (and perhaps the "dark side") of *furusato* is not only noticeable in the events of the film, but also in the strained interpersonal relationships between characters, especially family or community members. An emotionally absent single mother in particular implies a glaringly absent *furusato* because it reinforces the anxiety surrounding the disturbance of traditional family structures and the traditional role of the mother. Furthermore, as McRoy mentions, *Ringu* expresses the socio-cultural fear of the woman – the maternal figure – and her shifting role in society compared to the "old" Japan. He names the parallel of Sadako and Reiko, who are both able to vocalise a potentially life-saving knowledge (the volcanic eruption and the truth behind Sadako's curse, respectively) that the

men around them do not have; they are criticised by their male audience, but the film emphasises that they should not be ignored (87-88).

Despite the absence of *furusato*, there are still some hints of folklore to be found in *Ringu*. Sadako is a classic *yūrei* or *onryō* straight out of an urban legend, which is similar to early sources of Japanese horror and ghost stories: the *kaidan* mentioned in chapter 1. Because of the documentation of *kaidan* and by extension the influence of Yanagita's *Tōno monogatari*, *yōkai* and *onryō* were saved from vanishing. This allowed the tropes to be remembered and to be implemented in contemporary popular media. Thus, in Sadako's monstrous role she is a product of both tradition and modernity (Foster, 2009: 206-207), combining the use of technology with typical *kaidan* themes of horrific encounters with vengeful spirits.

Having said that, while Sadako could be seen as a classic *onryō*, she defies the rules of the world of spirits by seemingly moving around like a virus rather than a traditional ghost; she "infects" whoever happens to come across her tape with her curse, like she herself is the electronic message (Ancuta: 25). Sadako is and creates chaos – while her appearance is rooted in tradition, she uses technology as a"medium for the horrific" (Wada-Marciano: 20) and as a portal to the material world. By extension, she therefore uses the anxiety surrounding modernity and technology as well; the fear being that technology will rule one's life, which would never be the case in a *furusato* ideal.

Kairo: the ghosts of our future?

In *Kairo* 回路, also known as *Pulse* (but henceforth referred to as *Kairo* to avoid confusion with the American remake named *Pulse*), directed by Kurosawa Kiyoshi, the main source of techno horror is a familiar one: the Internet. The ghosts in this film use the Internet to invade the world of the living like a computer virus, driving people to suicide when they encounter these entities.

A main theme in *Kairo*, which it has in common with *Pom Poko*, is loss of identity and identity anxiety: *furusato* and traditional identity have vanished due to technological advancements and urbanisation. While *Pom Poko* shows the process of this vanishing – the *tanuki* being driven out of their *furusato* due to a rapidly expanding Tokyo – *Kairo* shows the result of it. In this film, technology is the main cause of loneliness and isolation, and therefore of the literal and metaphorical ghosts that take over Japan.

One of the reasons for this is that social life happens mostly online in contemporary society due to social media, meaning a sense of traditional “real life” community is lost and social relationships become more superficial. This is the first indicator of an absent *furusato*, where social bonds are extremely important. With the lack of connection perpetuating loneliness among the living and the dead (making them ghosts), the world of *Kairo* has become cold and horrific.

Another indicator of an absent *furusato* is that *Kairo*’s setting is Tokyo and Tokyo only: there is no proximity to nature whatsoever save the plant shop where Michi works. This is only at the start of the film however, as the dull colour palette later on indicates a total lack of nature.

The two storylines of *Kairo* follow several youngsters living and working in Tokyo. The scenes showing these storylines are separated by crosscuts: this suggests the stories of both groups happen at or around the same time until they collide. The first groupconsists of a few employees of the aforementioned plant shop;co-worker Taguchi does not show up at work for several days when Michi decides to visit his apartment. When they are talking, Taguchi ties a noose and commits suicide. After his death, his body disappears and only a black stain remains on the wall.

Both Yabe and Michi receive phone calls with a distorted voice calling out “save me”. For Yabe, this ends on an unfortunate note: hevisits Taguchi’s apartment when he finds a room sealed with red tape. In this “forbidden room” he encounters a ghost, resulting in one of the most iconic scenes in *Kairo*. The ghost, who almost seamlessly blends in with the dark background (figure 14), slowly but unnaturally walks towards Yabe. She starts in an off-center position and the lighting is so low-key that she is almost vanished; the audience almost has to search for her before she starts moving.

In the parallel storyline, student Ryosuke has a strange experience on the Internet. His computer opens a website by itself, showing videos of people alone in dark rooms exhibiting unusual behaviour. When the videos end, Ryosuke’s screen goes black and asks him: “do you want to meet a ghost?”

Figure 14: Yabe's ghost encounter.

Tokyo becomes gradually emptier as more people vanish and evacuations begin. Harue, a student Ryosuke befriended and attempted to run away with, disappears too – she ends up committing suicide, after which Ryosuke and Michi leave together in a car that runs out of gas. They stop at a warehouse where Ryosuke finds a door with red tape; he encounters a ghost telling him that "death is eternal loneliness". He tries to resist, but loses the will to live even after he is saved by Michi. When the two find a boat, Ryosuke lets go of his life and disintegrates. Michi, the captain of the ship and a small crew seem to be the only ones left as they travel to South America on the vast, open sea.

In fact, the last survivors on this ship are shown in the very first scene (figure 15) – it is an establishing shot.It indicates the main themes of this film: isolation and loneliness. The ship is not even in the center of this long shot; it is only a relatively small part of the screen, and there is no land in sight for miles.The audience thus knows how the film ends, immediately creating an atmosphere of hopelessness. While the survivors are safe and alive for the time being (their fate remains unknown) away from technology, they have no home. Given the fact that the Internet – and thus the presence of the ghosts – is everywhere, they may not ever find a home again. It is not unlikely that they have lost their chance at finding a home and by extension, a *furusato*.

Figure 15: The ship Michi and the last survivors are on, as shown at the start of the film.

The vanishing – or absence – of *furusato* in this film is expressed in the landscape. The lighting in the scenes is often low-key, making for a dull, dark environment. Additionally, Balmain notes that as Tokyo loses more of its people, the colour palate becomes less saturated and more greyish-green as if technology sucks the life out of the city; it was more saturated at the start of the film when the plant shop was shown, highlighting the small bits of nature within the city (185). The absence of nature later on accentuates the absence of *furusato* too, as Tokyo is then framed as purely "urban". After all, the first one of McMorran's three *furusato* aspects is "proximity to nature". The few fragments of nature in *Kairo* do not indicate this part of *furusato* whatsoever. Even when Michi drives around town at the end of the film to escape the destruction of Tokyo, the audience sees a few trees at most; apart from this, there is only urban environment (figure 16).

Figure 16: The empty streets of Tokyo.

Having said that, Kairo is mostly set indoors, where the characters are often alone; for example, Michi sitting in the bus all by herself and Ryosuke playing games in an abandoned arcade. When the characters are outside, however, Tokyo is constantly shown as empty whereas urban life is generally seen as bustling with life. In various scenes, characters are shown all by themselves in long shots, displaying deserted streets. The shots in Tokyo usually show high-rise buildings, making the characters look even smaller. As per McMorran's second *furusato* aspect, there is no sense of architectural familiarity and cohesiveness. Skyscrapers and buildings of many shapes and sizes tower over the characters, creating an intimidating sense of alienation from the cityscape; there is no clear oversight of the landscape because the buildings are so high. This, and the fact that the characters are often alone indoors,emphasises the loneliness of Tokyo's inhabitants as well as the vanishing of their community and *furusato*.

However, this is not the only scene that expresses the recurring theme of loneliness. The most prominent examples are the videos of people in their rooms all by themselves and people changing into black stains as they die. They are not just ghosts because they are dead; they are ghosts, lacking social connections and even an identity, because they have been isolated for so long: even in life, they were so alone they could basically be considered a ghost. Due to their dependence on technology and the impersonal nature of the Internet, they had no community to fall back on – community being the third important *furusato* aspect McMorran lists – accentuating the vanishing of *furusato* in their lives.

This is where the Internet as a horrific medium comes in; the Internet is designed and presented as an online space to connect with others, but instead it solidifies peoples' solitude. An example of this notion is seen when Ryosuke visits the computer lab and sees a visualisation of people, represented by small white orbs, existing in their own space without coming close to each other (figure 17). Harue explains the project is to showcase the isolation people experience in modern Japanese society. This represents everyone in *Kairo*, even the people the audience does not see: the main characters do not notice the people of Tokyo disappearing until the end, showing that they, too, are like the orbs on the screen moving past others. They may be friends, co-workers, or even potential love interests, but they do not connect beyond surface level. For example, Ryosuke admits he does not know what kind of person Harue is despite claiming she is his only friend.

Figure 17: Ryosuke staring at the computer screen.

The characters are ghosts to each other as well, which once is a direct example of the characters' lack of community and social bonds, and therefore of a vanished *furusato*: dialogues are often about failing to connect and communicate with people, loneliness in life and death, and lost relationships (Hughes: 25). The film makes a point to show that anyone can be a ghost; in one particular scene, Michi finds Yabe as he turns into a black stain. The point of view then shifts towards where Yabe stood, making the audience view the room from Yabe's perspective where most of the film is viewed from a bystander's point of view. The camera is stationed around Yabe's eye height, static and does not follow Michi as she walks away; it almost seems to be glued to the wall. The audience temporarily becomes him, a ghost, while he calls out for help (figure 18).

This is not the only unconventional camera angle in *Kairo*: Hughes names some examples, such as high angle shots that make the audience question where the camera is positioned – does the angle indicate surveillance cameras, hinting at the unnoticed pervasiveness of technology in our daily lives? – as well as computer aesthetics creeping into the mise-en-scène at times. Hughes states that frames are divided into multiple "screens" by using of windows, doors, steel railings and other elements in the environment. Bigger "screens" are reminiscent of video and moving images, whereas smaller "screens" are similar to photographs (30-32). Thus, media

and technology permeate the film in more ways than just the Internet as horrific medium.

Figure 18: Michi finding Yabe as a ghost and walking away.

One more reference to the Internet is the presence of the sealed “forbidden rooms”, which one could associate with private chat rooms – this implies the tendency of younger people to seek contact through the Internet rather than in “real life” (Balmain, 2001: 183). There is a sense of anonymity in these chat rooms; one can use them to talk to people all over the world, but it is incredibly easy to forge an identity that is not one’s own. This is a phenomenon that can still be seen on social media: practices such as catfishing – faking an identity, usually on dating websites, for the catfish’s own gain – happen frequently, driving home that one never *really* knows who the stranger on the other side of the screen is. In a sense, they could be called ghosts as well.

With the ghost metaphor and the “forbidden rooms” representing these anonymous chat rooms, Kurosawa comments on so-called *hikikomori* ひきこもり, extreme social recluses who are confined to their rooms, often due to strong psychological distress. The Internet provides a “safe haven” for them, where their identity does not matter and they – just like the ghosts – can exchange the words “help me” to express their anxieties about socio-cultural expectations such as “exam hell” (Iles: 123-124). Although no link has been fully proven yet, Gent’s article speculates that the Internet and modern technology have made it easier for *hikikomori* to stay withdrawn because technology reduces the need for face-to-face interaction, thus rendering a personal community in their environment unnecessary for them: video games can be played online and smartphones allow people to chat with others wherever they are (2019).

With the reduced need for face-to-face interactions, not just in the case of *hikikomori*, comes the anxiety of the disruption of traditional social structures and a changing society: the individual is favoured over the collective – a philosophy that is regarded to be more western rather than traditionally Japanese – and social bonds become more superficial. Thus, the concept and the ideals of *furusato* vanish more from contemporary Japanese society, and the dependence on technology increases.

In this regard, the lines are blurring between technology and the self. Especially the Internet is becoming a more integral and indispensible part of daily life, which is what *Kairo* shows quite literally. This can be seen in the aforementioned incorporation of computer aesthetics within the mise-en-scène as well. The video becomes reality, as Gerow states: “[Kurosawa uses] image glitches (like those visible on a video skipping) to not only signify the world of the dead on the net, but also, at unexpected moments, to turn spaces we thought “real” into

computer images, evoking the spread of the simulacrum" (22). This makes the audience doubt the actuality of what they see.

Moreover, *Kairo*'s ghosts are absorbed in the Internet and exist between cyberspace and the physical world – they are merged, and as such cease to exist as themselves (Jones: 187-188). Just like in the chat rooms, they have become an anonymous entity. Still, they are corporeal: in the scene where Ryosuke is confronted with a ghost, he rejects the reality of the ghost and firmly states his will to live until it turns out he can touch the blurry figure (figure 19). Ryosuke, who had a rather strong sense of identity throughout the film, is shaken up because *his* reality has become a doubting point too. Not to mention, this revelation means the ghost cannot be defeated: it is simply a person, and its horror is emphasised by the fact it looks rather normal and mundane (Iles: 125). Its identity is not a horrific one; rather, the ghost is similar to the protagonists. Ryosuke is not the "hero" and the ghost is not the "monster"; they are all just emotionally disconnected people.

This goes beyond the vanishing: *furusato* ideals are completely, irrecoverably lost within the city and its community. All semblances of (traditional) identity and society are vanished. As Ryosuke falls into the unusually harsh, almost spotlight-like light, he perhaps realises this too and succumbs to the hopelessness.

In conclusion, *Kairo* depicts a literal invasion of the Internet and technology. People are unable to connect with one another, living in their own personal space. While the streets are empty, the protagonists do not even notice the residents of Tokyo disappearing until it is much too late.

The ghosts, a metaphor for loneliness and despair, have become one with the digital world, articulating anxieties about the increasing importance of technology in daily life.

In the end, the last survivors have to abandon Japan altogether – they have no home left. Thus, traditional identity is completely dismantled: no community, no home, no social structures or even a society. The mundane has become the horrific and will stay horrific as technology and the self have become largely inseparable.

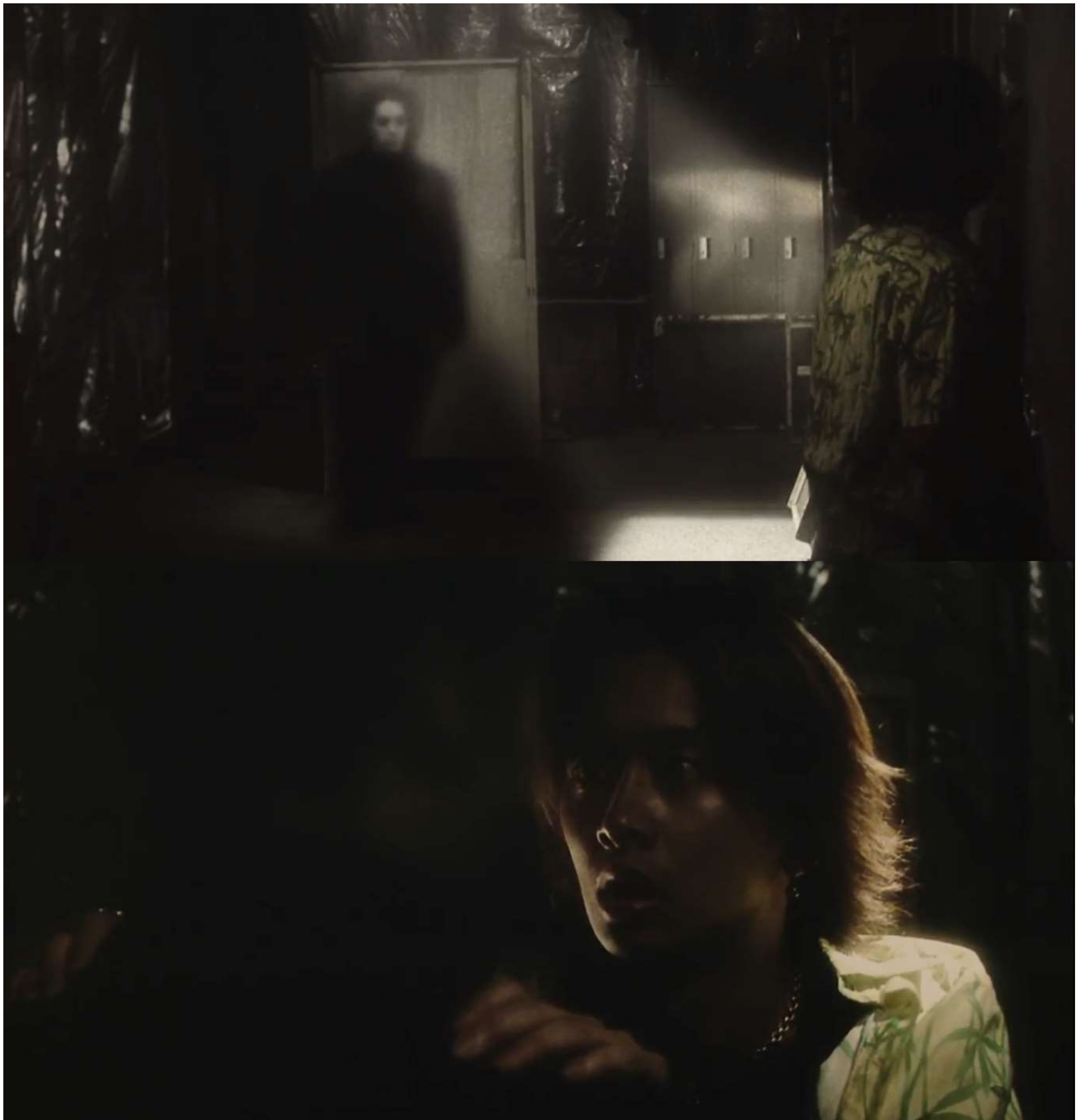

Figure 19: Ryosuke's ghost encounter.

Juxtaposition of case studies

Similarities

Perhaps surprisingly, some similarities can be found between *Kairo* and *Pom Poko*: first of all, both films feature a kind of "haunting". It is important to clearly define what "haunting" means in this context: Foster describes it as "(…) a kind of contextual error in which the past articulates itself uncomfortably, threateningly, into the present" (2012: 14). Thus, going by this definition, a haunting is not so much about paranormal activity and ghost attacks, but rather about a disconnect between space and time.

Kairo's ghosts are of the more traditional – and more disturbing – sort: an image of a deceased human, suspended in the world of the living, but not alive.They are, in a sense, an imprint of the past and a life lost as they quite literally cease to exist in the material world. Still, these ghosts can be interpreted as being allegorical as well, as they are the result and symbol of Kurosawa's theme of isolation. After all, the dead only remain as black stains, barely visible videos and disembodied voices pleading for help. Whenever the ghosts do appear more human, they are like shadows, blending in with the already dark environment. They are hardly ever found in the center of the screen, making them almost invisible until it is too late. The light does not usually fall on them either as a lot of scenes in the film use low-key lighting.

Pom Poko's "ghosts" are figurative too, perhaps even more so than in *Kairo*; when the *tanuki* conjure up their final illusion, they bring the past into the present. This illusion insinuates not only *furusato* and nostalgia, but a longing for an impossible future; the *tanuki* "haunt" contemporary Japanese society as a reminder of a life that is no longer feasible (Foster, 2012: 21-22). This is a more literal definition of Foster's "haunting". It does not directly involve the dead coming back to Earth, although the illusion did show people and *tanuki* that passed away before the events of the film (the old woman featured in the frame in figure 12, for example). The *tanukis*' "haunting" is of a more obvious spatiotemporal nature, as it is a projection of the past on the current landscape.

Another similarity between both films is, of course, loss of identity and the anxiety surrounding it. In *Pom Poko*, this is related to the destruction of the *tanukis*' *furusato*, and eventually the losses that force them to adapt to human society and the development of the city. They have to leave their traditional identity behind in order to survive.

As was briefly mentioned before, in *Kairo* this loss of identity is seen in the symbolism of the ghosts: their isolation has made them practically ghosts already. In death, they are basically "unknown" as well. The audience only sees them as a nameless ghost or, in the case of known members of the main cast dying, bodies completely disappearing and only leaving a black stain.

The *tanuki* and most notably Ryosuke try to actively resist their impending identity loss, but both to no avail. They attempt to stick to their reality by affirming their sense of self – the *tanuki* shapeshift and trick humans as they would traditionally do because they want to survive, Ryosuke denies the reality of the ghost he sees before him and declares he wants to live – but in the end, their reality is shattered.

While the fate of the *tanuki* is relatively not as horrific as Ryosuke's, they have to resort to leaving their identity behind by turning into a human, thus becoming just another person and a face in the crowd. Those that cannot shapeshift remain a *tanuki* and live in greater risk of dying early. Either way, with the destruction of their *furusato*, the *tanuki* have essentially become "ghosts" as well: the ghost of a past – and a lost future – that no longer has a place in this new, modern world.

In both films, the landscape plays an important role in conveying important themes, albeit in different ways. In *Kairo*, this refers to the long shots of the town, showing that it is completely empty; this shows the disappearance of everyone in Tokyo, a city that is supposed to be busy and bustling. In *Pom Poko*, this refers to the transience shown in the changing of the seasons; this shows that time goes on regardless, whether the *tanuki* are there to see it or not. At the end, both landscapes are gloomy and "dead", conveying the low mood of the film at that point as well as the losses that have been suffered.

The main characters, both in *Kairo* and *Pom Poko*, are faced with the destruction of their homes. While it is acknowledged that Tokyo or any place in *Kairo* is not presented as *furusato* – which will be discussed later – Michi and the others still have to flee their place of residence to escape the dangers that threaten their livelihood. The *tanuki* lose their home and most of their community; the main characters in *Kairo* did not really have community, but at least they had a home – that is, before the ghosts took over. Leaving behind one's home in this case can also indicate leaving behind part of one's identity.

Urbanisation, too, plays a role in the process of identity loss. In *Pom Poko* urbanisation is what threatens the *furusato* and the survival of the traditional

identity – *Kairo* is the result of this. The city is not a friendly place in *Kairo* at all, as it is a breeding ground for isolation and loneliness. In a way, this can be said about *Pom Poko* as well: the city, or rather the development thereof, causes a rift between the *tanuki* as they are desperate to save their home and argue about the measures they should take to do so. Ultimately, they become isolated from each other as they have to start a new life without Tama Hills. Some stick together, but they are no longer the community they were before.

The area where the films take place – both are set in and around Tokyo specifically – are home to the protagonists. In this urban environment, the residents have lost touch with a specific part of their traditional identity: spirituality. In both films, the Tokyo residents have no connection with spirituality or the supernatural anymore. These matters are often linked with folklore, which was discussed before as something important to the traditional. After all, the elders from Shikoku explain that they have been able to thrive due to the residents' respect for the supernatural, whereas the *tanuki* from Tama Hills fail to instil that same feeling in the Tokyo residents. In *Kairo*, there is no sense of spirituality in Tokyo whatsoever either. This will be discussed below.

Differences

While the *tanuki* do "haunt" Tokyo and therefore "ghosts" are a motif in both *Kairo* and *Pom Poko*, both films tackle spirituality and spirits differently. While it is implied the elders of Shikoku strike some fear in the hearts of those who revere them as they can change into gods and other mighty figures, their story does emphasise the importance of spirituality in the matter of traditional identity; they are part of folklore – not just the *tanuki* folklore, apparently – and are recognised as such, which ensures their survival. *Kairo*, however, is void of any type of spirituality. The ghosts are simply to be feared and cause both death and loss of identity when encountered, albeit indirectly as the ghosts' victims get depressed and lose the will to live. Still, their presence is not respected nor does anyone attempt to appease these spirits in any way. This is important because not appeasing spirits is what causes *yūrei* to exist: it is believed that not performing the proper rites and rituals prevent spirits from passing to the afterlife. Furthermore, when one dies under circumstances such as murder or when experiencing negative emotions, they can become *yūrei* as well – they will keep haunting the physical

world. Since they are not *onryō* – spirits specifically looking for revenge – they might be appeased when their emotional state is resolved. However, because the characters' sense of spirituality is vanished, they do not seem to know this, allowing the haunting to be more widespread and more severe than it might have been.

To continue, one of the most obvious differences between *Kairo* and *Pom Poko* is the depiction of community: while both films comment on the importance of this community (the characters in *Kairo* have lost their identity due to the absence of it), they illustrate it in opposite ways. The *tanuki* generally operate as a group, whereas the characters in *Kairo* are mostly by themselves. The *tanuki* have a close relationship that resembles a family – including a traditional social hierarchy where elders are held in high regard – whereas the characters in *Kairo* often talk about the inability to connect with others, and it shows; they are not shown to be close with each other at all. This is an absence of *furusato* on *Kairo*'s part: as mentioned in McMorran's shortlist of criteria, co-operation and sense of community are pivotal aspects of the *furusato* ideal. Tokyo in *Kairo*, despite its large population consisting of people living close to one another, is a city where people live in their own individual bubble, just like the simulation Ryosuke saw.

While the *tanuki* lose almost everything, the final scene is painted in a somewhat hopeful light: the *tanuki* of Tama Hills will always be "at home" with each other. While they have lost their *furusato* and are mostly separated each other, Shokichi and Ponkichi are celebrating when they *do* find each other again. Thus, their feeling of community still exists, even with most of that community gone. They partly find their *furusato* in each other, not just in Tama Hills.

This cannot be said about *Kairo*: the ending, with the ship in the open sea – which was already shown in the establishing shot at the start of the film – just seems to emphasise the remaining protagonists' loneliness. Despite Michi saying they will try to find survivors, the final scene does not at all seem hopeful or positive. After all, technology is found everywhere, and a strong community is not; at least, not in *Kairo*.

In the exact setting of both films lies another significant difference: while *Pom Poko* is set in a natural area on the border of the city, reminiscent of a traditional *furusato*, *Kairo*'s setting is purely urban. Of course, *Pom Poko* does end in contemporary Tokyo: this is in essence the start of the city that has become horrific in *Kairo*. Still, this is where the difference lies: *Pom Poko* ends on a bittersweet note with the *tanuki* still being able to live on in the city somehow. Their

life is rough, but they have at least some means of survival. Furthermore, *Pom Poko* shows the presence of nature quite extensively, even in the urbanised Tokyo. In *Kairo*, nature is entirely absent except for the plants in the plant shop. The city is cold, and it shows in the colour palette as well: it is a dull greyish green where it was more vibrant earlier. As was mentioned before, the landscape in both films turns gloomy, but the usage of colour palette is unique to *Kairo*. Despite the changing landscape, the colour palette in *Pom Poko* stays rather saturated and lively. The absence of natural colours in *Kairo* shows the absence of nature, *furusato*, and even of life itself.

Kairo and *Pom Poko* rely on different techniques and mediums to convey their theme of identity loss and anxiety. On the one hand, *Kairo* expresses that technology and relying on it too much is the root of identity anxiety or even loss of identity. This relates to the real social issue of *hikikomori* as well. As such, *Kairo* addresses a problem that is currently relevant in contemporary society. With the Internet as horrific medium, it places the anxiety surrounding identity in a modern era in a relatively more modern, relatable light as well: as Jones discusses in his article, technological advancements have become very rooted in our daily lives. This makes it harder to draw the line between one's own – perhaps "traditional", authentic – self and one's technology or one's online life. In the digital world of *Kairo*, there is no *furusato* to be found anywhere.

Pom Poko, on the other hand, explicitly symbolises the loss of a traditional identity and loss of *furusato* through the *tanuki* living near Tokyo. In this case, urbanisation and losing the countryside precipitate losing a way of living that is connected to a part of one's traditional identity; the death of the *tanuki* and them losing their place in Tama Hills is both literal and symbolic in this sense. However, both films show the anxiety to lose one's identity through modernisation and technological advancements. The latter may not be as directly obvious in *Pom Poko*, but the urban development of Tokyo could not have happened as rapidly were it not for technology.

Kairo expresses a connection between technology and isolation, but *Pom Poko* handles this quite differently: while the *tanuki* do become mostly isolated from one another at the end of the film, isolation in itself is not necessarily presented as a bad thing. The *tanuki* in Shikoku, for example, are isolated from outside influences and urbanisation. This has allowed them to keep their traditional identity, as well as the respect from the humans. The *tanuki* in Tama Hills, too, were rather isolated at the start of the film, Of course, they were a community

where the protagonists in *Kairo* were mostly all by themselves, but the *tanuki* had little to no contact with the "outside world". Thus, they lived in their own bubble in a sense, which is a familiar image seen in *Kairo*; however, *Kairo* (partly) blames isolation on loss of identity, whereas *Pom Poko* sees it as a way to retain it. The difference then lies in the distinction between isolation and loneliness: *furusato* is found in the *tanukis*' "bubble", but it does not exist in *Kairo*. The ghosts are simply lonely and depressed, which they pass on to those they meet.

Conclusion

Furusato can take on many forms. Its development has been linked to modernisation, urbanisation and westernisation starting around the time of the Meiji restoration: the Japanese government wanted Japanese society to advance rapidly so it would avoid getting colonised by western powers. These advancements and influences created the anxiety of a traditional Japanese identity being in jeopardy: an identity that was considered to be still intact in the (ideal) countryside. Therefore, *furusato* is generally associated with the countryside: away from urban influence, and by extension modernisation and internationalisation.

Ivy describes *furusato* as vanishing – it is not yet forgotten, but its ideals are not exactly considered present in contemporary Japanese society anymore either – yet it remains an important historical cultural aspect, especially when it is related to matters surrounding traditional Japanese identity. It can still be found in contemporary media, including films. Popular media heavily influences the perception of the *furusato* ideal in contemporary Japanese society; because *furusato* roots have vanished due to swift socio-cultural changes and modernisation, people "learn" about *furusato* by consuming media.

Furusato can refer to any (but still usually rural) location considered a "hometown" that evokes strong emotions. This includes places like Sakaiminato, where fans of *GeGeGe no Kitarō* travel to in order to witness the home of the creator of their beloved *manga*. In fact, this creator – Mizuki Shigeru – built upon a long tradition of writing about *yōkai* lore, *kaidan*, and folklore. This tradition, marked by the publishing of Yanagita Kunio's *Tōno monogatari*, resulted in *minzokugaku* (folklore studies) becoming an academic discipline in Japan. Because it is considered typically, traditionally Japanese, *yōkai* are a part of *furusato* too. Therefore, popular media using *yōkai* and *kaidan* tropes – for example, Studio Ghibli and J-horror films – inherently build upon tradition.

Studio Ghibli is well-known for using *furusato* and identity as themes in its films, but that is not the only genre where one might find its implementation: J-horror uses it too, but in a completely opposite way. In J-horror, *furusato* can be seen as an absent Other. Because it is emphatically not present in these films (and thus implicitly present due to its absence), this genre expresses themes of identity and identity anxiety as well. In the case of techno horror, this theme is specifically connected to technology and modernity. This is where the case studies discussed in this thesis come in.

All things considered, it is clear that both *Kairo* and *Pom Poko* address the issue of the anxiety surrounding loss of traditional identity in contemporary Japanese society. This is expressed in the themes and motifs of these films: while *Pom Poko* tackles this in a more literal sense through the use of the *tanuki* – a type of *yōkai*, and thus traditionally Japanese – as a symbol of *furusato*, *Kairo* operates in perhaps a more relatable and socially relevant manner with the Internet and technology as the root of isolation, loneliness, and loss of identity. The analysis in this thesis reveals that *Kairo* lacks what the *furusato* ideal is known for; community, a connection with nature, architectural familiarity and cohesiveness, and spirituality, to name a few (the first three being the *furusato* characteristics named by McMorran). As it happens, these very examples are some of the focal points in *Pom Poko*, emphasising the theme of *furusato*.

What threatens the *tanuki* is urbanisation and modernisation – they try to resist, but these advancements will go on no matter what. The *tanuki* are forced to adapt to this new world by shapeshifting and living life as humans, trying to move to more rural areas orstay in Tokyo as *tanuki* and risk death on a daily basis. Their *furusato* has all but vanished, and yet they seem to find a way to survive despite this. While the *tanuki* have to relinquish most of their traditional identity, the final scene shows that a small bit of *furusato* can still live on. The *tanuki* find their *furusato* n each other, even if their community will never be the same again. This is a metaphor for the Japanese people in contemporary society, whose *furusato* roots have vanished and who had to adapt to modernity as well.

Kairo, on the other hand, articulates identity anxiety in a slightly different way. *Furusato* is completely gone in this Tokyo, and it symbolises what would have happened if the symbolic "death" of *furusato* in *Pom Poko* was more drastic, widespread, and more literal. It is, in some way, the result of the events in *Pom Poko*. While the *tanuki* – and *furusato* – walk the line of vanishing, *Kairo* is cold, dead, and horrific in this regard. Thus, *Kairo* is indeed the nightmarish flipside of the Ghibli film. Seemingly no one is able to connect with one another anymore – there is no sense of community due to isolation and the superficial nature of the Internet – and the lonely dead have taken over the world. *Furusato* is the absent Other, fully vanished; both the contents of the film and the cinematographic style articulate this. Both *Kairo* and *Pom Poko* are haunted by *furusato*, but in *Kairo*'s dull, empty, greyish streets of Tokyo, everyone is essentially alone.

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