

ENTER PARANOIA:  
IDENTITY AND “MAKESHIFT SALVATIONS” IN  
KON SATOSHI’S *PARANOIA AGENT*

by

Jeffrey Steven Hanson

---

Copyright © Jeffrey Steven Hanson 2007

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the  
DEPARTMENT OF EAST ASIAN STUDIES  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS  
In the Graduate College  
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2007

## STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

This thesis has been submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for an advanced degree at the University of Arizona and is deposited in the University Library to be made available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

Brief quotations from this thesis are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgement of source is made. Requests for permission for extended quotation from or reproduction of this manuscript in whole or in part may be granted by the copyright holder.

SIGNED: Jeffrey Steven Hanson

## APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTORS

This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

<hr/>	<u>4-11-07</u>
J. Philip Gabriel	Date
Professor of East Asian Studies	
<hr/>	<u>4-11-07</u>
Brian J. McVeigh	Date
Adjunct Instructor	

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my committee for their input throughout this project: Professor McVeigh, Professor Gabriel, and Professor Jones. Their advice has been valuable and I hope to be able to use it for any projects that I undertake in the future.

Thanks to my family for being supportive of me as I pursued my master's degree, my parents especially. There are times when they have not always understood what exactly I was working on, but they still stood by me and for this I am grateful.

Finally, special thanks to Taffy and Sophie, for being cute and fluffy.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTORY NOTES.....	5
ABSTRACT.....	6
INTRODUCTION.....	7
PART I – SETTING THE STAGE.....	25
Chapter 1 – The Nature of Identity.....	25
Chapter 2 – The Creation of “Real” Paranoia.....	36
PART II – THE NATURE OF <i>PARANOIA AGENT</i> ITSELF.....	46
Chapter 3 – Realism and Fantasy.....	46
Chapter 4 – The Identity of Lil’ Slugger.....	56
PART III – IDENTITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL.....	75
Chapter 5 – Consumerism and Identity.....	75
Chapter 6 – Space and Identity.....	87
CONCLUSION.....	100
APPENDIX A: PRIMARY CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS.....	104
APPENDIX B: EPISODE SYNOPSES.....	115
APPENDIX C: PICTURES.....	143
APPENDIX D: LYRICS TO THE OPENING THEME SONG.....	146
REFERENCES.....	148

## INTRODUCTORY NOTES

### The Appendices

A recurring issue with media studies is how the original media is described; when writing an academic text, the author must consider that some readers might not have seen the media in question. Because *Paranoia Agent* changes significantly as the series progresses, dispersing plot and character information throughout the paper would not be very useful as what is true for one episode might not be for the next. Therefore, I have included character descriptions and episode summaries in the appendices at the end of this text (which is possible since *Paranoia Agent* is only 13 episodes long). While seeing *Paranoia Agent* before reading this paper would be preferred, the appendices allow those that have not seen the series to read the episode summaries and then digest the rest of the paper while those that already have can begin reading the paper immediately.

### Naming Conventions

Full names are given in standard Japanese order: the family name is listed first and the given name is second. However, because of the many familial relations between some of the characters, it is difficult to use a consistent system for identifying each one other than using their full names every time. Therefore, I will refer to the characters by the names that they are usually called by in the anime. While it should be evident who is being discussed by the context, I will make some points of clarification:

First, “Ikari” will refer to Ikari Keiichi, the police detective, while “Misae” will refer to his wife, Ikari Misae. Similarly, “Hirukawa” is used for Hirukawa Masami, the protagonist of episode 4, and “Taeko” will be used for Hirukawa Taeko, his daughter.

Also, I will address the primary antagonist of *Paranoia Agent* as “Lil’ Slugger,” the name given to him in the English dub of the series since this paper is intended for an English-speaking audience. While the ideas of gender and sex are somewhat meaningless when applied to Lil’ Slugger, I will refer to the character as “he.” Similarly, Maromi will be denoted as “she.”

### Translations

All English translations for *Paranoia Agent* come from the Geneon English DVD release unless otherwise specified. As opposed to most other Japanese DVD’s, the boxed set has two sets of subtitles: the English translation of the Japanese dialogue and the script of the English dubbing. While I will refer to the antagonist by his English name, “Lil’ Slugger,” all translations come from the English version of the Japanese audio track unless otherwise noted. Information that does not come from the television show (such as the Chinese character spellings of the characters’ names) comes from the program’s website: <<http://www.mousou.tv>>

## ABSTRACT

Kon Satoshi's *Paranoia Agent* is a series that demonstrates how many types of identity are constructed. While some aspects of the series are based in fantasy, *Paranoia Agent* takes place in a Tokyo that closely resembles the Tokyo of the real world. In particular, a corporate icon named Maromi parallels the rise of icons such as Hello Kitty in Japan; the public's devotion to Maromi demonstrates how consumerism shapes one's personal identity. Consumerism can also be used to explain the existence of Lil' Slugger, a type of phantasm who initially appears to free the people of Tokyo from their problems, but is actually a "crutch" that society uses to run away from reality. The destination of this escape can be called "consumutopia," a virtual space of "perfect consumption" where reality can be ignored. Consumutopia is one example of the – real or metaphorical – "spaces" that are examined in *Paranoia Agent*.

## INTRODUCTION

Even though Kon Satoshi (今敏) has become an award-winning director of animated films (including the Excellence Prize at the 2003 ACA Media Arts Festival for *Tokyo Godfathers* and the Grand Prize for *Millennium Actress* at the 2001 Festival [Kon 2003]), he is still relatively unknown in the United States. This is an oddity considering the explosion of interest in Japanese animation (anime) that has occurred in recent years. Miyazaki Hayao could be considered the king of anime by Western audiences (due in part to financial backing from the Disney Corporation for American releases of Studio Ghibli pictures), and Ōtomo Katsuhiro is remembered as the director of *Akira* (one of the first anime films that was successful in the U.S.). Kon, however, has not been able to reach the level of notability that these directors have been able to. One possible explanation is that his works do not fit into a type of mold that U.S. audiences expect from animation. Most of his films are neither as “family-friendly” as Miyazaki’s films nor as focused on action sequences as Ōtomo’s. Kon’s anime tend to focus on more psychologically-driven plots that generally require multiple viewings from the audience.

As such, an interesting aspect of Kon’s works is his treatment of how the individual views him or herself. Susan Napier has already examined the importance of the “gaze” (her term) of an outsider viewing one of the characters in Kon’s films (see Napier 2006), but this is also important for a character examining him or herself. One of the overarching themes of Kon’s animation is that his characters are constantly questioning who they are and how they fit into the worlds they inhabit. Furthermore,

even though the stories are fictional, they still represent real-world Japan in a way that allows the viewer to examine the very nature of reality itself.

This thesis will examine one of Kon's works in particular: his 2004 television series, *Paranoia Agent* (*Mōsō Dairinin* in Japanese). Set in modern-day Tokyo, it follows the rise and fall of a character designer named Sagi Tsukiko<sup>1</sup> and her Hello Kitty-like creation, Maromi<sup>2</sup>. However, the series is not entirely about her; the audience is introduced to a variety of protagonists, as many episodes are centered on a unique character and his or her struggles with the pressures of daily life. A feature of the first half of the series is that a minor character in one episode becomes the primary protagonist in the next (which Kon calls the "character-relay" system [Kon 2004a]). In addition, these characters are all attacked by a mysterious assailant who is named "Lil' Slugger"<sup>3</sup> by the media ("*Shōnen Batto*" in the original Japanese) due to the fact that he appears to be a middle-school student and carries a golden baseball bat. Who exactly this character is and what he means for the series will be explored in more detail throughout this paper.

My argument is that this television series provides an excellent look at how individuals construct their own various identities. I use the plural to imply that rather than each person having a single, monolithic and unchanging identity, there are actually multiple ways in which a person can view him or herself, and that this series helps to demonstrate how these identities interact. Even though this is done with a mysterious antagonist who could not exist in the real world, the symbolism that Lil' Slugger

---

<sup>1</sup> Sagi Tsukiko (hereafter called "Tsukiko") is the designer of the Maromi character. For more information, see page 104.

<sup>2</sup> See page 104 for a more in-depth description of Maromi.

<sup>3</sup> See page 105 for more information about Lil' Slugger.

represents is still applicable to contemporary Japan. In particular, he highlights how consumerism is used as a way to deal with and/or escape from society itself.

This paper is divided into three sections: the first will set the stage for the rest of the paper by examining a critique of the academic use of the word “identity” (chapter 1) as well as tracing the development of modern Japanese society and how technology has become integrated into everyday life (chapter 2). The second section examines the nature of *Paranoia Agent* as a whole. Chapter 3 will cover the “identity” of the series as – unlike Kon’s previous works – it is more ambiguous as to whether it is grounded in reality or fantasy. Chapter 4 will similarly examine the nature of Lil’ Slugger because one of the unanswered questions of the entire series is where the phantasm comes from. The final section takes a look at the individual and the nature of identity. Chapter 5 specifically examines consumerism with respect to an individual’s identity while Chapter 6 explores the concept of “space” and how it relates to personal identity.

### **Biographical Information on Kon**

Kon Satoshi was born in Hokkaidō Prefecture on October 12, 1963. His relatives would tell his parents that Kon had a “manga-esque face” (“*manga mitaina kao*”; Kon does not clarify what this meant), and he has wondered if this subconsciously contributed to his desire to be a manga artist. His older brother became a studio musician, so it seems that he was surrounded by other artistic influences while he was growing up (Kon 2005e). In his spare time, he and his friends would copy the panels of manga that he owned, an experience that would help him when he entered Musashino Art University in

1982 with the intent of majoring in visual communication design. Kon cites his “official” debut as a manga artist as taking place in 1985, when he won an award from *Yangu Magazine* for a manga he drew (Kon 2005f).

After graduating from Musashino in 1987 (Kon 2005g), Kon’s life would change when he became a temporary assistant to Ōtomo Katsuhiro (Yokota 2004:250). He turned to animation in 1990 at Ōtomo’s suggestion and helped create *Rojin Z* as well as design the layout for *Running Melos* (Kon 2005e). Ōtomo would later base his movie, *World Apartment Horror*, on a manga that Kon had published (Kon 2005e). The beginning of Kon’s fame as an anime specialist can probably be traced to 1992, when he wrote the screenplay for “*Kanojo no omoide*” (lit. “Her Memories,” but the official English title is “Magnetic Rose”). This was one of three short stories in the movie *Memories*, which combined directorial efforts from Ōtomo, Morimoto Kōji (who was an assistant to Ōtomo for *Akira*; Kon’s script was directed by Morimoto), and Okamura Tensai (better known for directing *Wolf’s Rain*). Kon traces his interest in mixing fantasy and reality back to his contribution to this film (Kon 2002b). The next year, Kon was in charge of the layout for *Mobile Police Patlabor 2* (which was directed by another icon of anime, Oshii Mamoru) and was also a production assistant for an episode of *Jojo’s Bizarre Adventure* (Kon 2005e). Kon would still do work as a manga artist in 1994 with the publication of *Seraphim (Serafimu)* in the magazine *Animage (Animeejū)* and in 1995 with *Comic Guy’s (Komikku gaizu)* serial publication of *OPUS* (neither work was actually concluded). *OPUS* would be Kon’s final published work as a manga artist (Kon 2005g).

Kon began to work as an animation director when he took the position for his first film, *Perfect Blue* (1997), which examined the fall and rise of a pop idol who wanted to become a legitimate actress (Kon 2005e). Its story was seen from the protagonist's point of view as she mentally breaks down. Upon seeing *Perfect Blue*, producer Taro Maki wanted Kon as the director for a new project, *Millennium Actress*, in 2002. This work was about a 70-year-old actress recounting the events of her life to a film historian. Like *Perfect Blue*, *Millennium Actress* was presented as a mixture of reality and fantasy as the actress's stories were seen by the audience as clips from her movies. Kon's third film was a departure from his previous works: the holiday comedy *Tokyo Godfathers* (2003) was presented to the audience as a "normal" narrative about three homeless people who must take an infant they found in the garbage back to its parents (Yokota 2004:250). *Paranoia Agent* is Kon's first television series and began to be broadcasted in 2003 (see Appendix B for more information). Even as this paper is being written, his latest directorial effort, *Paprika*, debuted in Japan on November 25, 2006 (Kon 2006).

### **The Creation of *Paranoia Agent***

#### *Directorial Influences*

There were bits and pieces of ideas that Kon had not used in his previous works (and some that he wanted to explore further), and he wanted to incorporate them into *Paranoia Agent* when given the chance to direct a television series (Kon 2005d)<sup>4</sup>. These themes have also been mixed with the influences on Kon from other directors and films.

---

<sup>4</sup> Kon does not explicitly delineate which aspects of *Paranoia Agent* come from his movies, but I have attempted to provide some insight throughout this thesis into how his past works can be seen in this series.

While these influences are varied, they make sense in light of the films with which Kon has been involved. One such theme is present in Terry Gilliam’s films: the ability to demonstrate how fantasy and reality can be combined (extremely relevant for *Paranoia Agent*). One such film is *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, which Kon praised for its ability to show the “rich power of imagination that people have” (“*ningen no sōzōryoku no yutakasa*”). This theme is especially important for his fourth film, *Paprika* (based on a novel by Tsutsui Yasutaka, this movie is about a machine that allows a person to enter another’s dreams). Kon has also claimed influences from Kurosawa Akira, Federico Fellini<sup>5</sup>, and Kurt Vonnegut Jr.’s *Slaughterhouse Five* (Kon 2002a, 2002b)<sup>6</sup>.

However, the most notable influence in *Paranoia Agent* is probably his first film: *Perfect Blue* (I give a brief plot summary in chapter 1). Kon had originally considered making a somewhat “orthodox” television series, but as he began to work out the structure and development of *Paranoia Agent*, it became more and more like *Perfect Blue*. In particular, both works examine the nature of what we call “reality” and whether or not this “reality” is even real at all (see chapter 3 for a further discussion of the duality of fantasy and reality in *Paranoia Agent*). Kon has stated that he usually wants to puzzle the television audience and force them to question the nature of what is happening in his anime (Kon 2005a). However, this could also potentially alienate viewers from watching his films (as shall be examined later).

---

<sup>5</sup> Kon was especially impressed with a statement that Fellini made (which was probably meant as a general statement about film directors): “I am a liar, but also an honest person” (“*Watashi wa usotsuki da. Shikashi seijitsuna ningen da.*”) (Kon 2002c).

<sup>6</sup> One theme that runs through all of these directors’ works – as well as my commentary on Kon’s – is the emphasis on cinematic techniques that many would label as “postmodern.” See my footnote on page 40 for a brief description of postmodernity and how the term is being used within this thesis.

*The Design of Lil' Slugger*

As I will examine in chapter 4, Lil' Slugger can be thought of a collection of images in that he represents different ideals to different people. This actually proves to be extremely appropriate as Kon originally designed Lil' Slugger based on the kind of images that a “paranoia agent” would conjure. For instance, Kon believed that the paranoia agent would need to be a male because he thought it would have been difficult to envision a woman as being capable of the level of violence that the agent would perform. Additionally, Lil' Slugger was made a middle-school-age youth because Kon thought that a child would possess more persuasive power than an adult. Kon notes that newspapers at that time tended to show stories of atrocious violence that were the result of juvenile delinquency, so a male middle-school student criminal would have a certain relevancy to twenty-first century Japan (Kon 2005a). Selecting a bat as a weapon for Lil' Slugger is no accident; throughout the past decade there have been reports of “boy bat attacks” (“*shōnen batto jiken*”) where the assailants are generally in their mid-to-late teens and use baseball bats as weapons. In one such attack, a high-school student randomly attacked eight people on the streets of Tokyo with a baseball bat because he had a fight with his father (“Teen Bat Rampage...” 2000). The sense of “chaos” present in the pattern of Lil' Slugger's attacks originated in assaults like this.

However, this being was not a criminal just for the sake of being a criminal; Kon compared Lil' Slugger to the killer in *Se7en* (Kevin Spacey's John Doe character) because – in the mind of the killer – his victims had committed crimes and now needed to be saved (Kon 2005a). Unfortunately, Lil' Slugger very rarely talks during the run of the

series, so it is difficult to see this motivation. However, the rationale of saving a person by harming them appears during episode 5 in which Kozuka<sup>7</sup> tries to confess to the attacks and also in Misae's<sup>8</sup> conversation with Lil' Slugger. To describe the nature of the victims' "crimes," Kon used the following analogy: if a student wants to stay home from school, he or she could claim to have a stomachache. It is not true at the beginning, but the student will gradually believe that he or she really does have a stomachache and perhaps feel enough pain to convince him or herself of that. It is not exactly a lie, but it also is not the truth (Kon 2005a). The victims' crimes could then be thought of as self-deception; they are unable to adequately accept or deal with the problems in their lives and Lil' Slugger is meant to punish them (the nature of this punishment is explored further in chapter 4).

The creation of the other characters – in my opinion – is not as interesting as the development of the antagonist. After the conception of the paranoia agent, the other characters were designed based on their relations to him. Kon thought of general situations that various characters would need to fulfill and more developed descriptions of these characters arose from them. For instance, Kon wanted the protagonist to be a female victim of the paranoia (Tsukiko). A policeman would be needed to investigate the attacker and would have to watch as the attacks increased in severity while the assailant

---

<sup>7</sup> Kozuka Makoto ("Kozuka") is a copycat criminal who tries to emulate the Lil' Slugger attacks. When he is captured, he tells the police that he believes that he is a "holy warrior" in a video game and needed to attack the victims to save them from a monster. Whether or not *he* accepts his own explanation is debatable; see page 126 for a synopsis of episode 5 and page 109 for a brief description of Kozuka.

<sup>8</sup> Ikari Misae ("Misae") is Ikari Keiichi's wife and one of the only people to successfully confront Lil' Slugger. See page 113.

continually escapes (Ikari<sup>9</sup>). As a side note, Kon also notes that a criticism of the real-world police is that they are powerless. We see this powerlessness throughout the investigation, but Kon portrays it as being caused by the mysticism associated with Lil' Slugger instead of Ikari's ability as a policeman. Another character would eventually need to counterattack the paranoia agent (Hirukawa<sup>10</sup>), etc. (Kon 2005b). This is not to say that any of these characters are unimportant, but that they were created to serve functional purposes for the titular "entity" of the series (i.e. Lil' Slugger himself).

### **Critical Reception of *Paranoia Agent***

English-language reviews of Kon's series<sup>11</sup> were generally extremely positive. The most common reaction was to highlight how it was able to "meet or exceed every standard one might have set for the first lengthy work Kon would create" (Carter 2004) and that it could be seen as an excellent extension of his previous works. Almost every review compared *Paranoia Agent* to his very first work, *Perfect Blue*. For example, Dominic K. Laeno, a reviewer for *THEM Anime*, compares Kon's "ability to seamlessly integrate his brilliantly insightful messages and storytelling [in *Paranoia Agent*]...to what

---

<sup>9</sup> Ikari Keiichi ("Ikari") is the older of two detectives who investigate the Lil' Slugger case. See page 106.

<sup>10</sup> Hirukawa Masami ("Hirukawa") is a corrupt security guard who is forced to steal in order to pay back the yakuza. See page 112.

<sup>11</sup> Because *Paranoia Agent* was first released in the United States one DVD at a time, several trends emerged in the reviews that I found: the first was that reviewers tended to review the first DVD (which contains episodes 1-4) after it was released, but not the remaining three. While these reviews still give an indication of the writers' opinions about more general aspects of the series, they do not account for the series as a whole. Second, because *Paranoia Agent* was not a movie, it was generally not reviewed by many of the primary sources for movie reviews (for example, the *New York Times* reviewed Kon's previous three movies, but not his television series). As a result, most of the reviews that I have used are more likely meant for an audience that is more familiar with anime than the general public (for example, <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com>). These comments are intended to alert the reader to these trends when reading the above section.

he did with his first directorial work: *Perfect Blue*” (Laeno 2005). This is no surprise, as some of the unifying themes present in *Paranoia Agent* – such as how an individual examines reality, the consequences of consumer fandom, etc. – are also present in his first film.

One high point of the series that the reviewers consistently mentioned was the actual presentation of the story; Bamboo Dong of the *Anime News Network* commented that “*Paranoia Agent* gives off the same sinister atmosphere that *Perfect Blue* did” and this sense that some potential terror was waiting for the viewer was even present in viewing the DVD menu and the opening title sequence (Dong 2004). The opening sequence was generally approved of by most reviewers, with Theron Martin of the *Anime News Network* commenting that the “music and graphic elements come together to produce one of the best-made and most effective openers of recent memory” (Martin 2005a). Even though there was a large number of characters, Bodhi Sarkar – a reviewer for *DVDactive* – noted that the series “never feels congested; the characterization is kept thorough yet concise, so the viewer is able to appreciate the torment of one protagonist before moving onto the next” (Sarkar 2005). While Sarkar reviewed only the first volume, Martin writes that throughout the series, “character designs continue to be exceptional, even the ones that are visually unappealing; when was the last time in anime you saw a character with a long-term illness who was convincingly depicted as such?” (Martin 2005b) With this comment, Martin hints at another overall positive that reviewers pointed to: there was a clear sense of realism in *Paranoia Agent* that constantly signaled to the audience that the story could potentially happen in the real world. For

example, “*Paranoia Agent* is a very good interpretation of how people generally take in information passively without fully realizing its greater effect and influence on their daily lives and way of thinking” (Laeno 2005).

One feature of the series that deserves special attention is its complexity. While every reviewer commented on the complexity inherent in *Paranoia Agent*, each one reacted differently as far as whether this was positive or negative and how interested an audience member would be. One of the positive opinions of the complexity comes from Sarkar: Kon “seamlessly blurs the fine line between fantasy and reality, manipulating even the audience into unforeseen misconceptions” (Sarkar 2005). However, Jason Carter of *Anime Jump* notes that he “understood everything that happened in the show but [has] no real idea why any of it occurred” (Carter 2004). Even though Carter intends this to be a positive statement (that is, *Paranoia Agent* can be followed by anyone), viewers that want a more rational series might be put off by his comment. Andy Patrizio of IGN.com compares the series to a David Lynch production, but his statement is meant as negative: “[*Paranoia Agent* is] as obtuse as something from David Lynch.” Patrizio also commented that “like his debut film, *Perfect Blue*, *Paranoia Agent* is confusing and not easy to follow” and the series was “a strange, often hard-to-follow series but...still intriguing” (Patrizio 2004). It is clear that the complexity of the series is probably what determines whether or not an audience member enjoys *Paranoia Agent*<sup>12</sup>.

---

<sup>12</sup> Other assorted negative comments included that “it may be too close to genre stereotypes of ‘manga animation’ to get the mainstream appreciation it deserves” (Osmond 2005:88) and a reference to the fact that 3 of the 13 episodes (8, 9, and 10; see pages 131-135) are ultimately filler (Martin 2005a).

It is entirely possible that, due to this complexity, *Paranoia Agent* (and perhaps Kon's works in general) has not had as strong a following in the United States as other anime directors' creations. However, the potential for complexity and "strangeness" to be a problem for non-Japanese audiences has been present in previous Japanese animated works. Satō Tadao made such a comment about animation director Kawamoto Kihachirō<sup>13</sup>: his animations had a "weirdness" or "dreadfulness" (*sugomi*) to them so that foreigners might not have been able to understand them; for example, Kawamoto's films tended to examine how reality can change (a theme present in Kon's films) (Satō 1992:279). While Satō does not clarify some of his remarks (such as whether or not his use of foreigners refers to *all* non-Japanese), they illustrate some common themes between Kon and Kawamoto's art, namely their ability to possibly alienate and confuse the audience as well as comment on the nature of reality, which is naturally a difficult concept to explain (see chapter 3 for a further discussion of reality in *Paranoia Agent*). Even though there is an inherent difficulty in trying to understand Kon's television series, it does have roots in works such as those of Kawamoto.

In fact, the complexity and "weirdness" in *Paranoia Agent* were seen as more positive in *Newtype*'s review of the series (*Newtype* is a Japanese magazine dedicated to anime). The lack of clarity in the narrative (the reviewer repeatedly used the word "contradictions" [*mujun*]) was the primary focus of the *Newtype* review<sup>14</sup>. It notes that

---

<sup>13</sup> Kawamoto is known for films such as *Hanaori* (1968), *Oni* (1972), and *Dōseiji* (1976) that were created using what is commonly called "stop-motion" animation with puppets (Satō 1992:278); he is currently one of the directors for the Japan Animation Association (*Nihon* 2007). Even though Kawamoto and Kon are neither part of the same generation nor share animation techniques, Satō's commentary is still useful in trying to explain why their works might have alienated audience members.

<sup>14</sup> The author of the review is not listed.

the series is so “scattered” (“*barabara*”) that the truth as to how the series’ world works becomes lost to the viewer, but this is precisely where the entertainment comes from (“*Sakusuru*” 2004:114). The review did not mention the technical aspects of the series (such as the art or the character design) and instead focused on how the complexity of the series was presented and what it meant philosophically for the presentation of “truth” in Kon’s series. While not specifically referring to *Perfect Blue* (as the English-language reviews did), the author does note that a person familiar with Kon’s previous films would have a better chance of understanding the series.

### **Popular Reception of *Paranoia Agent***

While it would be difficult to give the exact details of how this program was received by Japanese society at-large, it is still possible to ascertain more generally what viewers thought of *Paranoia Agent*. For the purposes of this section, I attempted to locate opinions of this series from more personal Internet media (for example, blogs, fanpages, etc.) in order to provide a general description of how the public would have viewed Kon’s program after it was aired on television. This is not meant to be a complete picture of the public’s view, but a guideline to describe a more mass-based set of opinions.

Most commentary about *Paranoia Agent* was positive, similar to the critical reviews.<sup>15</sup> Whereas critics tended to focus on the presentation of the series, the popular

---

<sup>15</sup> The few primarily negative responses I found were not very articulate about why they did not care for the show. For example, a customer-reviewer at <<http://amazon.co.jp>> said that the series seemed to be “only randomly complex” (“*tada yamikumo ni fukuzatsu ni shiteiru.*”), but does not elaborate (*Amazon* 2007).

response was to focus on its social commentary. One writer noted that the series examines what types of evil dwell inside normal people when they suddenly realize that they have no restraints. For example, the writer noted the school-bullying seen in episode 2 (Yasukawa 2004).<sup>16</sup> Similarly, whereas the critics generally saw episodes 8, 9, and 10 as a type of filler for the series, one blogger praised them for the social and philosophical questions they asked. More specifically, after viewing episode 8 (“Happy Family Planning”), the blogger noted that it addressed what “life and death” were and what exactly a “family” can consist of (Tachigui 2004).<sup>17</sup>

It is interesting to note that there was little consistency in terms of what category the series actually fell under. Of the comments listed on Amazon.co.jp, the series was variously called “psycho-suspense” (“*saiko sasupensu*”), “psycho-horror” (“*saiko horaa*”), and “mystery-horror” (“*misuterii horaa*”). Each viewer understood that it was meant to stimulate the imagination, but the exact ways in which it did so were not agreed upon (Amazon 2007). A blogger thought that it should be categorized as “psycho-science fiction” (“*saiko kei SF*”), emphasizing the other-worldly elements of the program (Filtration 2004). As previously discussed, this difficulty in categorizing it hints back to the complexity inherent in *Paranoia Agent* and the potential problems one would have in explaining it to someone else. In fact, there were a decent amount of sites similar to *TVAnime*’s treatment of the show: a writer would provide a description of what actually happened in each episode and little commentary about his or her reactions to the show

---

<sup>16</sup> “*Patto ken ha futsū no hitobito’ ni yadoru yokoshimana yokubō ya osaerarenai.*”

<sup>17</sup> “*Saigo no are wa, ‘sei to shi’ tte koto nandarou ne. Ato ‘kazoku’ mo?*” For a brief description of episode 8, see page 131.

(TVAnime 2004). One possible interpretation is that these writers wanted to describe the series as much as possible and let the reader judge if the program is worth viewing.

### ***Paranoia Agent's Position in Modern Anime***

Anime has become increasingly popular in the United States despite its foreign origin. While some productions might be less easily distinguishable as Japanese (for example, Swiss audiences had no idea that *Arupusu no Shōjo Haiji* [*Young Heidi of the Alps*] was Japanese in origin), anime can also be about Japanese traditions, customs, etc. yet still be accessible to a foreign audience (Satō 1995:248-9). Indeed, some aspects of *Paranoia Agent* might be better understood by a Japanese viewer (such as the reference to the youth “bat attacks”), but it still has enough generality to be appreciated by a global audience. Another dichotomy in anime is that of subject material: while there are some works that are appropriate for every possible demographic (such as the films of Miyazaki Hayao; one example would be *Spirited Away*, the 2001 Academy Award Winner for Best Animated Feature), others are meant for more mature audiences (for example, Oshii Mamoru’s *Ghost in the Shell*). Detailing every possible subsection of anime is beyond the scope of this introduction,<sup>18</sup> but a look at the types of productions that *Paranoia Agent* (and perhaps Kon’s works in general) is closely related to would be useful.

One recurring theme (and arguably the most powerful one) in *Paranoia Agent* is the exploration of what exactly is “real” in the world; the idea is that the barrier between

---

<sup>18</sup> The introduction to Susan J. Napier’s *Anime: From Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle* provides an excellent look at the state of anime in the U.S. as well as Napier’s opinion on the broad themes that anime utilize (Napier 2005:3-14).

what is fantasy and what is realistic is probably not as clear as one would think. This theme actually has a lengthy history in the world of Japanese animation that begins with one of its pioneers: Tezuka Osamu. While he is better known for his manga, Tezuka also created “experimental anime” (“*keikentekina anime*,” as Kitano calls it; this type of animation was generally short and not released to mass audiences) that dealt with the nature of reality. These works (such as *Mermaid* [*Ningyo*]) explain that dreams and illusions might not be simple fantasies; they could also be reflections of what happens in the real world (Kitano 1998:40-1).

In more modern anime, Oshii Mamoru’s works also examine what it means to “exist” and “not exist.” Anime such as his *Ghost in the Shell* take the idea of a fantasy (such as a dream) and asks “*whose* fantasy is it?” That is, whether or not a person partake in someone else’s dream (in particular, the protagonist in Oshii’s *Urusei Yatsura: Beautiful Dreamer* is able to force other people to live inside his own dreams). Oshii’s films also explore the boundary lines that exist between an individual and the people around him, perhaps also suggesting that two people could become one entity (which is exactly what happens in one of the final scenes in *Ghost in the Shell*) (Kitano 1998:111-3). In addition, Oshii’s films claim that even if a person knows if he or she is in the ‘real world,’ “it may not necessarily matter because a person makes the world what it is according to his or her perception of it” (Ruh 2004:182). In other words, whether the world is “real” or “fake” depends on the *person* instead of actual “reality.” Kon is similar to a director such as Oshii or Tezuka in that his characters must decide how to interact with the “real world” and if they are able to live inside their own “dream worlds” instead.

Kon's series shares another commonality with *Ghost in the Shell*: the realistic look of the animation. Even though the stereotype of Japanese animation consists of characters with large eyes and mouths (that is, an overly “cartoony” look), *Paranoia Agent* is part of a subsection of anime that strives for realism in its portrayal of its characters. Brian Ruh provides a concise history of this trend:

Hiroyuki Yamaga, director of the anime *The Wings of Honneamise* (*Oneamisu no Tsubasa*, 1987), has suggested that his film actually began the trend in realistic animation which was later picked up by directors such as Katsuhiro Ōtomo (dir. *Akira*, 1988) and Oshii. By making animation behave more like live cinema, these recent trends in anime serve to make the realities of the directors' imagined worlds more believable. (Ruh 2004:121)

This is particularly relevant for Kon due to the fact that he has worked extensively with Ōtomo in the past (such as his screenplay for one of the stories in Ōtomo's *Memories*). Even though there is a high degree of complexity in *Paranoia Agent*, the realism present in the animation (which was highly praised by American reviewers) helps the audience connect with the series and view it as able to happen in the real world.

This trend towards realistic animation could probably be tied to a tendency for creating anime that is in general more realistic (that is, a series could happen in the real world). In particular, many analysts have noted that the *characters* in anime have become increasingly complex and more three-dimensional. Kitano Taiitsu associates the beginning of this trend with Anno Hideaki's *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (*Shin Seiki Ebangerion*). He notes that even though the story was not necessarily new when it was released (a group of adolescents are piloting large robots), the appeal of the program was the more realistic and complicated characters (which he describes as “strangely real” [“*myōna riaru*”]) and – especially for the female characters – are a departure from the

stereotypical “bright ornamental female characters” seen in anime (“*akarui hanagata josei kyara*”) (Kitano 1998:145-6). Not only does the psychology of the characters in *Evangelion* play a pivotal part in how the characters interact with their machines, the final two episodes are essentially internal dialogues that the protagonists have regarding how they are viewed by the people around them (hinting at another link between *Paranoia Agent* and *Evangelion*: the emphasis on personal identity).

Like *Evangelion*, the characters in Kon’s series are not easily placed into stereotypical animation roles. With regards to his first film, *Perfect Blue* (but his comment could also apply to *Paranoia Agent*), Kon noted that – in terms of the content present in the film – it probably could not really be treated like animation (or at least the stereotype of what is *thought of* as animation) (Kon 1998) and the implication is that *Perfect Blue* could more easily be compared to “live-action” films. The characters in Kon’s series attempt to resolve two different pressures: how they view their personal identities and how they interact with the outside world. The characters’ inability to handle this contrast is what allows Lil’ Slugger to enter the world.

PART I  
SETTING THE STAGE

Chapter 1  
The Nature of Identity

One theme that is prevalent in Kon's works is what is commonly called "identity," that is, how a person can distinguish him or herself from the rest of society. However, the term "identity" is used in many different ways depending on the situation. For texts related to nation-building or nationalism, it can be used as a collective label for the people that make up a given country. It could also be used to explain how a person can identify with his or her ancestors (for example, a Japanese identity that comes from one's Japanese parents). Yet identity also has a reflexivity to it; that is, it can be used as a way to understand *oneself* and the way that one answers the question, "Who am I?" (this definition of identity will be explored later on).

However, the fact that there are so many facets to "identity" is what makes its usage so problematic. To better examine the problems inherent in using "identity" analysis, a look at Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper's "Beyond 'Identity'" would be useful. This article provides a thorough critique of the use of the term as it appears in modern academic works. Brubaker and Cooper examine whether or not the term can and should be used in analyzing the thought processes of the individual. Even though their text is not specifically related to literary or media studies, it still can help illuminate how

the concept of identity has been treated in previous studies as well as how identity is treated in Kon's films; this exploration is the main point of this chapter. However, as I shall argue, while their arguments are useful for examining some of the ambiguities inherent in discussing "identity," it is difficult to accept that a change of terms (as they suggest) is enough to clarify every academic issue related to an individual's or a group's identity.

### **The Problem of Identity**

Brubaker and Cooper's primary problem with "identity" is that it seems to have taken some kind of control over academia, that "the social sciences and humanities have surrendered to the word 'identity.'" In their view, the word can mean "too much...too little...or nothing at all" based on how it is used by the researcher (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:1, hereafter "Brubaker"). It should be emphasized that they are not discussing how identity is viewed by the person whose identity is in question (i.e. the subject of the study), but how *scholars* use the word. Without question, their opening assertion could also apply to the subject's own interpretation of identity. Asking "who I am" evokes numerous responses that could demonstrate that a person has "too much" or "no" interest in a specific aspect of their identity and this is by nature difficult to quantify. However, Brubaker and Cooper are interested with the use of "identity" in an academic setting when it becomes a type of "object" that is "something that all people have, seek, construct, and negotiate" (Brubaker 2000:2).

This reification of “identity” leads to their assertion that many generally assume that “identity” exists without question. Instead, “one can analyze ‘identity-talk’ and identity politics without, as analysts, positing the existence of ‘identities’” (Brubaker 2000:5). It is possible for abstract concepts such as “race” or “ethnicity” to not only become social categories as time progresses, but actual “things” that a person can have (at least as far as popular usage is concerned) and they argue that scholars “should avoid unintentionally *reproducing* or *reinforcing* such reification by uncritically adopting” popularly used terms and ideas as actual tools for analysis (original emphasis) (Brubaker 2000:5). The point of their article is not that *no one* uses identity as a type of conceptual framework, but that societal use of the term should not imply that it can become an analytical category.

Brubaker and Cooper argue that “identity” as a term can be dispensed with. While most arguments related to “identity” have “sought not to jettison but to save the term by reformulating it so as to make it immune from certain objection” (Brubaker 2000:8), they take the exact opposite position. Their solution is not to eliminate the type of concepts that “identity” is generally associated with, but to “sketch...some alternative analytical idioms that can do the necessary work without the attendant confusion” (Brubaker 2000:9). Because my paper is primarily concerned with how the individual sees him or herself when compared to the rest of society, I will focus on their alternative

terminology for one's personal identity<sup>19</sup>, which they label on page 17 as “self-understanding and social location.”

### “Self-Understanding”

Instead of using the word “identity,” the authors propose “self-understanding” as a way to describe how the individual sees him or herself. Because the analyst is actually discussing the individual's own view of him or herself and is not trying to create a different opinion *for* the individual, their term is meant to describe “one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act” (Brubaker 2000:17). However, Brubaker and Cooper also note that this is in itself problematic, as “identity” can also explain how others view the individual, while “self-understanding” cannot do so by the reflexive nature of the term. In addition, they note that the term “self-understanding” implies that the individual is *actively* trying to understand his or her own actions (Brubaker 2000:18). As seen in *Paranoia Agent*, this can certainly be said of characters like Harumi,<sup>20</sup> who questions her own ability to understand herself, but not necessarily for Yūichi,<sup>21</sup> who has such a concrete “self-understanding” that he does not actively question who he is. His problem is that his interactions with others represent challenges to his “self-understanding” (for example, his

---

<sup>19</sup> I will use the phrase “personal identity” as a way to describe how a person views him or herself as an individual.

<sup>20</sup> Chōno Harumi (“Harumi”) is a graduate student with multiple personality disorder; information regarding Harumi and her other personality (who is named “Maria”) can be found on page 111.

<sup>21</sup> Taira Yūichi (“Yūichi”) is a spoiled child that begins to lose his sanity after his classmates suspect him of being Lil' Slugger. See page 110.

belief that Ushiyama<sup>22</sup> is trying to take his place), but he never alters the way he views himself. From Yūichi's point of view, his problems are all because of the media and his classmates, not himself. Brubaker and Cooper's term actually becomes more unwieldy in this circumstance than "identity." One problem with their new term, which they admit, is this new term is not quite as objective as "identity" appears to be because, after all, different individuals can analyze themselves to different degrees and with varying levels of clarity.

However, the primary problem with Brubaker and Cooper's assertions regarding this new type of label is that the analyst does not gain any more functionality with "self-understanding" than with "identity." They note that "'self-understanding' lacks the reifying connotations of 'identity'" (Brubaker 2000:18), but this is not entirely accurate. While "self-understanding" itself does not *become* a type of object attached to the individual, it still *produces* one: the "self." My purpose is not to enter a philosophical discussion of whether or not the self exists, but to point out that a discussion of intrinsic and intangible aspects of an individual produce some kind of reified object regardless of what that object is called. Even though "self-understandings" "may exist, and inform action, without themselves being discursively articulated" (Brubaker 2000:18), they still imply that the "self" must exist or else there is literally nothing to understand.

In addition, their solution to the ambiguities present in "identity" is not to clarify what "identity" means, but to use a different word to fulfill some of the same functions that the previous term did. They are quite right in noting that "the problem is that

---

<sup>22</sup> Ushiyama Shōgo ("Ushiyama") is a classmate of Yūichi's who becomes the target of his paranoia. See page 111.

‘identity’ is used to designate *both* such strongly groupist, exclusive, affectively charged self-understandings *and* much looser, more open self-understandings” (original emphasis) (Brubaker 2000:19), but their recommendation is to alter the language that is used instead of the analysis underneath the language. “Identity” is not necessarily a carried, unchanging attribute such as skin color, but is a useful tool to express certain fundamental ways that people view themselves. Even if this term is changed, it would not change the fact that some types of expression that are currently designated as “identity” would still contain too much or too little value depending on the context.

Brubaker and Cooper note that their assertions about “identity” are related to similar reifying analyses made with respect to topics such as “race,” “ethnicity,” and the “nation.” Like these words, “identity” often carries multiple meanings to the point where these meanings “are not simply heterogeneous; they point in sharply differing directions” (Brubaker 2000:8). However, the authors do not explore the possibility of *accepting* the fact that there could be more than one type of identity and that these different definitions can co-exist. Brian J. McVeigh, in his text on the presence of nationalism in Japan entitled *Nationalisms of Japan: Managing and Mystifying Identity*, notes that “any given ‘nationalism’ is actually a vast array of ‘nationalisms’ that interconnect, overlap, and resonate as well as collide, clash, and compete with each other” (McVeigh 2004:4). Instead of exploring how each usage of nationalism can be replaced with a different analytical term – as Brubaker and Cooper do – McVeigh acknowledges that there is one

fundamental “branch” concept from which all further understandings of the original term are developed.<sup>23</sup>

A similar statement could be made about identity: having a “group” identity and an “individual” identity do not necessarily detract from each other, but both contribute to giving the individual a clearer picture of how he or she “fits” into everyday society. Brubaker and Cooper’s “self-understanding” would not be as effective because it is not as useful in examining the group itself. My point is that “identity” is similar to nationalism in that it is *not* something that can be rationally understood but is “fundamentally ambiguous” and “rather than searching for clear-cut definitions, we should accept and explore the...mysticism surrounding discussion” of this word (McVeigh 2004:6). It would be more useful to *clarify* one’s use of the word “identity,” primarily through the use of adjectives; for instance, one could have a *personal* identity and an *ethnocultural* identity that are related to two different concepts (how one views him or herself as an individual and how one is a part of a national collective, respectively).

### **Identity/Self-understanding in Kon’s Works**

The purpose of the above discussion has been to place the rest of this paper in context; the issue of identity is frequently a topic in scholarly works related to Japanese animation as it tends to deal with the transformations of the main characters. While Brubaker and Cooper seem to disagree with the idea that identity is a type of “thing” that

---

<sup>23</sup> McVeigh gives a list of examples of nationalism on page 5 (for example, “militarist” nationalism and “economic” nationalism); while each type of nationalism is directly related to different aspects of Japanese society, they are connected ideologically by explaining how the people interact with the state.

is “always in flux” (Brubaker 2000:28), this actually tends to be the case in animated worlds as the plots are generally driven by the changes in the identities of the main characters. The very basis of *Perfect Blue*, Kon’s first film that was released in 1997, is that a pop idol, Mima, is attempting to become a legitimate actress. As she tries to change into a “new” and “reinvented” Mima, she is also confronted by figures that want her to retain her previous idol image. Two such figures are Mimania, a stalker who begins to murder those close to her (a scriptwriter for the television show she works on, her agent, etc.) to scare her into becoming a singer again, and Rumi, her manager who uses Mima to live out her dream of being a pop idol. Mima loses the ability to distinguish fantasy from reality, and as Susan Napier points out, “it becomes clear that it is Mima’s own confused subjectivity, combined with the attacks (both psychological and physical) on her personal identity by Rumi and Mimania that is responsible for her descent into incipient madness” (Napier 2006:30). Regardless of the terms used to describe how Mima and those around her view her, she is caught between her old personal identity and her new one; it is this liminality that drives *Perfect Blue*. While Brubaker and Cooper would argue that using the word “identity” is problematic in this instance, my contention is that the word that is used does not change how the audience understands the animation: for Mima, the *transition* between identities is what is problematic.

Perhaps the greater issue is what the process of “identity-searching” is supposed to represent. Traditionally, the search for one’s personal identity is summarized with the question, “Who am I?” I agree with Brubaker and Cooper that most kinds of identity are

generally seen as objects that must be “found”; that is, if one does not “find” his or her personal identity, the individual does not truly understand him or herself. However, for this paper, I would like to provide a redefinition of this search for personal identity: instead of focusing on “Who am I?”, looking for one’s identity is really asking, “Who am I *supposed* to be?” As seen in *Perfect Blue* (and shall be examined in *Paranoia Agent* in more detail), Mima’s problems occur because of her transition from pop idol to acting star; in a sense, she is not asking, “Who is Mima?” but “Is Mima meant to be an actress when she used to be an idol?” This might seem like a simple “yes or no” question, but the response is usually not easily given with only one word; the *why* behind the “yes” or “no” is more important than the “yes” or “no” itself. The instability of Mima’s search for her “true” personal identity is perhaps related to a greater instability of the world itself, as Kon has noted in his personal journal for *Paranoia Agent* that facts themselves can be unstable depending on the person (Kon 2005a).<sup>24</sup> In other words, if “facts” can change, then so can a person’s personal identity (or any other kind of identity for that matter). Additionally, a problem with the use of “self-understanding” is that Mima’s troubles exist because of her interactions with Mimanina and Rumi; as Brubaker and Cooper acknowledge, “*self*-understanding” cannot accurately describe how others view one’s “self.”

Examining one’s “true” self is a broader theme in Kon’s anime. The characters in *Paranoia Agent* are troubled by their transitions between two different self-conceptions.

---

<sup>24</sup> This is particularly relevant given the media attention in the past year to the word “truthiness.”

For example, Taeko<sup>25</sup> was originally extremely close to her father (to the point where she could possibly have an Elektra complex), but later wanted nothing to do with her family (in her words, she wanted to “forget everything” [“*wasuretai...nanimokamo*”]).

Accepting this kind of personal transition is present in the real world as well since everyone must learn to deal with life’s problems; Kon’s focus is on how the characters adjust (or do *not* adjust) to such problems. The primary message is that the natural human tendency is to rely on some kind of power that shifts the responsibility for this transition away from the individual (the “makeshift salvation”).<sup>26</sup> In this case, that power is Lil’ Slugger.

The contrast between “identity” and “self-understanding” will be referenced throughout this paper as a way of examining whether or not the latter term is any more useful for examining the characters of *Paranoia Agent*. However, one important note is that Brubaker and Cooper were primarily describing “identity” as it is used in anthropological and sociological research. It would be possible to claim that their paper does not readily apply to a world in a work of fiction such as that seen in Kon’s series. It is vital to examine the world of *Paranoia Agent* to see if it is based enough on real-world Japan to make such an application valid. Examining the historical factors that

---

<sup>25</sup> Hirukawa Taeko (“Taeko”) is Hirukawa Masami’s daughter and leaves her family after feeling that she was betrayed by her father. See page 113.

<sup>26</sup> A “makeshift salvation” (*sono bashinogi no sukui*), which could be used for any kind of temporary and hastily-made solution that does not actually address one’s problems, is a phrase used by Misae as she explains in episode 11 that her husband told her that they cannot run away from reality and must learn to adapt to their misfortunes.

contributed to the postmodern<sup>27</sup> society seen in Japan as well as this television show will be the focus of the next chapter.

---

<sup>27</sup> For a brief discussion of postmodernity, see page 40.

## Chapter 2

### The Creation of “Real” Paranoia

Andrew Osmond, a DVD reviewer for *Sight & Sound*, describes the setting of *Paranoia Agent* as “a vision of Japan as a neon wonderland in which everyone seems to be going mad.” Osmond notes that Kon’s anime tend to examine how “modern” Japan works because as they explore issues that are immediately relevant to Japanese society (for example, *Paranoia Agent* examines “a grinning childlike figure” that is reminiscent of “a surge in juvenile crime” seen in Japan) (Osmond 2005). Osmond brings up an excellent issue: the validity of *Paranoia Agent* as a representation of modern-day Japan. This chapter shall examine that very point by exploring the historical causes that have contributed to the creation of the *actual* modern Japan and comparing it to the world of *Paranoia Agent*.

#### **National Dissatisfaction**

The “economic miracle” that took place in Japan after the occupation period has been thoroughly documented as scholars have attempted to explain why and how it occurred. However, *Paranoia Agent* is not about economic prosperity, but the pessimism that took place as the economic growth gave way to a recession. As *Foreign Policy* writer Douglas McGray phrased it, “the national swagger is gone” (McGray 2002:47). Part of the dissatisfaction is generational; the youth of Japan have increasingly viewed Japanese society as “very dark...their impressions of an adult life in that society [are]

equally depressing” (Kinsella 1995:242). Even though the wartime and postwar generations of workers “had strong incentives to work hard...during the high-growth period,” the following generations demonstrate “a marked departure from the work ethic of the preceding generations” (Sugimoto 2003:75-7). Yoshio Sugimoto, in his *An Introduction to Japanese Society*, gives three primary reasons behind the decline in “national swagger”:

First, the [current] generation grew up after the information revolution had begun and Japan’s economy had been integrated into the global market. Hence, they take it for granted that their everyday lives are connected with those in different parts of the world...

Second, with a high unemployment rate becoming a regular feature of the Japanese economy, the [current] generation is pessimistic about the job market...

Finally, as a product of small families and bureaucratized schools, the global generation is one of internal privacy and external caution. (Sugimoto 2003:77-8)

Overall, the idea of an insulated and secure Japanese work force has been replaced in the minds of the youth (and perhaps the older generations of workers as well) with one that is weak and unrewarding when compared to the world economy. This discrepancy could be part of why Ikari is unable to understand the current generation, as the two generations do not share the same view on the state of Japan. Related to this generational gap is an issue of interest to Kon: the attitude of the Japanese people towards history itself. While it would make sense for post-war Japanese to want to forget the immediate pre-war history, Kon wonders if too much history has been forgotten and replaced with fear. Not only that, he worries that the people’s *understanding* of that history is fading away (Kon 2002c). One possibility is that the youths’ negative view

towards the current state of the Japanese economy is related to the “erasure” of recent history (i.e. economic success) from their minds.

The atmosphere of the opening sequence of episode 1 demonstrates this lack of hope; many Japanese can be seen on their cell phones explaining how they are not to blame for their current problems. In this sequence, a truck driver has parked on the side of a nearly empty street and is complaining that the traffic is too thick to drive through. A salaryman crossing the street similarly explains to his coworker that their client is at fault instead of himself. Ikari seems to personify this dissatisfaction as he is worried about his lack of ability to adapt to the changing world. While he tries to adhere to his mantra of not running away from his problems (as the rest of society prefers to do), this faith is challenged as the series progresses.

### **Becoming Endeared to Technology**

The creation of modern Japanese society seems to be linked to the development of technology in Japan. Marilyn Ivy argues that Japanese mass culture was created primarily due to the technological improvements that came at the end of World War II. In her words:

The middle-class “American way of life” became the utopian goal and the dream of many Japanese in the 1950s, a goal tied to unflagging hard work as the basis for commodity acquisition. American television shows became the basis for the new middle-class image – particularly what objects, what possessions constituted the middle class – portrayed in Japanese serials and in the movies as well. During this period Japanese came to equate the middle class with a life-style that included a telephone, a refrigerator, and a Japanese-style bath; those people who had acquired those things were, pure and simply, the middle class. And television quickly became the primary means for the codification and dissemination of this conception of the middle class as a consumption category. (Ivy 1993:249)

As technology became more prominent and connected with consumption, the middle-class became solidified into a group with purchasing power.

It is no surprise that in *Paranoia Agent*, technology assumes a major role in linking the people together. One example of this is that a television broadcast is what informs Japanese society of the Lil' Slugger attack. In addition, the attack itself probably would have generated no news, but the fact that “experts” were brought in to debate the causes for the attack made it a problem for the “average” (in this case, middle-class) citizen (paralleling Ivy’s statement that “television...rapidly came to be the medium that circumscribed the limits of debate on mass culture [Ivy 1993:248]). Going back to the opening sequence, every single person who is disgruntled with their careers uses a cell phone, which some would consider to be a technology so “modern” that it allows for unhindered communication regardless of where a person is (though whether actual communication takes place is debatable; see McVeigh 2003:28). It is no surprise that many of the revelations in *Paranoia Agent* occur via television: Maniwa<sup>28</sup> attempts to contact his former partner via television when Ikari is in his utopic “Flat World”<sup>29</sup>, Maromi is introduced to society at-large by television (through both the Maromi cartoon and media reports of the massive sales), and Yūichi uses a television recording to remind

---

<sup>28</sup> Maniwa Mitsuhiro (“Maniwa”) is Ikari’s partner and is part of the “younger generation” that Ikari is unable to understand. See page 106 for more information on Maniwa.

<sup>29</sup> The phrase “Flat World” is a reference to the space that Ikari Keiichi enters near the end of the series (beginning with episode 11; Flat World is my own terminology since this space is not given an official name). The Flat World looks as if everything – the buildings, streets, and people – is made from a cardboard cutout; this world is meant to be a representation of a Post-War Japan that is nostalgic for Ikari as it is where he exits to when he can no longer handle everyday life. For a picture of this world, see page 144; for a more in-depth description of the context of this world, see the episode descriptions on page 135.

himself of his greatness and thus keep his social identity as a “number one” student intact.

The increase in technological consumption has led to an increase in information related to consumption: “consumers demand more information in order to make well-considered choices about objects of consumption, including a greater selection of cultural commodities” (Ivy 1993:254). The media – as the primary source of such information – then becomes intertwined with the presentation of “reality” and “the line between a stable, external ‘reality’ and an imagined one” becomes nonexistent (Ivy 1993:255). This is actually related to the presentation of *Paranoia Agent*’s story; the audience is usually not given the “real” story that is taking place, but a “fragmented” one, a reality that is *perceived* as real for the characters on-screen. Episode 2 of *Paranoia Agent* is the only one that is told from a character’s point of view (Taira Yūichi), so we do not see an objective “reality” but one that has been filtered through Yūichi’s perspective; the demons that his classmates transform into are not exactly fantasy, but are fully real for *him*. Kon’s message is that what actually happens is not as important as understanding what Yuichi “feels”; the series is not just a story that uses postmodern<sup>30</sup> techniques, but is

---

<sup>30</sup> The primary problem with the concept of postmodernism is that it is difficult to provide a definition that every scholar would agree with or even what aspects of postmodernity are the most important. For example, Peter Brooker and Will Brooker (in *Postmodern After-images*) examine the cinematic techniques of postmodernism such as “its ironic self-referentiality” (Brooker 1997:1), while Norman K. Denzin’s *Images of Postmodern Society* focuses on postmodernism as a type of ideology, one that is “characterized by the cultivation of conspicuous consumption consumer lifestyles... which stress the prestige and exchange value of appearance, civility, and personal pleasure and desire” (Denzin 1991:5). In fact, one could also divide postmodernism into how it is represented in different scholarly fields. Both of the aforementioned texts provide useful discussions on the nature of postmodernism, but for my purposes, there are three aspects of postmodernism that this paper will focus on:

1. The potential for self-reflexivity (a work of art referring back to itself; this also includes techniques that “break the fourth wall” or interact with the audience).

an example of postmodernity itself, primarily in how the character's interpretations of reality combine with objective reality (which will be discussed further in the next chapter).

### A "Cute" Kind of Superpower

Some argue that the despair that came with realizing the futility of working long hours each day led to a type of nostalgia for a time when such dedication was not necessary. Sharon Kinsella notes that for young adults in postmodern Japanese society, "[adulthood] was not viewed as a source of freedom or independence, [but as] quite the opposite, as a period of restrictions and hard work" (Kinsella 1995:242). This nostalgia led to what is perhaps the most recognizable aesthetic in Japan: cuteness or *kawaisa*. The presence of cuteness in Japan has already been sufficiently documented, but a brief overview is needed since the growing influence of Maromi on the events of the series parallels that of a "cute" icon (such as Hello Kitty or Tarepanda) on modern Japan.

Cuteness as an aesthetic has its roots in the 1960s when "cute" handwriting began to be used. This style of writing spread throughout Japan during the 1970s (especially by female teenagers) and by 1985, "upwards of 5 million young people were using the new script" (Kinsella 1995:221). The handwriting was actually part of a larger trend that "began to push traditional arts and crafts and strictly regulated literary and artistic culture to the margins of society" (Kinsella 1995:224). Being cute became a type of subversion;

- 
2. The blending together of realism and fantasy (this includes Denzin's note that "art not only mirrors life, it structures and reproduces it" [Denzin 1991:x])
  3. The emphasis on consumerism and its power to have symbolic meaning for one's life.

by being viewed as “powerless” and “controllable,” the individual “triggers a sympathetic response in another” and one’s true intentions become masked (McVeigh 1996:300).<sup>31</sup>

For the youth of Japan in the 1980s, this subversion turned into a desire “to escape from real life as completely as possible”; as Kinsella points out (as well as Sugimoto above), the future was not desirable because it was associated with work that led to nowhere and the present became nothing more than a point of preparation for the future (Kinsella 1995:252). This leads to perhaps the greatest difference between Japanese and American associations of cuteness: “whereas Disney cute was based more on a sentimental journey back into an idealized *rural society*...Japanese cute fashion became more concerned with a sentimental journey back into an idealized *childhood*” (emphasis added) (Kinsella 1995:241). In other words, the distinction is between a destination of location versus one of time. This is particularly relevant for Ikari, who seems to wish that he could return to a time when his generation’s logic made sense.<sup>32</sup>

While cuteness is not explored in great detail in *Paranoia Agent*, it is heavily visible due to the presence of Maromi the dog. Animals are “a common and important element in cute images” because “for one thing, they seem to require loving attention from people” (McVeigh 1996:295). In addition, with a cute animal object such as a plush toy, it is possible to think of it as being like a real human and interact with it accordingly

---

<sup>31</sup> An interesting note is that this sense of “powerlessness” can actually be found in Japanese aesthetics of the past. Yomota Inuhiko writes that one could reasonably draw a link between modern conceptions of *kawaisa* and the 11<sup>th</sup>-century aristocratic aesthetic of “*mono no aware*” (Yomota 2006:18); while this phrase literally translates to “the pity of objects” (Donald Keene translates it as a “sensitivity to things”), it is meant to imply that some kind of thing or situation evokes a sense of pity from the viewer, such as how the *The Tale of Genji* is about being aware of “the sorrow of human existence” (Keene 1999:489). This pity comes from a possible element of helplessness in the object, similar to how modern-day cute icons draw on the empathy of the public because they appear to be helpless.

<sup>32</sup> Near the end of the series, Ikari gets his wish; see page 91 for a discussion of how the Flat World becomes a type of utopia for the detective.

(Yomota 2006:86)<sup>33</sup> (note that this is exactly what happens with Tsukiko’s personal Maromi-doll). Maromi fulfills any given number of “requirements” for being cute: she has large eyes, an oversized “baby-esque” head, lacks a visible mouth (similar to Hello Kitty or Tarepanda), is pink (a notoriously cute color), and is noticeably clumsy and slow when she walks (like a baby). Her name is generally written with “cute” handwriting (such as on product posters) and she speaks with a high-pitched and squeaky (the adjective generally used in academic studies of women that try to act cute) voice. It is difficult to extrapolate different elements that contribute to her rise to fame in Kon’s Tokyo, but cuteness is certainly one of the major reasons why she catches on in that society.

Kon also uses Maromi as a bizarre type of “softener” for some of the more violently graphic sections of the series; as a Japanese animation company attempts to create a Maromi anime (episode 10), the various employees are killed one-by-one by Lil’ Slugger. However, these images are juxtaposed with short monologues by Maromi where she describes what each worker does. The most graphic occurrence is when one of these “softener” scenes has a dead animator in the background. This is an excellent way to demonstrate how cuteness is used as a way to “lighten” a serious topic to the point where it is more digestible to society at large, perhaps similar to the way in which cute icons are used in Japan to sell condoms or present warnings at construction sites. *Kawaisa* “sweetens social relations, making what is otherwise a ritualized, serious, formalized social existence more spontaneous, lighthearted, and intimate” (McVeigh 1996:295). To

---

<sup>33</sup> In a section on *nuigurumi* (stuffed animals): “*Tantekina ni itte kado ni ningenkasareta dōbutsu no eizō de aru*” (Yomota 2006:86).

place this episode into the context of the entire series, it is the first time that the audience has *repeated* exposure to the fact that Lil' Slugger is willing to kill his victims (the first instance of actual death is when Kozuka is killed; I am referring to the fact that many people die in succession in episode 10). Maromi's vignettes could be viewed as Kon's way of parodying the use of cuteness to downplay a serious topic such as death.

Kon has used cuteness in this way before: Mima, the protagonist of *Perfect Blue*, is constantly tormented by a virtual image of herself (that appears in reflective images such as a store window, etc.) that asserts that *she* is the "real" Mima. However, this virtual Mima appears in the outfit that Mima wore when she was a pop idol (this outfit consists of a tutu-like pink dress and a pink bow on Mima's hairband) and a chilling scene occurs when the virtual Mima appears to the psychologically disturbed Mimania. The monstrous portrayal of Mimania (whose physical appearance is similar to Quasimodo from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*) becomes less threatening when it is juxtaposed with the cute and "innocent" virtual Mima.

### **Conclusion**

Even though *Paranoia Agent* is a work of fiction, it does not take place in a nonexistent world. The Japan presented in this series is based on the Japan of the real world and the characters that exist (with the exception of Lil' Slugger) could also have real-world equivalents. However, these similarities to the real world do not necessarily dictate whether the events that take place *during* the series could actually happen. Many actions during the series could be viewed as either symbolic representations of real-life

events (similar to how *Millennium Actress* is presented) or as magical and mystical fantasy events which could not happen in “reality.” How the audience interprets these events is what contributes to the identity of *Paranoia Agent* as a television series and this shall be examined in the next chapter.

## PART II

THE NATURE OF *PARANOIA AGENT* ITSELF

## Chapter 3

## Realism and Fantasy

While the academic use of “identity” is often applied to the fictional characters in a television show, it is generally not used for the show itself. To clarify what I mean, when a television viewer turns on a program, that person usually knows exactly what kind of show he or she is tuning in to. A football game does not spontaneously change into a baseball game and a soap drama will not transform into a game show. In these cases, I refer to the identity of the show (the “program’s identity”) as the genre of program that the viewer is expecting to watch and the type of conventions that the audience can expect to see. However, this might be slightly ambiguous for some programs: an anime series might begin with a group of normal, real-world characters, but for various reasons, those characters are transported to a magical realm that is dissimilar from the earth (*The Vision of Escaflowne* and *The Twelve Kingdoms*<sup>34</sup> are excellent examples of this). For this example, the viewer thinks that he or she is going to watch a realistic series about ordinary people, but the setting changes to a more fantasy-based world. The program’s identity *changes*, but it is still somewhat clearly defined.

---

<sup>34</sup> Both anime programs have similar introductions: a female protagonist is dissatisfied with her life in a Japan based on the “real” one, but she is eventually taken to a fantasy world where she is able to find meaning in her life.

However, *Paranoia Agent* cannot be categorized so neatly. Whether it is realistic or fantastic is constantly in flux and at some points – in true postmodern fashion – it could be viewed as *both*; the program’s identity does not remain consistent throughout the series. *Newtype* magazine even claims that the entire point of the show is to determine what is “real” (“*hontō*”) and what is “fantasy” (“*uso*”<sup>35</sup>) (“*Doko kara*” 2004:101). What Kon generally wants to draw in his films “isn’t reality, but the truth” (“*Egakitai no wa jijitsu de wa naku shinjitsu*”) (Kon 2002a), so the lack of a demarcation between reality and fantasy throughout the series makes sense. This chapter examines how a viewer might attempt to categorize *Paranoia Agent* as well as the nature of “reality” in its world. Upon viewing the anime, the idea of reality tends to break down as what one could call objective reality<sup>36</sup> actually vanishes in the face of *subjective* reality.<sup>37</sup>

### Realism vs. Fantasy

One aspect of Kon’s animation – not just *Paranoia Agent* – is the constant redefinition of what reality is supposed to be. *Paranoia Agent* is similar to other visual media in Japan in that it is useful for exploring the connection between animation and reality (Napier 2002:422). The audience is usually required to interpret one of his works with incomplete information; as Kon states, “If you try to analyze things only using the information you currently have, you’ll move further and further from the essence [of what it is supposed to be].” Kon is also courageous enough to admit that there are

---

<sup>35</sup> Lit. “a lie,” but “fantasy” seems like a more appropriate translation given the context.

<sup>36</sup> To clarify, this refers to what actually happens in the world; that is, if there was some way to have an unbiased source record everything that happens, that would be objective reality.

<sup>37</sup> Unlike the above note, subjective reality is how an individual views the world around him or herself (the answer to the question, “What do you *think* happened?”).

periods when even the *creators* do not know what direction their creation will take (Kon 2004a). Since this would result in multiple interpretations of a single scene, a language must be created that will help explain some of the possible interpretations. For instance, some scenes might be based in “reality,” but are actually displayed as if they take place in some other world where the normal laws of reality do not apply. This next section is meant to help define a set of terms that will help explain some aspects of *Paranoia Agent*.

This explanation begins with a look at Kon’s second film: *Millennium Actress*. It is about a film historian’s interview with a 70-year-old actress who is recounting the story of her life. To give a brief summary of the actress’s life: Chiyoko (the actress) is approached by a movie producer when she is a schoolgirl to star in a movie, but her mother does not want her to pursue this profession. After meeting a rebel painter during the 1940’s, she agrees to take the acting job to try and chase after the painter. However, as the movie progresses, instead of just telling Chiyoko’s story via flashbacks, each section of scenes uses a background from one of her movies (which move chronologically from Tokugawa-era Japan to the space age, hence *millennium* actress), but her actions in that movie are supposed to be representative of how Chiyoko acted in real life. For example, a rival princess in Tokugawa Japan is a stand-in for her aging co-star, Eiko. The actual dialogue might be taken from one of Chiyoko’s films, but it is actually based on what happens in her life. The *presentation* is fantasy-based, but the *story* is grounded in reality. As such, it becomes natural to wonder what the “real” storyline was regarding Chiyoko’s life after seeing a scene from one of her “movies,” and there could be numerous ways of interpreting one specific scene. This is no accident;

after viewing Kon's direction in *Perfect Blue*, *Millennium Actress* producer, Maki Taro, wanted a film where a viewer would see it differently after each viewing (Kon 2001).

This search for "reality" (i.e. what can actually happen in our world and not just a work of fiction) becomes important when watching *Paranoia Agent*. Even though some elements might seem other-worldly (that is, they are not subject to modern physics or other-wise have some kind of "magical" element to it), it would be natural to try and find some real-world explanation for what is happening. This is encouraged by Ikari's comment in episode 1 that he does not believe Tsukiko was really attacked. After viewing the first three episodes, one possible explanation would be to expand upon Ikari's statement and assume that *none* of the characters were really attacked; due to their psychological traumas, they were assaulted by Lil' Slugger only in their minds. According to this explanation, their real-life injuries are actually self-inflicted, similar to what Tsukiko did.

Not only would this make sense in the light of Kon's other works, but the only other "realistic" explanation would make little sense. That is, that there really is a middle-schooler who – by pure coincidence – is attacking "people that are cornered" (*"oitsumerareta ningen,"* in Maniwa's words). While this explanation would make more sense with a larger group of people (the message then would be that *everyone* is cornered, an idea explored in a less realistic fashion in episodes 12 and 13 when everyone in Tokyo summons Lil' Slugger simultaneously and he becomes a type of black ooze), it seems a little implausible that a middle-school student could seriously mastermind a plot to try and relieve people of their psychological traumas. However, after Hirukawa's capture of

“Lil’ Slugger” (actually Kozuka) in episode 4, Kozuka claims to be doing exactly this, as he believes that he is some kind of video game warrior (an explanation which takes up all of episode 5). After Kozuka is killed by the “real” Lil’ Slugger, viewers must then discard the notion of looking for logic in a series that does not seem to be logical (a problem that Ikari must tackle in the series as well). When all the episodes are seen, it becomes difficult to apply any one interpretation to everything that happens in the series.

### **Two Interpretations**

It is for this very reason that I am introducing a set of definitions to help explain these aspects of *Paranoia Agent*: the Realistic literary interpretation and the Fantastic literary interpretation (as denoted by a capital R and F, respectively). A Realistic interpretation signifies that a plotline could happen in what the audience perceives as reality (for example, *Millennium Actress* is actually Chiyoko’s real-world life-story). A Fantastic interpretation indicates that a story’s plot contains some mystical and perhaps magical quality that means it could not occur in the real world (for example, *Bewitched* or *I Dream of Jeannie*). These are not meant to be hard and fast methods of categorization, but convenient ways to describe multiple and perhaps contradictory ways of interpreting a scene.

The best example of this dichotomy in Western literature (in my opinion) is Bill Watterson’s comic strip, *Calvin and Hobbes*. Under a Realistic interpretation, Hobbes is a stuffed tiger and is unable to communicate with Calvin; what the reader sees is Calvin’s one-sided conversations with what is really an imaginary friend. On the other hand, a

Fantastic interpretation indicates that Hobbes has some magical property that enables him to take the appearance of a stuffed tiger when other people are around and transform into a living, anthropomorphic tiger when only Calvin is present. Hobbes actually has conversations with Calvin and he is capable of affecting the outside world. However, with this particular comic strip, the interpretation one might apply does not matter as the basic identity of the comic does not change: it tells the story of a 6-year-old boy who is trying to enjoy what he realizes is an ephemeral childhood. In fact, Watterson specifically avoided scenarios where one interpretation would have to dominate the other; Calvin's parents never try to impress upon him that his stuffed tiger is not a real person and actually humor him at some points. One of the reasons Watterson refused to allow actual Hobbes dolls to be manufactured (along with *any* kind of *Calvin and Hobbes* merchandise) was that he did not want the readers to assume that one interpretation was actually fact. He said that he "doesn't want the issue of Hobbes's reality settled by a doll manufacturer" (Watterson 1995:11). His comic needs a certain level of ambiguity in order for Calvin's world to be meaningful.

This leads to the ambiguous nature of *Paranoia Agent*. The anime is unique in that it lets the audience interpret some scenes Realistically and others Fantastically. For instance, a scene that appears to be Realistically defined would be when Maniwa discards what he believes to be a sword and the audience sees that it is really a broken umbrella, implying that Radar Man's (Maniwa's alter ego) battles with Lil' Slugger are meant to be symbolic instead of real. However, Lil' Slugger's destruction of Tokyo when he consists of a black ooze can only be interpreted Fantastically as there are few real world

explanations that could easily explain the chaos that resulted (it is doubtful that there was no damage at all since a news report two years after the attacks comments on how the damage has finally been fully repaired). Yet there are also scenes, such as Kozuka's suicide/murder, that can be viewed either way (while the audience sees the second Lil' Slugger vanish through the wall, Kozuka hinted that he wanted to commit suicide [as seen in a past chat room dialogue in episode 7], so a Realistic interpretation is not that out of place). To say that one interpretation is "truer" than the other is meaningless, since "truth is not an eternal insight waiting to be uncovered. It is an agreement on an interpretation, and its validation is only temporary" (van Es 2002:111-2). That is, so long as the audience member interprets it as true, then the "actual" truth is unimportant.

### ***Rashōmon* and the Redefinition of Reality**

This fascination with what exactly makes up reality is not new to Japanese popular media. The Kurosawa Akira film, *Rashōmon*, portrays one series of events – a bandit killing a samurai – through the eyes of everyone involved, including a passing woodcutter and the dead samurai himself. Naturally, each character's interpretation of the events differs and they all spin the events so that they favor whoever is narrating. As David Desser notes in *Samurai Films of Akira Kurosawa*, this film is "essentially [a] metaphysical mystery [story] about the impossibility of certainty and the relativity of truth" (Desser 1983:65). In his analysis of *Rashōmon*, Desser compares the film to the idea of the "Classic Detective Story" (CDS), which is seen in American cinema such as *Laura* and *The Big Sleep*. The CDS contains a detective that generally has little

relationship to the crime at hand; “the outside world ‘intrudes’ upon the detective with its request for a ‘solution’ to the crime” (Desser 1983:67). In other words, there is some unique solution to the story and once it is found, the story ends.

Desser then compares the CDS to *Rashōmon* and notes that the film does not have a detective. Instead, as each person gives his or her interpretation of that day’s events, “we soon gather that we, the audience, are thrust into the role [of the detective]” (Desser 1983:67) and it is up to the audience to try and “solve” the mystery. This proves to be impossible; even though the story of the woodcutter could probably be taken as objective reality (since he is the only one that is not directly involved with the crime), his view is still subjective and pointing to his story as absolute truth would feel somewhat hollow. After all, as the other characters point out to the woodcutter, he is no more moralistic than the other storytellers. Desser concludes his discussion by rhetorically asking the readers, “How can we ever solve the mystery of *Rashōmon*?” (Desser 1983:67) The question would imply that a solution does not exist; the point of the film is to “fragment” its narrative in a way that also “fragments” the detectives (i.e. the audience).

In this light, *Paranoia Agent* becomes a bizarre combination of *Rashōmon* and the CDS; like a CDS, this series has a detective (two in fact: Ikari and Maniwa) who has no direct connection to the crime at hand, but the unique solution found in a CDS is gone. In its place is the fragmentation of facts present in a movie like *Rashōmon*. There are multiple interpretations of the same story (seen in its simplest form in the first attack;

Tsukiko claims Lil' Slugger attacked her while the Homeless Woman<sup>38</sup> says that Tsukiko was alone) and not even Ikari or Maniwa has all of the relevant facts. They do not have the same feeling of detachment and omniscience that a detective in a CDS would have (Ikari's interpretation of the Lil' Slugger case will be discussed later) and are actually forced to abandon the case. Like *Rashōmon*, the only true detective in *Paranoia Agent* is the audience, but unlike *Rashōmon*'s audience, we leave the series *knowing* that the mystery cannot be solved because this is explicitly said by Maniwa in the final Prophetic Vision.<sup>39</sup> Instead of actually ending the series, Maniwa's final message to the audience is that the events of the series will happen all over again, but with a different Maromi-like icon and a different Lil' Slugger (one could say that the series loops around back to the beginning), resulting in a bizarre interpretation of time as being cyclical instead of linear.

### **The Maintenance of Reality When Faced with Fantasy**

Perhaps the greatest irony of the series is that other-worldly elements often understand how the real world works better than *real people* do. For example, when Maniwa visits the residence of the *otaku*<sup>40</sup> character, one of his dolls comments, "Don't bother talking to him. That man is just a doll." This statement is extremely accurate, as the *otaku* has only had one meaningful conversation with another human being

---

<sup>38</sup> This character is not given an actual name (the official website for the series lists her as "the Old Woman" [*rōsha*]) so this will be the name that I refer to her as. See page 108 for a brief description of her.

<sup>39</sup> The "Prophetic Visions" come at the very end of every episode of *Paranoia Agent* and give the audience some scenes from the next episode. See page 117 for more details.

<sup>40</sup> The word "*otaku*" was originally used as an honorific phrase meaning "your house." However, in the 1980s, the term was increasingly used by fans of manga and anime as a form of address for other fans. While the modern usage of *otaku* roughly translates to "geek" or "nerd" in English, *otaku* is usually quantified by the medium that the individual is interested in (such as an anime *otaku*) (Schodt 1996:44).

throughout the series (Ikari's interrogation of him in episode 1). He does not even address Maria after having sex and instead talks to his dolls as if he had just spent the evening with them. The dolls – who Realistically are not able to move on their own – have actually analyzed reality (in this case, the *otaku*) *better* than the *otaku* could have done. Interpreting the *otaku* character as being representative of the *otaku* stereotype, he is unable to deal with reality and instead chooses to live in a type of fantasy world. This seems to be a self-referential belief in the power of fantasy (or perhaps consumerism) to comment on reality.

### **Conclusion**

Media such as *Paranoia Agent* and *Rashōmon* are not easily subject to categorization. *Paranoia Agent* cannot readily be identified as a detective story nor is it solely a fantasy-based anime. The program's identity changes after each episode and while what is happening can be confusing at times, the way the show can be interpreted will be different for every viewer. This ambiguity, like *Calvin and Hobbes*, is not just a gimmick used by Kon, but is necessary for the show to have the psychological power that it does. However, this lack of clarity in the narrative does not happen on its own. It requires an equally mysterious antagonist that could not possibly exist in the real world. The next chapter will examine that figure: Lil' Slugger.

## Chapter 4

### The Identity of Lil' Slugger

Unlike most other stories presented through visual media (excluding American television programs that are cancelled before the show can be resolved), *Paranoia Agent* leaves many questions unanswered after we see the final episode, which is somewhat odd considering that most Japanese television series have a clear-cut stopping point where (almost) all remaining loose ends are tied up. Not only are there plot points that are not touched upon (for example, what happened to most of the characters after the final Lil' Slugger attack), but fundamental questions of how the show was supposed to work are left to the audience's imagination. For example, if Tsukiko's Maromi doll can move because of some unknown power that Tsukiko has, where does this power come from? Was Maniwa *really* some kind of superhero? What was the role of the *otaku* character in this series? It would be convenient to write the answers to these questions off as unimportant, but they serve as reminders that it is most likely impossible to fully understand this show.

However, one question that remains after the series' conclusion needs to be addressed, even if a definitive answer is nonexistent: what is Lil' Slugger? While a simple answer seems to appear at many different times (for example, at the very beginning he could be interpreted as a construction of the victims' imaginations, who are mentally disturbed to begin with), the final result is that none of the potential answers would be a complete description of what he represents to the story. This chapter will

make an attempt to ascertain the nature of Lil' Slugger's identity and examine "where" such a phantasm could come from. Even if there is no logical explanation for Lil' Slugger's existence, he might be better explained in terms of the imagery he inspires and the symbolism he could represent.

### **Parallels between Lil' Slugger and Maromi**

Almost all discussions of Lil' Slugger must examine his relation to Maromi. As Misae shouts out to the antagonist (episode 11): "Your existence itself is a deception. Yes, deluding people with temporary peace of mind. *You're the same as that Maromi thing!*"<sup>41</sup> Immediately after this monologue, the walls collapse around Misae and we see a paradise in the background. Considering that for Kon, "a room reflects a mental state of its resident" (Yokota 2004:250), this peaceful image would imply that Misae has achieved some form of enlightenment about Lil' Slugger and the series itself (her final action before death is to help Ikari achieve the same kind of enlightenment and escape from the Flat World).

Considering the speaker of this message and the style of delivery, the fact that Maromi, an example of a mass consumerist icon, and Lil' Slugger, a representation of the "makeshift salvation" that people seek, are one and the same seems to be Kon's grand message for *Paranoia Agent*. As such, a brief examination of what a Hello Kitty-esque symbol such as Maromi represents to the many people that consume her products would be of value. The simplest way to do this is to examine Hello Kitty as a symbol of mass

---

<sup>41</sup> "Anata wa sonzai sono mono ga mayakashi nano desu. Sō, sono bakari no yasurami de hito wo madowasu. Kono Maromi to iyara to onaji nano desu."

consumption. Despite the simplicity of their character designs, saying that anything is similar to Maromi/Hello Kitty does not imply weakness, as “it is [the] very innocuousness [of Hello Kitty] that conceals her power” (McVeigh 2000:226). In speaking with young Japanese (in their early 20’s) about their reactions to Hello Kitty (such as why one would/would not purchase Hello Kitty, etc.), McVeigh notes that responses were given “within a framework of unhindered/freedom/self-autonomy versus coercion/control/compulsion” (McVeigh 2000:226).

Even though the people of *Paranoia Agent* seem to purchase Maromi for the first set of adjectives (which McVeigh associates with “consumutopia”; see below<sup>42</sup>), it seems instead that Maromi is actually representative of the second set, especially since during Misae’s line, “deluding people with temporary peace of mind,” there is a backdrop of a multitude of faces with blissful – almost oblivious – expressions on their faces. Instead of freedom, the Maromi-consumers have purchased a type of uniformity. As shall be explored in the next section, Lil’ Slugger could be seen as a part of consumutopia based on how he interacts with society: his victims call out to him because they think that he can provide them with freedom from their problems (such as when Yūichi explains to Harumi that Lil’ Slugger was able to “set him free” [*kaihō*]) or Hirukawa wants to be

---

<sup>42</sup> The term “consumutopia” first appears in McVeigh’s “How Hello Kitty Commodifies the Cute, Cool and Camp”; if a “utopia” is defined “as a condition, place, or situation of social or political perfection,” then a *consumutopia* is “a joint endeavor between capitalist producers and product consumers to establish sites, practices, or spaces of ‘perfect consumption’” (McVeigh 2000:228). In other words, consumutopia can be thought of as a virtual space where a consumer icon is consumed as much as possible, whether it is purchasing multiple products because of the icon or mentally associating with the icon. For example, Hello Kitty could be seen as an element of consumutopia due to her (omni)presence in Japan and the rest of the world (though it should be noted that while “there is no actual consumutopia...there are definitely serious attempts toward constructing one,” such as Sanrio’s development of Hello Kitty [McVeigh 2000:228]). While determining which consumer icons lead to this space is ultimately subjective, McVeigh gives five traits of an element of consumutopia, and these will be examined in the following section.

freed from stealing to repay the *yakuza*), but this actually binds the people closer to Lil' Slugger (and they must "consume" him more). They must continuously call upon him so that they can claim to be victims instead of finding legitimate solutions to their problems.

An interesting aspect of *Paranoia Agent* is how it chronicles the ascents of both Maromi and Lil' Slugger as being parallel to each other; increased consumer interest in Maromi is juxtaposed with increased gossip about Lil' Slugger. This fits in with a general trend in interest of Hello Kitty: even though not everyone might participate in a consumer fad, individuals eventually act like they are interested in that fad in order to gain social acceptance (McVeigh 2000:227). The "legend" of Lil' Slugger begins with an isolated incident in episode 1, but the snowballing of gossip and rumor-spreading results in Lil' Slugger's transformation into an avalanche of black ooze because of a little bit of belief from each individual. As Maniwa notes, once the people lose Maromi as their emotional crutch, they are forced to call upon Lil' Slugger. Additionally, those who initially display no interest in Lil' Slugger attempt to use him as a way to gain a social identity, such as Mrs. Kamohara (episode 9), who wants to use her husband's attack as a status symbol in the circle of apartment housewives.

### **Lil' Slugger as a part of Consumutopia**

McVeigh lists five traits of products that could lead to consumutopia (see the note on the previous page) that separate an average consumer product from one that provides "sites, practices, or spaces of 'perfect consumption'" (McVeigh 2000:228); that is, one object or icon is consumed far beyond most other consumer objects are. These traits

were originally applied to Hello Kitty in order to try and explain – from a marketing perspective (something beyond “like” and “dislike”) – why she has achieved the success she has. Even though Lil’ Slugger is not a corporate creation and his appearance cannot be seen on any consumer goods, he still possesses the same traits as Hello Kitty, and the spread of the “mythology” of Lil’ Slugger can be explained in consumerist terms. As such, I will apply these traits to Lil’ Slugger to explore how he evolves from a figment of Tsukiko’s imagination to the destroyer of Tokyo.

#### *Unifying Leitmotif*

The first trait is a “unifying leitmotif.” Even though there are a countless number of goods produced by Sanrio, they all contain Kitty’s face on them and capitalize on the marketing trend of *kawaisa* that has become commonplace in Japan. As one of McVeigh’s respondents explained, “Though [Hello Kitty’s] face is always the same, she has many goods of various styles that just make me want to collect them all.” The exact products that are used almost seem to be irrelevant. So long as the expressionless face of Hello Kitty is on them, people will purchase the objects more for their association with the cat than for the product itself (McVeigh 2000:228-30).

Whereas Kitty’s leitmotif was the cute appearance of Kitty herself, Lil’ Slugger’s is the exact opposite: fear and paranoia. Lil’ Slugger requires gossip, rumor, and paranoia to make his presence known. While the exact details of how he appears to his victims changes from telling to telling,<sup>43</sup> the “unifying leitmotif” remains the same: he appears to

---

<sup>43</sup> This seems to be the point of episode 9, where a group of housewives are trying to one-up one another with bizarre Lil’ Slugger stories. In the first four episodes – the victims do not clearly see the phantasm because he attacks them in darkened alleys. In the housewives’ stories, Lil’ Slugger knocks on a woman’s apartment door, swims in the ocean, and is a pinch hitter in a baseball game.

a “cornered person” and uses physical violence against that person. What is odd about the spread of the Lil’ Slugger stories is that the reason *why* he appears is eventually forgotten. The first few victims, such as Kawazu,<sup>44</sup> Yūichi, and Harumi, need Lil’ Slugger as an *escape* from the problems that back them into a corner, but this motivation is lost on the people spreading the rumors, especially as Lil’ Slugger begins to kill those that see him. The masses focus on the “cornered” aspect of the Lil’ Slugger attacks, and this is the only consistent part of the myth that is spread. The destruction eventually makes the attacks desired by some, such as the high school students who wish for Lil’ Slugger to destroy their high school (episode 11).<sup>45</sup>

### *Ubiquity*

The second trait of an element of consumutopia is ubiquity, which is based on the theory that if a product can be seen everywhere, consumption of that product will increase. For Hello Kitty, this concept is simple and was briefly addressed before: release as much merchandise as possible with the cat’s image. Furthermore, “Hello Kitty is an ideal product since it crosses generational lines; for young girls it is ‘cute,’ for teenagers it is ‘cool,’ and for women in their twenties and older it is best described as camp” (McVeigh 2000:231-3). Another aspect of ubiquity is the notion of “partial

---

<sup>44</sup> Kawazu Akio (“Kawazu”) is a tabloid reporter that is trying to use the Lil’ Slugger incidents for his stories. See page 108.

<sup>45</sup> One unresolved question of *Paranoia Agent* (specifically episode 8) is why Lil’ Slugger never appeared to Fuyubachi, Zebra, and Kamome until after they died, especially since suicidal tendencies would probably imply that a person is “cornered.” One possibility is that the three were never really depressed enough to be considered suicidal (episode 8 is, ironically, the most light-hearted episode in the series). Another is that Lil’ Slugger would not appear to someone that is going to kill him or herself anyways (when he sees Fuyubach and Kamome after they have died, he runs away in fear). Kozuka provides some support for the “not depressed enough” theory as he seems genuinely frightened when he sees Lil’ Slugger in his jail cell. If Kozuka was still suicidal at that point, he would have no need to be afraid.

participation”; that is, by seeing one’s peers partake in a consumer trend, one feels obliged to join in (McVeigh 2000:227).

Lil’ Slugger’s ubiquity comes from the mass media. A montage in episode 1 shows a sequence of news discussions with “child experts” that force the average person to pay attention to this case. What is interesting is that the attack itself is somewhat mundane: a woman is hit with a baseball bat. Even though the icon Tsukiko created is extremely popular, she does not really see that fame herself until the creation of a Maromi anime. However, the fact that it might have been a middle-school student raises the issue of teen violence, a touchy issue for a society that pays special attention to juvenile delinquency. Even though the “growth” of Lil’ Slugger is fueled by rumor and gossip, the media presentations of the case are the pieces of flint that get the fire started. An interesting “what-if” scenario would be if the Lil’ Slugger’s police case had received *no* media attention; for instance, Yūichi’s classmates, having not heard of Lil’ Slugger, would not have been “manipulated” into thinking that Yūichi was the criminal and he would have had no need for Lil’ Slugger. When applied to Lil’ Slugger, this aspect of consumutopia becomes a commentary on sensationalism in the media.

#### *Accessibility*

This characteristic is closely related to ubiquity and, as such, will be briefly addressed. After all, “products that are ubiquitous...are easily obtainable, can be conveniently bought, and have...a better chance of satisfying a consumer’s desires and generating profits” (McVeigh 2000:233). Lil’ Slugger actually satisfies this requirement *better* than Hello Kitty since television broadcasts are free. Not only can the public

observe the media's analysis on the attacks from the store windows of electronic stores (as Tsukiko does on occasion), but they can turn on their televisions at home to find the same information. This is not to say that those who seek out cuteness would also seek out news stories related to juvenile delinquency, but that the information on the Lil' Slugger attacks is always accessible to the general public (it is difficult to gauge how often news reports of the Lil' Slugger attacks appear in *Paranoia Agent*, but Tsukiko is seen watching these reports at various times during the day) and that interest in capturing Lil' Slugger increases as the attacks continue. In addition, "consumption" of Lil' Slugger-related news stories is not subject to any kind of production constraint, as Hello Kitty is (and Maromi as well when the images of her vanish in episode 12). For instance, fights broke out at a McDonald's in Taiwan after the fast food restaurant ran out of Hello Kitty and Daniel (her boyfriend) stuffed dolls that were part of a "Hello Kitty Meal Package" (Ko 2003:175), similar to the social unrest that occurs after Tokyo's Maromi goods vanish.

### *Projectability*

The fourth trait of an element of consumutopia is projectability. This gives the individual the ability to give whatever meaning to the object that he or she desires. Even though Sanrio has a concrete backstory for the cat, how Hello Kitty's *appearance* can be interpreted is extremely ambiguous. Since she has no expression to speak of and appears as a small, white cat, "her plainness characterizes her as a cryptic symbol waiting to be interpreted and filled with meaning. Thus, she functions as a mirror that reflects whatever image, desire or fantasy an individual brings to it" (McVeigh 2000:234).

Kitty's lack of expression actually provides an interesting irony: even though a large number of people partake in the consumption of Hello Kitty, each person can purchase merchandise as an individualistic consumer choice. To give an example, someone might purchase Hello Kitty merchandise to express to the world that he or she is a happy, cheery person like Hello Kitty, while someone else makes the same purchase to show society that he or she simply loves cats. This might sound like a mundane example, but it is meant to demonstrate that two people are buying the same good to show off their individuality in different ways even though they're partaking in the same consumer trend. That is, they "have a feeling of solidarity (*rentaikan*) while being able to let others have a peek at their individuality (*kosei*)" (McVeigh 2000:235).

Lil' Slugger's mystique works in a similar way; because there is not very much specific information about him (Ikari and Maniwa do not even have a decent police sketch at the beginning, just a silhouette of a youth with a bat), the people are free to interpret Lil' Slugger in any way that makes sense to them. While public opinion of his motives gels as the series goes on, the episodes that center on a specific character (i.e., 1-7) could be taken as those characters' interpretations of what Lil' Slugger represents to them. To Yūichi, Lil' Slugger is a savior that can help him regain his status amongst his peers (interestingly, Yūichi never blames Lil' Slugger for his problems, but instead blames Ushiyama and the media). For Kozuka, he represents an ideal figure of popularity to be emulated. Ikari sees Lil' Slugger as a symbol of the next generation (for whom "no motive has become a motive for crime" [*sore jidai ni mokuteki to nakute shimatta hanzai*])). Taeko uses him as a tool to help her "become empty" ("*garanto ni*

*naritai*,” a fitting word choice considering she develops amnesia after the Lil’ Slugger attack). As Kon notes, he could be viewed as evil at first glance, but “for the victims, Lil’ Slugger exists to bring salvation” (Kon 2004b).<sup>46</sup>

Even though Lil’ Slugger performs the same action every time, the *why* of what he is doing changes drastically depending on the individual. It is comparable to Robert van Es’s commentary on *Rashōmon*: “In the twentieth century more and more people started to realize that they are not merely actors playing their parts in the theater of life, but also co-directors able to change the play – or at least a scene” (van Es 2002:102). Calling on Lil’ Slugger represents a type of “scene change”; the victim is trying to rely on an outside force to directly change an undesired aspect of his or her life. While they are all making the same directing change, they have different reasons for doing so.

### *Contagious Desire*

Because this trait deals primarily with intangibles and other amorphous factors, it is probably the most difficult to judge, a difficulty McVeigh readily admits. Contagious desire is best described as how quickly the populace will grow to want a given material object. While a natural contagion (word-of-mouth, for example) would certainly be acceptable, this type of infectious desire is usually driven by a company via television advertisements and advertising campaigns. McVeigh also points to another corporate method that would be effective as well: creating a “virtual world” that houses the character (in this case, Hello Kitty) where it would function similarly to a normal human being. By endowing this character with supposedly real-world emotions and actions (“A

---

<sup>46</sup> “*Shōnen batto wa ikken jaakuna sonzai toshite egakaremasu ga, shikashi higaisha ni totte shōnen batto wa sukui wo motarasu sonzai de [aru].*”

very energetic young girl, Kitty loves to play outdoors.”), this would provide the public with a way to associate with the character (McVeigh 2000:235-6). This relates back to the idea of projectability since by giving Hello Kitty a “real” life, Sanrio is essentially giving their customers a way to project their life experiences onto the cat; in this way, “what is produced is the experience rather than a thing” (Clammer 1997:60).

It is just as difficult to show that contagious desire is a trait of Lil’ Slugger, especially since no one really wants to die (Zebra, Fuyubachi, Kamome, and possibly Kozuka excluded). However, people do not try to associate with the character, but instead with the *legend* of Lil’ Slugger. While episodes 8, 9, and 10 do not relate directly to the story, they are meant to demonstrate how much Lil’ Slugger has become enmeshed into the lives of ordinary people. From a media perspective, this makes sense: related to the discussion of “ubiquity,” the legend of Lil’ Slugger grew after Kozuka was killed. The stories told by the housewives in episode 9 are about common pressures in Japanese society, such as going through examination hell or dealing with an “evil” mother-in-law, so they actually show how the legend relates to ordinary Japanese instead of someone with a type of psychosis, such as Harumi.

Perhaps it would be easier to explain the spread of the legend of Lil’ Slugger by examining him as a type of “myth,” especially because of Kon’s fascination with myths.<sup>47</sup>

As word of Lil’ Slugger spreads from person to person, no one tells the next person or group of people of his origin; eventually, they forget about the first attack, especially by

---

<sup>47</sup> Throughout interviews he has done, Kon has reiterated his fascination with myths; in particular, he likes to compare myths from Japan to those of the West (his conclusion is that Western myths tend to follow a typical pattern of having a “hero” and a “happy ending” while Japanese myths tend to be less concrete). He has speculated that movies could be a reaction to myths that society has lost and thus intentionally tries to include “mythical” elements in his films (Kon 2002a, 2002c).

the time that Misae hears the rumors that are spread when she is walking back home (episode 11). Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty – in her discussion of how myths are perceived and created – notes that this anonymity regarding an origin of a myth is important for it to have a type of mystical power (O'Flaherty 1995:28). While the attacks are originally linked to Tsukiko by the “experts” that discuss the Lil' Slugger case, the instance of the first attack becomes increasingly unimportant as the people of Tokyo are focused only on the current carnage and not how it began.

It is easy for the audience to see how this myth is “created,” but for each individual who hears the story, it is as if the embellishments that each person adds were *always* part of the Lil' Slugger mythology. With each addition to his legend, the actual Lil' Slugger becomes more and more powerful, as evidenced by his increasingly monstrous appearances in his confrontations with Misae and Maniwa/Radar Man. The ending point of this evolution is the black ooze Lil' Slugger becomes which is capable of destroying entire buildings (as well as – in a possible reference to *Ringu/The Ring* – the ability to flow out of a television set). Similar to contagious desire, myth-making is done by a “transformation through time: what begins as an individual experience of rebellion against society...becomes the new charter for a myth of a new society” (O'Flaherty 1995:30); for this discussion, the individual act of Tsukiko striking herself with a lead pipe becomes the origin of the Lil' Slugger myth that is known by all of society. However, this raises the issue of how Lil' Slugger was created.

### The Creation of Lil' Slugger

While we have previously examined the growth and maintenance of Lil' Slugger, we have not touched upon how he came into existence. Because Kon gives almost no information regarding how Lil' Slugger came into existence other than that he originated within Tsukiko's mind (and just saying that "Tsukiko thought him up" does not seem terribly satisfying), this must be done with only the clue that Lil' Slugger and Maromi are the same and that he exists to alleviate a person's problems. As has been previously discussed, Hello Kitty (and Maromi as well) and Lil' Slugger are both elements of a consumutopia. Since they both allow for "perfect consumption," Lil' Slugger's existence can then be thought of as a symbolic outgrowth of consumerism.

#### *A Metaphorical Creation*

Richard Wilk has a somewhat philosophical approach to consumption. His approach is to throw objectivity right out the window and focus on how to define consumption in metaphorical terms. As he states, "One can never abandon metaphor. The idea of perfect scientific objectivity about consumption is a futile illusion because metaphor is an essential part of our cognitive process" (Wilk 2004:24). While this statement is certainly open to debate, it seems to be relevant to a discussion of *Paranoia Agent*, which, at times, can probably be viewed *entirely* as a metaphor.

Wilk begins his chapter of *Elusive Consumption* by moving away from "objectivity" and assuming that "almost every aspect of consumption is laden with moral value and meaning." He notes that the reasons people consume "have very little to do with acts of consumption" (Wilk 2004:11). His next step is to break down what

consumption means from a semantic perspective by first examining a separate chain of words. The first chain that he creates is that a person begins his or her life by being born, then proceeds through the course of life itself, and ends with death (that is, birth->life->death). The second chain is to examine the “life” of a consumer product: the product enters into existence through “production,” moves into the hands of the public via “exchange,” and finally leaves the world through “consumption” (production->exchange->consumption). Both chains are then set side-by-side: consumption becomes a type of “death” as it means a product can no longer be consumed. While this is perhaps too strong of a generalization (for instance, his model does not take into account practices that put consumer products back into circulation [“reincarnation” in his human life-model], such as eBay), it does provide a useful way to examine Lil’ Slugger.

To examine how Wilk’s model applies to Lil’ Slugger, we shall document how one of the victims makes a “call out” to Lil’ Slugger before applying Wilk’s model to the idea of a “makeshift salvation.” There must first be a point where there is a negative change in the victim’s life (here, I use the word “victim” as an indication that he or she will be attacked by Lil’ Slugger, not as implying that the person deserves pity for his or her actions). Not only does that person’s life change, but it then contains a problem for which a solution must be obtained. This desire for a solution is necessary or else there would be no need for Lil’ Slugger to appear. For example, Hirukawa learns that he must come up with two million yen to pay Makabe the *yakuza* boss and Harumi must find a way to reconcile her marriage and Maria, her other personality.

The character must then deal with his or her environment. Their psychologically problematic minds try to develop some kind of harmony between the problem and the outside world. That is, instead of permanently solving the problem, the character looks for a way to temporarily appease it. As the victims become more and more separated from reality, there is eventually a type of “demand” for a makeshift salvation, similar to how a society could create a demand for some type of consumer good. This would be the “production” part of the model: the production of the temporary fix. The first makeshift salvations the victims try to create are ones that they personally think of. For example, Harumi’s plan to get rid of Maria is to throw away all of Maria’s belongings. Similarly, Taeko initially wants to have revenge on her father by committing suicide. When these solutions prove ineffective, Lil’ Slugger is seen as a bringer of “real” makeshift salvations, as if he were a vendor of genuine, Sanrio-created Hello Kitty piece of merchandise and the characters could only create cheap knock-offs.

The “exchange” aspect of Wilk’s model is how the victims receive their “salvation.” The method is almost always the same: Lil’ Slugger attacks one of the victims with a baseball bat. Afterwards, the “consumption” part of the model is the aftermath of the attack and how the attack fixes a victim’s problems. The makeshift salvation that Lil’ Slugger can provide a person is what is being consumed (as if he was providing a service for the people of Tokyo), as he provides a way for the characters to come to terms with their surroundings in a way that they were previously unable to do. He also becomes a literal manifestation of Wilk’s life model because his actions

eventually do mean the deaths of those that call upon him, beginning metaphorically with Taeko because she develops amnesia, and literally with Kozuka.

At first glance, the violence that Lil' Slugger represents is difficult to merge with Wilk's metaphorical construction. Wilk ultimately views consumption as something that is morally neutral; it could assume power over a person, but it is the responsibility of the individual to assert control over the forces of consumption (Wilk 2004:20). However, Lil' Slugger is no different; if the masses were able to accept reality and handle it to the best of their abilities, there would not be a need for the "production" of what Lil' Slugger provides. As Misae (who appears to be the mouthpiece for Kon in *Paranoia Agent*) states, human beings are always *capable* of facing reality, but she tells Lil' Slugger that he actually "[deludes] people with temporary peace of mind." As such, Wilk's view actually fits in with this construction of Lil' Slugger in that he can only gain power over human beings if they give him that power.

### **Radar Man as an Opponent of Lil' Slugger**

One character in *Paranoia Agent* does not want to yield this power to the phantasm. After Maniwa is forced to leave the police force, he assumes an alter ego: the "super"-hero Radar Man. Realistically, he appears as a disheveled man wearing odd goggles and a cape, but from Maniwa's perspective (and Lil' Slugger's as well), he is a fully costumed, sword-wielding hero and the world's last hope (quite literally because Ikari has given up on the case) to battle Lil' Slugger. Instead of thinking of Maniwa as psychotic, it would be more appropriate to think of Radar Man as a consumeristic symbol

in the same manner as Lil' Slugger. That is, if Lil' Slugger is a symbolic force, then Maniwa – as Radar Man – is another symbol designed to combat him. After all, “in a society predicated upon the marketing of images [which would include Maromi as well as Lil' Slugger], images become a weapon of resistance” (Nava 1992:163) and Maniwa is essentially trying to “fight fire with fire.”

Maniwa's change of role from policeman to superhero is rooted in the same logic as the superhero comic books that Radar Man has his foundations in: because the police force is insufficient in keeping order in the city, a “larger than life” symbol of justice is needed (Bongco 2000:93). Maniwa was unable to apprehend Lil' Slugger when he was a mere man, so he became a superhero in order to elevate himself in terms of moral and symbolic authority. He is creating the necessary “distance between the hero figure and aspects of establishment” such as the police (Bongco 2000:93). Maniwa is actually similar to Hirukawa in this regard, as Hirukawa also began to think of himself as a higher type of authority, one who could accept bribes from the *yakuza* without considering himself any less of a man. The difference between the two is that Hirukawa is still forced to deal with reality as the *yakuza* threatens the harmony of his family life. Maniwa has no such ties to the real world, so he can immerse himself in his fantasy world where he is fantastically able to hear anything via his radar pack.

If we think of Maniwa as a fan of superheroes in general, then his redefinition of his own personal identity actually falls into line with trends in comic book production, where fans “are not passive consumers of a cultural product,” but “are in many ways

active in its creation” (Bongco 2000:128).<sup>48</sup> In essence, Maniwa’s actions near the end of the series are his way of scripting his own comic book. The end of episode 7 becomes his origin story, and episodes 12 and 13 are his climactic battle against Lil’ Slugger. Kon shows the audience a part of this process: when Maniwa finds the bat that Tsukiko’s father used ten years ago to “hunt” Lil’ Slugger, he “rewrites” it as a holy sword necessary for Lil’ Slugger’s defeat.

From a consumeristic standpoint, Maniwa is actually following an old cliché: if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em. Because he and Ikari were unable to capture Lil’ Slugger – a manifestation of consumerism – when they were policemen, Maniwa literally robes himself in consumerism and becomes a symbol himself. This line of reasoning is based on the idea that one can most easily change a system by acting within it. Superhero comics are generally perceived to allow the reader to escape the confines of everyday life, similar to how the protagonists of *Paranoia Agent* have called upon Lil’ Slugger. Maniwa’s belief is apparently that only by becoming an escapist symbol like Lil’ Slugger can he effectively take him down. Unfortunately for him, Radar Man’s attempts to destroy Lil’ Slugger are no more successful than Maniwa the detective’s; his fights are ineffective and the “holy sword” can only temporarily damage Lil’ Slugger. Radar Man’s primary purpose is instead to guide Tsukiko and force her to come to terms with the truth. The message seems to be that even positive methods of escape like becoming a superhero are still not as effective as confronting one’s problems directly.

---

<sup>48</sup> We could perhaps label this as a type of “fanatic identity”: claiming oneself to be a fan of a specific type of pop culture trend (a fan of comic books or a specific comic book character) or a location (a fan of a sports team).

## Conclusion

Lil' Slugger is an exception to a statement I made in chapter 1: whereas most personal identity searches ask "Who am I supposed to be?", a look at Lil' Slugger's identity must first ask "Who is he?" because his origin is never clearly explained. The audience learns that he comes from the mind of a 10-year-old Tsukiko when she tries to shift responsibility for the death of her dog, but *why* he exists is never fully explored. One possibility is that Lil' Slugger emerges from loss and that Kon's message is that consumerism always leads to some type of loss (after all, purchasing a dog is still a business transaction).<sup>49</sup> If we examine Lil' Slugger not as a real world organism, but as a metaphorical construction, a similar kind of reasoning emerges, as shown by Wilk's model of equating "death" with "consumption." Kon notes in *Paranoia Agent* that Lil' Slugger is similar to the consumeristic icons that the public sees and his existence must be explored with this as a backdrop. A discussion of Lil' Slugger also lends itself as a starting point for a look at consumerism in general in *Paranoia Agent* and how it affects one's personal identity.

---

<sup>49</sup> This actually has a Buddhist subtext as the religion holds that any attachments one has – especially to material objects – will ultimately lead to suffering.

PART III  
IDENTITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Chapter 5  
Consumerism and Identity

The movie *Fight Club* could be considered a commentary on hyper-consumeristic societies such as the United States or Japan. Tyler Durden's plot to bomb the buildings of several credit card companies represents his wish to neutralize the playing field and free the people from their dependence on the most popular form of payment for commercial goods. However, Henry Giroux notes that "consumerism in *Fight Club* is criticized primarily as an ideological force and existential experience that weakens and domesticates men, robbing them of their primary role as producers whose bodies affirm and legitimate their sense of agency and control" (Giroux 2002:270). In other words, consumerism in *Fight Club* is related to a search for male identity instead of socio-economics.

Consumerism takes a similar position in *Paranoia Agent*. While there are instances where the economic situations of the characters are related to their desire to purchase goods (such as Hirukawa and his reliance on *yakuza* bribe money), consumption is best viewed as being symbolic of the wishes of the characters. As opposed to being an obstacle to male identity in *Fight Club*, consumerism in *Paranoia Agent* – in the eyes of the characters – becomes a quantifier of many types of identity and it shapes how the

characters interact with the world. This chapter examines how consumerism functions as a symbolic building block of personal identity in the Tokyo of *Paranoia Agent*. The characters do not rely on an icon like Maromi only because of purchasing trends but because she represents some aspect of themselves that they wish to see.

### **Tsukiko and Maromi**

While every character in the series has some kind of connection to Maromi and/or Lil' Slugger, Tsukiko has a more unique relationship with Maromi (and – by extension – the Maromi-doll that she always carries). Created due to some force hidden away in Tsukiko's subconscious (which is, of course, the Fantastic interpretation;<sup>50</sup> the Realistic one is that Tsukiko is schizophrenic and hears a voice she believes to be Maromi's), the force of Maromi appears to Tsukiko as an almost-parental source of protection. As her Maromi-doll says, "I'll protect *only* you, Tsukiko" ("*Boku ga Tsuki-chan dake wo mamotte ageru.*"). Creating a type of protector for oneself (even if unintentionally) is actually a common theme in Japanese pop art; Tezuka Osamu's titular character in *Tetsuwan Atomu* (*Astro Boy*) was designed to replace his creator's son. Similarly, the robotic cat Doraemon was created to help a young Nobita get through his daily life as an ordinary child. However, what separates Maromi from previous models of a "created protector" is that the audience generally is not allowed to see any negative aspects of a protector such as Astro Boy. Kon shows that the "help" that Maromi provides does not allow Tsukiko to develop as a human being. Tsukiko also seems unsurprised with her

---

<sup>50</sup> See Chapter 3 for an explanation of my usage of "Fantastic" and "Realistic."

Maromi doll moving around in the first episode, so it is possible that Maromi has been dictating Tsukiko's life since the accident that occurred when Tsukiko was 10 years old.

Tsukiko is similar to Lain, the titular character of another psycho-thriller anime, *Serial Experiments Lain*.<sup>51</sup> Both of these young women are unable to meaningfully interact with the rest of society (though Lain eventually learns to do so), and they both use some type of consumer good to gain power and social capital. For Tsukiko, it is through her creation of the Maromi character and for Lain, it is her eventual mastery of the wired (*Serial Experiments Lain*'s version of the Internet). Susan Napier notes how the bear suit that Lain wears is a symbol of "her own desire to escape reality" (Napier 2002:432), so Lain has created a personal identity centered on the consumer good that she constantly wears. In a similar vein, Tsukiko takes this concept one step further: her personal identity is centered on a consumeristic good that she has *created*. Unlike Lain's personality, which was created over the wired, Tsukiko's "alter-ego" can actually communicate to her; in fact, Maromi's will actually seems to override Tsukiko's ability to process outside information (for example, when Maromi admonishes Tsukiko for "thinking too much" [*kangaesugi datte ba*]) about the recent Lil' Slugger incidents). Whereas Lain eventually sheds the bear suit to become a "lord" of the wired, Tsukiko

---

<sup>51</sup> *Serial Experiments Lain* was broadcast in Japan in 1998 and directed by Nakamura Ryūtarō. It chronicles the life of a young girl named Lain that is portrayed as introverted and shy in the beginning but uses the "wired" – the series' version of the Internet – to overcome her shyness and eventually gains mastery over the wired itself. One commonality between *Paranoia Agent* and *Serial Experiments Lain* is the presence of a world that is separate from the "real" world and the official website for *Serial Experiments Lain* explicitly asks if a person can live entirely in a virtual world ("It is the beginning of the birth of a race that can only exist in the network.") ("*Nettowaaku no sekai de shika sonzaishinai 'jinshu' mo umarehajimeru.*") (*Serial Experiments Lain* 1998).

cannot detach herself from her Maromi-based identity until the very end of the series (even then, whether or not she finds an independent personal identity is left ambiguous).

Napier also used Lain as a representative for young, female protagonists (*shōjo*, lit. “young girl”) that “may also speak to Japanese fears concerning their own culture.” The ability to forget or remember various facts of one’s life are “forms of aesthetic judgment...Japan seems caught between forgetting and remembering. The *shōjo* in [her] chapter illustrate the need to move beyond this ambiguous condition” (emphasis added) (Napier 2005:192). Therein lays Tsukiko’s problem: she is unable to forget *or* remember. Her reliance on Maromi keeps her in a state of paralysis: when she tries to remember the past (as when she sees the news report of Lil’ Slugger’s arrest), Maromi reminds her that she should not do so, and when she attempts to forget about everything troubling her (such as when Ikari and Maniwa tell her that the initial attack never happened), she must then rely on Lil’ Slugger as a type of escape. An example of this duality is in episode 12: during a phone call with Maniwa, he tells her that he knows of the accident from when Tsukiko was 10 years old and tries to make her remember it. The Maromi-doll cuts the phone cord and yells at Tsukiko, “No, Tsukiko! Don’t think!” (“*Dame da yo, Tsukichan! Kangaecha dame da!*”) Her final recollection of how her dog – also named Maromi – died becomes her way of remembering and accepting the past, which allows her to move on. This seems to be the primary point of *Paranoia Agent* in terms of its message for the audience: instead of running away from one’s problems, one must *accept* those problems and try to solve them regardless of how painful it might be for the individual (this will be explored in more detail in Chapter 6 and the Conclusion).

### Consumerism as a Means of Escape

Tsukiko's reliance on Maromi is actually related to a more common trend behind the symbolism of consumerism: escapism. By letting her Maromi doll "think" for her, Tsukiko does not have to deal with the real world and can then become even more detached from the people around her. Since Tsukiko's personal thoughts are very rarely revealed, it is difficult to describe what her interpretation of the real world looks like. However, the other characters are more forthcoming about how they use consumerism as a way to escape the problems of their lives.

Hirukawa could be seen as the embodiment of this type of escapism; the episode he is featured in (episode 4) describes how he relies on consumerism to escape his unsatisfying life as a low-level security guard. In a conversation with Ikari, Hirukawa claims that he has no potential for job advancement. Considering the importance of one's career to his or her personal identity<sup>52</sup> – which could possibly be labeled an "employment identity" – Hirukawa seemingly has a bleak future that is devoid of the potential for personal change. As he notes, "the only thing I have left is my family"<sup>53</sup> and it is doubtful that his primary job gives him the funds he needs for consumption beyond what is necessary for the well-being of his family.

However, before the events of *Paranoia Agent*, Hirukawa begins to accept bribes from the *yakuza*. The added income brings two changes in Hirukawa's perspective on

---

<sup>52</sup> John McCreery notes that "for the typical middle-class man [in Japan], his job would be his primary source of identity" (McCreery 2000:247); this is somewhat over-generalized, but useful for examining Hirukawa and Ikari.

<sup>53</sup> "Ore ni wa mo kazoku shika inain dakara."

life: what he actually does and how he thinks of himself. What he does with the dirty money is relatively clear due to the montage of images seen during his conversation with Ikari: he begins to live life to the fullest. In addition to building work on a dream house for his family, he goes to karaoke bars and casinos with the *yakuza* members and orders prostitutes, which the audience first sees in episode 3 when he is with Maria. Hirukawa is able to use his consumeristic actions as a way of gaining some kind of control over his life, even in getting his call girls to address him as “Daddy” (“*otōsan*”). Instead of a bleak future in a dead-end job, the corrupt policeman now has a bright outlook on life that he can mold to his own desires. By being oblivious to the fact that the *yakuza* could possibly demand repayment and end these experiences (which is exactly what happens), Hirukawa can also view this future as potentially endless and somewhat utopic (which will be addressed further in chapter 6).

Consumerism has also changed how Hirukawa sees himself. The most interesting part of episode 4 is the recurring juxtaposition of what Hirukawa does in real life and scenes from a manga that is apparently entitled *A Man's Path*<sup>54</sup> (“*Otoko michi*,” which is also the name of the episode). This manga is about a male protagonist that journeys to save his lover from a group of bandits despite the obstacles that he encounters. Through minor comments by Hirukawa (such as calling himself a “shining example of a man,” [*otoko ippiki*,” the official Geneon translation is “lone wolf”]), it is clear that he thinks of himself as being similar to the character from *A Man's Path* in terms of nobility and his purpose in life. This rationale seems to stay with him even when he is forced to begin

---

<sup>54</sup> Hirukawa can be seen reading this manga when the *yakuza* boss Makabe arrives in his limousine.

stealing to repay the *yakuza*. His consumption of this manga (combined with his other exploits) serves as Hirukawa's escape from being "security guard" Hirukawa to "manga hero" Hirukawa and provides a deeper and more "pure" meaning to his life.

### **Consumerism as a Type of Search**

Ikari also seems to search for meaning in his life, but within the constraints of his current position in life. John Clammer makes an important point regarding the status of work in postmodern Japan in his book, *Contemporary Urban Japan*: "Work for many Japanese, especially younger ones, is no longer for building the nation. *It is for building the self*. Work, in other words, is undertaken for motives of consumption" (emphasis added) (Clammer 1997:56). Even though Ikari does not have a job explicitly designed for the maintenance of Japan's economic power, it would still be useful to examine how his work is related to his own interpretation of his personal identity because Ikari's search for Lil' Slugger actually becomes a quest for a clear understanding of how he fits into Japanese society.

Before going into more detail, a brief comparison with *Millennium Actress* is necessary. The entire purpose of the movie – indeed, the purpose of Chiyoko's existence – is her chase after a rebel painter whom she encountered when she was a girl. Even though she realizes when she is older that she no longer remembers what the man's face looks like, she also accepts the fact that her interest in the man was of secondary importance to actually chasing after him. As she says in the last line of the film, "It's the

chasing after him I really love.” In other words, the ending itself is unimportant and it is the drive *towards* the ending that is so important in Chiyoko’s life.

If we examine *Paranoia Agent* from Ikari Keiichi’s point of view, the series becomes a type of chase that is similar to Chiyoko’s. During the first half of the series, Ikari chases after Lil’ Slugger as part of his duty as a detective. However, Ikari soon sees the apparent gap between his generation and the next one, which is personified by this criminal who takes the form of a middle-school student. Because his “old-fashioned” policeman’s intuition appears to fail him, Ikari’s search for Lil’ Slugger is also a quest for the justification that his method of crime investigation – and by extension, his entire generation – still has a place in the world. In other words, he’s not just looking for Lil’ Slugger; Ikari is trying to reestablish his own *generational* identity and this identity requires that his age bracket still be able to meaningfully contribute to society. By catching Kozuka, he seems to obtain the justification that he needs.

Unfortunately, Lil’ Slugger kills the copycat criminal and thus takes away the symbol that helped Ikari rationalize his place in the world. After losing sight of what he was chasing after, Ikari eventually gives in to the same consumeristic forces that the other victims had. This time, the “makeshift salvation” comes not in the form of Lil’ Slugger, but in Inukai, an ex-convict who became a security guard and co-worker of Ikari. Inukai, when he is trying to convince Ikari that the Lil’ Slugger case was not his fault, actually uses the same kind of language that Maromi used in a previous episode in the same kind of situation. His claim that Ikari is “just tired” (“*Danna wa tsukareteitaru dake de sa.*”) and attempt to shift the blame from Ikari to the Lil’ Slugger case itself is similar to

Maromi's conversation with a little boy (in episode 10's cartoon *Mellow Maromi*) where she says that the boy is not at fault for his lack of baseball skills. The boy is "just tired" and needs to "take a rest" ("*Yasumi na yo.*"). Ikari finally gives in to the logic of redirecting blame that he had spent the first half of the series fighting against. This is symbolized by picking up a Maromi keychain which he later admits "is kind of cute if you look at it closely" ("*Kore yoku miru to kawaii desu ne.*"). Finding security in blaming the next generation for his problems, Ikari leaves the bar and enters the Flat World, which will be examined further in a discussion related to spaces within *Paranoia Agent*.

To conclude this section, Ikari exits the Flat World the same way that Chiyoko exits the real world: by realizing that his search had no end. He says, "My place disappeared long ago! The reality is that I have no place where I'm supposed to be."<sup>55</sup> Ikari's conclusion is actually similar to graphic artist Frank Miller's commentary on his own work, *The Dark Knight Returns*, a graphic novel about an older Bruce Wayne's struggle with the fact that Batman's position in the world has changed in the past twenty years: "The key transition is his recognition he's no longer part of the authority...this knowledge that he's no longer on the side of the powers that be" (Bongco 2000:142). Ikari similarly must accept that his position as a symbol of authority has changed; his final confession is an admission that his search could never have an ending and he had to either find solace in the search itself or come to terms with reality. In the final episode of *Paranoia Agent*, Ikari finally accepts the fact that there is no longer a place for him the

---

<sup>55</sup> "*Ore no ibasho nanzatto gurinen da yo! Sono ibasho wa naitte genjitsu koso na, ore no hontō no ibasho nan da!*"

world; as a symbol of that acceptance, Ikari takes a baseball bat and uses it to strike the Maromi keychain that he found. The keychain hits the sky and causes the entire Flat World to shatter.

### **Consumerism as a Method of Identity Confirmation**

Ikari's search for his "true" identity is related to a redefinition of "identity-seeking" that I originally proposed: asking oneself, "Who am I *supposed* to be?" Consumerism becomes a way for people to reexamine who they are and "assert sovereignty over one's very existence" whenever they feel detached from the rest of society; "consumption in this situation, far from violating the idea of personal authenticity, comes to constitute it" (Clammer 1997:63,66).

In particular, Chōno Harumi is an example of someone *without* sovereignty over her existence. Suffering from multiple personality disorder, Harumi has learned to live her life alongside her second personality, Maria. What is ironic (and somewhat fitting as a type of "yin-yang" dualism) is that Harumi, a graduate student, is unable to partake in modern consumption, while Maria, as a prostitute, is a *source* of consumption. Harumi and Maria contact each other via an answering machine and it becomes a device used for both personalities to try and maintain their respective identities. After all, their messages to each other primarily consist of declarations of which one is "real" (for example, "There is not Maria!" [*Maria nante inai!*"] or "You're the fake!" [*Misemono wa anta!*"])). Maria makes it clear that she enjoys who she is and how she lives her life, while Harumi often seems out of place wherever she is, as she is not even able to have

meaningful conversations with the professor whom she works for and eventually agrees to marry. In Harumi's words, "I often feel like I don't know where I am," ("*Tokidoki jibun wa doko ni iru to ka suru wakaranakunaru.*") and "I feel like I'm nobody. I don't know who I am." ("*Dare demo nai. Dare dakara wakaranai.*") Odder still, when the two personalities are juxtaposed, Maria – the "fake" one – seems to have a better grip on reality than the "real" one (i.e. Harumi). As such, it is difficult for the two personalities to communicate with each other since their perspectives and interests are by nature nonnegotiable; Harumi wants to live a quiet, uneventful life, while Maria wants to live life to the fullest. These two poles should balance each other out, but Maria's firm grip on who she is and Harumi's vanishing self-understanding (and "second-self"-understanding) tilts the scale of control in favor of Maria.

When Harumi agrees to marry Akihiko (the professor), she believes that she must rid herself of Maria. She actually tries to undertake this by using what I will call "consumptive reasoning": if she hides Maria's clothes, makeup, and personal belongings – that is, her consumeristic possessions – then the other personality will disappear. Harumi is removing Maria's tools of "identity authentication," so Maria should vanish along with them. This turns out not to be the case, as Maria reappears along with her belongings and the message, "I won't let you go." ("*Inasanai.*") Harumi tries this again, only this time taking Maria's things to the dump; this seems to be equivalent to Wilk's metaphor of consumption where the "death" of the product leads to the death of the individual. In the end, the only weapon Harumi has is to call on Lil' Slugger, who provides a type of release similar to what Yūichi claimed he experienced. The message

here is that the only way Harumi could free herself of a persona defined by consumerism was *another* symbol defined by consumerism (perhaps similar to Maniwa's decision to become Radar Man). Like the other protagonists, the audience does not see Harumi and Maria's lives after Lil' Slugger and Maromi vanish, so we cannot see if the two personalities are able to confront their problem.

### **Conclusion**

Purchasing and using consumer goods is generally not just about the actual economic act of buying something. Consumerism becomes a way for the individual to reach a type of understanding about him or herself. Consumer objects similarly become a way for the people to explore their own natures and negotiate how they view the world. However, consumerism also becomes a way to manipulate the space that one occupies, whether that space is in the real world or is constructed inside one's mind. The next chapter will examine how personal identity is manipulated inside of various types of spaces and how some of these spaces are created because of consumerism.

## Chapter 6

### Space and Identity

The Wachowski brothers' groundbreaking film, *The Matrix*, is interesting because it forces the audience to ask *where* the Matrix is. While this might sound like a trivial question, it has no simple answer. Even though – in objective reality – it is actually inside the code run by the machines, this would not be a satisfactory answer to those that were actually living inside this computer program; it could be considered to exist inside the minds of the people forced to live there, but this conflicts with the experiences of those living outside the Matrix. Since this fantasy world is actually more pleasant to live in than the harsh reality of the outside world, selecting which world is the “real” one also depends on whether a person prefers a pleasurable world to live in or cold, hard reality.

This example leads to an examination of what exactly is “space.” Similar to the discussion of “identity” in chapter 1, in an academic context, space is a subjective term whose definition depends on the context and content of the discussion.<sup>56</sup> In *Paranoia Agent*, the concept of space takes on many different meanings, ranging from actual spaces (such as Ikari's Flat Word) to metaphorical ones (the world of Yūichi's paranoid mind) that arise from different mental states of the characters. This chapter will examine different connotations of space and how they apply to *Paranoia Agent*.

---

<sup>56</sup> This was also seen in chapter 3, where a distinction needed to be drawn between spaces similar to what we would call the real world (the Realistic interpretation) and those that are dissimilar from it (the Fantastic interpretation).

### The Consumeristic Side of Space

The first task at hand is to look at how space is redefined from a consumptive perspective. Space becomes both a term for an actual area and a generalized term for the emotions that one associates with the area. Perhaps the best example of this is found in Lynne Tillman's book, *Motion Sickness*:

In *Motion Sickness*, the narrator feels liberated by travel and financial independence. She comments on "the freedoms that money can buy" and observes that the act of "buying a hotel room" is one in which she is "psychologically unburdened"...She imagines herself being unburdened psychologically and able to express herself, a liberation that comes through the economic. Hotel rooms are bought and the freedom given is marked both by guilt and the mercantile stamp of purchase. (Annesley 1998:78)

This example should be familiar to the reader. A hotel room is not only a physically different space than one's home, but also a mentally different one. Society generally associates hotels with freedom from responsibility and ordinary life because one of a hotel's primary functions is to provide a place to stay at a vacation spot. Granted, another primary use is for business travel, but the hotel room still becomes a different mental space from one's home. Consumption revolves around not just the purchase of a room, but the emotions associated with that room. In other words, "the tourist consumes the *differences* that the foreign space offers" (emphasis added) (Gottdeiner 2000:266).

This kind of transition can also be seen without physically moving to a different location. Newer forms of communication – such as cell phones – have been criticized as separating the individual from the rest of society because even though a person is able to communicate with others that are a distance away, it is at the expense of communicating with those immediately around the individual. As part of a study about the images people

associate with cell phones, one person said that “Japan is gradually losing its traditions because of cell phones” as each person becomes more and more distant from the rest of the country (yet in the same study, someone else replied that “cell phones haven’t penetrated Japanese culture yet”) (McVeigh 2003:23). The very first scene of episode 1 (as well as one of the final scenes of episode 13) is of a street full of people (all on cell phones) using a kind of reasoning that is prevalent in *Paranoia Agent*: shifting responsibility for their problems onto a scapegoat and making themselves the victims. In this manner, cell phones are being used in the process of “individualization”; that is, the individual is being separated from the rest of society. They become a “part of self-presentation tactics” and help define the individual’s social identity (McVeigh 2003:19, 31). Another interesting use of cell phones in *Paranoia Agent* is Harumi and Maria’s distinction between a cell phone for Maria’s work and one for Harumi’s; Harumi panics after she tries to get rid of Maria the first time because the calls that originally went to Maria’s phone now go to Harumi’s. The virtual spaces of the two personalities collide because of their cell phone usage, and the situation can only be resolved through the use of Lil’ Slugger. In this light, Kon portrays cell phones as another way to summon the force of Lil’ Slugger into the world.

However, this “separation” from society assumes a darker form in episode 8. Zebra, Fuyubachi, and Kamome meet due to a chat room – the most common example of a popularly-used virtual space – and they all agree to meet in person, but it is only so that

they can commit suicide.<sup>57</sup> The paradox of cell phones and other modern communication technologies is that even though they seem to “connect individuals [and] widen one’s circle of friends,” some would claim that they actually *simulate* human relations instead of providing meaningful communication (McVeigh 2003:28). The threesome mentioned above at first appear to escape from the paradox since they all express a desire to meet outside of the virtual world, but it is only through death.<sup>58</sup> This could be Kon’s message that meaningful communication via impersonal technology (in a space that doesn’t seem to exist) is a futile task.

As further evidence of this, there is also the message board that Tsukiko visits which contains commentary from the fans and critics of M&F’s products. After being confronted by Ikari and Maniwa, Tsukiko visits the company’s message board, possibly as a way to convince herself that she still has supporters. Because she is unable to effectively communicate with other human beings, she turns to a medium where there is essentially one-way communication (assuming, of course, that the recipient of the messages never replies, which seems to be true of Tsukiko). While some of her fans tell

---

<sup>57</sup> The plot of episode 8 has a basis in reality. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen the trend of “Internet Suicides” (“*Netto jisatsu*”) increase in Japan. What happens in these suicide pacts is similar to episode 8’s plot: a group of people meet in a chat room and agree to commit suicide. According to the *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 55 people died in this manner in 2003 (a rise of 21 from the year before) and 7 of those people were between 10 – 19 years old, so seeing Kamome partake in something like this is not unrealistic (“*Netto Jisatsu*” 2005). The problem is such a concern in Japan that Internet Service Providers have recently begun to give suspicious information to the police in order to prevent these suicides from happening (“*Netto de Jisatsu Yokoku*” 2007).

<sup>58</sup> One additional note is that Fuyubachi, Zebra, and Kamome are most likely going to spend the rest of their afterlives riding the bullet train and touring Japan. Marilyn Ivy, in *Discourses of the Vanishing*, provides an account of how Japan National Railway used the idea of “discovering” Japan to stimulate ticket sales (Ivy 1995:29-65). In this light, one could claim that the threesome of episode 8 cannot escape consumption even in death (granted, money is no longer necessary for them).

her not to worry (similar to what Maromi will tell her later on), there are also fans that turn on her and accuse her of making up the attack.

Even though Tsukiko is trying to confirm to herself that she is incapable of faking an attack, the fans are trying to solidify their fanatical identities that are centered around Maromi the dog, and this requires that they virtually assault Tsukiko. By commenting on the motives of their “idol,” the fans are “seeking to intensify their experience” of consuming Maromi. Instead of providing unanimous support to Tsukiko, they are also trying to be “creative agents” that apply their own “appropriates of meaning and interventions of energies within the space and time” of their passion (Kelly 2004:101). In other words, they are trying to apply their own individual interpretations of how they consume their idol. Tsukiko wanted to pursue a form of passive communication with the fans to try and relieve her mind, but instead, she discovered that these fans placed their own pursuit ahead of her mental comfort. Again, this is a case where impersonal communication is shown to be unsatisfactory in light of face-to-face communication (which is shown in the form of Tsukiko’s conversation with Maromi immediately following her visit to the message board).

### **Ikari’s Flat World**

Naturally, a consumer would prefer that the differences he or she consumes be as pleasant as possible. Since consumerism can be viewed as a way to alter one’s personal and social identities, one result is that the consumer must always redefine them. Gabriel and Lang compare consumerism to writing a story: the individual is “always rewriting the

earlier parts, so that the activity of writing becomes itself part of the story” (Gabriel and Lang 1995:86). If identity-seeking is a process, then the process must have some kind of ending point even if it can never be reached. This ending point could be referred to as a type of utopia.

In fact, the mysterious world that Ikari enters near the end of the series could be described as a utopia. Instead of relying on Lil’ Slugger to solve his problems, Ikari turns to the other major force of consumerism in *Paranoia Agent*: Maromi. Even though Ikari is not initially aware of it, the world that he enters is constructed out of Maromi merchandise (perhaps in some other-worldly dimension), so his world can be interpreted as the aforementioned “ending point” of the identity-seeking process. By Michel Foucault’s definition of a utopia:

Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces. (Foucault 1986:24)

The Flat World clearly occupies some kind of space outside of “reality,” though it is difficult to clearly ascertain where this world would be located. Instead of a world that is dominated by the current generation, this world has a nostalgic feel that is ideal for someone like Ikari, who yearns for a time when his generation’s line of thinking still made sense (which would make the Flat World the “inverted analogy” of the real world that Ikari has sought out). It might seem like a contradiction that a utopia could consist of a world from the past (in this case, 1950’s Japan), but for Ikari, the Flat World is perfect; that world – which is the old Japan that Ikari *remembers* to have existed – is different from objective reality’s post-war Japan. The nostalgia that the Flat World provides is “an

implicit critique of the present” and a statement that the past is superior to the present (Clammer 1997:139). This nostalgia is important, as it implies that consumerism has allowed Ikari to exist outside of the “real” world (Clammer 1997:9). Because Foucault claims that the real world is made up of “a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another” (Foucault 1986:23), a utopia must contain no relations at all in order to achieve perfection. Even though Ikari feels a sense of acceptance in the Flat World, there are no “real” persons there that could claim any kind of relation to him. This world makes sense to him until Tsukiko tries to redefine her personal identity so that she becomes his daughter (it would be reasonable to theorize that in Tsukiko’s potential utopia, she has a much closer relationship to her father; by Foucault’s definition, this utopia cannot exist). By creating a relation to him, she has poked a hole in Ikari’s utopia and thus allowed Misae to briefly appear to Ikari and remind him that this world cannot replace reality. He then realizes that as much as he wants the Flat World to exist, it is a hollow existence. Again, this is a sign that a positive escape is still not an acceptable alternative to facing reality.

### **The World of *Mellow Maromi***

One of the ways that Hello Kitty was able to achieve success (as was mentioned in the discussion of “contagious desire” in Chapter 4) was the creation of a Hello Kitty “world.” Most of the “facts” regarding Hello Kitty can be listed off by her fans: she has a sister named Mimi, is the weight of “three apples,” etc. The creation of a world for Hello Kitty to live in gives her a sense of power; she now can be seen as an actual “person” that

could be capable of societal interaction instead of as only an “icon.” In *Paranoia Agent*, the “power” of Maromi takes a more concrete meaning; as consumer awareness of her increases throughout the series, so too does her ability to influence the world around her and also her ability to protect Tsukiko from what she sees as negative elements. The point where this change is most notable is the creation of a Maromi anime, entitled *Mellow Maromi*. By giving her a “world” to live in, similar to Hello Kitty, Maromi now has a backstory that helps create the Maromi craze seen in episodes 11 and 12.

There also seems to be a parallel between Maromi’s world and the Flat World that Ikari eventually occupies. The Flat World is meant to be a realm where Ikari can feel at peace with himself; as mentioned before, it is a type of utopia where he does not need to think about what is going on. The Maromi anime seems to provide the same kind of sense of peace for the masses of Tokyo. During episode 11, Kon shows various figures – ranging from the main characters to a group of anonymous people – that are all shown sitting still with glazed-over expressions on their faces. The idea is that *Mellow Maromi*’s audience achieves the same kind of peace that Ikari experiences and they are equally as unconcerned with the problems of the real world. The Maromi anime can then be described as giving Maromi a symbolic type of power (similar to how Hello Kitty’s background gives her power in a shop) as well as *actual* power over the people that mindlessly watch her program.

#### *The Consuming Paradox*

The fact that almost everyone in *Paranoia Agent* eventually watches the show leads to the nature of individualistic choice. The fans tuning in probably think they are

watching for their own respective reasons, but their decision to watch *Mellow Maromi* actually bands them together into a block. Steven Miles is able to generalize this idea with what he calls “the consuming paradox”: “the idea that while...consumerism appears to offer us as individuals all sorts of opportunities and experiences,...as consumers we appear to be directed down certain predetermined routes of consumption which ensure that consumerism is ultimately as constraining as it is enabling” (Miles 1998:147). That is, what appears to be an individualistic choice is actually taken by many people at once. Scholars have had mixed reactions to this concept; Conrad Lodziak argues that consumers become entranced by the illusion of projectability and are actually unable to find more meaningful forms of expression. Miles counters by noting that “consumer goods [are a] resource which individual consumers can use as a means of constructing their social life” (Miles 1998:154, 159).

The portrayal of the general populace when they are watching the Maromi anime follows Lodziak’s stance. After the popularity of Maromi begins to grow (more specifically, around episode 10 with the production of the *Mellow Maromi* cartoon), the fans of the icon begin to coalesce into a more solid block of people. As a result, *everyone* begins to watch the cartoon. While each individual might think that he or she is watching the show for a unique reason, they actually converge into a group that appears (at least from their expressions during Misae’s soliloquy) to be consuming the show in the same manner. The Lodziak argument would be that these people will not experience anything more meaningful in how they view the program. Similarly, Misae must convince Lil’

Slugger “that human beings are not as weak or corrupt as you seem to think,”<sup>59</sup> a possible sign that the television program is the first stage in the public giving in to the dual forces of Maromi and Lil’ Slugger. The conclusion to this sense of “giving in” is the black ooze that Lil’ Slugger becomes: every individual follows a trend and a little bit of belief from each person combine to form the Tokyo-destroying entity.

### Exiting a Space

The issue then is similar to one faced by the protagonist in Jim Henson’s early directorial effort, *The Cube*<sup>60</sup>: how to leave an undesirable space. The Man in the Cube (as he is called in the ending credits; hereafter, he will be referred to as “the Man”) finds himself trapped in a cube-spaced room and spends the entire film trying to escape.

During his search for an exit, he hears the following song:

You’ll never get out, you’ll never get out, you’ll never get out of the cube.  
You’ll never get out, you’ll never get out, you’ll never get out till you’re dead!

While not a space in the “real world,” the people who rely on Lil’ Slugger can be thought of as occupying a similar place as the Man: a space of consumutopia that seemingly has no escape. As the Man’s quest was ultimately fruitless (the movie ends with the Man stumbling around his cube as the credits roll), we can ask the residents of Lil’ Slugger and

---

<sup>59</sup> In a statement to Lil’ Slugger in episode 11, Misae says, “*Ningen wa anata ga kangaeteiru hodo, yowaku mo asamashiku mo nai to iu koto wo hanashite agemasu.*”

<sup>60</sup> *The Cube* is an hour-long film produced and directed by Jim Henson before he began to gain fame for his puppetry. An experimental piece, it only aired once in 1969. The film demonstrates some early glimpses of postmodernism as one of the characters says, “Well, as I interpret what you’re doing here, this is all a very complex discussion of reality versus illusion. The perfect subject for the television medium!” (Hayes 2006)

Maromi's consumutopias a similar question: how does one escape from this space, especially if they cannot see the exit?

The primary solution is apparently to rely on oneself, as the Man attempted to do. Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto noted of Kurosawa Akira's *Rashōmon*: "The film underlines the man-made nature of the social chaos. What leads humans to destroy themselves is egotism. At the same time, *what saves humans comes from themselves, too*. Egotism must be countered by human compassion, honesty, and altruism" (emphasis added) (Yoshimoto 2000:183). The power to leave a consumutopia must thus come from within. This is where Kon's series differs from *The Cube*. Henson's film ends with the protagonist thinking that he has left his cube and remarking to a "warden," "It was such a revelation when I realized that this was me (holds up his hand to his face)." He then cuts his hand and is ecstatic to see that he is bleeding, but after tasting the blood, realizes that it is actually strawberry jam. The walls fade around him and he is back inside a cube. This nihilistic ending implies that an exit strategy probably does not exist for either the Man or anyone locked away inside a cube.

However, Kon's ending is somewhat more optimistic; Tsukiko is able to destroy Lil' Slugger (at least for the moment) by coming to terms with the fact that her negligence led to her dog's (the *original* Maromi) death. The next time we see her, she is walking across the street wearing a schoolgirl's outfit, a sign that she is trying to start over and reconstruct her life. Yet instead of a giant Maromi billboard, there is a giant animated cat that looks down on the rebuilt city. The final message is dualistic: salvation for the individual *can* come from within and requires a willingness to change, but a

salvation for society in general does not exist. As Maniwa says in the final Prophetic Vision, everything must go back to the beginning. Even then, a person's power over his or her surroundings can only do so much. For example, Ikari is able to escape from the Flat World, but the audience sees that he is still a low-level security guard; Tsukiko now wears a schoolgirl's outfit and has presumably left her job at M&F. The future is not exactly dismal for the primary characters, but they must now try to adjust to their new positions in life.

This seems to lead to a more general message for the rest of society that is consistent with the portrayal of Lil' Slugger as a villain: instead of trying to *escape* from the world, Kon's series holds that people must *adapt* to their problems and try to handle them the best that they can. Ikari and Tsukiko do not necessarily *escape* from their situations in the final episode, but instead adapt to what happens to them, similar to the way the Man in the Cube must learn to adapt to being in the cube for the rest of his life (since his attempts at escape prove futile).

### **Conclusion**

The circuitousness of *Paranoia Agent's* ending could be a subtle indication that people must try to control the spaces they occupy instead of escaping them. Instead of providing his series with a happy ending in the traditional sense of the term (what some might call a "Hollywood ending"), *Paranoia Agent* has a set of *satisfactory* endings for the characters; they learn to adjust to the real world instead of trying to run away from it. Even though it is nice to spend the night in a hotel room as a way to get a break from the

real world, permanently occupying a space such as this or Ikari's utopia is impossible. Like Lil' Slugger himself, consumeristic spaces are "makeshift salvations" that provide the individual with a transient sense of happiness. Separating from society is an appeal for a type of world that an individual can mold to his or her desires, and the final message of *Paranoia Agent* is that this world cannot exist forever.

## CONCLUSION

Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* could be described as a type of puzzle, one that seems to mock the viewer after he or she has found the very last piece. Even though the audience discovers that "Rosebud" refers to Kane's childhood sled, they must then ask if that knowledge actually helps in understanding Charles Foster Kane (LeBoeuf 2002:131).<sup>61</sup> Welles is challenging the audience's ability to understand a man who did not give them a personal account of his life. The audience sees how Kane's associates viewed his personal identity, but not how Kane himself viewed it.

In a similar vein, Kon Satoshi challenges the audience after they discover the "secret" of *Paranoia Agent*. While we know at the end that Lil' Slugger is actually a construction of the 10-year-old Tsukiko's fragmented mind, do we really understand her any better (also, does she understand *herself* any better)? More importantly, is this knowledge enough to end society's need for Lil' Slugger? Kon's answer is an emphatic "no" since the series ends exactly as it started, with Maniwa writing on the ground in the same way that the Old Man did, trying to find the answer to an equation that will not solve anything (and of course, with episode 13's Prophetic Vision stating that everything must return to the beginning). At the end of the series, a giant *kawaii* kitten looks down from a neon billboard and the society of *Paranoia Agent*'s Tokyo seems to behave exactly

---

<sup>61</sup> In his "Citizen Kant: Themes of Consciousness and Cognition in *Citizen Kane*," Leboeuf describes the two primary interpretations of Rosebud as a symbol for understanding Kane. The first is the "enigma interpretation": even though the audience "knows" what Rosebud means, this information is not useful; there is a "futility" to finding "some 'essence or ultimate 'meaning' of any given person." The second is the "Rosebud interpretation": knowing what Rosebud is explains everything; "Kane's personality can be sufficiently explained by the singular event of his 'lost childhood' or 'lost innocence'" (LeBoeuf 2002:128).

as it did before. While Welles's film is secretive about whether or not we can really *know* Kane, Kon's series is blunter: the mystery cannot truly be solved. However, like *Citizen Kane* and *Rashōmon*, the audience learns about the futility of trying to understand certain people or events and they "[begin] to question any philosophical attempt to attain indubitable and universal Truth" (Stoehr 2006:68).

Part of this futility comes from the nature of *Paranoia Agent* as a television program. Even though there is one common thread that binds every episode together, most of the episodes use different narrative techniques (for example, episode 2 is seen through Yūichi's first-person perspective while episode 5 is a metaphorical video game story) that make them separate entities and parts of a whole at the same time. While the audience does not see different first-person accounts in each episode (such as in *Citizen Kane* or *Rashōmon*), the differences between them are still able to "fragment" the primary narrative so that the audience cannot easily see objective reality. To say that the episodes are meant to be grounded in *either* the Fantastic or the Realistic would not adequately describe the psychological power behind Kon's series.

Lil' Slugger is the boundary between the "real world" and "fantasy." While he begins the series as a creation of Tsukiko's imagination, he eventually becomes a living demon. By attacking the masses, this phantasm allows his "victims" to run away from the actual problems in their lives. However, the characters learn that a "makeshift salvation" – a temporary solution based on self-deception and hiding from the truth – is no substitute for finding permanent solutions to life's troubles. This leads to the most important message Kon has for his audience: a figure that feeds on paranoia and mistrust

such as Lil' Slugger can provide society with the same kind of emotional crutch as a mass cultural icon like Maromi. As Maromi gains in popularity in the program's Tokyo, the people turn to her as a way to relieve themselves of the stress inherent in real life. Yet the primary message behind the comparison between Maromi and Lil' Slugger is not about taking an anti-mass consumerist stance so much as it is about humans *giving in* to the power of consumerism. As evidenced by Misae's soliloquy (episode 11), humans have the ability to conquer negative forces such as Lil' Slugger, but most do not have the willpower to do so. The "solutions" Lil' Slugger and Maromi provide are too appealing to ignore.

As such, consumerism plays a greater role in *Paranoia Agent* than just explaining the role of the antagonist. It also helps the audience understand the psychoses of the characters as well as what motivates them. For instance, Tsukiko must deal with the fans of Maromi that increasingly turn against her in favor of their own fanatic reinterpretations of the icon. Similarly, Maniwa redefines himself as a type of superhero that must combat Lil' Slugger by using the same type of consumeristic forces that created the phantasm. Hirukawa views himself as a "manga hero" that sleeps with prostitutes and goes to karaoke bars in order to make up for his dull and uneventful career track. In the context of *Paranoia Agent's* story, consumerism is probably the most useful way to examine the actions of the characters and why they feel they need the "salvation" Lil' Slugger and Maromi provide.

### Final Thoughts

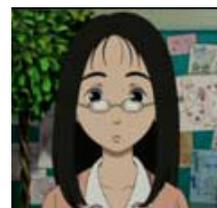
*Paranoia Agent* could best be interpreted as a search, not just of Ikari and Maniwa for Lil' Slugger, but of each individual character trying to find meaning in a world where meaning is seemingly another object to be bought. However, unlike Charles Foster Kane, who was "so very successful for awhile in shaping his outer world" yet "failed to cultivate his own inner character" (Stoehr 2006:80), the characters of *Paranoia Agent* – except for Misae – are unable to do either (while Misae had the least control over the outside world, she alone was able to control her own will). Not only did the characters fail to understand their personal identities, pressures from the real world forced them to rely on Lil' Slugger or Maromi to regain some kind of control over their lives. The "makeshift salvation" that consumerism provided seemed to allow the characters to control both their psyches and the real world at the same time. Unfortunately, believing that this would be true was not enough to *make* it true. Kon's final message is that salvation for the individual can only come from within as there is no way for a person to run away from his or her problems. One must deal with life as it comes.

APPENDIX A  
PRIMARY CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

The Japanese names for characters that are not explicitly named in the series come from <www.mousou.tv>.

**Sagi Tsukiko**

鷺 月子



Tsukiko is a character designer for the Tokyo-based company, M&F. The creator of the popular “Maromi” line of products, she begins the series under pressure from her bosses to come up with a new design to follow up Maromi’s success. A quiet and introverted woman ( “mysterious” [*fushigina*], as Kon describes her [Kon 2004a]), Tsukiko seems unable to converse or relate to anyone except the Maromi-doll she carries around with her; some people mistake this as arrogance or disrespect towards other people. *Paranoia Agent* is really Tsukiko’s story and what happens after an attack by the assailant, Lil’ Slugger.

**Maromi**

マロミ



Maromi is a corporate creation of M&F. Originally, she starts out as a stuffed toy, but throughout the series, we see her transition into a pop culture phenomenon with the creation of a cartoon series, a music CD, and a multitude of other merchandise. In

addition, Tsukiko’s Maromi-doll talks to her and seems to provide the voice of the “will” of the Maromi phenomenon. Maromi’s name comes from a dog that Tsukiko had when she was 10 years old.

Maromi is clearly inspired by the numerous *kawaii* icons that can be seen in Japan, of which Hello Kitty and Tarepanda are the most prominent examples (visually, Maromi is extremely similar to Tarepanda). This parallel leads to the potential for *Paranoia Agent* to be interpreted as a commentary on consumerism.



### Lil’ Slugger

少年バット (“*Shōnen Batto*”; lit. “Boy Bat”)

The exact nature of who Lil’ Slugger is and how he or it came into existence are never clearly defined and definite answers to these questions can only come about through the use of symbolism (as has been done throughout this paper).

For the purposes of this appendix, Lil’ Slugger can be thought of as the primary antagonist of *Paranoia Agent*. The series begins with Lil’ Slugger attacking what appears to be a random group of people. He is armed with only a golden baseball bat that is shaped like “a dog’s leg” (though the Japanese dialogue says that the bat is shaped like the character “*ku*” [ < ]); the sound of his gold-colored rollerblades is usually the only warning his victims have before they are struck. No one can remember concrete details about his appearance other than that he looks like a middle-school student. How Lil’ Slugger is perceived by society at large is one of the driving points behind the series, and the change in this perception raises discussions about how the audience should interpret

him. Make sure to read the episode summaries in Appendix B for a description of how he changes throughout the run of *Paranoia Agent*.



### **Ikari Keiichi**

猪狩 慶一

Ikari, along with Tsukiko, could be considered one of the two main protagonists of Kon's creation. A veteran police detective, Ikari originally approaches the Lil' Slugger case with a sense of ennui: he does not believe that Tsukiko was attacked and prefers to rely on his "policeman's intuition" to support this. One possible interpretation of *Paranoia Agent* is that it is the story of Ikari's attempts to resolve his understanding of the generational gap that Lil' Slugger represents.

The character in his given name at first appears to be ironic as it stands for "joy" or "pleasure" and Ikari is generally dour and taciturn in nature. One possibility is that it is meant to imply that pleasure is the emotion that Ikari denies himself as he attempts to find his place in society, which he seemingly believes will occur when he is able to capture Lil' Slugger.



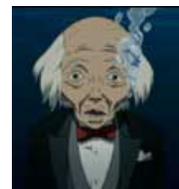
### **Maniwa Mitsuhiro**

馬庭 光弘

Maniwa is Ikari's partner and serves as a representative of the "younger generation" that balances Ikari's age. While he is dedicated to his police work, he tends to use more enigmatic methods when dealing with the criminals, as evidenced by

becoming a minstrel in Kozuka's video game world to get him to continue his confession. He could also be viewed as *too* devoted, as his actions – while correct in principle – ultimately get himself and Ikari fired and lead to the creation of his Radar Man alter ego. Of all the main characters, Maniwa probably comes closest of figuring out the secrets of *Paranoia Agent*, but he also serves as proof that the mystery is never truly solved and life must always repeat itself.

His given name is read “a light that is vast,” indicative of how his actions reveal more of the “solution” to the Lil' Slugger mystery to the other characters.



### **The Old Man**                      老人

Perhaps the most enigmatic character in *Paranoia Agent*, the Old Man (no other name is given) was the victim of Kawazu's car accident before the events of the series and was hospitalized as a result. However, the audience regularly sees him after every episode as the deliverer of the “Prophetic Visions” that contain scenes from the next episode. He constantly talks in metaphors and riddles; his information is useful, but it must be deciphered first, which is usually only done by the audience and not the main characters (for example, he draws pictures of several animals on the hospital floor; each of those animals represents one of the Lil' Slugger victims because each victim has a Chinese character in his or her name that is the same as one of the animals that he draws).



**The Homeless Woman**      老婆 (lit. the old woman)

Even though she has a minor role as far as the entire series is concerned, the Homeless Woman is necessary for the plot to go forward. She is the only one that was present when Tsukiko was attacked, and she tells her story to Ikari and Maniwa. After The Homeless Woman fulfills this purpose, she is not seen again.



**Kawazu Akio**                      川津 明雄

The second person attacked by Lil' Slugger, Kawazu is a tabloid reporter in search of a story. Before the events of *Paranoia Agent*, he hit the Old Man with his car and needed to pay for his medical expenses or be taken to court by the Old Man's family. Kawazu then follows Tsukiko, Ikari, and Maniwa in order to write about the Lil' Slugger case. Tracking Tsukiko eventually leads to his run-in with Lil' Slugger.

His given name can be read as "clear superiority," significant as he shifts the blame for the car accident by believing that he is the victim ("I'm the victim for accidentally hitting him.").



**Kozuka Makoto**

狐塚 誠

A middle-school student, Kozuka is a copycat criminal who attacks people in the same way that Lil' Slugger did. While he initially claims credit for all of the attacks by confessing that he believes himself to be a “holy warrior” (“*sei senshi*”) who is ridding the world of evil, Kozuka is forced to tell the truth after Ikari learns the true nature of Tsukiko’s attack: he attacked Ushiyama and Hirukawa as a way to imitate someone he looked up to. The presence of Kozuka in *Paranoia Agent* makes the entity of Lil’ Slugger even more complex, as it is difficult to find an explanation that accounts for both Kozuka and Lil’ Slugger’s actions.

One of the puzzles of *Paranoia Agent* is whether Kozuka actually believes that he is a holy warrior in a video game or is really a pathological liar who is using a bizarre story as a way to “plead insanity.” His name reflects this duality: his family name contains the Chinese character for “fox,” a creature known in Japanese mythology to trick people and possibly possess them;<sup>62</sup> Kozuka’s story could be a “fox-like” way to deceive the police. However, his given name is the character for “truth” or “sincerity,” which could also be Kon’s way of saying that Kozuka really does think of himself as the “holy warrior.” Unfortunately, the exact truth behind Kozuka’s intentions is never revealed.

---

<sup>62</sup> For a further discussion of the symbolisms associated with foxes in Japan, see Karen A. Smyers’s *The Fox and the Jewel*, chapter 3 (Smyers 1999).



**Taira Yūichi**

鯛良 優一

Yūichi (nicknamed “Itchi” by his peers, meaning “number one”) at first seems to be an average child. However, he is actually a vain and arrogant brat who is more concerned with how his classmates perceive him than with their friendship. Because he always wears a gold-colored baseball cap (which fittingly contains the logo of the New York Yankees, who are considered to be the epitome of a “number one” team in sports) and gold-colored rollerblades, his classmates begin to suspect him of being Lil’ Slugger. Yūichi’s “perfect” world becomes shattered as the students who used to praise him now think him to be a criminal. Searching for an explanation, Yūichi blames their attitudes on transfer student Ushiyama Shōgo, whom he thinks is running a smear campaign in order to defeat Yūichi in a school election.

“The Golden Shoes,” the episode featuring Itchi, is the only one told primarily from a first-person view of a single character (that is, a character is providing narration). An interesting consequence is that one could argue that the audience never hears the true story about Yūichi, as it is possible that he is giving a biased account of his life.

The “Yū” character in his name means “to excel or surpass,” a clear indication of Yūichi’s desire to be considered “number one” amongst his peers, as if this were the only factor that drove him to succeed.

**Ushiyama Shōgo**

牛山 尚吾



Ushiyama is a transfer student to Yūichi's middle school. Originally from the countryside, he is described by Yūichi as being poor at everything except academics, where he becomes Itchi's rival. Ushiyama left his previous school because he was bullied by the other students and wanted to start over again; part of his attempts at being more open than he was at his last school include running for class president, which pits him directly against Yūichi. At his new school, he becomes the target of Itchi's paranoia when Itchi is suspected of being Lil' Slugger.

Even though Maniwa claims that Ushiyama does not fit into the pattern of Lil' Slugger attacks because he does not undergo psychological duress, this is not entirely true. By transferring schools, Ushiyama is trying to escape from his problems instead of directly confronting them. He has left his problems and the accompanying psychosis in his past and, unlike the other victims, is attacked from *behind*.

“My own esteem” is a possible reading of his given name, symbolic of his ability to remain positive despite Yūichi's increasing resentment towards him.

**Chōno Harumi**

蝶野 晴美

**Maria**

マリア



Harumi is a graduate student at Jiai University and also the tutor of Yūichi.

However, she has multiple personality disorder and her second personality is the Double

Lips call girl, Maria. The storyline of episode 3 is about Harumi's inability to adequately control her other personality as well as address the question of "who she really is."

Harumi continually tries to make Maria vanish, but Maria insists that Harumi is actually the "fake" personality and she only wants to enjoy herself. The only resolution the two personalities have is when they are attacked by Lil' Slugger.

Harumi's family name contains the Chinese character for "butterfly," appropriate given her second personality (also because butterfly can be written with the same character twice); butterflies are known for their metamorphosis from caterpillars, so one question to ask is who would really be the butterfly: Harumi or Maria.



**Hirukawa Masami**

蛭川 雅美

While Hirukawa appears to be a mild-mannered security guard who is dedicated to helping his family, he is actually a corrupt policeman who spends his nights either at karaoke bars or with prostitutes. Hirukawa accepts bribes from the *yakuza* so that he does not report the prostitution ring that Maria is a part of. Unfortunately, he takes too much from a local *yakuza* boss and must eventually repay the money that was given to him. By night, he is forced to become a petty thief and steals from the residents of a neighboring district, one that he does not have to patrol. Hirukawa is also a reader of a manga called *A Man's Path* and probably views himself as a type of manga-hero who must act out to protect the ones he loves.

His family name contains the Chinese character for “leech,” appropriate since he is able to live a comfortable life because of the money he accepts from the *yakuza*. Similarly, when they demand repayment, he takes money from the innocent.



**Hirukawa Taeko**                      蛭川 妙子

The daughter of Hirukawa Masami, Taeko is, at first, a happy and cheerful young girl. The protagonist of episode 6, she is extremely close to her father and seems to forego relationships with children her age because of her preference for spending time with him. It almost seems as if she develops an Elektra complex (at one point, she tells her father that she wants to be his wife when she gets older). However, Taeko discovers that her father installed a camera in her room when she sees pictures of herself undressing on the family laptop (the most likely theory is that Hirukawa would have sold the pictures as child pornography, but the reason why he took the photos is never stated) and immediately runs away from home. Her father’s betrayal makes her desire to “disappear” from the world, a request that Lil’ Slugger fulfills.



**Ikari Misae**                              猪狩 美佐江

Misae, Ikari Keiichi’s wife, is one of the more intriguing characters in *Paranoia Agent*. Although she is physically the weakest character in the series (the audience first

meets her after a doctor has informed her that she must have surgery or risk death), she is mentally the strongest and is one of the only figures to successfully confront Lil' Slugger. In fact, Misae is actually able to use her meeting with him to gain the strength to accept the hospital's help. She could be viewed as the mouthpiece for Kon in this series based on this confrontation despite the fact that she appears so late in the series (her first appearance – other than the opening sequence – is in episode 11).<sup>63</sup> With her remaining strength, she finds a way to visit Ikari in the Flat World and help him escape it.

---

<sup>63</sup> See page 57 for a discussion of Misae's primary monologue and the implications it has for the world of *Paranoia Agent*.

APPENDIX B  
EPISODE SYNOPSES

**The Opening Sequence**

The opening segment to each episode is the first impression that the audience will have of *Paranoia Agent* and, in my opinion, it will either intrigue them into watching the first episode or confuse them enough to watch it anyway. The concept is extremely simple: each character appears on the screen and is looking at the audience while laughing hysterically. Behind each character is an unpleasant background scene and, in some cases, the scenario on-screen will lead to the death of the character. Even though this design is the result of a simple request from Kon (he had wanted to find a way to “wake up” the audience since the show would have been broadcast late at night [Kon 2004a]), the effect is disconcerting: the audience has no idea what the characters are laughing about, and many will spend the entire series trying to solve this puzzle. One possible theory is that the characters are in such a deep level of denial about the states that they are in that they are forced to laugh to try to alleviate their problems. This would make sense considering the theme in *Paranoia Agent* of running away from one’s problems. Throughout this opening, an upbeat techno song by Hirasawa Susumu (oddly entitled “Dream Island Obsessional Park” in English<sup>64</sup>) is playing in the background (the lyrics to this song can be found in Appendix D). Listed below is a chart of the characters that appear in the opening and the background that appears with each character:

---

<sup>64</sup> *Yume no Shima Shinen Kōen*

<i>Character</i>	<i>Background Scenery</i>
Tsukiko	The top of a building; she is apparently about to jump off <sup>65</sup>
Yūichi and Ushiyama	A flooded street in the rain
Taeko	The bottom of the ocean
Maniwa	Falling from the sky
Kawazu	A (possibly post-atomic bomb) wasteland
Harumi and Maria	A garbage dump
Misae	A house that has just been destroyed
Ikari	On top of a missile silo that is in front of a mushroom cloud
Homeless Woman	On a table in a fancy restaurant as if she was about to be eaten
Hirukawa	On top of a snow-covered mountain
Old Man	On the moon, while explosions can be seen on the earth's surface
Lil' Slugger	A tranquil, pastoral setting

### **The Ending Sequence**

As it is difficult to ascertain the significance of the ending sequence, it is perplexing to the first-time viewer. As the credits play, every main character is seen fast asleep on the ground. The camera pans over each one for a couple of seconds before moving on to the next figure. At the very end, the camera moves away to reveal that the characters are positioned in the shape of a question mark with a giant Maromi-doll at the very center. Similar to the opening being a “wake-up call” for the audience, Kon wanted a series of imagery that would help the audience “go to sleep” for the ending (Kon 2004a), so showing everyone sleeping seems to be a logical choice. I have not been able to determine a pattern in the order of the characters, so one possible explanation is that the ending sequence is Kon’s way of showing that some aspects of his series cannot be explained (he addresses this idea for the opening sequence; he had heard that some fans

---

<sup>65</sup> This is a particularly appropriate image considering that Kon originally wanted Tsukiko to consider suicide as a way to escape her problems (Kon 2005b).

are trying to relate the opening to what happens in the show and Kon notes that some aspects of the show cannot be resolved [Kon 2004a]). For the sake of completeness, the order of the sleeping characters is as follows:

Tsukiko, Kawazu, the Homeless Woman, Yūichi, Ushiyama, Ikari, Taeko, Misae, Hirukawa, Maria, Harumi, and Maniwa.

### **The Prophetic Visions**

The final “Prophetic Visions” at the end of every episode are worth noting mainly because of how much they deviate from what traditionally occurs in an anime series. Ordinarily after an anime episode, scenes from the next episode and a brief explanation of it are given. In *Paranoia Agent*, scenes of the next episode are given, but they are narrated with a cryptic explanation by the Old Man. These explanations are meant to be metaphorical (for example, references to a cow refer to Ushiyama, whose name contains the Chinese character for “cow”) and are nearly impossible to be understood by someone seeing *Paranoia Agent* for the first time. As an example, below is the script for the Prophetic Vision at the end of episode 1:

To begin with...A rabbit jumps behind the moon. What is it that the black rabbit sees on the horizon with his red eyes? A fish on the land has trouble when he's stepped on by cows. The playful palace where the butterfly dances fades away. In the twilight, the case is started accidentally by the cow and it will continue to do more good. The golden fox grins at you. Then...

To someone that has never seen the entire series, this preview is meaningless, especially since almost none of the characters featured in episode 2 were in episode 1. Only after seeing the rest of the program does the Vision make sense based on the Chinese

characters in the names of the show’s primary figures: the “fish” is Yūichi, the “cow” is Ushiyama, and the “butterfly” is Harumi (for a further description, see the synopsis below for episode 2).

**Episode 1                      Enter Lil’ Slugger                      (少年バット参上)<sup>66</sup>**

The episode begins in a crowded Japan street; various people are on their cell phones explaining to friends, bosses, and coworkers why their problems (such as a late business project, not wanting to see a movie, etc.) are because of “someone else’s” fault. The scene then shifts to an old man drawing equations on the ground as he sees for the first time – as does the audience – Sagi Tsukiko.

Tsukiko is a character designer for the M&F Company and is attempting to draw a character that will be the next big hit for her company and that is similar to her first design, Maromi the dog. Facing a one-week deadline and jealousy from her coworkers because of her success, Tsukiko asks the Maromi-doll she carries everywhere with her if it can perform some kind of miracle as she walks home. After passing the Homeless Woman, she begins to see the darkness close in around her as she trips and falls in a parking lot. While she gathers her belongings, she sees the outline of a young boy with a baseball bat approach, and he strikes her.

---

<sup>66</sup> The literal translation of this episode’s title could be read as either “Shōnen Bat visits” or “Shōnen Bat is called upon.” Both titles provide a sense of confusion when someone watches the series for the first time, as they imply that Lil’ Slugger’s presence is requested by the characters. It is most likely that Kon wanted this ambiguity, as he has said that he wants to “puzzle” the television audience (Kon 2004), but the viewer that sees only the translated English title sees no such ambiguity.

In her hospital room, Tsukiko is interrogated by the detectives Ikari Keiichi and Maniwa Mitsuhiro. Tsukiko is unable to give much information to the policemen other than that her assailant had a golden bat and was probably a middle-school student.

The next scene introduces the audience to Kawazu Akio; Kawazu, a tabloid journalist, must pay the Old Man's medical bills because he was responsible for injuring him in a car accident. Kawazu is running behind on paying the bills and tries to get information from the detectives in order to get a story worth writing about. He then tricks a passing nurse into giving him information about Tsukiko.

Ikari explains to Maniwa that he thinks that the attack is a hoax. Maniwa notes that Ikari's "detective's intuition" ("*tanteikan*") is false and proposes that they investigate the case "scientifically" ("*kagakuteki ni*"). As Maniwa and Ikari ask various people about the assailant, a child "expert's" (my term) voice can be heard in the background as she explains that this crime is due to the repressed nature of Japanese society. Some of the people that the detectives interview actually do not seem that surprised that a child would commit this crime. The two men then receive a tip that a homeless woman lived near the crime scene, but they discover that Kawazu got there first.

Tsukiko looks over an internet bulletin board related to the M&F Company; some writers sympathize with her, but many others accuse her of making up the attacks. Her Maromi-doll then appears to get up, and explain to Tsukiko that her accusers are just jealous of her success (it should be noted that Tsukiko does not find Maromi's actions odd in any way).

The next day, Tsukiko runs into Kawazu; she tries to avoid him, but he pulls out a drawing he found at the Homeless Woman's dwelling. Kawazu tries to ask her questions about the accident and implies that she might have faked the attack. When Kawazu flat-out asks if there really was an assailant, Tsukiko hears the sound of inline skates and cringes as if she were about to be attacked.

Tsukiko gives this information to the detectives. The next few scenes set up the people's descriptions of the assailant, who has been called "Lil' Slugger" ("*Shōnen Batto*" or "Boy Bat" in Japanese). Kawazu appears in Tsukiko's apartment to talk to her again, but she tries to evade him. She trips and drops a handkerchief with Maromi on it. As Kawazu bends down to pick it up, he is attacked by Lil' Slugger. Tsukiko then collapses from exhaustion as Lil' Slugger approaches her. He says, "Hello again," and skates off.<sup>67</sup>

## **Episode 2                      The Golden Shoes                      (金の靴)**

This episode is unique in that it is the only one that is narrated by one of the characters (Taira Yūichi). Yūichi is nicknamed "Itchi" ("number one") due to the fact that he believes he is the best at everything he does. Itchi is notable visually for his golden baseball cap (with the New York Yankees logo) and golden roller blades. After he gets to school one day, he discovers a note with "You're Lil' Slugger!" written on it in his locker. The reason that the students have been avoiding him is that his golden rollerblades and hat match the description of Lil' Slugger. Yūichi thinks that Ushiyama

---

<sup>67</sup> Lil' Slugger actually says "*tadaima*" in Japanese, implying a sense of familiarity with Tsukiko and also that he was in effect "coming home" (the word is commonly used after a person returns home and greets the rest of his or her family). The Japanese line is probably meant to be more confusing to the first-time viewer than the less ambiguous "Hello again."

Shōgo, a classmate that recently transferred in, is the source of the rumor and speculates that Ushiyama started it in order to ruin Itchi's reputation so he could win a position in the student council elections. However, Ushiyama appears to be a friendly student and actually offers to shake Yūichi's hand. Yūichi wants to keep his head high, but he is constantly bombarded by reminders from students that they think he is Lil' Slugger. The audience then begins to see his psychosis as his classmates become more "demonic" in Yūichi's perception.

Yūichi later talks to his tutor, Chōno Harumi, in order to take his mind off the situation (an interesting note is that Itchi says that he does not need a tutor, but enjoys talking to Harumi anyway). Yūichi insists that he wants to handle the situation himself and that he does not want any adults involved.

Ushiyama meets with Yūichi the next day. Yūichi directly accuses him of starting the rumor and appears to physically threaten him. Later in class, someone sends Yūichi a picture that was taken of him threatening Ushiyama (it is never revealed who actually took the picture) and seconds later, everyone in class receives the same picture.

Ushiyama then defends Yūichi and informs the teacher that someone is bullying him. Instead of appreciating Ushiyama's concern, Yūichi hates him even more.

The detectives interrogate Yūichi about any possible involvement and he states that he knows nothing about the incident. He is relieved as he thinks that he can use the interrogation as a way to rebuild his popularity at his upcoming birthday party. The reality is that no one goes to his party and his classmates became even more suspicious. Yūichi throws away his golden skates to try and put the rumor to rest.

As he walks home from school, he meets Ushiyama, who is carrying a palm tree. Ushiyama explains that he is not upset about their previous encounter, and he tries to empathize with Yūichi. As Ushiyama walks up the street, Yūichi dreams of Lil' Slugger attacking Ushiyama so he can become a hero by capturing him. Life soon imitates his dream as Lil' Slugger skates by and hits Ushiyama from behind; however, since Itchi no longer has his skates, Lil' Slugger gets away from him. At his house, Itchi looks over an old tape of himself playing baseball while he sits in the corner of his room. He does not want to go to school since he was the only one near Ushiyama at the time of the attack. The world around Yūichi becomes extremely psychedelic as it twists out of proportion. He finally sees Lil' Slugger approach and the criminal attacks him.

### Episode 3

### Double Lips

### (ダブルリップ)

This episode begins with a strange juxtaposition: the sounds of a woman sexually climaxing while images of anime-esque girls are flashed on the screen. The next scene reveals that this woman is Maria, a call girl, as she services her client, who happens to be an *otaku*-esque man. He talks to his anime figurines immediately after sex and does not even acknowledge Maria's presence. Maria showers and leaves for the next job; she checks her voicemail and hears a single message: "How long are you planning to do this?"<sup>68</sup> Maria then leaves a message to the same answering machine ("I'm doing this because I like to."<sup>69</sup>). As Maria showers and changes at her apartment, the audience discovers that Maria is also Chōno Harumi; Harumi actually has multiple personality

<sup>68</sup> "*Itsu made sonna koto tsuzukeru ki?*"

<sup>69</sup> "*Watashi wa suki de atteiru no.*"

disorder, and Maria is her second personality. Conversations between the two are heard as messages on the answering machine, and both personalities challenge the existence of the other.

Harumi meets her psychiatrist, and he tells her that Maria realizes her existence is fading. Despite Maria's actions, she actually wants Harumi to be happy. The next day, Harumi meets with the professor whom she works for at Jiai University (his name is not mentioned in the episode, but the credits reveal that it is Akihiko Ryū) to discuss the upcoming semester. With little fanfare or warning, he asks her to marry her. At her next appointment, Maria tells her client that she will be "retiring," much to his dismay. In the morning, Harumi believes that she has seen the last of Maria and packs all of her clothes and makeup into a suitcase. However, when she is with her fiancée later that day, she gets a call from Double Lips (the prostitution organization Maria is a part of), who – believing Maria is on the line – say that she said she wouldn't be quitting. Harumi returns home to find Maria's possessions unpacked and a new message on her answering machine. As her cell phone rings, Maria picks up the phone.

Harumi and Akihiko agree to have a "photo-only" wedding, where pictures will be taken of various aspects of a wedding, but without a formal ceremony. As Harumi shops with her fiancée, the audience sees an inner conversation between Harumi and Maria in which Maria claims that she will never let Harumi go. The scene shifts to Harumi's next appointment with her psychiatrist in which he recommends that she discuss her ailment with her husband. Instead of doing so, she again packs Maria's

belongings and throws them away at the garbage dump. While the taxi driver tells her to hurry, Maria regains control and takes her belongings back.

When Harumi visits Yūichi, she remarks that he looks better, and Yūichi says that Lil' Slugger set him free. Harumi is then seen in front of her answering machine as she goes through a large number of messages from Maria where she says that she wants to be free. In a state of panic, Harumi throws the machine on the floor and hears her cell phone ring. On the other end is Maria. Harumi throws the phone against a picture of Maria and destroys it as well.

The next set of scenes take place within Harumi's mind as she is "assaulted" by Maria, who mocks Harumi by claiming she can ease her suffering. Lil' Slugger then appears and attacks Harumi. Later that day, a news broadcast reveals that Lil' Slugger has been captured by Hirukawa Masami.

#### **Episode 4                      A Man's Path                      (男道)**

Hirukawa is riding in a train and hears the news that Maria (he was one of her clients) was also the woman who was attacked by Lil' Slugger. Because he is a security guard in an area close to the attacks, he meets Ikari and Maniwa while they are on their rounds. The three are discussing how little information there is about the case when Hirukawa invites Ikari to take a break for more leisurely discussion, as the two men turn out to be old friends. The scene changes to a meeting room with Hirukawa and a local *yakuza* boss, Handa. Hirukawa has been accepting bribes to prevent him from reporting the prostitution ring that Double Lips was a part of. The next few scenes consist of

Hirukawa's explanation to Ikari that everything he does is for his family because he will never get promoted, but the images on screen are of Hirukawa in nightclubs and casinos at Handa's expense. The final line of his dialogue is a contradiction: "I guess I'll just work and live honestly and complete my life as a good man."<sup>70</sup>

The next scene begins an interesting trend in this episode: panels of a manga series (assumedly called *A Man's Path*) are displayed. The story in this manga is of a young man who must fight corruption and save his loved ones. While – in the context of the story – this is actually a manga that Hirukawa reads, the passages that are shown are meant to mirror what happens in Hirukawa's life. The twist is that whenever the manga protagonist performs a heroic action (such as fighting a group of criminals who demand he repay them), Hirukawa acts markedly more cowardly. For example, Makabe, Handa's superior, demands that Hirukawa pay back the money he accepted from Handa. Needing to obtain a lot of money in a short period of time, Hirukawa resorts to petty thievery, stealing money from the residents of a district that neighbors the one he is in charge of.

The policeman is only able to come up with one million yen, so Makabe forces him to pay another two million yen. Hirukawa is again unable to come up with the proper amount and begs Makabe to stop this. However, Makabe now asks for five million yen and notes that Hirukawa's happiness "was built upon someone else's misfortune."<sup>71</sup> Hirukawa breaks into a family's apartment and steals the money that they have been saving to build their own house.

---

<sup>70</sup> "Seizei jimichi ni hataraite otoko no tsutome wo matto zuru sa."

<sup>71</sup> "tanin no fukō no ue ni naretatte irun desu yo."

Later that night, Ikari and Hirukawa sit at a bar and discuss the nature of crime. Ikari asks why people commit crimes and asks if a lack of a motive can now be considered a motive in itself. In the end, Ikari says that he is dedicated to finding the assailant as a way of examining Lil' Slugger's generation.

Afterwards, Hirukawa can be seen stumbling down the street begging that someone stop him from committing crimes. Lil' Slugger attacks him, but when he stops to gloat, he realizes that Hirukawa is not unconscious. As he tries to escape, Hirukawa throws his shoe at him, knocking him to the ground. The next scene is the news report of Lil' Slugger's capture seen in the previous episode. Thinking that he can no longer pressure Hirukawa, Makabe drives away from the news scene. The episode ends with Ikari and Maniwa leaving to interrogate Lil' Slugger.

## **Episode 5                      The Holy Warrior                      (聖戦士)**

This episode does not need a scene-by-scene breakdown so much as it does a general description. When taking Lil' Slugger in for interrogation, the two detectives discover that his real name is Kozuka Makoto. Kozuka's story is that he believes he is a character in a video game-like world where his attacks are actually his way of destroying an evil being named Gohma. The events of this episode, even though they appear to take place in a fantasy world, are actually Kozuka's way of explaining why he committed the crimes. Oddly enough, the events that Kozuka describes actually take place in a type of strategy guide that he possesses. Maniwa uses this knowledge to relate to what Kozuka is saying so that his statements can be interpreted as a confession. This episode is

essentially a retelling of the first few events of the series, so a look at some of the themes of the episode will suffice:

- Maniwa and Ikari continually argue about how to treat the interrogation. Ikari tries to place Kozuka's statements in the context of what has actually been happening while Maniwa encourages Kozuka's use of the video game setting. This is part of the recurring trend of Ikari's attempts to reconcile the differences between his generation and the next one (which apparently has difficulty in telling the difference between fantasy and reality).
- Maniwa increasingly becomes entrenched in this world; he eventually becomes a type of wandering minstrel who records the Holy Warrior's actions and later becomes a warrior alongside Kozuka.
- Each victim is treated as a monster possessed by the power of Gohma. The characters are shown as animals that are based on the characters of their family names. For example, Ushiyama is a cow and Kawazu is a frog.
- No mention of Tsukiko is made (this is addressed further in episodes 6 and 7).
- The Old Man starts to take a more prominent position in the events of the series. In Kozuka's fantasy world, he is presented as a sage who has been advising Kozuka.

One final note is that Kozuka does reveal that he needed to see an old woman who supposedly held the secrets to the "next level"; this reference is to the Homeless Woman who was reported to live in the area of the attack.

## **Episode 6**

### **Fear of a Direct Hit**

### **(直撃の不安)**

A storm is going to hit Tokyo and the opening scenes describe how the main characters are going to prepare for it. In this sequence we see a little girl who looks lost and frightened; the audience eventually discovers that her name is Taeko. Two storylines are interlaced in this episode: the detectives' attempt to uncover the truth behind Tsukiko's attack and Taeko's journey of solitude in the rain.

At the Homeless Woman's shack, Ikari and Maniwa have approached her and notice that she has a bag that belongs to Tsukiko; she took the bag from the scene of the attack. The Homeless Woman tells the detectives that she saw the entire attack on Tsukiko and that Tsukiko was alone the entire time. Ikari concludes that Kozuka is nothing more than a copycat criminal and he wants to see Tsukiko again for interrogation. They tell her that they want to go over the details of the assault one more time. As they go over the story, Ikari reveals that they found a lead pipe in the gutter near the attack and that the Homeless Woman saw her use the pipe to injure herself. Just as Ikari yells that Tsukiko faked the attack, she falls onto the floor as if struck by a bat.

Taeko's storyline consists of flashbacks to previous times in her life that are similar to the events that occur in the present. One of the first flashbacks is of her running to her father after being bullied by her classmates; she said to him that she wanted to grow up to be his bride. Another is to a night in the past, when her parents discussed the possibility of moving into a larger house and Taeko said that the old house is fine. Back in the present, Taeko receives a cell phone call that is apparently from one of her parents and she expresses her wish that the house would disappear. The final flashback is to the first day that she lived in her family's new house. She was preparing a

surprise on the family's laptop when she stumbled across a bizarre series of pictures. Taeko learned that the photos are of her undressing in her room.<sup>72</sup> Enraged, Taeko tore her room apart to try and find the camera. In the present, Taeko is nauseous as she remembers the pictures and suddenly looks up with a wicked smile on her face. She hints that she intends to commit suicide and prepares to jump off a bridge into the middle of a rushing river. However, after seeing the Homeless Woman float by, she is unable to go through with her plan. Her phone rings, but she is not even able to destroy *it*. Taeko yells that she wants to forget everything, and she is hit by Lil' Slugger at the same moment that Tsukiko falls to the floor. Taeko's father, who is revealed to be Hirukawa, then yells through the phone as their house falls into the river.

With the typhoon over, Hirukawa is at the hospital by his daughter's side. He explains that their house is gone as she wished. Taeko then sits up and asks, "Excuse me, but who are you?"<sup>73</sup>

## **Episode 7                      MHz                      (MHz)**

Ikari and Maniwa are called to the hospital due to the similarity of Taeko's injury to the other cases. Seeing her and Hirukawa's states, they see that nothing will come of talking to either of them. While Maniwa wants to find a connection between Taeko's attack and the previous ones, Ikari states that they have a culprit and there is nothing

---

<sup>72</sup> It is never stated what the pictures were used for, but I think that the most reasonable theory – given her father's greed – is that they were sold as child pornography.

<sup>73</sup> "*Anno, donata desu ka.*" This line is probably a reference to Mima's first spoken line as an actress in *Perfect Blue*.

more that they can do. They return to see Kozuka and Ikari asks him about the attack on Tsukiko; Kozuka admits that Ushiyama and Hirukawa were the only two that he attacked.

Afterwards, Maniwa revisits the victims in order to determine who assaulted the ones whom Kozuka did not. He asks them if they were troubled by anything that made them feel “emotionally cornered” (“*oitsumerareta*”) in a similar fashion as Tsukiko was. Maniwa explains to Ikari that all the victims besides Ushiyama were under extreme pressure and this was probably the reason they were attacked. Ikari says that they have no other leads and that no one could handpick targets that were under emotional duress. They try one more time to get Kozuka to confess to the other attacks, but he maintains that he only attacked Ushiyama and Hirukawa.

Maniwa tries one more time to get information from Hirukawa, but he does not respond, which Maniwa interprets as emotional duress. He concludes that Lil’ Slugger appeared to Taeko and Tsukiko at the same time and can thus replicate himself as many times as needed (that is, he is everywhere and nowhere at the same time). Ikari’s response to Maniwa is that he needs to take a vacation. Ignoring the advice, Maniwa tries to determine how to find a “cornered person” and thus trap Lil’ Slugger. His solution is to use Kozuka to capture the “real” Lil’ Slugger. Ikari and Maniwa rush to Kozuka’s cell, only to discover that Lil’ Slugger has killed Kozuka and the phantasm escapes by vanishing through the wall. A news station reports Kozuka’s death as a suicide and Ikari and Maniwa resign. The episode ends with Maniwa waking up from a dream in which he is attacked by Lil’ Slugger and going into a room filled with radio equipment where he broadcasts his findings on the Lil’ Slugger case.

## Episode 8                    Happy Family Planning    (明るい家族計画)<sup>74</sup>

This is the first of three episodes that break away from the main plotline. These episodes are meant to demonstrate how much Lil' Slugger has permeated Japanese society and as such, full episode descriptions will not be given. Instead, a brief look at the key themes for each episode will be provided.

Episode 8 chronicles the exploits of three individuals who are attempting to commit suicide: Fuyubachi, an old man that is concerned about reaching the end of his life; Zebra, a young man who is possibly upset about the loss of his lover; and Kamome, a child who does not want to be left alone again (the explicit reasons why they want to commit suicide are not given; what I have given are reasonable guesses based on the little we learn about their characters). While the entire episode is about how the three of them attempt to commit suicide, the audience discovers at the very end that at some point they were successful and will spend the rest of their afterlives exploring Japan via the bullet-train. Some points about the episode:

- It is unknown when exactly they die, but the most reasonable time would be after the building is destroyed because they do not have shadows in the very next scene.
- Fuyubachi and Zebra are unwilling to let Kamome die since she is still a child. She actually displays a kind of excitement about using the train and seeing the country, yet is still emphatic about killing herself.

---

<sup>74</sup> The idea behind this episode has a basis in reality. See page 90 for a footnote about Internet suicide pacts.

- The greatest irony of the episode is that they become friends eternally by meeting through a chat program; newer forms of communication (Instant Messenger, bulletin boards, cell phones, etc.) have been criticized for “simulating” human interactions instead of creating actual human interaction.
- Throughout the episode, chat messages are seen from someone named Fox; Fuyubachi says that he was the Lil’ Slugger imposter (that is, Kozuka).
- The idea of a “makeshift family” in this episode is also seen in Kon’s *Tokyo Godfathers* (as Napier 2006 first illustrates). The “families” in both media consist of a father (in this case, Fuyubachi), a gay man who serves as a mother (Zebra), and a young girl who becomes the daughter (Kamome). Kon has noted that *Tokyo Godfathers* is not about thinking of the homeless as “people without homes” so much as it is “people that have lost their families” (Kon 2002b),<sup>75</sup> so the threesome in *Paranoia Agent* are likely meant to be a “new” kind of family.
- The title is a reference to a brand of “extra-thin” condoms seen near the end of the episode. The futility of using condoms that will break is similar to the futility of trying to kill oneself when one is already dead.

### **Episode 9                      Etc.                                      (ETC)**

This episode revolves around a group of housewives who meet outside their apartment to share stories they have heard about Lil’ Slugger. The episode is notable for describing what the public believes Lil’ Slugger to be capable of, and it appears that

---

<sup>75</sup> “*Kono sakuhin ni oite wa tan ni ‘uchi’ wo ushinatta hito to iu dake de wa naku ‘kazoku’ wo ushinatta hito, to iu imi de toraeteimasu.*”

many believe his power is limitless. Another interesting note is that the stories in the episode are about common pressures in Japanese society (for example, taking an examination or dealing with one's "evil" mother-in-law), so they also show how Lil' Slugger interacts with an ordinary person instead of someone with some type of psychosis such as Yūichi or Harumi. Telling these stories is also a way of affirming status for the women in the episode; a woman named Kamohara is mocked by the others for being unable to tell a believable Lil' Slugger story. The episode ends with Mrs. Kamohara arriving home to see that her husband, an anime storywriter, has been attacked by Lil' Slugger. Instead of calling for an ambulance, she presses him for the details of his assault. The individual stories are not necessary for understanding the overarching plot, so they have been omitted here.

**Episode 10**                      **Mellow Maromi**                      (マロミまどろみ)

This episode serves one major purpose: to demonstrate the maliciousness of Lil' Slugger. *Mellow Maromi* is the name of an anime that is about the icon and episode 10 is about the making of this anime. As the production of the series continues, the staff is killed off by Lil' Slugger. The last remaining member of the staff, the incompetent Saruta, must take the production tape to the broadcasting studio to be aired. He tries to stay awake along the way, but sees visions of Lil' Slugger on the highway. The episode ends with Saruta dead in the middle of the street while the broadcast executives take the tape from his hands. Some notes about this episode:

- The scenes are often interrupted with a screen's worth of text that explains the job function of the character appearing on screen (such as the Sound Director). The text is narrated by Maromi. The greater significance of this is explained in chapter 2.
- Most of the killings occur because an individual staff member is "cornered" as the result of a problem that Saruta causes. His inability to handle his job is a recurring theme of the entire episode.
- Saruta's name contains the Chinese character for "monkey" ("saru"; 猿). In pre-modern Japan, a monkey was viewed as "a clever animal, similar to but not wise enough to qualify as a full-fledged human" (Ohnuki-Tierney 1987:34). *Mellow Maromi's* production manager continually addresses Saruta as a type of sub-human, going so far as to claim he has the "pride of a human being, but the brain of a monkey."<sup>76</sup> It seems that Saruta is like a monkey that is simulating being a human.
- Saruta seems to have an over-inflated sense of self-worth, as he remarks that in delivering the tape, he holds the world's fate in his hands. This could possibly be similar to Hirukawa's belief that he is like a manga hero.
- Saruta seems to embody the idea of shifting one's blame to a scapegoat (which is ironic considering Ohnuki-Tierney's study saying that monkeys were viewed as scapegoats for human problems in Tokugawa Japan [Ohnuki-Tierney 1987:64-5]). In a dream that he has while driving, he arrives with the tape too late and reports that it is not his fault. When he wakes up, he states that he "doesn't make blunders."  
 ("Oresama ga dojina kufun no monka.")

---

<sup>76</sup> "Atama wa saru nami no kuse ni, puraido wa hito nami ka."

**Episode 11**                      **No Entry**                      (進入禁止)

The episode begins with a woman being told by her doctor that she must receive an operation or risk death. She responds by saying that she cannot afford it and leaves. As she walks home, she hears the public whisper that Lil' Slugger has become more of a monster now than a man. The woman arrives home to see Lil' Slugger waiting for her. She confesses that she did at one point wish to die, but now will not go through with it as she feels that she would betray her husband, Ikari Keiichi. It turns out that this woman is his wife, Misae. The audience sees that Ikari is now working as a security guard. Throughout this episode, there are numerous short scenes that describe how far Ikari has sunk since he left his job at the police station.

Misae questions the nature of Lil' Slugger's intentions and his apparent belief that he is doing good. She beckons Lil' Slugger to sit down so that he can hear her story. She explains that she was born with a weak constitution and is unable to bear children. Instead, she said that she wanted to become a woman worthy of her husband. However, as she devoted herself to him, she noticed that he was spending more and more time at work. Misae reasoned that because of the work that he did, she should work hard as well in the home since she was a "useless invalid" (*"tatanai byōki no nin"*).

Attention then shifts to Ikari's new job. As he runs to his third construction site in the day, he stops and picks up a Maromi keychain. At the site, he discovers that his coworker is Inukai, a man that he arrested several years ago. During the day, they

reminisce about the past and how the times have changed. Ikari admits that seeing Inukai makes him feel as if he has come home somehow.

Meanwhile, Misae has gotten to the point in her story where Ikari began to investigate the Lil' Slugger case. She says that his resignation was a defeat to the two of them as a couple. Lil' Slugger seems ready to attack her, but she suddenly starts to laugh. He strikes, but causes only a small cut on her face. Misae is confident that she and Ikari will be able to work through this crisis. As she recounts her troubles and explains how she is able to survive, Lil' Slugger destroys her house. She compares her troubles to humanity's ability to survive and adapt and concludes that Lil' Slugger "is the same as that Maromi thing."<sup>77</sup> The walls of her house figuratively fall down to reveal the tranquil setting that is seen during the opening sequence, and she states that she will have the surgery.

Ikari and Inukai have gone to a bar to continue their conversation. Ikari reveals that he no longer cares about the Lil' Slugger case and is finally able to accept that there might not be a place for him in the world. As the two of them leave the bar, the real world is replaced with one where everything consists of cardboard cutout-looking animation. Ikari seems to be at peace with this world as he picks up the Maromi keychain (the keychain is the only 3-D object besides Ikari).<sup>78</sup>

## Episode 12

## Radar Man

(レーダーマン)

---

<sup>77</sup> "Kono Maromi to iyara to onaji nano desu."

<sup>78</sup> Additionally, Inukai is nowhere to be seen. My personal theory is that he did not exist, and he was a representation of Lil' Slugger that appeared to Ikari in his depressed state of mind.

This episode marks the appearance of Maniwa's alter ego: Radar Man, a superhero whose sole purpose is to combat Lil' Slugger. The audience first sees him using a sword to fight against Lil' Slugger's bat. After seeing his sword fail him, Radar Man throws it away and the audience sees what it really is: an umbrella. He goes to visit the Old Man, who cryptically tells him to "dance with a bunny" ("*usagi to dansu*") and then dies. Maniwa hears Misae's voice coming through on his portable radar pack (it is not explained how this works or if this is really what is happening or Maniwa's interpretation). He goes to the Ikaris' house, where Misae begs Maniwa to find her husband and tells him that Maromi and Lil' Slugger are the same.

The next few scenes consist of various news broadcasts that explain how much Maromi has impacted Japanese society (the floating of giant Maromi balloons as an advertising promotion, riots amongst those who want to buy her merchandise, etc.). The final scene is a talk show appearance that Tsukiko is making to help bring attention to the television show. As Maniwa ponders the possible connection between Maromi and Lil' Slugger, he sees the talk show host display an old sketchbook of Tsukiko's. One sketch catches Maniwa's attention: a small miniature stick figure that resembles Lil' Slugger.

Maniwa hears someone call out to him behind a pane of glass<sup>79</sup>, and it turns out to be an anime-esque woman dressed in a Playboy bunny costume. The bunny takes him to the residence of the *otaku*-esque man that was previously seen in episode 3. Maniwa meets the other various dolls that he has created (who comment that the *otaku* will not respond to anything Maniwa says because he is "only a doll" ("*tada no ningyō*") and is

---

<sup>79</sup> It should be noted that in the reflection, he is wearing the Radar Man outfit instead of what he is actually wearing."

unable to respond to actual human interaction). Using Maniwa's access to the police network, the dolls find a 10-year-old newspaper article about a schoolchild named Tsukiko being attacked by a middle-school student with a bat. Maniwa then hitchhikes his way to the home of Tsukiko's father to try and find answers.

Meanwhile, Hatamura, Tsukiko's boss, is driving her home and informs her that she still needs to come up with a new character design. She attempts to leave, but Hatamura grabs her by the throat and threatens her. Tsukiko finally gets out of the car and Hatamura crashes into a wall. She sees the monster that Lil' Slugger has become, but it vanishes into the night.

When Maniwa arrives at Tsukiko's father's house, the father tells him what happened ten years ago (the audience does not find out at this point) and shows him a shed that contains the remains of a doghouse that says "Maromi" on it. In the doghouse is a bat that Tsukiko's father once used as part of a promise to hunt down the attacker. Maniwa picks the bat up and sees it as a type of holy sword, one that should be able to defeat Lil' Slugger since it represents the truth about what happened.

That night, Tsukiko is still trying to design a new character when she gets a call from Maniwa. He reveals that he knows everything from her father, but the Maromi-doll cuts the phone cord before he can say anything more. It is too late: Lil' Slugger bursts through the door ready to strike. Maniwa then appears with the "sword" in hand. He is able to slash through Lil' Slugger, but he regenerates himself and the two fight again. During the fight, the Maromi doll leads Tsukiko through a door that leads to Ikari's world. Maromi's final comment is that she will always protect Tsukiko.

Radar Man's battle ends prematurely as Lil' Slugger runs away. The news reports that all of the Maromi symbols in Tokyo have vanished, from the Maromi merchandise to its appearance on the *otaku's* shirt. The next few scenes revisit the original protagonists as they discover that their "makeshift salvations" have vanished: Maria reappears, Yūichi is once again accused of being Lil' Slugger, and Kawazu must now deal with the fact that the Old Man is dead. Misae is brought to the hospital where she has a spiritual encounter with the Old Man; she says that she wants to go to where her husband is.

### **Episode 13                    The Final Episode                    (最終回)**

Ikari, Tsukiko, and the Maromi doll are seen walking through the Flat World. Maromi tells Tsukiko that this is Ikari's world because it is "where he can be the happiest" ("*Kare ni totte ichiban basho*"). Tsukiko is informed by one of the world's residents that Lil' Slugger will never come to this world. As Tsukiko spends more time in the Flat World, she is increasingly seen by the world as Ikari's daughter.

However, in the real world, Lil' Slugger has taken the form of a black ooze that is beginning to devour the city. Maniwa sees the carnage take place and tries to locate Tsukiko. He eventually reaches through to a television in the Flat World and reports to Ikari that the people are lost without Maromi to emotionally rely on; in response, they have all called out to Lil' Slugger. Before Maniwa can fully explain, Ikari throws a rock at the television and stops the broadcast. As the crowd applauds him, he sees an image of Misae in the distance. He consoles himself by going to a bar, where he sees a young

Misae working as a waitress. As Tsukiko drags Ikari away, Misae and the rest of the bar fall into an abyss.

By this point, Tsukiko appears as a young girl and begins to call Ikari “Father” (“*tōsan*”). She has a real dog with her that she calls “Maromi.” The two begin to walk through the festival until they see fireworks. Ikari recalls that he wanted a daughter since he thought that he would not get along with a son, just like he did not get along with his own father. He again sees Misae in the crowd and he remembers how he had repeatedly told her that they must always accept reality and that every obstacle can be overcome. Misae finally dies in the real world, and Ikari realizes that the Flat World is only a false happiness. He takes a bat and begins to shatter the world itself. He admits that there really is no place in the real world for him anymore and that he must accept that. He hits the Maromi keychain at the Flat World’s sky and shatters it altogether.

When Ikari and Tsukiko return to the real world, they see Maniwa. He confronts Tsukiko about the truth of her past. Ten years ago, Tsukiko’s father bought her a dog; Tsukiko accidentally let go of the leash and it was hit by a car. Instead of telling her father the truth, she made up a story about a street assailant with a bat so that she could become the victim. Her father actually knew she was lying, but because he thought he was at fault for making Tsukiko a quiet, shy child, he went out every night to convince her that he was trying to find the nonexistent assailant.

As if responding to Tsukiko’s summons, the black ooze of Lil’ Slugger gathers into one blob and appears before them. The city’s Maromi merchandise then combine into one entity so that they can hold off Lil’ Slugger while Tsukiko and Ikari run away.

However, the two of them are swallowed by the ooze. Tsukiko then sees the scene from ten years ago play out and her dog is hit by a car. This time, the 20-year-old Tsukiko is there as well; as the 10-year-old Tsukiko blames the street assailant for the attack, her shadow takes the form of Lil' Slugger. The 20-year-old Tsukiko runs to Maromi and picks her up in her arms and admits that it is her fault that she died. The shadow of Lil' Slugger says "Good-bye" ("*sayōnara*") and then vanishes. The black ooze vanishes from the city and Ikari remarks that it looks as it did after World War II (which Kon admits makes no sense considering Ikari's age [Kon 2004a]).

Action resumes two years later in a rebuilt Tokyo. A cartoon cat appears on a downtown television (similar in design to Maromi) and Tsukiko walks down the street wearing a school uniform. She bumps into Kawazu, who looks at her and smiles. Ikari is standing outside a building in a security guard outfit. Maniwa is outside of the hospital writing equations on the sidewalk in a manner similar to the Old Man at the beginning of the series. He is just about to write down a final number when he looks up and the screen fades to black.

### **The Final Prophetic Vision**

A brief commentary is necessary for the final Prophetic Vision, especially since there is no episode following number 13. Instead of the Old Man, Maniwa is the one giving a message to the audience. Scenes from the previous episodes appear as Maniwa notes that even though something appears to have ended, it actually can loop around to the beginning. The final message seems to be that – like the cat that appears to have

replaced Maromi – the mystery of Lil’ Slugger can never truly be solved; humanity will always need to have some kind of emotional crutch and that crutch changes over time.

## APPENDIX C

## PICTURES

Taken from Kon Satoshi's personal website ("Kon's Tone"):

<<http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~xw7s-kn/paranoia/mousou.html>>



The many characters of *Paranoia Agent*. From Left to Right:  
Tsukiko, Yūichi, Kawazu, Misae, Ikari, Taeko, Lil' Slugger, Maria, Harumi, Hirukawa,  
the Homeless Woman, Ushiyama, and Maniwa.



Maromi, as she is seen in Tsukiko's sketchbook.



The Flat World that Ikari visits.



Akihiko becoming engulfed by the black ooze of Lil' Slugger.

## APPENDIX D

## LYRICS TO THE OPENING THEME SONG

The lyrics to the song, “Dream Island Obsessional Park,” are taken from the Geneon DVD’s transcriptions.

**English:**

Raa-eee-yaa Ra-ra-e-yo-ra<sup>80</sup>  
 A magnificent mushroom cloud in the sky  
 Raa-eee-yaa Ra-ra-e-yo-ra  
 In the afternoon of birds pecking at food in an alley  
 Touching the grass under the sunlight streaming through the leaves  
 I’ll talk with you  
 See, on the lunch bench, a dream blossoms

Carry the sound of the waves in your heart  
 Sink your blues  
 Stretch a bridge to tomorrow  
 Don’t worry about *tsunami*

Raa-eee-yaa Ra-ra-e-yo-ra  
 A magnificent mushroom cloud in the sky  
 Raa-eee-yaa Ra-ra-e-yo-ra  
 The afternoon of birds pecking at food in an alley  
 Raa-eee-yaa Ra-ra-e-yo-ra  
 The dream I nurtured on the lunch bench  
 Raa-eee-yaa Ra-ra-e-yo-ra  
 The afternoon born on the day of the sunlight streaming through the leaves

**Japanese:**

Raa-eee-yaa Ra-ra-e-yo-ra  
*Sora ni migotona kinoko no kumo*  
 Raa-eee-yaa Ra-ra-e-yo-ra  
*Komichi de e wo hamu kotori no gogo wa*  
*Komorebi no shiba ni te wo furete*  
*Kimi to katarō*

---

<sup>80</sup> This is the DVD’s transcription of the “war cry” (Kon’s term) that the singer uses throughout the song. One other note is that during the course of my research, some websites have translated this war cry as “the lost children are” (“*maigo wa*”, it does not look that similar on paper, but the singing makes it difficult to determine the exact syllables of this line). While this would be an interesting metaphor to use for the main characters, this translation is incorrect as Kon himself has said that the phrase is a nonsensical war cry that is meant to help “wake up” the audience (Kon 2005c).

*Hora ranchi no benchi no ue de yume wa hana saku*

*Nami no oto wo sono mune ni*

*Yūitsu wa shizumete*

*Hashi wo asu ni nobashi*

*Tsunami nado anzuru kotonaku*

*Raa-eee-yaa Ra-ra-e-yo-ra*

*Sora ni migotona kinoko no kumo*

*Raa-eee-yaa Ra-ra-e-yo-ra*

*Komichi de e wo hamu kotori no gogo*

*Raa-eee-yaa Ra-ra-e-yo-ra*

*Ranchi no benchi de sodateta yume*

*Raa-eee-yaa Ra-ra-e-yo-ra*

*Komorebi no hi ni umareta gogo yo*

## REFERENCES

- Amazon.co.jp*. "Mōsō Dairinin." Accessed 20 Apr. 2007.  
<<http://www.amazon.co.jp/>>. Path: "saachi: Mōsō Dairinin"
- Annesley, James. *Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture and the Contemporary American Novel*. London, UK: Pluto Press, 1998.
- Bongco, Mila. *Reading Comics: Language, Culture, and the Concept of the Superhero in Comic Books*. New York, New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000.
- Brooker, Peter and Will Brooker. "Introduction." *Postmodern After-Images: A Reader in Film, Television and Video*. Eds. Peter Brooker and Will Brooker. London, UK: Arnold, 1997.
- Brubaker, Rogers and Frederick Cooper. "Beyond 'Identity.'" *Theory and Society* 29.1 (2000): 1-47.
- Campbell, Colin. "I Shop Therefore I Know that I Am: The Metaphysical Basis of Modern Consumerism." *Elusive Consumption*. Eds. Karin M. Ekström and Helene Brembeck. Oxford, UK: Berg, 2004. 27-44.
- Carter, Jason. "Paranoia Agent Vol. 1 Review." *Anime Jump!*. 25 Nov. 2004. Accessed 27 Jan. 2007.  
<<http://www.animejump.com/index.php?module=prodreviews&func=showcontent&id=571>>
- Clammer, John. *Contemporary Urban Japan: A Sociology of Consumption*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 1997.
- Denzin, Norman K. *Images of Postmodern Society: Social Theory and Contemporary Cinema*. London, UK: Sage Publications, 1991.
- Desser, David. *The Samurai Films of Akira Kurosawa*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Research Press, 1983.
- "Doko kara kitanoka 'Shōnen Batto.'" *Newtype* May 2004: 100-101.
- Dong, Bamboo. "Paranoia Agent DVD 1: Enter Lil' Slugger Review." *Anime News Network*. 27 Sep. 2004. Accessed 24 Jan. 2007.  
<<http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/review/paranoia-agent/dvd-1>>
- Filtration*. "Mōsō Dairinin." *Junsui*. 26 May 2004. Accessed 15 Apr. 2007.  
<[http://junsui.txt-nifty.com/filtration/2004/05/post\\_17.html](http://junsui.txt-nifty.com/filtration/2004/05/post_17.html)>

- Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." Translated by Jay Miskowiec. *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986): 22-27.
- Gabriel, Yiannis and Tim Lang. *The Unmanageable Consumer: Contemporary Consumption and its Fragmentation*. London, UK: Sage Publications, 1995.
- Giroux, Henry A. *Breaking in to the Movies: Film and the Culture of Politics*. Malden, Massachusetts: Malden Publishers, 2002.
- Gottdeiner, Mark. *New Forms of Consumption: Consumers, Culture, and Commodification*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000.
- Hayes, Paul. "The Cube." *Independent Culture*. 2 Sep. 2006. Accessed 31 Jan. 2007. <<http://www.indiecult.com/2006-09/the-cube-1969>>
- Ivy, Marilyn. *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*. Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- , "Formations of Mass Culture." *Postwar Japan as History*. Ed. Andrew Gordon. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1993. 239-258.
- Keene, Donald. *Seeds in the Heart*. New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Kelly, William W. "Sense and Sensibility at the Ballpark: What Fans Make of Professional Baseball in Modern Japan." *Fanning the Flames: Fans and Consumer Culture in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. William W. Kelly. New York City, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004. 79-105.
- Kinsella, Sharon. "Cuties in Japan." *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*. Eds. Lise Skov and Brian Moeran. Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 1995. 220-254.
- Kitano Taiitsu. *Nihon Anime Shigaku Kenkyū Josetsu*. Tokyo, Japan: Yahata Shoten, 1998.
- Ko, Yu-Fen. "Consuming Differences: 'Hello Kitty' and the Identity Crisis in Taiwan." *Postcolonial Studies* 6.2 (2003): 175-189.
- Kon Satoshi. DVD Audio Commentary. *Paranoia Agent Volume 4: Sayonari Maromi*. DVD. Dir. Kon Satoshi. 2004a. Geneon, 2004.

- “Interview 1: 2002/12 *Ōsutoraria kara, omo ni ‘Sennen Joyu’ ni kansuru intabyū.*” *Kon’s Tone*. Dec 2002a. Accessed 15 Jul 2006.  
<<http://www1.parkcity.ne.jp/s-kon/Interviews/Interviews01.html>>
- “Interview 2: 2002/12 *Itaria kara, omo ni ‘Sennen Joyu’ ni kansuru intabyū.*” *Kon’s Tone*. Dec 2002b. Accessed 15 Jan. 2007.  
<<http://www1.parkcity.ne.jp/s-kon/Interviews/Interviews02.html>>
- “Interview 3: 2002/12 *Kanada kara, omo ni ‘Sennen Joyu’ ni kansuru intabyū.*” *Kon’s Tone*. Dec 2002c. Accessed 18 Jan. 2007.  
<<http://www1.parkcity.ne.jp/s-kon/Interviews/Interviews03.html>>
- “Interview 5: 1998/2 *Amerika kara ‘Paafekuto Burū’ ni kansuru intabyū.*” *Kon’s Tone*. Feb. 1998. Accessed 19 Feb. 2007.  
<<http://www1.parkcity.ne.jp/s-kon/Interviews/Interviews05.html>>
- “Interview 7: 2004/6 *Amerika kara kantoku sakuhin zenpan ni kansuru intabyū.*” *Kon’s Tone*. Jun. 2004b. Accessed 20 Mar. 2007.  
<<http://www1.parkcity.ne.jp/s-kon/Interviews/Interviews07.html>>
- “Japan Media Arts Plaza: Winner’s Interview.” *Japan Media Arts Plaza*. 2003. 22 Aug. 2006.  
<[http://plaza.bunka.go.jp/english/festival/backnumber/winners\\_i/p22/kon.html](http://plaza.bunka.go.jp/english/festival/backnumber/winners_i/p22/kon.html)>
- “Kon’s Tone.” *Kon’s Tone*. 14 Nov. 2006. Accessed 5 Jan. 2007.  
<<http://www1.parkcity.ne.jp/s-kon/>>
- “*Mōsō no ichi: Shumi no sanbutsu, sono 1.*” *Kon’s Tone*. 2005a. Accessed 14 Jul. 2006.  
<<http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~xw7s-kn/paranoia/mousou001A.html>>
- “*Mōsō no ichi: Shumi no sanbutsu, sono 2.*” *Kon’s Tone*. 2005b. Accessed 14 Jul. 2006.  
<<http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~xw7s-kn/paranoia/mousou001B.html>>
- “*Mōsō no jū: Warau hito, madoromu hito.*” *Kon’s Tone*. 2005c. Accessed 30 Jan. 2007.  
<<http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~xw7s-kn/paranoia/mousou010A.html>>
- “*Mōsō no ni: Sonkantoku no nazo.*” *Kon’s Tone*. 2005d. Accessed 15 Jul. 2006.  
<<http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~xw7s-kn/paranoia/mousou002.html>>
- “*Samayoeru tamashii.*” *Kon’s Tone*. 2005e. Accessed 5 Nov. 2006.  
<<http://www1.parkcity.ne.jp/s-kon/wandering.html>>

- . "Tamashi no gyokuza." *Kon's Tone*. 2005f. Accessed 5 Nov. 2006.  
<<http://www1.parkcity.ne.jp/s-kon/soul.html>>
- . "The Making of Millenium Actress." *Millenium Actress*. Dir. Kon Satoshi. 2001. DVD. Dreamworks Home Entertainment, 2003.
- . "Who am I?" *Kon's Tone*. 2005g. Accessed 4 Nov. 2006.
- Laeno, Dominic K. "Paranoia Agent Review." *THEM Anime*. 2004. Accessed 8 Feb. 2007.  
<<http://www.themanime.org/viewreview.php?id=939>>
- LeBoeuf, Dave. "Citizen Kant: Themes of Consciousness and Cognition in *Citizen Kane*." *Film and Knowledge: Essays on the Integration of Images and Ideas*. Ed. Kevin L. Stoehr. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002. 120-140.
- Martin, Theron. "Paranoia Agent DVD 3: Serial Psychosis Review." *Anime News Network*. 11 Apr. 2005a. Accessed 24 Jan. 2007.  
<<http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/review/paranoia-agent/dvd-3>>
- . "Paranoia Agent DVD 4: Sayonara Maromi Review." *Anime News Network*. 5 Jun. 2005b. Accessed 24 Jan. 2007.  
<<http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/review/paranoia-agent/dvd-4>>
- McCreery, John L. *Japanese Consumer Behaviour: From Worker Bees to Wary Shoppers: An Anthropologist Reads Research by the Hakuodo Institute of Life and Living*. Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000.
- McGray, Douglas. "Japan's Gross National Cool." *Foreign Policy* 130 (2002): 44-54.
- McVeigh, Brian J. "Commodifying Affection, Authority and Gender in the Everyday Objects of Japan." *Journal of Material Culture* 1.3 (1996): 219-312.
- . "How Hello Kitty Commodifies the Cute, Cool and Camp." *Journal of Material Culture* 5.2 (2000): 225-245.
- . "Individualization, individuality, interiority, and the Internet." *Japanese Cybercultures*. Eds. Nanette Gottlieb and Mark McLelland. London, UK: Routledge, 2003. 19-33.
- . *Nationalisms of Japan: Managing and Mystifying Identity*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004.

- Miles, Steven. *Consumerism as a Way of Life*. London, UK: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Napier Susan J. *Anime: From Akira to Howl's Moving Castle*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.
- "Excuse Me, Who Are You?": Performance, the Gaze, and the Female in the Works of Kon Satoshi." *Cinema Anime: Critical Engagements with Japanese Animation*. Ed. Steven T. Brown. New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. 23-42.
- "When the Machines Stop: Fantasy, Reality, and Terminal Identity in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Serial Experiments Lain*." *Science Fiction Studies* 29.3 (2002): 418-435.
- Nava, Mica. *Changing Cultures: Feminism, Youth and Consumerism*. London, UK: Sage Publications, 1992.
- "Netto de jisatsu yokaku sakunen 79 nin chū, 43 nin kyūjo...keisatsuchō shirabe." *Yomiuri Online*. 15 Mar. 2007. Accessed 12 Apr. 2007.  
<<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/net/news/20070315nt0e.htm>>
- "Netto jisatsu nenreisō kakudai." *Yomiuri Online*. 2 Jun. 2005. Accessed 12 Apr. 2007.  
<<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/net/news/20050602nt12.htm>>
- Nihon animeeshon kyōkai*. Japan Animation Association. Accessed 6 Feb. 2007.  
<<http://www.jaa.gr.jp/j/>>
- O'Flaherty, Wendy Doniger. *Other Peoples' Myths: the Cave of Echoes*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko. *The Monkey as Mirror: Symbolic Transformations in Japanese History and Ritual*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- Osmond, Andrew. "Tokyo Stories." *Sight & Sound* 15.8 (2005): 88-88.
- Patrizio, Andy. "Paranoia Agent – Volume 1: Enter Lil' Slugger Review." *dvd.IGN.com* 1 Nov. 2004. Accessed 24 Jan. 2007.  
<<http://dvd.ign.com/articles/562/562533p1.html>>
- Ruh, Brian. *Stray Dog of Anime: the Films of Mamoru Oshii*. New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- "Sakusuru...Sōsa." *Newtype* Jun. 2004: 114-115.

- Sarkar, Bodhi. "Paranoia Agent Vol. 1 Review." *DVDactive*. 11 Jul. 2005. Accessed 27 Jan. 2007.  
<<http://www.dvdactive.com/reviews/dvd/paranoia-agent-vol--1.html>>
- Satō Tadao. *Nihon eiga*. Tokyo, Japan: Daisan Bunemisha, 1992.
- Satō Tadao. *Nihon eigashi Volume 3*. Tokyo, Japan: Iwanami Shoten, 1995.
- Schodt, Frederik L. *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*. Berkeley, California: Stone Bridge Press, 1996.
- Serial Experiments Lain*. Triangle Staff/Pioneer LDC. 1998. Accessed 29 Jan. 2007.  
<<http://www.geneon-ent.co.jp/rondorobe/anime/lain/home.html>>
- Smyers, Karen A. *The Fox and the Jewel: Shared and Private Meanings in Contemporary Japanese Inari Worship*. Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999.
- Sugimoto, Yoshio. *An Introduction to Japanese Society*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Tachigui Rebyū. "Mōsō Dairinin." 30 Jun. 2004. Accessed 15 Apr. 2007.  
<[http://homepage3.nifty.com/tachigui\\_review/archives/0406.html](http://homepage3.nifty.com/tachigui_review/archives/0406.html)>
- "Teen Bat Rampage Shocks Tokyo." *BBC News Online* 17 Dec. 2000. Accessed 11 Apr. 2007.  
<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/1078827.stm>>
- TVAnime*. "Mōsō Dairinin." *TVAnime*. 23 May 2004. Accessed 15 Apr. 2007.  
<<http://tvanime.exblog.jp/i8>>
- van Es, Robert. "Persistent Ambiguity and Moral Responsibility in *Rashomon*." *Film and Knowledge: Essays on the Integration of Images and Ideas*. Ed. Kevin L. Stoehr. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002. 102-119.
- Watterson, Bill. *The Calvin and Hobbes Tenth Anniversary Book*. Kansas City, Missouri: Andrews and McMeel, 1995.
- Wilk, Richard. "Morals and Metaphors: the Meaning of Consumption." *Elusive Consumption*. Eds. Karin M. Ekström and Helene Brembeck. Oxford, UK: Berg, 2004. 11-26.

Yasukawa Shōgo. “*Mōsō Darinin (1)*.” *Hatena Diary*. 28 Apr. 2004. Accessed 15 Apr. 2007.

<<http://d.hatena.ne.jp/asin/B0001NQ8DY>>

Yokota, Masao. “Satoshi Kon’s Transition from Comics to Animation.” *International Journal of Comic Art* 6.1 (2004): 250-265.

Yomota Inuhiko. “*Kawaii*” *ron*. Tokyo, Japan: Chukuma Shobō, 2006.

Yoshimoto, Mitsuhiro. *Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000.