Articles: Gender Studies

Not Being Kumiko: The Displaced Feminine Subject in Murakami Haruki's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*

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ABSTRACT

There is little doubt that Murakami Haruki's novels offer rich pickings for those intent on developing 'feminist' critiques of contemporary Japanese fiction. Many of the women of his narratives have variously figured as prostitutes, simpletons, clairvoyants, Lolitas, clerical assistants or housewives. Their subjectivities have frequently been rendered in terms of absence, negation, anonymity – and sexual relations with the protagonist have often been represented in highly simulacral or phantasmal ways: telephone sex, wet dreams, the virtual intimacy of computer mediated dialogue. Most recently, this has appeared in the form of the Oedipal taboo – as the adolescent hero's intercourse with a maternal apparition.

Notwithstanding the obvious efficacy of feminist and psychoanalytic readings in attempting to account for Murakami's popularity, it is important that such analyses be qualified by recognition of Murakami's own project of critique – the dismantling of the narrative subjectivities made available through the paradigms of Japanese literary modernity. Indeed, it can be argued that his treatment of female subjectivities is linked to a broader subversion of modalities of the subject – and that this is apparent through his repeated use of the tropes of abjection and the sublime.

This paper proposes just such a 'double reading' of the central motif of Murakami's longest fictional work The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle (Nejimakidori kuronikuru). It situates the figure of Kumiko in terms of an incessantly 'displaced' feminine subjectivity which is, nevertheless, universalized at a broader discursive level as the site of undecidability, the liminal and the ontological threshold of the sublime.

Introduction

Murakami Haruki's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle (Nejimakidori kuronikuru)* is a three volume fictional tour de force first published in Japan in the mid 1990's. At the time of publication it was considered to be the author's most radical experimentation with narrative format, and has remained controversial for both its graphic (some might argue ambiguous) treatment of 'sensitive' historical incidents, as well as its depiction of what can only be called instances of 'extreme imagination'. Less analysed – and perhaps less clearly understood – are the ways in which this novel deals with the representation of feminine subjectivity, and the implications of this for broader questions arising from the novel's treatment of the subject in/of Japanese modernity.

The aims of this discussion are twofold. Firstly, to highlight some of the ways in which this text represents feminine subjectivity through processes of displacement and negation. Secondly, to consider to what extent these textual processes are part of a strategy to destabilize both the idea of a cohesive subjectivity and its representation at a more broadly historical level.

The first section of the paper discusses examples of the protagonist's projected sexual fantasies directed towards a ubiquitous yet anonymous and continually displaced feminine subject. This is followed by a consideration of some episodes in which the narrating subject is threatened with dissolution/abjection. The discussion concludes by suggesting that such textual strategies constitute a kind of 'poetics of dissociation' which is evident in many of Murakami's narrative endeavours, and which powerfully informs his ongoing critique of Japanese literary modernity.

Not Being Kumiko

The first part of this paper uses illustrative examples to highlight the specific treatment of feminine subjectivity in the *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (hereafter given as *Nejimakidori*). After outlining several critical responses to the novel, the analysis introduces some feminist perspectives which are, in turn, used to broaden the discussion concerning the author's radical textual strategies for problematizing subjectivity at a more general level.

The opening chapter of *Nejimakidori* hints at what is to become the integral narrative of this long novel – the protagonist Boku's quest for re-unification with his missing wife, Kumiko. Despite the fact that Kumiko's disappearance is not revealed until the opening sentence of Book Two,[1] the estrangement between Boku and Kumiko is evident from the outset. Significantly, the mission for Kumiko's retrieval and return to the family home is homologous with another quest for the unattainable object of a more amorphous desire. This desire is reflected not only in the 'sexual' yearning of the imagined male subject, but, as is argued later, is displaced to the broader plane of a hankering for subjective unity at the level of the historical subject's encounter with itself.

Several of the more prominent critics of the novel have preferred to focus on describing thematic aspects of the representation of male/female relations in the text. Jay Rubin (who has provided the excellent English translation of *Nejimakidori*) identifies the essence of the central narrative as a story about a sexually suppressed wife who leaves her husband for a lover, with the husband left floundering in a state of fear and confusion as to how to accomplish her return.[2] In a later discussion, he does, however, hint at a larger project for the protagonist: 'his search for her is more a search inside himself for the meaning of his marriage to her and the meaning of his life as a product of Japan's modern history.'[3] From another perspective, Strecher suggests that although the 'quest of the novel is the retrieval of Kumiko and the restoration of Tôru's relationship with her', there is also a related theme of a specific nexus between the 'bodies of women' and the removal of their 'core identities'.[4]

Japanese critic Ishikura notes that there are numerous novels which deal with the misunderstandings of couples in a 'minimalist' way, and as society has become more complex, the focus of contemporary fiction has tended to move from a macro to a micro level – and subsequently, the larger 'world-image' has been lost. In *Nejimakidori*, however, Ishikura suggests that Murakami offers both a view of human relations and a 'new world-image'.[5] Elsewhere she characterizes the presented parallel structures of male/female relations in this novel in terms of a kind of pathological mix of pain, pleasure and release.[6]

This approach approximates a kind of psychoanalytic explication of Kumiko's story as, fundamentally, an extended exploration of the male subject's projection of woman-as-other. Evidence that Boku's sex with this 'woman' who is both Kumiko and *not* Kumiko (but always the universalized, feminized object of his fantasy) runs throughout the text. And it is also clear that Boku's 'quest' is a displaced search for an *unattainable* other: the ostensible object of his emotional cathexis is constantly shifting (Kumiko, Kano Kureta, Kasahara Mei, Kumiko) and he can only

simulate union with a woman who is always the 'temporary substitute', an amorphous space in which the fleeting, ephemeral sense of his identity is present, but wherein his usually 'guaranteed' epiphanic moment of ejaculation is potentially denied:

> 「最初にクミコの中に入ったとき……そこには何か、奇妙に覚めたものがあった……そこには一種の乖離の感覚があった。自分が抱いているこの体はさっきまで隣に並んで新しく話していた女の体とはべつのものなんじゃないか、自分の気づかないうちにどこかでべつの誰かの肉体と入れ代わってしまったんじゃないかという不思議な思いに僕は捉われた。
> そして今僕が抱いているのは、一時的にここにあるかりそめの肉体であるようにさえ思えた。あるいはそのせいかもしれないけれど、性的に興奮していたにもかかわらず、射精をするまでにけっこう時間がかかった。」[7]

> *The first time I went inside Kumiko…There was something oddly lucid there, a sense of separation...I was seized by the bizarre thought that the body I was holding in my arms was not the body of the woman I had had next to me until a few minutes earlier…a switch had been pulled without my noticing, and someone else's flesh had taken its place…The body I was holding was nothing but a temporary substitute. This might have been the reason why, although I was fully aroused, it took me a very long time to come.*[8]

Later (and with the auditory image privileged over the visual) Boku fantasizes about Kumiko's sexual triste with her unnamed secret lover, and in the same passage, moves to the FM Classical music station. In the dead of night, he listens to Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings, and while enjoying 'the seventh of Schumann's *Forest Scenes*' ('Bird as Prophet') his imagination wanders:

> 「僕はクミコがその男の体の下で腰をくねらせたり、相手の背中に爪を立てたり、シーツの上によだれを垂らしたりしていたところを想像した。」[9]

> *I imagined Kumiko twisting her hips beneath the other man, raising her legs, planting her fingernails on his back, drooling on the sheets.*[10]

This is followed, once again, by the ubiquitous telephone call ('The sound shot me out of the sofa'[11]) from Kano Kureta, and the imagined figure of Boku's generalized desire, once again, is transferred to the 'other woman' as the site of alterity.

It is clear from various examples that the masculinized reading positions prescribed by the figure of Boku-as-narrator indicated early in the text, revolve around the images of 'fantasy' and 'constraint'. Boku's first two conversations in the opening chapter are sexually charged dialogues with women previously unknown to him. When the telephone rings a second time he is drawn into a simulated 'telephone sex' dialogue, an encounter which feels tantalizingly 'real':

> 「声の調子から、彼女が嘘をついていないことはわかった。彼女は本当に両脚を十時五分の角度に開き、性器をあたたかく湿らせているのだ。『唇を撫でて。ゆっくりとよ。そして開くの。ゆっくりとね。指の腹でゆっくりと撫でるの……』」[12]

> *I could tell from her voice that she was not faking it. She really did have her legs open to ten-*

oh-five, her sex warm and moist.
'Touch the lips,' she said. 'Sloowly. Now open them. That's it. Slowly slowly. Let your fingers caress them.' [13]

Soon afterwards, meeting Mei Kasahara, (the Lolita-like figure who later writes him a string of unanswered letters) this originally 'auditory' image is repeated, and mingled with a visual form:

「十五か十六というところだろう。わずかにめくれあがった上唇が不思議な角度宙につきだしていた。『撫でた』、という声が聞こえたような気がした。それはあの電話の女の声だった。僕は手の甲で額の汗を拭った。」[14]

She couldn't have been more than fifteen or sixteen. With its slight curl, her upper lip pointed up at a strange angle. I seemed to hear a voice saying 'Touch me' - the voice of the woman on the phone. I wiped the sweat from my forehead with the bank of my hand.[15]

In the second chapter, after a trivial argument with his wife Kumiko, he lays awake next to her sleeping figure in the dark, and casts her existence in terms of a vast, dark and unknowable domain:

「何かもっと大きな、致命的なものごとの始まりに過ぎないかもしれないのだ。それはただの入り口なのかもしれない。そしてその奥には、僕のまだ知らないクミコだけの世界が広がっているのかもしれない。それは僕に真っ暗な巨大な部屋を想像させた。」[16]

I might be standing in the entrance of something big, and inside lay a world that belonged to Kumiko alone, a vast world that I had never known. I saw it as a big, dark room.[17]

In the kind of feminist approach to narrative suggested by Gabriele Schwab (1996), we note that in this passage, woman is positioned as being both 'inside' the narrative (through grammatical association) and 'outside' the narrative (through gender affiliation). Here, woman is cast as absolute Other, a stranger, an object, ‘a dark shape on the bed’.[18] As we have shown above, the image of woman as unspecified, universalized quasi-subject, emerges after Boku's first two conversations with women. Firstly, with the telephone-sex girl, there is unfolding an unconstrained relation of fantasy. The second, with his wife Kumiko, is clearly of a constrained nature and synonymous with the socially sanctioned role of 'the wife'. Although both the implied exemplars of the 'unconstrained' and 'constrained' turn out to be the same woman, the reader may not become aware of this until much later in the narrative.

It is clear that this text (along with others of the Murakami oeuvre) lends itself readily to feminist critique, but we need to consider what the implications of such critique might be in regard to Murakami’s own broader, critical project. Although, Boku's relations with the 'virtual' and 'real' women are being continuously displaced and transformed, a key point seems to be the notion of 'universal woman', a hint of which emerges from the following statement, once again, very early in the narrative:

「世界中の女が僕をびっくりさせるために電話をかけてきているみたいだ。」[19]

Had the women of the world chosen today to surprise me on the telephone?[20]

This idea of a ubiquitous, universalized woman compares very interestingly with a passage from Marguerite Duras' *The Malady of Death*, cited by Schwab in her work on otherness in literary language:

> *You wouldn't have known her, you'd have seen her everywhere at once, in a hotel, in a street, in a train, in a bar, in a book, in a film, in yourself, your inmost self, when your sex grew erect in the night, seeking somewhere to put itself, somewhere to shed its load of tears.*[21]

Although the text is scripted by a woman, Schwab's response to this could have been written for precisely the opening scene of *Nejimakidori*, as an invitation for the male reader to partake in a fantasy:

> *Mediated by an abstract narrative voice – a fantasy about a man 's intimate encounter with a woman who is 'everywhere at once', every-woman, anonymous, yet pertaining to everyman's inmost self."*[22]

As has been shown in some selected examples, evidence that Boku's sex with this woman who is both Kumiko *and* not Kumiko (universal feminized object) runs throughout the text. From the beginning of the narrative, the scene is set for the projected desires of the male protagonist only ever occurring in the liminal/virtual/phantastic sites of telephone, dream-work or 'e-mail' message.

There is no doubt that Boku's transference of desire from woman to woman, specified through the proper nouns 'Kumiko' and 'Kano Kureta' is mediated by the general category/signifier 'Woman', and the impossibility of engaging with a present, 'real' and 'non-virtual' woman emerges from a matrix of unspecifiable intentionality and orientation, mingling both Oedipal and sublime dimensions of desire: simultaneously shoring up and breaking down the boundaries of subjectivity, in a way which forestalls abjection by the incessantly ambiguous process of marking out presence / over-running the subject, performed in the periodic acts of ejaculation in the novel.[23]

In a fascinating twist, it is the elusive 'object' of Boku's erotic dreams, Kano Kureta, who actually reveals to Boku, by recounting precisely the contents of his dreams, the nature of his deferred and displaced subjectivity as desire. Not only does Kano Kureta often appear wearing the clothes of his missing wife, Kumiko, she reveals to him her clairvoyant knowledge that as an object of fantasy, her identity often alternates with that of 'another woman' whose identity she has no idea of:

> 「二度目に岡田様の夢に現れたときに、私は岡田様と交わっている途中で知らない女性と交代いたしました……その女性が誰であったのか、私にはわかりません。でもその出来事は岡田様に何かを示唆しているはずです。」[24]

> *In your second dream, when I was in the midst of having relations with you, another woman took my place…I have no idea who she was…But that event was probably meant to suggest something to you.*[25]

However, the more profound revelation comes in the form of Kano Kureta's lucid explanation of the closed circularity of Boku's own economy of desire:

> 「もちろん私たちは現実に交わっているわけではありません。岡田様が射精なさるとき、それ

は私の体内にではなく、岡田様自身の意識の中に射精なさるわけです。おわかりですか？それは作り上げられた意識なのです。」[26]

Of course, we did not have relations in reality. When you ejaculated, it was not into me, physically, but in your own consciousness. Do you see? It was a fabricated consciousness.[27]

Boku is very often confronting boundaries, and engaging with limits: the boundaries of subjectivity, the boundaries of the body, the boundaries of social constraint and censure, the boundaries of sexual engagement (marital/extra-marital/dream-state). But the attempts at shoring up boundaries around corporeality and subjectivity are always tentative, and need to be continually renewed. At the bottom of the well 'with its moldy smell and its trace of dampness', he undertakes a strangely contradictory musing (utilizing woman as metaphor) on the tension between maintaining a discernable self and loss-of-self, the slide into an amorphous, undifferentiated state of non-being:

「僕は暗闇の中でそれらの物体が自分の身体にぴったりと密着していることを確認する。僕が自分から離れていないことを確認する。」[28]

I check to see in the darkness that these objects are in firm contact with myself. I check to see that I am not separated from myself.[29]

and only a few lines later,

「僕はまじり合っていく違った種類の暗闇の中で……僕は「彼女たち」を相手にしているときと同じように、自分から離れようとする。
暗闇の中にうずくまっている不器用な僕の肉体から逃れ出ようとする。
僕は今ではひとつの空き家に過ぎず、捨てられた井戸に過ぎないのだ。」[30]

In the two increasingly intermingled darknesses…I try to separate from myself, just as I do whenever I am with the women. I try to get out of this clumsy flesh of mine, which is crouching down here in the dark. Now I am nothing but a vacant house, an abandoned well.[31]

This ambiguous process of Boku's confirmation that he is not separated from himself – and yet wants to separate himself – is significant in two ways. Firstly, the attempted shoring up of his sense of a discrete, subjective cohesion is mediated by reference to his differentiation to woman as other, the *plural* form 'the women' (given in Japanese as *kanojotachi*): all women certainly, yet also specifically, Kumiko, Kano Kureta, the 'telephone-sex' girl who are, as we have shown above, the inter-changeable objects of an incessantly displaced desire.

Secondly, what is also interesting about this rejection of corporeality, the revulsion towards the body ('this clumsy flesh of mine'), and the figure of 'a vacant house', (an 'abandoned well') as signifying absence and an abject *lack* of subjectivity, is its equivalence with the lack of specific subjectivity of 'the women' indicated by the generalized signifier 'woman'. Boku's justification for going down into the well is to find access to the 'non-real', virtual space into which Kumiko has disappeared, but the price which must be paid is a surrendering of his sense of self: subjectivity here is at best confused, and in an extreme sense, under suspension.

In Boku's allegorical quest for Kumiko, the key metaphoric devices are 'the wall' (*kabe*) and 'the well' (*ido*). In terms of the Freudian tripartite structure of Super-ego, Ego and Id, the well clearly signifies the Id, as the seat of dark passions, the death instinct and so on. The well is the position from which Boku launches himself into sex as well as unbridled acts of violence – attacking the guitar player and Wataya Noboru. In the Lacanian scheme, the Id is closer to the Imaginary, the pre-linguistic state of undifferentiated being in which the subject is yet to identify its separateness prior to entry into the order of the Symbolic, language and the Oedipal configuration.

As possibly the only attempt to offer, in Japanese, a sophisticated and extended critique of Murakami's fiction in terms of the psychoanalytic perspectives of Freud and Lacan, Kobayashi Masaaki's analysis has recognized, in the central quest of *Nejimakidori* (the attempt to retrieve Kumiko) the crucial link between the tropes of the wall, the well and the question of the subject, language and the Symbolic. Kobayashi notes Lacan's claim that the relationality (*kankeisei*) of the small 'o' 'other', and the imaginary 'self ' – that is of the 'immature other' (*mijuku na tasha*) and the 'immature self ' (*mijuku na jiga*) – is a fiction. The cause of the misunderstanding which supports the axis (*jiku*) of such a fiction, is the modification of 'empty or hollow language' (*kûkyo na kotobo*) into a 'wall of language' (*rangâjyu no kabe*).[32]

For the psychological subject (*shinteki na shutai*), the Other (*daimonji no tasha*) which is comprised of the objects of the real, is obstructed by this wall of language – and this difficult to attain phase is isolated/segregated (*kakuri sarete iru*). It is noted that Lacan implies that in order to break through (*tsukiyaburu*) this barrier, the psychological subject continually seeks to replenish and give substance to language through dialogue (*taiwa*). For Kobayashi, in Book Three of *Nejimakidori*, such a process is attempted as it traces the possibility of dialogue to the imagined room(s) (*heya*) of Boku's unconscious, and extends to the virtual correspondence (*tsûshin*) with Kumiko.[33] This ostensibly 'disembodied', and dematerialized discourse remains part of a broader ambiguous, problematic and unresolved process for the promised yet continually deferred reunion with Kumiko. Is the wall which Boku passes through in order to enter the disembodied realm synonymous with the 'wall of language'?

Our response to this can only be tentative, nevertheless it is clear that the 'wall of language' which Kobayashi refers to is crucial to this ambiguity – but precisely because Boku must give up or lose something in order to pass through it. On this point, Lacan makes two relevant observations on the nexus between language, subjectivity and the body:

> *I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it, as an object.*[34]

and

> *The Word is in fact a gift of Language, and language is not immaterial. It is a subtle body, but body it is. Words are trapped in all the corporeal images which captivate the subject…*[35]

In support of this, Lacan offers as examples, descriptions which seem highly apposite to Kristeva's later discussion of materials which exceed the boundaries of the body as signifying the threat of abjection: 'the flood of urine of urethral ambition … the retained faeces of avaricious *jouisannce*.'[36] To this we might add the ejaculatory excesses of Boku's 'wet dreams', and the free-flowing blood of the acts of violence occurring on the other side of the wall – and the other side of time, history and memory.

Returning to our central proposition in this paper, we can conclude that indeed Kumiko does

not have a story – or for that matter, subjectivity of her own. The story is Boku's: it 'stands in' for Kumiko's, and the latter is merely one aspect of the presented process of the protagonist's continually displaced libidinal desires, oriented toward the imagined object of woman as other. In so far as this narrative thread is no less than a story about Boku's desire, it is also a story about woman as elusive, phantasmal, without subjectivity – the cliched 'universal' woman defined through the imagined, displaced figure of Kumiko, whose disembodiment sees her recede into the virtual space of a series of digitally stored speech acts presented via the aesthetic modality of an illuminated computer monitor:

> 「この画面の向こう側に、東京の地下の暗闇を這う長いケーブルの延長線のどこかに、おそらくクミコがいるのだ。そこで彼女は同じようにモニターの前に座り、キーボードに両手を置いているはずだ。でも僕がここで現実に目にできるのは、ちりちりというかすかな機械音を立てるモニターテレビのスクリーンだけだ。」[37]
>
> *Beyond this screen, at the far end of the cable that creeps through Tokyo's underground darkness, may be Kumiko. She, too, should be sitting before a monitor, with her hands on a keyboard. In reality, all I can see is my monitor, which sits there making a faint electronic squeal.*[38]

However, because human language is essentially never 'disembodied'[39] (despite a range of possible new modalities of its presentation), Boku senses the physical presence and nuances of Kumiko in the saved transcript of their dialogue which emphasizes the curtailed semantic economy of their virtual exchange:

> 「僕はコンピューターの前に戻り、椅子に腰を下ろし、青い画面の上でのやりとりをもう一度始めから終わりまで注意深く読み返してみる。僕が何を言ったか、彼女が何を言ったか。それについて僕が何を言ったか、彼女が何を言ったか。」[40]
>
> *I go back to the computer and sit there, carefully rereading our entire exchange on the glowing tube from beginning to end: what I said, what she said, what I said to that, what she said to that.*[41]

This purely graphic and 'verbal' exchange is nevertheless semantically regulated and presented via an imagined simulacrum of the auditory modalities of the embodied cadences of a human voice:

> 「我々の会話は画面の上にそのまま残されている。そこには不思議に生々しいものがある。画面の上に並んだ字を目で追いながら、僕は彼女の声を聞き取ることができる。その抑揚や、微妙な声のトーンや間の取り方を、僕は知ることができる。カーソルは最後の行の上でまだ心臓の鼓動のような規則的な点滅を続けている。次の言葉が発せられるのを息を殺して待ち続けている。でもそこに続く言葉はない。」[42]
>
> *The whole thing is still there on the screen, with a certain graphic intensity. As my eyes follow the rows of characters she has made, I can hear her voice. I can recognize the rise and fall of*

> *her voice, the subtle tones and pauses. The cursor on the last line keeps up its blinking with all the regularity of a heartbeat, waiting with bated breath for the next word to be sent. But there is no next word.*[43]

Ultimately, Boku's relation with Kumiko moves from a highly corporeal to an auditory one, conducted over the telephone – and then finally, to a 'disembodied' modality: a series of virtual dialogues conducted via the 'e-mail' format. The literary representation of this kind of speech act was quite revolutionary at the time of publication because 'e-mail' was not nearly as common or widespread as it is now. The 'virtual relationship' is indicative of a new contemporary mode of communication, where the words on the screen mark out the phantasmal trace of subjectivity, which is, nevertheless, tentatively bestowed on the woman who is not Kumiko, in this story which does not belong to her, but rather to the imagined position of the male protagonist as reading and speaking subject.

Abject Stories: The Subject in Retreat

The subject never is. The subject is only the signifying process and appears only as a signifying practice, that is, only when absent within the position out of which social, historical, and signifying activity unfolds.

Julia Kristeva,
Revolution in Poetic Language[44]

If the narrative perspectives established around the stories of Kumiko and Nutmeg are made possible by a range of unstable, shifting subject positions in the presented worlds available to the reader, the stories told by several other characters can be said to radically broach the very question of even the *possibility* of maintaining any cohesive sense of subjectivity. In particular, Boku's narrated episodes of alienation from his own body, the acts of sexual violation narrated by Kano Kureta, and the horrific episodes of human skinning alive related by Captain Mamiya, mark perhaps the most shocking and extreme condition of the sublime limits of the subject's encounter with itself. Indeed, it is arguably the graphic, 'horror-movie-like' scenes of the latter, which have made *Nejimakidori* such a landmark contemporary novel.

Lacan's comments, that the subject is defined by a kind of *lack* – that it must 'lose' itself in order to enter language – have already been noted. This is affirmed in Kristeva's assertion that as a signifying practice, subjectivity 'appears', paradoxically, only by being *absent* from 'the position out of which social, historical and signifying activity unfolds'. It is well known that Kristeva transformed Lacan's categories of Imaginary and Symbolic into, respectively, the semiotic and the symbolic,[45] and it is also the case that she extended and explored the central idea of 'lack' in her studies in terms of the notion of abjection, the theory of which is outlined in her important essay *Powers of Horror*.[46] Put very simply, abjection describes that state the subject falls into when it is threatened within a return to the pre-Oedipal, pre-symbolic, maternal realm. Burgin describes the Kristevan sense of the abject as

> *the means by which the subject is first impelled towards the possibility of constituting itself as such – in an act of revulsion, of expulsion of that which can no longer be contained. Significantly, the first object of abjection is the pre-oedipal mother – prefiguring that positioning of the woman in society which Kristeva locates, in the patriarchal scheme, as*

perpetually at the border line, the edge, the 'outer limit' …[47]

The putative subject's response to such a threat can manifest itself in the experience of revulsion or rejection of the body, or what it produces. We can characterize the episodes of Boku's alienating 'out of body' experiences as an intimation of the Kristevan notion of abjection, and as an important dimension of the aesthetic of the sublime in *Nejimakidori:*

「僕はその完璧な暗黒のそこにしゃがみこんでいた。目にすることのできるのは無だけだった。僕はその無の一部になっていた。僕は目を閉じて自分の心臓の音を聞き、血液が体内を循環する音を聞き、肺がふいごのように収縮する音を聞き、ぬめぬめとした内臓が食べ物を要求して身をくねらせる音を聞いた。深い暗闇の中ではすべての動きが、すべての振動が不自然に誇張されていた。これが僕の肉体なのだ。でも闇の中ではそれはあまりにも生々しく、あまりにも肉体でありすぎた。」[48]

I was crouching down in the total darkness. All I could see was nothingness. And I was part of this nothingness. I closed my eyes and listened to the sound of my heart, to the sound of the blood circulating through my body, to the bellows-like contractions of my lungs, to the slippery undulations of my food-starved gut. In the deep darkness, every movement, every throb, was magnified enormously. This was my body: my flesh. But in the darkness, it was all too raw and physical.[49]

The original Japanese gives a much greater sense of the sheer viscerality of Boku's revulsion, of his sense of horror at the immediacy of his own corporeality: the onomatopoeic resonance (*gion*) of words like *nume nume toshita* ('slimy', from *numeri*: 'slime'; 'sliminess')[50] and *namanamashiku*, an adverbial form of the adjective connoting 'green', 'fresh' 'vivid', certainly of the sense of the word 'raw' which is used in the translation, but also 'vivid', 'graphic' or even 'reeking'.[51]

In the darkness at the bottom of the well, Boku's revulsion towards his own body is played out blindly – without vision – and relying on the auditory and haptic senses for perception. Boku as subject, moves closer to a state of undifferentiation, a state of abjection, where he is only flesh and no-subject, or where the borders of his subjectivity are at best elusive and tenuous. He tries to forestall this threatened abjection by imitating the sound of the wind-up bird, but fails. The cry of the wind-up bird as a central trope of the novel is the audio-image of that which 'winds the world's spring' and signifies the passage of contiguous as well as discontinuous time(s): generalized cosmic time, as well as the specific times of 'memory' and 'history', which take form in the narrative-as-chronicle. It is this sound which gives order to the chaos and horror of his threatened abjection by invoking the elements of the symbolic: language, conscious memory, history and articulated desire.

What is signified here are the liminal zones or perhaps interstitial realm of the semiotic, which always 'feels the pressure' of the symbolic. In the Lacanian Imaginary or the Kristevan realm of the semiotic, where the auditory image of the phonemic unit is first modelled on the metabolic sounds of the body: the 'throbs' and 'undulations', the 'bellow-like' contractions, we sense a transitional state of subjectivity. Grosz describes it thus:

The semiotic transfers its particular characteristics onto signifying elements: phonemic units are produced from the energies and impulses of the drives … creating the irreducibly material

elements of representation.[52]

Here language is a 'breaking-through', an irruption of the semiotic into the pre-established social order of the symbolic. But in the necessary unification of the different aspects of the signifier (that is to say, of the dimensions and modalities of the visual, the audio, the haptic, olfactory, etc.) there occurs a kind of unification, the origins of which are at once repressed. Kristeva characterizes the specific melding together of two aspects of these sensory modalities – the audio image and visual image – as a 'condensation', and suggests that not only does this function as an indispensable condition for the establishment of the Oedipal configuration, but also that any threat to its continuity represents a direct threat to the Oedipal.[53]

In another vividly depicted episode at the bottom of the well, Boku describes his unrelenting efforts to confirm the existence of a body he cannot see, but that can only be surmised through the modalities of the auditory and the haptic:

「暗闇の中でただじっとしていると、自分がそこに存在しているという事実がだんだんうまく呑み込めなくなってくるのだ。だから僕はときどき軽い咳払いをしたり、手のひらで自分の顔を撫でてみたりした。そうすることで僕の耳は僕の声の存在を確かめ、僕の手は僕の顔の存在を確かめ、僕の顔は僕の手の存在を確かめることができた。」[54]

Staying very still in the darkness, I became less and less convinced of the fact that I actually existed. To cope with that, I would clear my throat now and then, or run my hand over my face. That way, my ears could check on the existence of my voice, my hand could check on the existence of my face, and my face could check on the existence of my hand.[55]

Here the sheer redundancy of verbal language is made evident, and it must accede to the demands of a form of semiosis generated entirely in the matrix of the corporeal:

「まるで僕の中で無言の熾烈な綱引きのようなことが行われていて、僕の意識が少しずつ僕の肉体を自分の領域に引きずり込みつつあるようだった……肉体などというものは結局のところ、意識のために染色体という記号を適当に並べかえて用意された、ただのかりそめの殻にすぎないのではないか、と僕はふと思った。」[56]

I felt as if a fierce and wordless tug-of-war were going on inside me, a contest in which my mind was slowly dragging my body into its own territory … The thought struck me that my own body was a mere provisional husk that had been prepared for my mind by a rearrangement of the signs known as chromosomes.[57]

We might wish to characterize Boku's imagining of and revulsion towards his own body in the darkness as evidence of the fact that, as Ruthrof puts it, generally speaking 'we do not feel at home in this body'. Citing Ackerman, Ruthrof notes that we all carry 'an exaggerated mental picture of our body' which is somehow frightening. He argues, however, that this is inevitable:

To say that this grotesque body is the wrong one would require a plane of metajudgement which is denied us. All we can say is that ordinary perceptions of ourselves and the haptic

body are in conflict. The signs responsible for the two Gestalten are in conflict.

It is inevitable, because this perceptual conflict is no more than an instance of 'sign conflict' or 'heterosemiosis'. This should not seem so surprising, since as Ruthrof reminds us, the heterosemiotic merely reflects what has been described, at a more abstract level, in the larger project of much contemporary theory's concern with signification as differentiation.[58]

What these disjunctive notions such as 'sign conflict', 'heterosemiosis' and 'differentiation' have in common, is that they connote the idea of dissociation. And it is this notion, as it emerges in various ways throughout *Nejimakidori*, which underpins and indeed links the specific narrative displacement of the 'feminine' subject with the broader meta-narrative of this novel: the retreating or threatened subject of history.

Conclusion: A Poetics of Dissociation?

The above discussion has demonstrated some of the ways in which the multiple narrative trajectories of *Nejimakidori* tend to displace the feminine subject, as well as destabilize any sense of subjective unity made available through the masculinized reading positions of the narrator. It showed how the figure of Kumiko acted as some kind of substitute for the protagonist's incessantly deferred encounter with a universalized feminine other. This was followed by a discussion of episodes relating the horror of the narrative subject's encounter with its own threatened dissolution. In this brief, concluding section, it is suggested that there is a link between between these two textual strategies which is not antithetical to Murakami's broader project of critique.

Interestingly, no Japanese commentators referred to here have used the term 'abject' (let alone 'sublime' – *kôsô*) to describe the radical treatment of subjectivity in *Nejimakidori*. Despite this, it is impossible to avoid the problem of accounting for the vividly depicted representations of violence and horror in *Nejimakidori*. Are these perhaps indicative of forms of authorially guided 'therapy' built into the reception possibilities of the text – a bringing to light of repressed memories?

In conversation with the Japanese psychiatrist Kawai Hayao, Murakami has stressed that in the imagined narrative of Boku's quest to retrieve his missing wife, the protagonist would have to 'turn something upside down' (*hikkuri kaeshi*), and this inevitably resulted in a resort to violence. In the section of the dialogue entitled 'The Violence in Japanese Society', he also concedes that although at a personal, authorial level he is at a loss to explain his creation of such extreme images (the skinning episodes and the execution of Chinese prisoners), at a more abstract level, the nexus between the personal world of darkness and historical violence is clear:

> 「……闇の世界はなにかというと、そこには延々積み重なった歴史的な暴力というのが存在しているのです。」[59]
>
> *If one asks 'what is the world of darkness?' - it is that place where far-reaching, accumulated historical violence exists.*

Murakami goes on to reflect on the probability that the personal violence which is used to return from the 'world of darkness' to the 'world of light' at the end of Book Three, is in concert with historical violence – and this reflects his own particular sense of historical awareness.[60]

Some of the more insightful critical responses to *Nejimakidori* include Kato Norihiro's

analysis[61], which unwittingly describes the split subject as a version of the Kristevan theory of abjection, and Yoshida Haruo's discussion[62], which couches this division in terms of the subject 'fleshed-out' or embodied in the violence of history. However, it is Saito Tamaki's critique, which, in its foregrounding of the psychoanalytic theory of dissociation (*kairi*), can be said to usefully incorporate both of these approaches. As a psychiatrist himself, Saito immediately discerns the significance of Murakami's 'confession' (in dialogue with Kawai)[63] that he had no clear idea why certain actions were represented in the text and what meanings were generated by them. Acknowledging that Murakami's works in the nineties have achieved a 'high standard' in terms of being able to couple 'trauma and dissociation', he enthusiastically declares that he has something to learn (in a professional sense) about the 'phenomenon of dissociation', by reading *Nejimakdori*.[64]

Here we see an indirect reference to the contradictory tension between the splitting of the subject (the discordant and conflicting modalities of the subject, directly linking the discursive power of the writing of history – the efficacy of its logic – to its power to synthesize and integrate the chaotic contents of history) and the command to bring-to-order the subject of history, and history as subject. But to what extent is this reflective of a more fundamental schism in the interstitial spaces of subjectivity (arrayed between memory and thought) implied by the disjunctive effect of bringing together the conventionally perceived modalities of 'fiction' and 'history'? Or to rephrase the question: in the context of their deployment in *Nejimakidori*, and the critical texts surrounding it, are these narrative modalities fundamentally in conflict or not?

In terms of the contradictory, multiple meanings of *Nejimakidori* as contemporary fiction, our answer to this question is in the affirmative. But the implied 'violence' of this conflict is not indicative of artistic shortcoming. On the contrary, this artful grating together of two heterogeneous language games, is indicative precisely of the mature Murakami's contribution to the important task of developing the sophistication of the debate around Japanese modernity from *within* what Karatani describes as the 'closed discursive space' of Japan.

This is why, amongst the many critical responses to *Nejimakidori*, Saito's application of the psychoanalytic term 'dissociation' (although disarmingly simple) is also, at an abstract level, one of the most apposite tropes for our consideration of the text's significance for contemporary Japanese writing. Whether it be in terms of the critical undecidability of the text's genre, or the disjunctive modalities available in the reader's aesthetic construction of it as narrative, the sense that in *Nejimakidori* something is awry, out of synch, is undeniable.

Saito points out that dissociation is a phenomenon that depends on the functioning of a phantasm which can be transposed into the broader context of a fictional work. In this kind of world, some things are dissociated (*kairi sareru*) and others are repeated (*hanfuku sareru*) – the point being that some readers will take dissociation as a kind of 'mannerism', while others will take it as indicating simply the 'reality of repetition'.[65] This sense of the disconnected, the disjunctive, the separate (and notwithstanding the conventional, psychopathological description of the coexistence of two or more distinct 'personalities' in the same person), can manifest as a defensive mechanism which protects against trauma and stress.

An important aspect of Saito's description is in regard to what he describes as the loss of 'spacio-temporal continuity' (*jikanteki – kûkanteki na renzokusei*) in the mind of the individual.'[66] Here we recall Jameson's characterization of the postmodern as a kind of 'schizophrenic' construction of time, and his depiction of the 'schizo [who] is bereft of every scene, open to everything in spite of himself, living in the greatest confusion'.[67] On this point it is clear not only that the spacio-temporal logic of *Nejimakidori* assumes several forms of narrative re-telling, but also that these forms reflect a range of subjective displacements variously ordered within an

overall aesthetic of the sublime.

Another of Saito's observations on Nejimakdori which is pertinent to our argument relates to nomenclature – naming, and the proper noun. He reminds us of Karatani Kojin's assertion regarding Murakami's 'resistance' to proper nouns (*koyûme*) – in support of a general claim that dissociation, which can be a response to loss, manifests itself as a resistance to proper nouns.[68] It is clear that proper nouns in *Nejimakidori* keep shifting and being displaced: when Kumiko leaves the house, she loses her name and becomes the anonymous 'erotic telephone woman'; the cat (Wataya Noboru) disappears, and gets renamed Sawara upon return; when the 'prostitute of the mind', Kano Kureta, ceases sexual engagement with Boku, she loses her name.[69]

Proceeding from the proposition that schizophrenia (*rijinbyô*) or the condition of 'the loss of the sense of reality' (*genjitsukansôshitsu*) is nothing other than the process of the 'becoming anonymous ' (*tokumeika*) – the robbing of the self-image and world-image of its particularity (*koyûsei*) or substantiality (*konomonosei*) – Saito reflects on the emptying out of meaning in dissociation. In response to the question as to why dissociation entails an avoidance of particularity or substantiality, he concludes that the subject (*shutai*) defends itself from the wounds of external experience through 'forgetfulness' or 'being oblivious' (*bôkyaku suru*) to the world, and notes that Murakami himself, describing *Nejimakidori* in its form as a 'holy grail legend' kind of narrative, takes the task of retrieving or recuperating (*torimodosu*) 'something' as its central motif.

In conclusion, we are left to ponder how this process of dissociation in *Nejimakdori* brings to light precisely what it is that needs to be recuperated? As we have argued here, it is certainly not just the protagonist's missing wife, or her displaced and phantasmal subjectivity in the guise of 'other' women. Rather, perhaps things much more fundamental – akin to what Marilyn Ivy calls 'modernity's losses'[70] – are in need of recovery or recuperation. If indeed it is the elusive subject of Japanese modernity which is at stake here, it is significant that attempts to give shape to it – however tentative they may be – continue to inform Murakami's fictional endeavours in works subsequent to the publication of the landmark *Nejimakidori* almost a decade ago.

1. Hereafter, the following abbreviations will be used: NDK for the original Japanese text entitled *Nejimakidori kuronikuru*, followed by volume, chapter and page number. WBC for the English translation by Jay Rubin entitled *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* followed by volume, chapter and page number. See reference list for publication details. For the revelation of Kumiko's disappearance, see NDK: 2;1;7. WBC: 2;1;183.
2. Jay Rubin, 'Sekusu to rekishi to kioku - Murakami Haruki "Nejimakidori kuronikuru", trans. Sakai Yokuko. *Shincho* 2 (Feb.1995), pp.254 - 259.
3. See Jay Rubin, 'Murakami Haruki', in *Modern Japanese Writers*, ed. Jay Rubin, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001, p.239.
4. See Matthew Strecher, 'Magical Realism and the Search for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki', Journal of Japanese Studies 25, 2 (1999) pp.265-274; p. 287.
5. See Ishikura Michiko, 'Aratana sekaizô no kakutoku - "Nejimakidori kuronikuru" ron', in *Murakami Haruki Sutadeizu 04* (Wakakusa Shobô, 1999), pp.119-151; 129,130.
6. Ishikura Michiko, 'Murakami Haruki "Nejimakidori kuronikuru" nôto', Senshû Daigaku Daigakuin, *Bunken Ronshû* (October, 1994),1-36; 20, 21.
7. NDK 2: 6; 108-9.
8. WBC 2: 6; 230.
9. NDK 2: 11; 196.
10. WBC 2: 11; 280.

11. Ibid.
12. NDK 1: 1; 9.
13. WBC 1: 1; 11.
14. NDK 1: 1; 6.
15. WBC 1: 1; 15.
16. NDK 1: 2; 57.
17. WBC 1: 2; 30.
18. Gabriele Schwab, *The Mirror and the Killer Queen: Otherness in Literary Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 171.
19. NDK 1: 1; 12.
20. WBC 1: 1; 8.
21. See Gabriele Schwab, *The Mirror and the Killer Queen*, op.cit., p. 170. Schwab is citing Marguerite Duras's *The Malady of Death*, a short story originally published in French in 1982. See *The Malady of Death*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Grove, 1986).
22. Ibid., p.171.
23. For episodes of ejaculation and suppressed urges of ejaculation, see for example NDK 1: 9; 189., WBC 1: 9; 103, and NDK 2: 8; 141., WBC 2: 8; 249.
24. NDK 2 : 4 ; 74.
25. WBC 2: 4; 214.
26. NDK 2: 4; 73.
27. WBC 2: 4; 214.
28. NDK 3: 9; 100.
29. WBC 3; 8; 397.
30. NDK 3: 9; 100.
31. WBC 3: 8; 397.
32. See Kobayashi Masaaki, *Murakami Haruki: Tô to umi no kanata ni* (Tokyo: Shinwasha, 1998), p.160.
33. Ibid., pp.160-61.
34. Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis* trans. Anthony Wilden (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968), p.63.
35. Ibid., p.64.
36. Ibid., p.63.
37. NDK 3: 23; 253 - 54.
38. WBC 3: 22; 489.
39. As shown in the argument presented above by Lacan.
40. NDK 3: 23; 264.
41. WBC 3: 22; 495.
42. NDK 3: 23; 264.
43. Ibid.
44. Cited in Martha J. Reineke, *Sacrificed Lives: Kristeva on Women and Violence* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p.49.
45. Sue Vice, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reader*, ed. Sue Vice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), pp.150 - 153.Vice describes 'the semiotic' as the pre-Oedipal realm where the infant exists in as state of being defined by the 'pulsions' of the mothers body as well as its own drives.
46. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press), 1982.
47. Victor Burgin, 'Geometry and Abjection', in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristevai*, ed. J.

Fletcher & A. Benjamin (London & New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1990),p.115.

48. NDK 2: 10; 156
49. WBC 2: 10; 258.
50. *Kenkyusha'a New Japanese-English Dictionary*, op.cit., p.1260
51. Ibid., p. 1181.
52. Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), p.50; cited in *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reader*, ed. Sue Vice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p.152.
53. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.52.
54. NDK 2: 7; 112.
55. WBC 2: 7; 232-3.
56. NDK 2: 7; 112.
57. WBC 2: 7; 233.
58. Horst Ruthrof, *The Body in Language* (London And New York, Cassell, 2000); especially Chapter 6, 'Sign Conflict: Meaning as Heterosemiotic', pp.72,73. Ruthrof is quoting from Diane Ackerman, *A Natural History of the Senses* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 95.
59. *Murakami Haruki, Kawai Hayao ni ai ni iku*, Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996, p. 173; Yoshida, op.cit., p.207.
60. Ibid., pp173-4.
61. See Kato, Norihiro. ‘Ozomashisa to keiji – “Nejmakidori kuronikuru” in *Murakami Haruki – iero peji*, Tokyo: Kochi Shuppansha, 1996, pp.191-220.
62. See Yoshida Haruo, *Murakami Haruki – tenkan suru*, Tokyo: Sairyusha, 1997, p.205.
63. Ibid., p.114.
64. Saito Tamaki, 'Kairi no gihô to rekishiteki gaishô', *Yurîka*, Sangatsu rinjizôkan, Sôtokushu: 'Murakami Haruki o yomu', 32, 4 (March, 2000), 62-63.
65. Ibid., p.63.
66. Ibid.
67. Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1991, p.133.
68. Saito Tamaki, op.cit., p. 69.
69. Ibid.
70. See Marylin Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan,* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

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