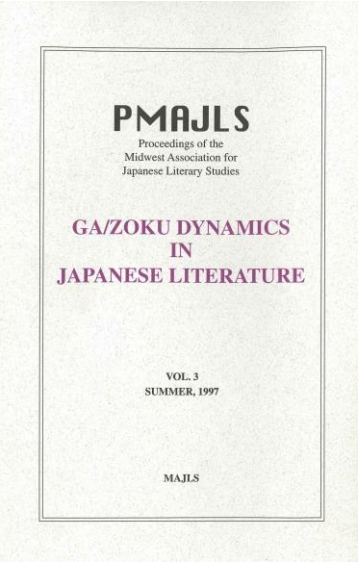
“Televisual Retrofutures and the Body of Insomnia: Visuality and Virtual Realities in the Short Fiction of Murakami Haruki”

Livia Monnet

Proceedings of the Midwest Association for Japanese Literary Studies 3 (1997): 340–380.



PMAJLS 3:
Ga/Zoku Dynamics in Japanese Literature.
Ed. Eiji Sekine.

Televisual Retrofutures and the Body of Insomnia: Visuality and Virtual Realities in the Short Fiction of Murakami Haruki

LIVIA MONNET
University of Montreal

The fiction of Murakami Haruki has rarely been discussed in terms of its responses to contemporary information technologies and their impact on late-capitalist economies.[1] In this essay, I argue that many of the texts Murakami has published since the 1980's, whether or not in the genre of cybernetic fiction represented by The Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World (1985, English translation 1991), are apt to produce virtual worlds and cyberspaces very much like those generated by computers, and which exhibit a marked awareness of dominant ideologies and unequal social relations in contemporary Japan and other information societies. The highly visual politics of

---

1. Until recently Murakami's texts were analyzed in terms of the consciousness of the zenkyōtō (the All-Campus Joint Struggle Committees that led the student movement of the late 1960's and early 1970's) generation they supposedly reflect; of the "Murakami phenomenon," or the tremendous popular success of his writings in the late 1980's and early 1990's; and finally as offshoot of postmodern consumerism, or as ironic entertainment in the mode of the fantastic or SF. See Fukami Haruka, Murakami Haruki no uta; Kasai Kiyoshi, Katō Norihiro, Takeda Seiji, Murakami Haruki o meguru bōken; Kuroko Kazuo, Murakami Haruki to dōjidai bungaku; Kasai Kiyoshi, Monogatari no uroborosu, 262-291.

representation in these texts - of which only two, the stories "TV People" and "Sleep," are examined here[2] - also features forms of subjectivity and corporeality which are unmistakably structured by both modernist and postmodern technological interventions.

"TV People"

Televisual Visitants: The World Is Shrinking

The narrator in this story is an ad designer for an electrical appliance company. One Sunday afternoon he is visited by a group of three TV People carrying a brand new TV set. The little men switch on the TV but only a blank image appears in the screen. The uncanny televisual visitants show up next at a business meeting at the narrator's company, carrying a Sony color TV set as usual. After the meeting the designer has a nightmare in which he delivers a meaningless talk to an audience of stone statues and TV people. Upon waking up he finds a little TV man who has climbed out of the TV screen to inform him that his wife has left him, and that there will be a phone call from her within the next few minutes. As he waits for this call the narrator realizes that he has shrunk in size and is about to turn into a televisual being like his otherworldly visitors.

---

2. "TV People" ("TV Pipuru") and "Sleep" ("Nemuri") are included in the collection TV People. The English translations used in this study are by Alfred Birnbaum and Jay Rubin, respectively, and may be found in The Elephant Vanishes. For discussions of TV People, see Kuroko, Murakami Haruki to dōjidai bungaku, 40-47 and Kasai, Katō and Takeda, 133-143. A brief examination of The Hard-Boiled Wonderland as a complex example of cybernetic fiction is found in David Porush, 120-21. The term cybernetic fiction, often used interchangeably with cyberpunk, designates a type of fiction that dramatizes the uses and abuses of cybertechnologies.

The Dissolution of Life into TV

At first sight, "TV People" seems to be doing little else than to translate into the terms of the bizarre and the fantastic a condition Baudrillard has described as "the dissolution of TV into life, the dissolution of life into TV."[3] In other words, the text seems to demonstrate that televisual modes of perception and cognition, televisual spectatorship - televisual culture in general - has not only taken possession of but literally supplanted reality in contemporary Japanese society as well as in other information cultures. Thus the TV People are literally televisual characters - characters belonging to, but who can also move freely in and out of the virtual world behind the TV screen. Their high-pitched, unnatural-sounding voices and their smallness - though undoubtedly life-like, the persons appearing on our TV screens can never be life-size - are both unmistakable indications of the TV People's status as televisual virtual images. In addition, the fact that the little, identical-looking TV men leave their "natural" televisual habitat and relentlessly pursue the narrator suggests that the virtual environment inside the TV set has spilled over and permeated the quotidian reality of contemporary Japan.

> In fact, if you see TV People somewhere, you might not notice at first that they're small. But even if you don't, they'll probably strike you as somehow strange. Unsettling, maybe.... TV People look as if they were reduced by photocopy, everything mechanically calibrated. Say their height has been reduced by a factor of 0.7, then their shoulder width is also in 0.7 reduction; ditto (0.7 reduction) for the feet, head, ears, and fingers. Like plastic models, only a little smaller than the real thing. (197)

---

3. See Baudrillard, Simulations, 55.

> Yes, just as in the dream, one of the TV People is on the television screen. The same guy I passed on the stairs to the office. No mistake.... The one who first opened the door to the apartment.... The next thing I know, he's stepping through the screen. Hands gripping the frame, lifting himself up and over, one foot after the other, like climbing out of a window, leaving a white TV screen glowing behind him.
>
> He rubs his left hand in the palm of his right, slowly acclimating himself to the world outside the television.... He has that all-the-time-in-the-world nonchalance. Like a veteran TV-show host. Then he looks me in the face.(212-213)

The narrator's "transformation" into a TV man at the end of the story also signals, it would seem, the text's unconditional adherence to Baudrillard's somber pronouncements on television's fatal ability to dissolve all distinctions between reality and simulation, life and its projection on the TV screen: the narrator now clearly realizes that he has long been an integral part of the seamless virtual environment generated by television (216). On the other hand, instances such as the nightmare in which the designer gradually turns to stone while lecturing to an audience of stone statues and TV People, and the fact that the TV set brought by the latter shows a blank image or stays dark most of the time seem to critique, not only the mindlessness and political conformism of contemporary TV culture, but the eclecticism, simulated nostalgia, self-referential pastiches and unabashed consumerism of postmodern mass culture as a whole.

> The TV People plug (the TV set) into a wall socket, then switch it on... The screen lights up. A moment later the picture floats into view. They change the channels by remote control. But all the channels are blank - probably, I think, because they haven't connected the set to an antenna....

> Yet somehow the TV People don't seem bothered that they aren't picking up any broadcast... Blank screen, no image - makes no difference to them. Having pushed the button and had the power come on, they've completed what they came to do. (202)

> I dream about a meeting. I'm standing up, delivering a statement. I myself don't understand. I open my mouth and talk. If I don't, I'm a dead man.... Everyone around me is dead and turned to stone. A roomful of stone statues... The windows are all broken; gusts of wind are coming on. And the TV People are here. Three of them. Like the first time. They're carrying a Sony color TV. And on the screen are the TV People. I'm running out of words; little by little I can feel my fingertips growing stiffer. Gradually turning to stone. (p. 212)

Demonizing mass culture in late capitalist information societies though they seem, such moments rather call attention to yet another postmodern cultural phenomenon Istvan Csicery-Ronay, Jr. has described as SF consciousness.

SF Consciousness and the Imaginary Autonomy of Reality

According to Csicery-Ronay, information technologies and the culture of information have succeeded in creating an as yet inchoate world-view that may be called "artificial immanence:" values that were previously considered transcendental or naturally given now seem at least theoretically apt of artificial simulation or reproduction. SF, which has grown steadily in popularity and sophistication, has by now achieved the status of a mode of discourse straddling the literary, scientific and philosophical imaginations and subverting the boundaries between them. Since it both produces and hyperbolizes the new immanence by employing radical scientific concepts of material relations which in their turn have altered our perception of what is imaginable

and plausible, SF has become an inseparable aspect of the consciousness of people living in the postmodern world. Even theory, Csicery-Ronay goes on to assert, has become "theory-SF" - the outcome of a radical process of "science-fictionalization" of theory.[4]

In light of the above observations, it becomes possible to reformulate "TV People"'s somber vision of the power of televisual simulations, unabashed eclecticism and the endless self-reproduction of postmodern mass culture as a projection of/on an SF consciousness that pervades every aspect of and at the same exposes the "problematic autonomy of reality" in information societies.[5] Murakami's text also offers privileged glimpses into the science-fictionalization of contemporary Japanese culture. The SF consciousness at work in the text is - not surprisingly in view of the representation of the impact of television discussed above - projected as eminently visual, and as the dominant scopic regime in postmodern information cultures. Finally, the SF consciousness/SF scopic regime theorized and simulated in "TV People" demonstrates that the artificial immanence, or hyperreality of the retrofuture - the contemporary cultural moment which often seems seriously threatened by the "retrochronal semiovirus" of an imagined future time that destroys the "original chronocytes" of the present's imagination through insidious simulacra[6] - is neither ahistorical

---

4. Istvan Csicery-Ronay, Jr.(1991), 387-389. Csicery-Ronay considers Baudrillard and Donna Haraway two eminent practitioners of "theory-SF."

5. The phrase "the problematic autonomy of reality" appears in Csicery-Ronay (1991), 390.

6. Csicery-Ronay defines the retrofuture, or "retrofuturistic chronosemiitis" as a condition in which a "retrochronal semiovirus" of a "time further in the future than the one in which we exist.... infects the host present, reproducing itself in simulacra, until it destroys all

nor transcendent, but contingent and marked by a multiplicity of axes of identity.

Televisual virtual images which are at the same time three-dimensional "real" characters, the weird species of TV people featured in Murakami's text may also be regarded as cyborgs, computer simulations or AI (artificial intelligence) creations. Evoking the cyborg characters in William Gibson's celebrated cyberpunk novel Neuromancer (1984),"[7] the little TV men invade the narrator's life, appearing at the most unlikely times and at the most unlikely places and constantly haunting him. The TV People's manner of utterly ignoring everyone and concentrating on their meaningless activities (202), and the fact that the wife and colleagues of the protagonist pay no attention to them (203, 209) suggests that they have been there all the time and that the narrator simply did not notice them. Like the narrator's nightmare and his final transformation into a TV man, such instances indicate that all characters in the story are variants of TV People, and that they own - or have been implanted with - a cyborg identity and consciousness. The SF virtual world to which the TV People belong, then, has colonized - indeed has become interchangeable with - reality, rendering the latter's autonomy extremely precarious if not non-existent. In other words, reality is the illusionistic SF cyberspace projected by the story, a space that, needless to say, is capable of endless (self)-reproduction or simulation.

---

the original chronocytes of the host imagination." See Csicery-Ronay (1992), 26.

7. See, for instance, cyborgs such as Case, Molly, the Moderns and Armitage, and the pure computer simulations and constructs Dixie Flatline and Wintermute. Neuromancer is the first part of the Sprawl trilogy which includes Count Zero (1986) and Mona Lisa Overdrive (1988).

One effect of the ubiquitous SF consciousness depicted in "TV People" consists in the fact that the self-awareness of the story's characters is also SF: these characters know that they are SF characters in an SF virtual world. Such a self-reflexivity - which, again, resonates with the self-consciousness of the cyborgs and other artificially created characters in cyberpunk novels[8] - may be seen in the meaningful silence with which a company colleague the protagonist has befriended meets the latter's anxious query about the TV People: this reaction signifies a disbelief with respect to the narrator's belated realization that he too is an android with an artificially implanted consciousness/unconscious just like everyone else.

> One colleague leaves his seat to go to the toilet, and I get up to follow. This is a guy who entered the company around the same time I did... Sometimes we go out for a drink together after work.... He's the first to complain. "Oh, joy! Looks like we're in for more of the same, straight through to evening. I swear! Meetings, meetings, meetings, going to drag on forever."
>
> "You can say that again," I say.... "Oh, by the way, those guys who came in with the TV just now..." I launch forth, then cut off.

---

8. See the testimony of Dixie Flatline, the computer program or construct with which Case, the protagonist of Neuromancer works:

> "Motive," the construct said. "Real motive problem, with an AI. Not human, see?"
>
> "Well, yeah, obviously."
>
> "Nope. I mean, it's not human. And you can't get a handle on it. Me, I'm not human either, but I respond like one. See?"
>
> "Wait a sec," Case said. "Are you sentient, or not?"
>
> "Well, it feels like I am, kid, but I'm really just a bunch of ROM. It's one of them, ah, philosophical questions, I guess..." The ugly laughter sensation rattled down Case's spine. "But I ain't likely to write you no poem, if you follow me. Your AI, it just might. But it ain't no way human." (131)

> He doesn't say anything. He turns off the faucet, pulls two paper towels from the dispenser, and wipes his hands.... Maybe he didn't hear me. Or maybe he's pretending not to hear. I can't tell. But from the sudden strain in the atmosphere, I know enough not to ask. I shut up, wipe my hands, and walk down the corridor to the conference room. The rest of the afternoon's meetings, he avoids my eyes. (209-210)

The TV Image as General Equivalent

An especially interesting feature of the SF timespace of high-tech postmodern culture simulated in "TV People" is its imperialistic, oppressive visuality. This environment actualizes William Gibson's description of computer-generated virtual realities as "consensual hallucination"[9] insofar as it is a hallucinated and hallucinatory space of rampant visuality which the characters in the text agree, or pretend to consider "real." An unmistakable symptom of this aggressive visuality is the ubiquitousness of televisual perception and televisual representation. Not only does the TV image - epitomized by the TV People and identical with the computer-generated cyber-image - absorb, repress or kill off sounds, but sounds are seemingly condemned to a visual existence, i.e. they become perceptible and intelligible only insofar as they can be read as images. The TV People are soundless - you never hear their footsteps (198) - and, except for the representative who informs the narrator of his wife's defection, always silent: "The TV People speak not a word. Their movements come off in perfect

---

9. See the following definition of cyberspace Neuromancer:

> Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system... Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. (51)

order, hence they don't need to speak" (201). These little televisual cyborgs may also be regarded as visual translations or metaphors of a complex sound material both from the narrator's life - such as the unresolved problems between the protagonist and his wife, or the reports and discussions during company meetings - and from the larger context of contemporary Japanese culture.

> Then I think about the TV People rep's revelation, about the wife's failure to materialize. He's saying she's gone. That she isn't coming home. I can't bring myself to believe it's over. Sure, we're not the perfect couple. In four years, we've had our spats; we have our little problems... But is this cause for despair?... There must be some reason she can't get to a phone. Any number of possible reasons. For instance... I can't think of a single one. I'm hopelessly confused. (215)

> At work, the day is solid with meetings from the morning on. Important meetings on sales campaigns for a new product line. Several employees read reports. Blackboards fill with figures, bar graphs proliferate on computer screens. Heated discussions.... At one of the afternoon meetings, I see TV People again... Just as on the previous day, they come traipsing across the conference room, carrying a Sony color TV. A model one size bigger.... They open the door and march right into the conference room, flashing it in our direction. Then they parade the thing around the room, scanning the place for somewhere to set it down, until at last, not finding any location, they carry it backward out the door. (206-209)

The televisual image in "TV People" is posited as the very paradigm, the general equivalent or symbol of psychic-affective, economic, social and cultural relations in late-capitalist information societies. The function of the TV image as general equivalent may be theorized with the help of Jean-Joseph Goux's argument on the formal connections between the purely

economic domain and the symbolic economies of subjects and objects. In Symbolic Economies after Marx and Freud, Goux argues that all symbolic economies in capitalist societies follow the logic of the general equivalent as formulated by Marx: the circulation, substitution and exchange of commodities is regulated by a single measure of value, or general equivalent, which is set apart from immediate use and all other commodities. In the patriarchal symbolic economies of desire, exchange is regulated by the father and the phallus. The formation of the money form as described by Marx corresponds to the development toward the phallus, as general equivalent of objects, and the father, as general equivalent of subjects, as analyzed by Freud.[10]

Of particular significance for my argument here is Goux's claim that the segregation of economic practices and their symbolic valences in modern capitalist societies has given rise to a type of commercial exchange which takes place between abstract positions rather than between subjects (Goux, 122, 129). This rift between intersubjective and economic relations in its turn leads to a depreciation of meaning for the latter relations, as well as to profound alterations in the function and value of the symbol and the symbolic:

> The symbol may ultimately lose its "depth," its verticality: instead of being a sign of the unfathomable, it becomes a signifying articulation, a structure, a machine. What is repressed by such a signifying economy is the dimension of interiority. (131-132)

If the televisual image in "TV People" is a symbol or structural machine signifying the suppression and/or loss of

---

10. Goux, Symbolic Economies, 17-24. For a succinct discussion of Goux's argument, see David Brande, 88-90, 92-93.

interiority in late- capitalist information societies, the TV People are visual simulations of the "abstract positions" of subjects in such societies. They make visible both what David Brande has called "the form of subjectivity conditioned by the triumph of exchange-value under the aegis of the general equivalent,"[11] and the triumph of the visual over other modes of symbolizing. Not only do the TV People occupy the abstract position of marketable televisual images, but they call attention to the construction of the postmodern subjectivities of the narrator, his wife and the other characters in the story as depthless, televisual/cybernetic simulations and as a performative effects of gender, sex, class, profession and other discourses and cultural practices. The narrator's dream of TV People and dead stone statues also suggests that postmodern subjects not only occupy abstract positions in late-capitalist symbolic economies regulated by the general equivalent of the TV/cyber-image, the phallic signifier and desire, but are themselves abstractions. The TV People, the protagonist and his colleagues at the electrical appliance company may be regarded as visual abstractions or symbolizations of unequal gender and labor relations, of the fierce economic competition, hectic marketing strategies, the constant revolutionizing of the modes of production and the loss of aura of subjectivity in late capitalist information societies.

The Dictatorship of the Televisual Gaze

The televisual subjectivity of the characters in "TV People" - a subjectivity which, as demonstrated by the narrator's reactions to the unexpected visits of the TV People, also has pronounced cinematic features[12] - is spectatorial, and can assume various

---

11. Brande, 90.

12. The narrator watches the meaningless activities of the TV People as if he were watching a film. His bewilderment and disorientation at

shapes and identities. As virtual doubles of the narrator and the other characters, and as metaphors of the bewildering mass of visual information in televisual culture, the TV People can potentially become/appear as anything. The interesting thing about this spectating televisual subjectivity is that it watches itself watching TV. The gaze of the schizoid self of the postmodern TV spectator is returned by the TV screen/televisual culture as a whole. This is represented in the text as a fascinating crossing of stares: the TV People representative stares at the narrator who in his turn stares back at him.

> Yet, just as in the dream, one of the TV People is on the television screen. The same guy I passed on the stairs to the office. No mistake... He stands there - against a bright, fluorescent white background, the tail end of a dream infiltrating my conscious reality - *staring at me.* I shut, then reopen my eyes, hoping he'll have slipped back to never-never land. But he doesn't disappear... He gets bigger. His face fills the whole screen, getting closer and closer. (212)

> The TV People rep hasn't so much as twitched in all this time. *Right elbow still propped up on the TV set, he's watching me. I'm being watched.* The TV People factory crew keeps working. Busy, busy, busy. The clock ticks on... The room has grown dark, stifling. Someone's footsteps echo down the hall. (216; Emphasis added)

The structure and functioning of gazing in these passages may be theorized by means of Lacan's concept of the camera-like "inside-out" structure of the gaze which "photographs" the

subject, allowing him/her to see him/herself being seen.[13] More important for my purposes, however, is the proposition we find here that the gaze of postmodern information culture controls the subject, that the latter is held captive by a totalitarian and oppressive, if diffused vision. If the narrator and the TV People, while seemingly in control of the channel-switching device of the Sony color TV brought by the little televisual cyborgs, can obtain only a blank screen or images of TV People engaged in meaningless actions, it is because the televisual gaze has substituted itself for, and dictates what and how they see. The authority - or rather, dictatorship - of the televisual/cinematic gaze also implies that the montage of disparate images and bits of information the TV spectator creates through remote-control and/or video recording/viewing reflects the endless fragmentation and reconstitution of an identity the postmodern subject cannot claim as his/hers, but merely enacts as an effect of late capitalist ideologies and strategies of commodification.

---

these apparitions (202) are akin to the psychic regression or "artificial psychosis" induced by the cinematic apparatus, which Jean-Louis Baudry has described as a state of hallucination in which "perceptions are representations mistaken for perceptions." See Baudry, 121.

13. See Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, 106:

> In the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture.
>
> This is the function that is found at the heart of the institution of the subject in the visible. What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter life and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which... I am photographed.

The Virtual Subject and The (Virtual) Continuum of Simulation Machines

"TV People" also dramatizes the participatory and interactive model of communication in computer-generated virtual environments insofar as there is a "real" exchange and interaction between the narrator and the TV People representative who climbs out of the TV screen. The most memorable aspect in the text's visual politics, however, is its positing of a convergence between cinematic, televisual and cybernetic technologies. Television, cinema and computer networks are seen as nearly identical "simulation machines" capable of creating virtual realities, virtual gazes and virtual bodies and identities for the spectator/user, and enabling the latter to circulate freely in and out of the virtual space between and around herself and the flow of visual information produced by these apparatuses. While the near-identity between these three types of visual media is simulated or merely implicit - the ad designer, his wife and company colleagues, with all their fantastic virtual identities, are after all engaged in very real, conflicting intersubjective relations - the point of the text's totalizing, nihilistic statement on postmodern information culture seems to be the stressing of the virtual dimension in the constitution of the unconscious, memory, subjectivity, gender, sex and the body. Like most cybernetic fictions, "TV People" provides an ideal fictional counterpart to, and a fertile ground of speculation for modernist and postmodern philosophies and cultural theories emphasizing the simulationist and performative aspect in the construction of the subject.[14]

---

14. See, for instance, Henri Bergson's discussion of the "virtual sensation" of memory and the "essentially virtual" nature of the past in Matter and Memory; Jean Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis's conceptualization of fantasy as virtual cinematic projection in "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality;" Judith Butler's theorization of gender

Airplanes in Giant Orange Juicers, or The Non-Sense of Postmodern SF

"TV People," then, simulates or theorizes in and as virtual images on the science-fictionalization of the (science) fiction of the "artificial reality" on contemporary Japan and postmodern information cultures in general. In true postmodern hyperconscious fashion, Murakami's SF text represents and theorizes on SF by projecting endlessly self-reproducing - and admittedly not very optimistic simulations - of SF. Inspite of this dystopian simulacral perspective and its affinities with the more somber vein in both cyberpunk fiction and theory-SF, the text is saved from apocalyptic gloom by its awareness of the ideological foundations of all cultural constructions of subjectivity and of current discourses on cybertechnologies and virtual realities, as well as by a delightful ironic-comic discourse. A characteristic example of this nonsensical black humor, evoking both Lewis Carroll's Alice in the Wonderland and Beckett's "Waiting for Godot," and some of the most hilarious slapstick moments in Murakami's own A Wild Sheep Chase and The Hard-Boiled Wonderland,[15] is the conversation

---

and sex as citational, illusionistic performative effects of historical social and cultural practices in Bodies that Matter.

15. See, for instance, the following passage from the first chapter of The Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World:

> It was then that she said, "Proust."
>
> Or more precisely, she didn't pronounce the word "Proust," but simply moved her lips to form what ought to have been "Proust." I had yet to hear a genuine peep out of her. It was as if she were talking to me from the far side of a thick sheet of glass.
>
> Proust?
>
> "Marcel Proust?" I asked her.
>
> She gave me a look. Then she repeated, "Proust." I gave up on the effort and fell back in line behind her, trying for the life of me to come up with other lip movements that

between the narrator and the TV People representative on the "airplane" the little TV cyborgs are building. What I find most irresistible in this passage is its serious miming of children's prattle.

> "We're making an airplane," says my TV People visitant. His voice has no perspective to it. A curious, paper-thin voice.
>
> He speaks, and the screen is all machinery. Very professional fade-in. Just like on the news. First, there's an opening shot of a large factory interior, then it cuts to a close-up of the work space, camera center. Two TV People are hard at work on some machine, tightening bolts with wrenches, adjusting gauges... The machine, however, is unlike anything I've ever seen... Looks more like some kind of gigantic orange juicer than an airplane. No wings, no seats.
>
> "Doesn't look like an airplane," I say. Doesn't sound like my voice, either. Strangely brittle, as if the nutrients had been strained out through a thick filter. Have I grown so old all of a sudden?
>
> "That's probably because we haven't painted it yet," he says. "Tomorrow we'll have it the right color. Then you'll see it's an airplane."
>
> "The color's not the problem. It's the shape. That's not an airplane."

---

corresponded to "Proust." Truest?... Brew whist? ... Blue is it?... One after the other, quietly to myself, I pronounced strings of meaningless syllables, but none seemed to match. I could only conclude that she had indeed said, "Proust." But what I couldn't figure was, what was the connection between this long corridor and Marcel Proust?

Perhaps she'd cited Marcel Proust as a metaphor for the length of the corridor. Yet, supposing that were the case, wasn't it a trifle flighty - not to say inconsiderate - as a choice of expression? Now if she'd cited this long corridor as a metaphor for the works of Marcel Proust, that much I could accept. But the reverse was bizarre.

A corridor as long as Marcel Proust? (9-10)

> "Well, if it's not an airplane, what is it?" he asks me. If he doesn't know, and I don't know, then what is it? "So, that's why it's got to be the color." The TV People rep puts it to me gently. "Paint it the right color, and it'll be an airplane." (213)

If a giant orange juicer can look like an airplane, then your average ad designer who likes beer and Garc^{h}a Márquez can also start to shrink in size and look like a thin-voiced, nondescript TV man. Which is to say that the disasters befalling the unfortunate designer may all be a bad dream, an optical illusion. In its own idiosyncratic, nonsensical way, "TV People"'s evaluation of postmodern information cultures falls indeed in line with Donna Haraway's diagnosis that in such cultures "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion."[16] Let us examine now the rather different virtual realities projected by the story "Sleep."

"Sleep"

From the Horror of Nightmare to the Horror of Awakening

The narrator in this story is a thirty-year old woman whose husband is a dentist and who has an eight-year old son. One night the young woman has a horrifying nightmare in which an unknown old man pours water endlessly over her feet. This nightmare induces an unusual state of sleeplessness during which the protagonist experiences an extraordinary outburst of energy and vitality. As a result of the heightened awareness provoked by insomnia, the young woman realizes she has been oppressed and

---

16. See Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature, 149.

instrumentalized by the laws, conventions and sociocultural practices determining marriage, family life and motherhood. The closing scene of the story brings back the horror of the protagonist's earlier nightmare: locked in her tiny car on an empty parking lot, the young woman finds herself rocked back and forth with tremendous force by two men who seem to have murderous intentions.

Cyberspace in/of(f) the Mind

As I showed in my discussion of "TV People," virtual realities and cyberspaces are by no means products of cybertechnologies alone. Needless to say, the preoccupation with such simulated environments did not originate in postmodern information culture either. David Porush goes as far as to define cyberspace as the symptom of a pathological condition, namely the brain's compulsion to emit spatial projections of its disorientation whenever metaphor/representation and cognition/the perception of material reality overlap.

> Cyberspace, then, is the metastasis of a brain condition. Call it a potentially happy cancer. Or better yet, a virus mutated from a genetic compulsion in the brain. It is the imperialism of a disciplined form of as if behavior. Cyberspace..., (as the) strong expression of (the) urge to exteriorize our own neurological drama can be found in any cultural moment when we confuse the metaphorical as the cognitive - or rather, *the moment when we recognize that the cognitive is the metaphorical.*[17]

Though I do not subscribe to Porush's pathologizing of the cybernetic imagination - the ability to produce simulations of what is believed to be the real by means of, or as if through a data-based information circuit - I find his definition useful

---

17. David Porush, 121.

insofar as it calls attention to, precisely, the structure of the brain as simulation machine. Memory, the unconscious, the processes of sensual perception and cognition, the myriad functions of neurological cells are not so much like as the very model of the cinematic and televisual apparatuses, or the electronic-cybernetic intelligence, indeed these very things par excellence.[18] "Sleep" dramatizes the simulationist, cybercreative function of the brain insofar as it shows that the protagonist literally exteriorizes her neurological/psychic drama, first as a nightmare, then in the form of an extraordinary prolonged insomnia. The story also expands the notions of virtual reality and cyberspace to include various forms of intertextuality.

The Nightmare as Film

An archetypal example of oneiric virtual reality, the nightmare of the female narrator not only offers an illusion of reality so perfect that the dreamer is convinced she is not dreaming, but it allows the young woman to see herself dreaming - or rather waking from a dream which was also a nightmare. In the virtual hallucinated space of the dream the protagonist activates a "virtual mobilized gaze" that is returned to her in boomerang fashion both by herself as a dreamer and as a waking subject in a dream, and by the old man in a black shirt who is staring at her.

This virtual gaze is identical with the one constituting an integral feature of the cinematic and televisual apparatuses, and

---

18. In Creative Evolution (323), Bergson notes that the "mechanism of our ordinary (intellectual) knowledge is of a cinematographical kind" insofar as it treats our mental life as a rapid succession of separate images. Freud's notion of screen memory is another well-know example of the conceptualization of the functions of the brain in cinematic/virtual/cyberspatial terms. See also the definition of cyberspace, in Neuromancer (note 9 above).

which Anne Friedberg defines as a "received perception mediated through representation... (that) travels in an imaginary flânerie through an imaginary elsewhere and an imaginary elsewhen."[19] In other words, not only is the female protagonist in "Sleep" defined as a *dreaming virtual subject* by a split, cinematic gaze identical to the one that positions the ad designer in "TV People" as an SF televisual subject or postmodern cyborg, but the eminently filmic character of her dream is foregrounded in unequivocal terms. Here is this rather extraordinary nightmare.

> I remember with perfect clarity that first night I lost the ability to sleep. I was having a repulsive dream - a dark, slimy dream... I woke at the climactic moment - came fully awake with a start, as if something had dragged me back at the last moment from a fatal turning point....
>
> "It was a dream," I told myself, and I waited for my breathing to calm down.... Just then, I seemed to catch a glimpse of something at the foot of the bed, something like a vague, black shadow....
>
> The moment I tried to focus on it, the shadow began to assume a definite shape, as if it had been waiting for me to notice it... It was a gaunt old man wearing a skintight black shirt. His hair was gray and short, his cheeks sunken. He stood at my feet, perfectly still. He said nothing, but his piercing eyes stared at me. They were huge eyes, and I could see the red network of veins in them. The old man's face wore no expression at all. It told me nothing. It was like an opening in the darkness.
>
> This was no longer the dream, I knew. From that I had already awakened... No, this was no dream. This was reality. And in reality an old man I had never seen before was standing at the foot of my bed....
>
> Now I saw that he was holding something - a tall, narrow, rounded thing that shone white.... It was a pitcher, an old-fashioned porcelain pitcher. After some time, the man raised the pitcher and began pouring water from it onto my feet. I

19. Friedberg, Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern, 2.

could not feel the water. I could see it and hear it splashing down onto my feet, but I couldn't feel a thing.

The old man went on and on pouring water over my feet... I began to worry that my feet would eventually rot and melt away. Yes, of course they would rot. What else could they do with so much water pouring over them?...

I closed my eyes and let out a scream so loud it took every ounce of strength I had. But it never left my body. It reverberated soundlessly inside, tearing through me, shutting down my heart.... Something inside me died. Something melted away, leaving only a shuddering vacuum. An explosive flash incinerated everything my existence depended on. (82-83)

Feminist Coming-to-Consciousness

There is an undeniable archetypal dimension in the protagonist's nightmare which makes it irresistible for the reader to propose an archetypal reading based on Jung's theories of nightmares, or on feminist revisions of these theories. In view of the fact that the young woman's dream anticipates her later insight that death is a state of eternal wakefulness (106), and that the figure of the old man in a black shirt prefigures the unknown attackers who attempt to overturn her car in the last scene of the story (108-109), it is tempting to view the nightmare as the symbolic staging of a regressive death wish featuring a manifestation of the archetype of the Terrible Death Father.[20]

---

20. Jane White-Lewis proposes the archetype of the Terrible Death Father in response to Jung's contention that the archaic, mythical aspect in most nightmares is a manifestation of the figure of the Terrible/Devouring Mother, which in its turn signifies a desire for and fascination with death. White-Lewis also claims that the recurring characters of intruders or attackers in women's nightmares are symbolic representations of a fear of if not of the actual experience of rape and abuse. See White-Lewis, 54-55. For Jung's views on nightmares, see "Mind and Earth," ; "The Tavistock Lectures." The fullest discussion of the links between nightmares and the archetype of the Terrible

However, elements such as the gaze of the old man in black, the fact that he keeps pouring water from a pitcher on the feet of the narrator-dreamer, and the striking parallels between the narrator's dream as a whole and Anna Karenina's recurring nightmare of an old dirty peasant in Tolstoy's novel render such a reading problematic. In addition, the sleeplessness induced by the nightmare causes the narrator to arrive at a new perspective on her life. A comparison between the reflections and attitude of the protagonist before and after she is visited by insomnia will show that the latter is programmed in the text as a kind of feminist-coming-to-consciousness.

The young woman's perception of her condition as housewife and mother before she loses her ability to sleep clearly signals her dissatisfaction with and the desire to change this condition.

> So that's my life - or my life before I stopped sleeping - each day pretty much a repetition of the one before.... I'd sometimes wonder what kind of life this was. Which is not to say that I found it empty. I was - very simply - amazed. At the lack of demarcation between the days... At the fact that my footprints were being blown away before I even had a chance to turn and look at them.
>
> Whenever I felt like that, I would look at my face in the bathroom mirror... I'd stare at my face purely as a physical object, and gradually it would disconnect from the rest of me, becoming just some thing that happened to exist at the same time as myself. And a realisation would come to me: This is happening here and now. It's got nothing to do with footprints. Reality and I exist simultaneously at this present moment. That's the most important thing. (81-82)

As a result of the new awareness brought on by her insomnia, the narrator decides to take advantage of the freedom

---

Mother is found in the chapter "Symbols of the Mother and of Rebirth," in Symbols of Transformation.

and spare time of sleeplessness to achieve independence and self-emancipation.

> One book did have a fascinating point to make. The author maintained that human beings, by their very nature, are incapable of escaping from certain fixed idiosyncratic tendencies, both in their thought processes and in their physical movements.... What modulates these tendencies and keeps them in check... is nothing other than sleep.... Sleeping is an act that has been programmed, with karmic inevitability, into the human system, and no one can diverge from it. If a person were to diverge from it, the person's very "ground of being" would be threatened.
>
> "Tendencies?" I asked myself.
>
> The only "tendency" of mine that I could think of was housework... Cooking and shopping and laundry and mothering: What were they if not "tendencies?"....
>
> So, then, what was this life of mine? I was being consumed by my tendencies and then sleeping to repair the damage.... I'm through with sleep! So what if I loose my "ground of being?" I will not be consumed by my "tendencies"... My flesh may have to be consumed, but my mind belongs to me... I will not hand it over to anyone. I don't want to be "repaired." I will not sleep. (98-99)

The protagonist gradually realizes she has been living out a persona or subjectivity which is not hers, but the effect of patriarchal discourses and social practices that have been forced on her like straightjackets. She awakens to the reality of gender inequality, of the continuing social and cultural subordination of women in contemporary Japan. Her alienation from her husband and son signals her awareness that both her "men" are representatives of a powerful patriarchal social order which has not significantly altered its oppressive practices with respect to

women.[21] From this perspective it becomes possible to interpret the penetrating stare of the old man and the water torture in the narrator's nightmare as metaphorical representations of the male gaze and the power of repressive institutions such as marriage and patriarchal motherhood. It goes without saying that such a signifying potential in the narrator's nightmare, like the representation of her state of sleeplessness, positions her as woman *tout court*, as a sign, a fetish, a Derridean supplement signaling an emptiness in the structure, as the void of the Real around which discourse is built, or other symbolic signifiers of femininity one can think of.

It would seem, then, that the text adopts a strong feminist and anti-patriarchal position even while remaining anchored in androcentric discourses of appropriation and fetishization of the signs of woman and/or femininity. The question to ask at this point is, what does all this have to do with cyberspace? The answer lies with Anna Karenina. Tolstoy's heroine also provides us with a clue for decoding the ambivalent, masculinist-feminist stance I have been describing.

Ominous Virtual Peasants and the Masquerade of Female Cinematic Spectatorship

After waking up from the terrifying nightmare of the old man who pours water endlessly over her feet, the protagonist begins to read Anna Karenina, which she had already read in high school and the plot of which she had nearly forgotten (86). In the course of the sleepless days resulting from the traumatic experience of the nightmare, the young woman reads Tolstoy's

---

21. The protagonist's view of the similarities in physical appearance, speech and behavior between her husband and her son changes significantly after the onset of insomnia. She realizes that her spouse and her son are total strangers to her, and that they will never understand her. See 104-105.

massive masterpiece as many as three times, each time making "new discoveries" in the "Chinese-box"-like world of the novel (100). The various passages describing the narrator's reactions to Tolstoy's novel suggest that she identifies with Anna Karenina to the point of literally taking the place of the latter heroine; and that Tolstoy's masterpiece, above all the masochistic, tragic persona of Anna intrudes into Murakami's text, violently and imperiously sweeping away the objects, habits and rituals making-up the quotidian reality of the narrator and taking possession of her body and mind. This implies that there is a traffic or mutual transfer of virtual bodies, virtual identities and virtual "Chinese-box"-like textual worlds between Anna Karenina and Murakami's text which not only evokes the apparently limitless freedom of travel and transformation, as well as the capacity for (cybernetic) transcendence of the main characters in cybernetic fictions and cyberpunk novels such as Thomas Pynchon's Vineland (1991) and Neal Stephenson's Snow Crash (1992),[22] but at the same requires a redefinition of intertextuality as virtual environment or cyberspace allowing for an extraordinary elasticity and flexibility of both readers and intratextual data. Watch, for instance, the collapsing of temporal and spatial boundaries, the confusion of perception/cognition and representation/metaphor and the narrator's "insider

---

22. The Puncutron Machine in Pynchon's Vineland provides computer-assisted help for individuals wishing to arrive at a transcendent vision. Juanita, the partner of Hiro, one of the two protagonists in Stephenson's Snow Crash, allows the fundamentalist mass-media preacher L. Bob Rife to implant a radio antenna in her brain which converts her into a robotic "wirehead." Thanks to this device Juanita becomes a ba'al shem who uses cybernetic cabalistic practices to converse with angels, spirits and gods.

For critical assessments of Vineland, see The Vineland Papers, ed. Geoffrey Green, Donald J. Greiner and Larry McCaffery. A recent study of Snow Crash is David Porush's "Hooking the Brainstem."

perspective" of the characters and events in Anna Karenina in her reading experience of Tolstoy's novel.

> I sighed and stole a glance at the big volume lying on the table. And that was that. I plunged into Anna Karenina and kept reading until the sun came up. Anna and Vronsky stared at each other at the ball and fell into their doomed love. Anna went to pieces when Vronsky's horse fell at the racetrack... I was there with Vronsky when he spurred his horse over the obstacles. I heard the crowd cheering him on. And I was there in the stands watching his horse go down. Then the window brightened with the morning light, I laid down the book and went to the kitchen for a cup of coffee. My mind was filled with scenes from the novel and with a tremendous hunger obliterating any other thoughts. (89).

> I read Anna Karenina three times. Each time, I made new discoveries. This enormous novel was full of revelations and riddles. Like a Chinese box, the world of the novel contained smaller worlds, and inside those were yet smaller worlds... The old me had been able to understand only the tiniest fragment of it, but the gaze of this new me could penetrate to the core with perfect understanding. I knew exactly what the great Tolstoy wanted to say...; I could see how his message had organically crystallized as a novel, and what in that novel had surpassed the author himself. (100-101)

If intertextuality is a virtual reality allowing for unlimited space and time travel, (the illusion of) power and control over and unprecedented insight into reality and the world of the imagination, it follows that literary texts are also simulation machines like the cinema, television and computers/data-based information networks. While this is anything but a new proposition - it should suffice to recall in this respect the extraordinary visibility of the cinema in modernist and especially

postmodernist fiction[23] - it is underscored in "Sleep," significantly enough, by the dreamwork in the narrator's nightmare and by the cinematic gaze. Here I am referring, not to the virtual character of and the cinematic gaze structuring the nightmare, but to what may be called the intertextual dreamwork and the intertextual virtual mobilized gaze in the narrator's dream. More specifically, this nightmare is quite clearly a postmodern ironic simulation of Anna Karenina's recurring dream of a dirty old peasant with a disheveled beard in Tolstoy's novel. This dream, in which the old peasant is bending over a sack, mumbling something in French about beating and pounding the iron, or "doing something horrible with the iron" over Anna's body,[24] is a harbinger of Anna's suicide at the end of part 7 of the novel. Though Anna's dream is only briefly alluded to in "Sleep,"[25] the virtual transfer of information and the similarities between the old man in a black shirt in the narrator's nightmare in Murakami's story and the old peasant in Anna's dream in Tolstoy's novel, as well as the fact that the narrator's dream prefigures the attack of the two men in the closing scene of the former text indicate that the nightmare in

---

23. Examples of eminently cinematic postmodernist texts are Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children (1981) and The Satanic Verses (1988), Manuel Puig's The Kiss of the Spider Woman (El Beso de la mujer araña) (1976), Marguerite Duras's Agatha (1981) and L'Amant (The Lover, 1984).

24. See Anna Karenina, 427-28 and part 7, chapter 26, 876.

25. The allusion to Anna's nightmare appears in the following passage:

> I was in the mood for a long Russian novel, and I had read Anna Karenina only once, long ago, probably in high school. I remembered just a few things about it: the first line "All happy families resemble one another; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way," and the heroine's throwing herself under a train at the end. *And that early on there was a hint of the final suicide.* Wasn't there a scene at a racetrack? Or was that in another novel? (86-87; emphasis added)

Murakami's text is a simulation of Anna's dream. On the other hand, instances such as the narrator's visualization of her split self in the mirror (81-82),[26] and the positioning of the young woman as a sign or archetypal image of femininity by a voyeuristic-fetishizing gaze derived from the masculinist scopophilia of classical cinema and from the institutions of marriage and the nuclear family in contemporary Japan, call attention to the presence of an intertextual virtual mobilized gaze in Murakami's text which offers the protagonist the "choice" of another positionality or subjecthood - that of the cinematic spectator or reader of the simulated realities produced by novels. Needless to say, for the narrator before the advent of insomnia, this is not really an option but yet another prescribed role in which the madness or schizophrenia of a simultaneous identification with patriarchal/masculinist constructions of woman and an impossible position outside discourse and/or visuality is inherent. If the gaze defining the subjectivity of the dentist's wife in the simulated virtual space of the insomnia ensuing from her traumatic nightmare seems to be no longer a constricting "patriarchal" one, but that of a new, liberated feminist consciousness ready to embrace the alternative of masquerade or the "narcissism entailed in becoming (the

---

26. This perception of the narrator in "Sleep" clearly echoes Anna Karenina's realization of a schizophrenic doubling in her psyche as a result of her adulterous relationship with Vronsky. See, for instance, the following passage in Tolstoy's novel:

> She was not simply miserable, she began to feel alarm at the new spiritual condition, never experienced before, in which she found herself. She felt as though everything were beginning to be double in her soul, just as objects sometimes appear double to over-tired eyes. She hardly knew at times what it was she feared, and what she hoped for (part 3, chapter 15, 342).

For a recent study of Anna Karenina, see Gary Adelman, Anna Karenina: The Bitterness of Ecstasy.

woman's) own object of desire, in assuming the (feminine) image in the most radical way,"[27] this proves, alas, an illusion. The cause for the evanescent mirage of the emancipation of the narrator lies in the very narcissism of her "new" perception of her rejuvenated body, in her decision to remain in the virtual timespace of insomnia as well as in the very illusion of unlimited freedom and mutability offered by this timespace.

The "Male Gaze" in the Mirror

The illusionistic space of the protagonist's insomnia - a space which may be regarded as virtual or simulated both on account of its intertextual communication with Anna Karenina and other texts such as the stories by Raymond Carver dealing with insomnia,[28] and of its originating in the narrator's

---

27. See Mary Anne Doanne's speculations on the position of and the alternative of masquerade offered to the female film spectator:

> Above and beyond a simple adoption of the masculine position in relation to the cinematic sign, the female spectator is given two options: the masochism of over-identification or the narcissism entailed in becoming one's own object of desire, in assuming the image in the most radical way. The effectivity of masquerade lies precisely in its potential to manufacture a distance from the image, to generate a problematic within which the image is manipulable, producible and readable by the woman. (Doanne, 56)

28. In several stories by Raymond Carver, insomnia serves as a prelude to dramatic epiphanies followed by the decision of the protagonist to change the condition in which he/she finds him/herself. See, for instance, the stories "The Student's Wife," in Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? (1978), "I Could See the Smallest Things," in What We Talk About When We Talk About Love (1982), and "Menudo," in Where I'm Calling From (1988). Murakami has produced translations of Carver's stories and poems, as well as essays on this contemporary American writer. See the collections Boku ga denwa o kaketeiru basho (1983), Yoru ni naru to sake wa (1985), Sasayaka da keredo, yaku ni tatsu koto (1989).

nightmare - is both bizarre and fantastic. Sleeplessness becomes a miraculous cure for fatigue, boredom and monotony, a state of mind which has an effect comparable to that of the legendary Taoist immortality pills: the young woman discovers to her amazement that she has grown younger and prettier.

> One day, after showering, I stood naked in front of the mirror. I was amazed to discover that my body appeared to be almost bursting with vitality. I studied every inch of myself, head to toe, but I could find not the slightest hint of excess flesh, not one wrinkle... I took a pinch of flesh near my waist and found it almost hard, with a wonderful elasticity.
>
> It dawned on me that I was prettier than I had realized. I looked so much younger than before that it was almost shocking. I could probably pass for twenty-four....
>
> What was happening to me?
>
> I thought about seeing a doctor. (97)

Compare now the protagonist's perception of her body before the advent of insomnia.

> After my husband goes back to the office, I take a bathing suit and towel and drive to the neighborhood athletic club. I swim for half an hour. I swim hard. I'm not that crazy about the swimming itself: I just want to keep the flab off. I've always liked my own figure.... I like to stand naked in front of the mirror. I like to study the soft outlines I see there, the balanced vitality....
>
> I'm thirty. When you reach thirty, you realize it's not the end of the world... It's a question of attitude... If a thirty-year-old woman loves her body and is serious about keeping it looking the way it should, she has to put in a certain amount of effort. I learned that from my mother. She used

---

For a study of Murakami's translations of Carver and of the impact of the latter writer on Murakami's fiction, see Sengoku Hideyo. For an introduction to the treatment of insomnia in Carver's work, see Ernest Fontana.

> to be a slim, lovely woman, but not anymore. I don't want the same thing to happen to me. (80)

What interests me here is less the young woman's narcissism - she clearly focuses on her own body as a libidinal object - than the look she directs at her body, as well as the tremendous importance she accords the latter. The narcissistic look returned by the mirror, I would argue, is not the protagonist's own but a borrowed or implanted one, the look of loving the self for the sake, not of this self but of being looked at. In other words, the young woman loves herself and her body once again as a sign, as (the) woman locked inescapably in the position of to-be-looked-at-ness by the gaze of the late-capitalist patriarchal social order, as the slim, attractive, sexy female body advertised and commodified in contemporary Japanese popular culture. While it is easy to see that the self-love of the protagonist before the advent of sleeplessness is mainly produced by a masculinist virtual gaze she has internalized and which she projects outward, the lingering presence of this gaze in the post-nightmare, new "feminist" awareness of the narrator may come as a surprise.

However, the fact that both the unconscious and the conscious self-perception of the young woman continue to be structured by a schizophrenic split; that her assuming of insomnia does not entail any form of radical social protest or rebellion but manifests itself merely as reading novels to her heart's content while munching chocolate and cookies (101) or driving to the harbor late at night (101-102); and finally the ending of the story which makes explicit that very little has changed in the status of the narrator as potential victim of male sexual violence (108-109), are unmistakable indications of a very limited capacity for subversion in the text's representation of sleeplessness. The fantastic touch in this representation, as well as the dream-like undecidability in the closing scene of the story,

which suggests that the narrator's insomnia may after all be a waking dream, a somnanbulic hallucination or cyberspace she projects in an attempt to resolve her dissatisfaction with her present life, are elements that further undermine the feminist potential in "Sleep"'s dramatization of insomnia. Even the text's materialist stance on the body, which may be best theorized with the help of David Hume's notion of subjectivity and identity as working fictions that are grounded in the body, and of the argument of materialist feminists on the historical and cultural specificity of located identities, cannot significantly alter the story's ambivalent textual politics, its able simulation of a feminist subversive discourse that remains anchored in rather conventional masculinist bourgeois values.

The Habit of Saying "I" and the Embarassment of the Modernist Dream(ing) Consciousness

We remember the protagonist's discovery in a book that sleep is a therapeutical strategy developed by the brain to counteract the wearing down of the body by mental and physical tendencies, and her decision to renounce sleep altogether in order to create a space for herself that would be free of energy-consuming tendencies, restricting gender roles and oppressive social conventions. I quote below again the passage most relevant for my discussion of the body politics in "Sleep."

> One book did have a fascinating point to make. The author maintained that human beings, by their very nature, are incapable of escaping from certain fixed idiosyncratic tendencies, both in their thought processes and in their physical movements. People unconsciously fashion their own action- and thought-tendencies, which under normal circumstances never disappear. In other words, people live in the prison cells of their own tendencies. What modulates these tendencies and keeps them in check... is nothing other than sleep.... Sleeping is an act that has been programmed...

> into the human system, and no one can diverge from it. If a person were to diverge from it, the person's very "ground of being" would be threatened.
>
> "Tendencies?" I ask myself.
>
> The only "tendency" of mine that I could think of was housework - those chores I perform day after day like an unfeeling machine. Cooking and shopping and laundry and mothering: What were they if not "tendencies?" I could do them with my eyes closed..... Tendencies. They were consuming me, wearing me down on one side like the heel of a shoe. I needed sleep every day to adjust them and cool me down. (98-99)

This passage resonates uncannily with David Hume's conception of the construction of identity and subjectivity. In A Treatise of Human Nature (1739), Hume argues that human beings consist of a continuous flux of chaotic sensory perceptions of which they can make sense only by relying on fictions of causal connection.[29] The process of building the fiction(s) of identity and subjectivity - what Hume calls the "notion of soul, and self, and substance" (254) - is based on memory. Memory is the process of assembling the random flow of sensory perceptions and the beliefs and ideas they inspire through resemblance and causation. These tendencies of the mind set in motion a narrative process which becomes the foundation of the habit of identity: the narration of the past determines in a decisive way present and future perceptions of the subject's sense of self.

Hume thus conceives the subject as an embodied entity that exists in space and time by means of the mind's "habit" of connecting perceptions in a manner that creates the illusion of a stable identity. The data for the construction of the fictions of

---

29. See Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature. For a succinct presentation of Hume's philosophy, see Michelle Kendrick, 152-59.

identity and subjectivity are gathered in the proprioceptive spaces of sensory impression produced by the body. To Hume the reality of the body is unassailable, that which precedes and constitutes all philosophical speculations.

> "We may well ask... what causes induce us to believe in the existence of body? but it is in vain to ask, whether there be a body or not? That is a point which we must take for granted in all our reasonings. (87)

In Empiricism and Subjectivity, Gilles Deleuze offers a precise and succinct description of Hume's philosophy of the self:

> We start with atomic parts, but these atomic parts have transitions, passages, "tendencies," which circulate from one another. These tendencies give rise to habits. Isn't this the answer to the question "what are we?" We are habits, nothing but habits - the habit of saying "I." Perhaps there is no more striking answer to the problem of the Self. (x)

It is nearly superfluous to comment that the self/subjectivity of the protagonist in "Sleep" is projected as a cluster of "habits of saying I", as the performative effect of fictions produced by the mind's/memory's "tendencies," or ordering of data and sensory perceptions intercepted by the body. Though Murakami's text stresses the centrality of the body as much as Hume's Treatise, it departs from the English philosopher and his contemporary interpreters in that it dramatizes the social, cultural and historical situatedness of the fictions of the embodied self. This would seem to place "Sleep" on the same political terrain as materialist feminist critics and theorists such as Donna Haraway, who argues that the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made is needed "not in order to deny meaning and bodies, but in order to live in meanings and bodies

that have a chance for the future."[30] However, Murakami's story quickly withdraws from its (simulated) camaraderie with contemporary feminism by positing a radical disconnection between the body and the mind.

> I went through the motions - shopping, cooking, playing with my son, having sex with my husband. It was easy once I got the hang of it. All I had to do was break the connection between my mind and my body. While my body went about its business, my mind floated in its own inner space....
>
> No one noticed that I had changed - that I had given up sleeping entirely, that I was spending all my time reading, that my mind was someplace a hundred years - and hundreds of miles - from reality. No matter how mechanically I worked, no matter how little love or emotion I invested in my handling of reality, my husband and my son and my mother-in-law went on relating to me as they always had. If anything, they seemed more at ease with me than before. (95-96)

This passage clearly reinscribes the tension between the traditional binaries of mind/body, reality/appearance, truth/illusion, male/female and cognition/perception that should have been abolished by the virtual fantastic dreamspace of the protagonist's insomnia. The projection of the narrator as pure cyberspatial mind or disembodied self is just as problematic in that it contradicts the political investment in the body and the tracing of the historical and cultural locatedness of her subjectivity discussed above. The oscillation or ambivalence in "Sleep"'s politics of representation - which, as I have shown, is less an ambivalence, than a consistently masculinist, fairly conventional stance disguised as feminist awakening - may be attributed to what I would call the dream(ing) consciousness

---

30. See Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs and Women, 187.

structuring the text. Just as fluid and undecidable, but less self-reflexively virtual than the SF consciousness dramatized in "TV People," this dream(ing) consciousness calls attention to the fact that traditional modes of perception/cognition, representation and symbolizing may have - indeed, have already been - appropriated by information and cybertechnologies and set afloat as deceptive simulations in the fiction of cyberspace. As my discussion of the nightmare and insomnia of the protagonist has made clear, this is a consciousness which in its turn is structured by yet another dream or fantasy, namely that of the still patriarchally-defined, late-capitalist ideology of contemporary Japanese society. In the terms of Slavoj Zizek's characterization of the Lacanian notion of ideology, this powerful fantasy designates "a totality set on effacing the traces of its own impossibility:"[31] the totality of the dreams and fictions ceaselessly produced by late-capitalist information societies to cover up the embarassment of still operative modernist-masculinist structures of thought and feeling, and the crude narratives of oppression and aggression lurking in their midst.

The Wakefulness of the Cybernetic Imagination

Like The Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World, William Gibson's celebrated cyberpunk "Sprawl Trilogy" and cult movies such as Ridley Scott's Blade Runner (1982), "TV People" and "Sleep" convincingly demonstrate that the cybernetic imagination is a dominant trend in contemporary postmodernism and information cultures, and that cyberspace may indeed be the parable for/or signifying articulation of this imagination. Murakami's cybernetic fictions dramatize the fact that the dream of the present cultural moment (in late-capitalist information societies) and the virtual image of the retrofuture it

31. Zizek, The Sublime Object of Ideology, 49.

contains, is not one of "rational magic, of mystical reason... (of the) triumph of poetry over poverty, of 'it-can-be-so' over 'it-should-be-so'" - as one celebratory definition of computer-generated cyberspace would have it,[32] but rather one of pure horror. If the sleep of modern(ist) reason certainly begets monsters, the wakefulness of the cybernetic imagination seems ideally apt - even in its moments of euphoria, of romantic sublime or ironic humor - to spawn chilling visions of "no return" or "it-is-too-late" signs ad infinitum.

Bibliography

Adelman, Gary. Anna Karenina: The Bitterness of Ecstasy. Twayne Masterwork Studies. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990.

Baudrillard, Jean. Simulations. Trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.

Baudry, Jean-Louis. "The Apparatus." Trans. Bertrand Augst and Jean Andrews. Camera Obscura 1 (Fall 1976): 104-126.

Bergson, Henri. Matter and Memory. Trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer. New York: Zone Books, 1991 [1896].

_____. Creative Evolution. Trans. A. Mitchell. London: MacMillan, 1911.

Brande, David. "The Business of Cyberpunk: Symbolic Economy and Ideology in William Gibson." In Robert Markley, ed., Virtual Realities and Their Discontents, 79-106. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Butler, Judith. Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex. London: Routledge, 1993.

Carver, Raymond. Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? New York: McGraw Hill, 1978.

----------. What We Talk About When We Talk About Love. New York: Vintage, 1982.

----------. Boku ga denwa o kakete iru basho (Where I Am Calling From). Trans. Murakami Haruki. Tokyo: Chū ō Kō ronsha, 1983.

---

32. See Marcos Novak, 225-26.

----------. Yoru ni naru to sake wa... (Wine in the Evening) Trans. Murakami Haruki. Tokyo: Chū ō kō ronsha, 1985.
---------- Where I am Calling From. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988.
----------. Sasayaka da keredo, yaku ni tatsu koto (Small Things That Help). Trans. Murakami Haruki. Tokyo: Chū ō kō ronsha, 1989.
Csicery-Ronay, Jr, Istvan. "The SF of Theory: Baudrillard and Haraway." Science-Fiction Studies 18 (Nov. 1991): 387-404.
----------. "Futuristic Flu, or, The Revenge of the Future." In George Slusser and Thomas Shippey, eds., Fiction 2000: Cyberpunk and the Future of Narrative, pp. 26-45. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992.
Deleuze, Gilles. Empiricism and Subjectivity. Trans. Constantin V. Boundas. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991 [1953].
Doanne, Mary Anne. "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator." In Patricia Erens, ed., Issues in Feminist Film Criticism, 41-57. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
Duras, Marguerite. Agatha. Paris: Minuit, 1981.
----------. L'Amant. Paris: Minuit, 1984.
----------. The Lover. Trans. Barbara Bray. New York: Perennial, 1986.
Fontana, Ernest. "Insomnia in Raymond Carver's Fiction." Studies in Short Fiction. 26, no. 4 (Fall 1989): 447-451.
Foster, Hal, ed. Vision and Visuality. Seattle: Bay Press, 1988.
Friedberg, Anne. Window Shopping: The Cinema and The Postmodern. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
Fukami Haruka. Murakami Haruki no uta. Tokyo: Seihyusha, 1990.
Gibson, William. Neuromancer. New York: Ace Books, 1984.
---------- , Count Zero. New York: Ace Books, 1986.
----------. Mona Lisa Overdrive. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1988.
Goux, Jean-Joseph. Symbolic Economies after Marx and Freud. Trans. Jennifer Curtiss Gage. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990.
Green, Geoffrey, Donald J. Greiner and Larry McCaffrey, eds. The Vineland Papers. Normal, Ill.: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994.

Haraway, Donna J. Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Hume, David. A Treatise of Human Nature. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951.

Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." New Left Review No. 146 (July-Aug. 1984): 59-92.

Jay, Martin. "Scopic Regimes of Modernity." In Hal Foster, ed., Vision and Visuality, 3-27. Seattle: Bay Press, 1988.

Jung, Carl G. The Collected Works of C.G. Jung (CW). Trans. R.F.C. Hull. 18 vols. Bollingen Series. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953-1979.

----------. Symbols of Transformation. CW 5, 1976 [1952].

----------. "Mind and Earth." In CW 10 (Civilization in Transition), 29-49, 1975 [1931].

----------. "The Tavistock Lectures." In CW 18 (Miscellaneous Writings), 5-182, 1976 [1935].

Kasai Kiyoshi. Monogatari no uroborosu: Nihon gensō sakkaron. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō , 1988.

Kasai Kiyoshi, Katō Toyohiro, Takeda Seiji. Murakami Haruki o meguru bō ken. Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 1991.

Kendrick, Michelle. "Cyberspace and the Technological Real." In Robert Markley, ed., Virtual Realities and Their Discontents, pp. 143-160. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Kuroko Kazuo. Murakami Haruki to dō jidai bungaku. Tokyo: Kawai shuppan, 1990.

Lacan, Jacques. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: W.W. Norton, 1978.

Laplanche, Jean and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis. "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality." In Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan, eds., Formations of Fantasy, 5-34. London: Methuen, 1986.

Markley, Robert, ed. Virtual Realities and Their Discontents. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Murakami, Haruki. Sekai no owari to hādo boirudo wandārando. Tokyo: Shinchō sha, 1985.

----------. Dansu, Dansu, Dansu. Jō , ge. 2 vols. Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1988.

----------. TV Pīpuru . Tokyo: Bungei shunjū , 1990.
----------. The Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991.
----------. Dance, Dance, Dance. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1994.
----------. The Elephant Vanishes. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum and Jay Rubin. New York: Vintage International, 1994.
Novak, Marcos. "Liquid Architecture in Cyberspace." In Michael Benedikt, ed., Cyberspace: First Steps. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991.
Porush, David. "Hacking the Brainstem: Postmodern Metaphysics and Stephenson's Snow Crash." In Robert Markley, ed., Virtual Realities and Their Discontents, pp. 107-142. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996.
Puig, Manuel. Kiss of the Spider Woman. Trans. Thomas Colchie. New York: Vintage Books, 1991 [1976].
Pynchon, Thomas. Vineland. London: Secker and Wargurg, 1990.
Rushdie, Salman. Midnight's Children. London: Jonathan Cape, 1980.
------ The Satanic Verses. New York: Viking, 1989.
Sengoku Hideyo. "Murakami Haruki to Amerika: Reimondo Kābā o tō shite." Yurī ka/Eureka 21, no. 8 (June 1989): 103-117.
Stephenson, Neal. Snow Crash. New York: Bantam Books, 1992.
Tolstoy, Leo. Anna Karenina. Trans. Constance Garnett. Leonard J. Kent and Nina Berberova, eds. Modern Library College Editions. New York: Modern Library, 1965 [1878].
White-Lewis, Jane. "In Defense of Nightmares: Clinical and Literary Cases." In Carol Schreier Rupprecht, ed., The Dream and the Text: Essays in Literature and Language, pp. 48-70. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.
Zizek, Slavoj. The Sublime Object of Ideology. London: Verso, 1989.