“IT FEELS TOO GOOD TO BE REAL”: APPROACHING COMMITMENT THROUGH QUEER SPACE AND TIME IN HARUKI MURAKAMI’S *THE WIND-UP BIRD CHRONICLE* AND *1Q84*

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Katayun Pasha
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The Undersigned Faculty Committee Approves the

Thesis of Katayun Pasha:

“It Feels Too Good to Be Real”: Approaching Commitment through Queer Space and
Time in Haruki Murakami’s The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle and IQ84

Yetta Howard, Chair
Department of English and Comparative Literature

Stephen-Paul Martin
Department of English and Comparative Literature

Anh Hua
Department of Women’s Studies

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Approval Date
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Katayun Pasha
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In this thesis, I examine two novels that comprise the bookends of what has been referred to as the “commitment” stage in Haruki Murakami’s career: The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle (1998), which is the novel that initially launched his advocacy for commitment, and 1Q84 (2011), his most recently translated novel in English. While Murakami’s earlier writings seemed to argue that the cohesive self is impossible because of the difficulty in negotiation the multifaceted (and often competing) constraints of the binary structures of East/West, traditional/modern, urban/rural, masculine/feminine, and gay/straight, these two texts mark a shift in the author’s oeuvre towards attempting to engage with the world and those in it at all costs. Throughout this thesis, I argue that Murakami’s advocacy for commitment is evident in the way that he eschews and subverts the aforementioned dualities, primarily through his use of queer notions of time and space. Because queer frameworks are also heavily invested in disrupting the distinctions of the binaries, my intervention into Murakami’s work relies on queer theories of time, space, sexual embodiment, and Asian subjectivity. Ultimately, I discover that as Murakami progresses through the commitment stage of his career, he steers his characters through time and space that is progressively more liminal and queer, and as a result, his characters come closer and closer to achieving cohesive identities and connections to one another.
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CHAPTER 1

“BUT I DOUBT THEY’VE SEEN A SKY WITH TWO MOONS IN IT”: HARIKI MURAKAMI AND NON-NORMATIVE CONCEPTIONS OF SPACE AND TIME

Think of it this way, Tengo. Your readers have seen the sky with one moon in it any number of times, right? But I doubt they’ve seen a sky with two moons in it side by side. When you introduce things that most readers have never seen before into a piece of fiction, you have to describe them with as much precision and in as much detail as possible. What you can eliminate from fiction is the description of things that most readers have seen.

-Haruki Murakami, *IQ84*

A “queer” adjustment in the way we think about time, in fact, requires and produces new conceptions of space. … “queer” refers to non-normative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time.

-Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*

The fictional, two-mooned realm mentioned by Komatsu, the literary editor speaking in the epigraph from Haruki Murakami’s most recently translated novel, certainly challenges normative conceptions of space (here, both lived space and outer space) because this world requires new “logics and organizations” that must be learned in “as much detail and as much precision as possible” (Halberstam 6; Murakami, *IQ84* 173). For instance, in this new world non-normative practices are presented with such nonchalance that issues like heightened female sexuality, group sex, and even ritualized intercourse with a prepubescent shrine maiden seem almost unremarkable. Likewise, the normative conception of time as linear is also challenged in the novel through the alternating narrations, the overlap and gaps between them, and the flashbacks and stories told to the protagonists. Even this, though, becomes especially subversive when the play-within-the-play world of *IQ84* eventually superimposes itself onto the present reality of 1984. As Judith Halberstam notes in the passage above, queer time and space provide an opportunity to unmoor from the rigid binary structure, and
in doing so, allow us to achieve a new understanding of the world that does not rely on the value judgments that bind us.

While the queer qualities of space and time in *IQ84* require a lengthy discussion that is reserved for the third chapter of this project, the above quote is perhaps most poignant here at the beginning, particularly in conversation with Halberstam. On first reading, this passage can easily be seen as a metafictional moment in which the author is discussing his craft—and there is certainly evidence to back this up, as much of the novel is clearly a meditation on the act of writing. However, this moment additionally seems to be a place where Murakami is theorizing a conception of time and space that echoes Halberstam’s understanding, in that Komatsu’s comment too calls for a spatial and temporal “queering,” which emphasizes the non-normative and “eliminate[s]” the dependence on normative logics as a primary mode of understanding. In other words, while this writerly advice might initially seem like nothing more than thoughts on descriptive passages, it also seems to be an admission that non-normative spatial and temporal conceptions have become increasingly important for Murakami, as they offer new insights into the production of the self.

Since his emergence on the literary scene in 1979 with the novel *Hear the Wind Sing*, Murakami’s works have demonstrated a frustration with the forced binaries of East/West, traditional/modern, and self/other while simultaneously refusing to be defined in terms of these strict categories. Perhaps this is the reason he has become not only one of the most significant contemporary authors in his native Japan but also one of the country’s largest literary and cultural exports to the rest of the world. Translated into over forty different languages, Murakami’s works are renowned worldwide for their portrayal of the detachment, loss, and fractured identity that is typical in Western notions of postmodern literature. The ambivalent protagonists, surreal settings, and sparse prose have become hallmarks of Murakami’s works, gaining him international attention and praise—most notably evidenced by the fact that he was shortlisted for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013. Anticipating this nomination, prominent Murakami scholar Matthew Strecher authored a reflective piece on the past thirty years in criticism on the author, “At the Critical Stage: A Report on the State of Murakami Haruki Studies,” which reminds us that Murakami was initially criticized in his home country for the very characteristics which now make him so popular around the world. Early skeptics defined his works as too Western (and specifically American) in style, as he is
admittedly influenced by non-Japanese authors such as Vonnegut, Carver, Salinger, Kafka, and Chandler, among others. In fact, Murakami has been the Japanese translator of several of these very same authors, suggesting not only a literary kinship but also a stylistic one. For instance, much has been made of Murakami’s consistent use of *boku*, the informal *I*, in his first person narration, as traditional Japanese literature tended to favor a more formal version of the pronoun. Though there is no English equivalent for the various pronouns, perhaps the best analogy would be the close, familiar perspective provided by the first-person narrations the aforementioned Western writers are so famous for.

Remarking on this style, Matthew Strecher notes that it has been dubbed “‘nationality-less’ (*mukokuseki*)” by Japanese critics and recounts an oft-told anecdote about Murakami’s initial reception in Japan: “1994 Nobel laureate Ōe Kenzaburō [commented in a published 1993 conversation] to British novelist Kazuo Ishiguro that ‘Murakami Haruki writes in Japanese, but his writing is not really Japanese. If you translate it into American English, it can be read very naturally in New York’” (“Critical Stage” 857). While this statement certainly predicts Murakami’s steady acceptance into international literary circles, it more significantly demonstrates the fact that Murakami’s particularly American style was considered a shift away from—and even, a flouting of—“pure” Japanese literature (*jubunbaku*) (Strecher, “Beyond ‘Pure’” 354). Much like the distinction between literary and commercial fictions in Western publishing, *jubunbaku* is hard to define and is instead set in strict opposition to mass-oriented literature—the I-know-it-when-I-see-it distinction between high and low forms of art. What can be read from Ōe’s observation, then, is that it is precisely the widespread and culturally unspecific appeal of Murakami’s work that was initially seen as diluting its “purity.”

For his own part, Murakami has often spoken of having no intention of challenging the established order, but rather, to write in a way that comes most naturally to him. Born into postwar Japan in 1949, Murakami grew up during a period of intense cultural influence from the West—most specifically American and English—and he, like many Japanese of his and future generations, experienced what might be considered an accelerated version of the postmodern identity crisis, as Rebecca Suter explains in the introduction to her book, *The Japanization of Modernity*: “in a very short span of time [Japan] underwent epistemological changes that in the West had occurred gradually over the course of three centuries… A
particularly significant issue in the development of Japanese modernity is the formation of
the notion of the modern individual subject” (2). Coming of age during this time of rapid
change and Westernization, then, shaped the ambiguously cultural mukokuseki style that has
become Murakami’s trademark, but perhaps more importantly, it is reflected in his
characters, the disillusionment and alienation that comes from their fractured identities, and
the persistent use of space and temporality to both represent the split in Japanese identity and
to challenge the binaries that shaped it.

As Suter indicates above, the shift into modernity happened much more rapidly in
postwar Japan than much of the rest of the world. This was triggered by national traumas (the
atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese surrender, the publicized
rejection of deity status—Ningen-sengen—by Emperor Hirohito) and further aggravated by
the prolonged occupation by Allied forces and cultural imperialism from the West. Indeed,
much of the scholarship on Murakami’s work describes he ontological crisis that his work is
centered upon as an attempt to grapple with, and explore the implications of, the
(im)possibility of a cohesive identity and genuine human connection in postwar Japan.
Rebecca Suter goes on to assert that even the notion of an identity is something that is
defined by the West—and in many ways, for Murakami, in contradistinction to it. She cites
an interview with Murakami, where he falsely (and purposely) leads the Western interviewer
to believe that the Japanese have no word for “identity”:

> Although it is true that the term aidentitī [identity], in katakana [a Japanese
syllabary used to translate foreign words and concepts], is often used in
contemporary Japanese, it is also true that the Japanese equivalents do exist … As
in other interviews with American journalists or writers, Murakami is playing the
part of the “compliant colonized,” giving to America the image of Japan that
Americans want to have, i.e., a group society that does not know the freedom of
American individualism, a culture to which the idea of “individual identity” is so
alien that a writer needs to escape to the United States to attain such an “identity.”
(Suter 72)

By playfully joking with this interviewer, Murakami is nodding toward the idea that Western
involvement in Japan is a huge factor in impeding identity production, further suggesting that
this is because the Japanese have interpellated the Western view of their subjectivity—
even on a linguistic level, as the native words for “identity” have dropped out of common
usage. This, then, implies that there might some sort of double-binary system in place in
Japan: the long-standing normative values of the home culture, onto which the Western value system is superimposed and internalized.

Caught between competing value systems and the stifling binary systems that rule them both, Murakami’s characters consistently struggle to grasp their identities. For instance, in an essay focusing on Murakami’s earlier works, “Magical Realism and the Search for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki,” Matthew Strecher remarks about the identities of the detached, often nameless narrator:

Where is his unique individuality? What does it look like? How can it be seen, touched, used to express the Self? Put into the existentialist terms of Jean-Paul Sartre, or, later, the psychological theory of Jacques Lacan, Murakami’s implicit question is, always, how can the first-person protagonist forge connections with an Other (conscious or unconscious) and thereby identify himself, prove to himself that he even exists? (267)

In other words, the search for identity in Murakami’s work consistently endeavors to push the binaries of self/other and conscious/unconscious against one another, in an effort to expose these distinctions as a fiction. Moreover, as Suter suggested above, any attempt at attaining the self is further exasperated by the rapidity with which the false dualities formed in Japan, making the negotiation of differences so untenable—and the self so unknowable.

Much has already been written on Murakami’s concern for the fractured identity, especially in regards to the loner male protagonist and the dissociative females he meets along the way. This project will endeavor to build on the established discussions by examining the notion of the fractured identity, particularly in terms of queer embodiment and sexuality as they intersect with non-normative conceptions of space and time in two of Murakami’s more lengthy works, The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle (1998) and 1Q84 (2011). In the following pages, I hope to demonstrate that much of what has been attributed to the author’s “nationality-less” style is actually an attempt to subvert the binaries of East/West, modern/traditional, urban/rural, male/female, and gay/straight, thus opening up a new space and time for the individual to (if not attain, then at least) glimpse what the self might look like if freed from the multifaceted fiction of dichotomous thinking. Though a clear picture of the unified self and what it means remains elusive even in the two above-mentioned novels, they mark a shift away from the skepticism that a cohesive identity is even possible that dominates his early works into a more hopeful and insistent search for one.
Before continuing, though, it seems necessary to expand on the importance of time and space in this search, as Murakami is perhaps most well-known for the surreal, labyrinthine settings these odysseys are set in. Though he does not often mention the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki directly, Murakami grew up in a time when the reformation of geographies was a key issue in reshaping the national identity—two cities had been flattened, thus opening up a literal space for modernization. In the intervening years, the rapid change to Japan’s landscape has perhaps become one of the most salient examples of the split in the national—and individual—identity: the moss gardens, rice paddies and Shinto temples that represent the “traditional” Japan vs. the high-speed Shinkansen bullet trains and neon-lit skyscrapers of huge metropolises like Tokyo, signifying the “modern” Japan.¹ Furthermore, the binary of traditional/modern not only creates spatial tension, but also, it forces individuals to negotiate issues of temporality, as the values, codes, and societal standards of two vastly different eras are superimposed onto one another. Thus, the simultaneity and dissonance between the extremities of Japanese culture has long been an interest for Murakami, and he has certainly seized their symbolic possibilities throughout his oeuvre.

Probably the most overt example of this is the author’s 1985 novel, Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World, where the narrative is split into the two decisively opposite halves named in the title—the former of which is a cyberpunk technofuture of corporate espionage and brain hackers, and the latter is a dreamlike village dystopia, where the subconscious must be cut away before entrance is allowed. These settings reflect the split in contemporary Japanese culture and signal an ongoing concern for the ways in which space and time can contribute to the loss of identity—and, indeed, by the end of the aforementioned novel, the self is lost forever. However, as Murakami has continued to grapple with these issues over the course of his three-decade career, his position seems to have evolved, as Matthew Strecher’s panoramic essay on the state of Murakami studies describes, from one of “detachment to commitment”:

¹ The popularized images I’ve provided to represent the “old”/“new” Japan are undoubtedly Orientalist abstractions from a Western point of view. While this project endeavors to problematize these definitions, this is nevertheless a common perception of the Japanese culture split, and therefore, it seems to be an appropriate jumping-off point.
One point on which most critics agree is that Murakami has undergone a “shift” (tenkan) since 1995; whereas his protagonists prior to The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle had been almost uniformly detached, socially and politically disinterested loners—they have been described variously as “self-absorbed,” “autistic,” even “transcendent”—in this watershed novel and those that follow it, his heroes have shown greater commitment to those around them. (“Critical Stage” 863)

Here, Strecher is remarking on the scholarly consensus that has been reached on the phases of Murakami’s works: whereas his earlier writings often seem to conclude that a unified self is impossible, The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle and subsequent works—including 1Q84—indicate an acknowledgment by the author that at the very least the search for identity and connection is a worthy one. Likewise, Murakami’s use of setting has followed the same trajectory, moving away from the opposing, detached settings like Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World and towards a new temporal space that opens up the possibility of negotiating self.

Murakami’s trademark surreal setting, then, becomes a reflection of one of the central questions of his work: how much one person can really know about another if they barely know themselves. The pervasive alienation one feels in the face of rapid industrial, political, and cultural change leads to the unfulfilled relationships, failed marriages, and missed connections seem to dominate Murakami’s oeuvre. Whether the work is supporting a detachment from—or the commitment to—connection and intimacy, there can be no question that many of the obstacles that arise between characters are due to difficulties in negotiating matters of gender, embodiment, and sexuality, both in the self and with one another. These, too, seem to be intricately linked with issues of space and time, as Elizabeth Grosz discusses in her book, Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space:

the body [is] a, indeed, [is] the, primary sociocultural product. It involves a double displacement, an alteration or realignment of a number of conceptual schemas that have thus far been used to think bodies: on the one hand it involves problematizing a whole series of binary oppositions and dichotomous categories governing the ways we understand bodies, their relations to other objects and to the world (among the more crucial oppositions challenged by reconceptualizing the terms in which bodies are thought are the distinctions between mind and body, subject and object, psychological and biological, gender and sex, culture and nature, etc.). (31)

Since, as discussed earlier, Murakami’s work consistently problematizes the binary system on many of the same levels that Grosz mentions, this project will rely quite heavily on queer
readings of space and time, particularly where they intersect with issues of gender, sexuality, and embodiment. In the following pages, I will argue that Murakami’s use of liminal settings in the novels reflects his newfound investment in, as Matthew Strecher noted above, a commitment to the struggle of discovering one’s self—and, in turn, committing to one another. His subversion of normative spatial and temporal constructs, particularly in terms of the logic that rules them, suggests that the path to wholeness can only traverse through a third, queered space and time.\(^2\)

Even if the journey is incomplete or the encounter is fleeting, this mere fact indicates that Murakami has begun to recognize the possibility that the fractured self ultimately can be reconciled—subverting even the grand narratives of postmodern thought—though what this unified self might look like or mean remains a mystery. Working within this argument, the second chapter will focus specifically on *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*—the text that definitively shifted Murakami’s stance on identity—and will discuss the novel in terms of the way it initially seems to simply subvert traditional binaries and eventually theorizes and introduces a new, queered space where the self can begin to be reconciled. The final chapter, then, will demonstrate that it is precisely because the entirety of the author’s most recently translated novel, *1Q84*, takes place in that queered space and time that allows for what is perhaps the most connected conclusion in Murakami’s oeuvre thus far.

These novels have been paired in this project for many reasons, not the least of which is that they provide a bookended picture of Murakami’s work in the commitment stage of his career. Furthermore, while other fictional works in this period—*Sputnik Sweetheart* (1999), *Kafka on the Shore* (2002), *After Dark* (2004)—display the same kind of concerns about identity production in modern Japan, the texts I’ve chosen to work with have so many similarities—whether they be surface-level or much deeper—that they almost beg to be discussed in tandem. While the connections between these novels will be developed in depth throughout this project, it is my belief that even a cursory discussion of the common concerns will reveal an author in conversation with himself on the issue of identity (and coextensive

\(^2\) These liminal conceptions of space and time not only challenge normative assumptions, but they create a third space that allows for a new understanding of temporal and spatial being. Furthermore, non-normative sexuality was often referred in the past as a “third sex,” which further reinforces the liminal third space as queer.
with my claims), often using many of the same tools in both novels. To put it another way, while I would never presume to call *IQ84* a “sequel” to *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, the two books have so much in common that it seems as if Murakami—whether consciously or not—was linking them.

Indeed, the similarity that is most obvious from the very outset is that each novel consists of three books, begins in the year 1984, and is set in motion in the opening pages by a piece of classical music—Rossini’s *The Thieving Magpie* in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* and Jánaček’s *Sinfonietta* in *IQ84*. Not only is the last item on this preliminary list important because the focus on the auditory is a subversion of normative modes of literature, being that the visual usually takes primacy in many forms of art besides music, it is also important to note that these compositions initiate the characters into new spatial and temporal conceptions, returning throughout the narrative to remind both the characters and the readers where the journey began. These musical pieces serve not only as a trigger for the respective stories and the entry into new governing logics, but they also evoke a physical reaction in the characters that, in their own individual ways, signify a manifestation of the emptiness and loss that is symptomatic of the fractured identity. The recurring motif of the aforementioned compositions prompts the main characters to think about what is at stake in this journey and how it began. While this reminder of loss is important to fuel the characters, it also has spatial and temporal implications. In their introduction to the anthology, *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, David Eng and David Kazanjian discuss how melancholy also becomes a temporal space, one that a person can inhabit and which constantly mingles with the past:

> In this regard, we find in Freud’s conception of melancholia’s persistent struggle with its lost objects not simply a “grasping” and “holding” on to a fixed notion of the past but rather a continuous engagement with loss and its remains. This engagement generates sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future. (4)

Thus, Murakami’s insistence on triggering and remembering past trauma is an attempt to bring about a new understanding of how to move forward towards commitment.³

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³ In fact, many scholars agree that Murakami’s shift into the commitment stage of his career was triggered by the two massive and nationally traumatic events of 1995: the Hanshin earthquake in January and the AUM Shinrikyō sarin attack in March. In direct response to these traumas, Murakami released the nonfiction collection of essays, *Underground* (1997), and the short story collection, *after the quake* (2000). See Jonathan Boutler’s “Writing Guilt: Haruki Murakami and the Archives of National Mourning” for a thorough discussion
At the center of both novels is a journey that navigates through, around, and between the intersections of various opposing dualities, and what this translates to in the concrete terms of plot progression is the simple question of whether one can reconnect with a once-profound love that has been lost due to the crushing constraints of the binary system. In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, Toru Okada searches for his missing wife and is forced to confront his own demons before there is even a chance for him to get her back. Likewise, in *1Q84* Aomame and Tengo share a fleeting but intense moment of emotional connection in the fourth grade and spend the subsequent two decades attempting to attain that understanding again. In other words, living with a fractured identity has real world consequences for Murakami because it quite simply prevents individuals from developing and sustaining meaningful relationships. Though his earlier works featured apathetic loners who seemed contented in their estrangement, the insistence on human connection in these two novels seems to be an acknowledgement on the author’s part that even fictional characters should not endure a lonely, isolated life forever—perhaps even going so far as to suggest that the real-life citizens of Japan (and, indeed, the world) cannot afford to live alienated lives either.

To continue—but hopefully without belaboring the justification of textual choices in a tedious listing of every similarity between the novels—there are two final connections that are worth discussing here. The first is a character named Ushikawa, a morally-lax private detective who appears in both novels—though, admittedly, he will not feature much in my analysis in subsequent chapters. Although it is not clear whether this is meant to be the *exact* same person, Ushikawa is described in much the same way in both books: a capable but seedy gumshoe type who is exceedingly ugly, misshapen, rude, and tenacious. Though there is certainly an argument to be made that these are not actually the same person—and there is much to support that assessment, particularly because the version of Ushikawa in *1Q84* dies (in chronological, diegetic time) before the incarnation in *Wind-Up* even appears—the important point for me is that Ushikawa provides a link that cannot be overlooked. Simply put, if Murakami didn’t want us to see this link, he could’ve easily given the characters different names and characteristics. It appears, then, that even the author is acknowledging the connection between these two novels in some small way.

of these two works in regards to trauma, melancholy, and the shift towards commitment.
The final and most telling similarity between these two books can be seen before the front covers are ever even cracked open: the sheer size and length of these volumes. In light of the claim that these two novels best represent an author trying to grapple with the massive issue of identity production in spite of the harmful effects of the binary, the length and scale of these texts correspondingly represent how complicated and arduous the task of negotiating the self might be. Even still, while *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* comes in at 607 pages in the American edition, it is seemingly dwarfed by the 925 pages of *1Q84*. This both suggests that Murakami continues to grapple with this issue in more depth throughout his career and that the uncharacteristically hopeful and connected ending of *1Q84* is only possible after a long, strange, sometimes-dangerous, and often-queer journey. Moreover, the size and scope of the novels becomes a space of its own, one that subverts the preconceived notions of the ideal length for fiction (at least from a marketing standpoint), since the average novel tends to be at least a few hundred pages shorter. Even in the reading experience, the heft of these novels suggests a long and onerous negotiation of the self. In much the same way, the length creates its own temporality because they are far too long to finish in one sitting (or two, or three…), which forces the reader to sustain the main narrative in their minds over a long period of time. This becomes increasingly more complicated as other narratives and perspectives come in, introducing new chronologies and converging on each other, at times superseding the main narrative and at others superimposing themselves onto it.

Thus, the length, scope, and multi-layered complexity of these two novels work together to cast Murakami as a writer of excess, in that they seem to purposefully overload readers with many intersecting layers of signification. This certainly has queer associations, as the term *excess* has also been applied to queer aesthetics, as explained by Amelia Jones in the essay, “How Ron Athey Makes Me Feel: The Political Potential of Upsetting Art”:

Challenging the prohibition on allowing emotions to pollute the rational purity of Euro-American high modernism in its twentieth-century guises, for example, a handful of artists since 1970—most of them feminist, queer, or inspired by feminist and queer movements—began explicitly to activate affect, expressing or conveying excessive feeling in order to encourage emotional responses in return. (158)

The idea of excess in Jones’s reading reflects the complexities of emotion in dealing with huge questions like identity and sexual subjectivity, particularly because Athey’s art is laden with non-normative practices like BDSM, many of which Murakami depicts in indirect ways.
In light of this, there are two things to note about the above quote. The first is that the idea of excess in aesthetics is something that is seen as challenging purity of modernist conceptions of art. It seems, then, that Murakami is subverting artistic forms on both sides of the Pacific—junbungaku as pure literature in Japan and the emotionally suppressed rationalism of Western modernism, which leads to my second point about the above passage. One of the most dominant Orientalist abstractions about Japanese culture is exactly that of emotional repression, and this is a stereotype that Murakami certainly plays with often, once again insinuating that the Western perception has been interpellated by individual subjects in Japan. However, as Murakami has moved more and more towards the notion of commitment, his books have gotten longer and longer, ultimately suggesting that the queer attribute of excessiveness itself provides a space and time to reconcile the fractured identity.

To end this chapter precisely where it began, Komatsu tells Tengo in the epigraph from IQ84, “[w]hen you introduce things that most readers have never seen before into a piece of fiction, you have to describe them with as much precision and in as much detail as possible. What you can eliminate from fiction is the description of things that most readers have seen” (Murakami 173). Moving through the readings of The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle and IQ84 with this idea in mind, this project endeavors to demonstrate how Murakami has become increasingly reliant on queer time and space—with its liminal, nonsequential, subversive and excessive characteristics—in order to approach an understanding of the self. And, if Komatsu is right, this should be a wholly new understanding that is unbound from the binary, not one “that most readers have seen.”
CHAPTER 2

“LIKE SKINNING A PEACH”: UNRAVELING THE BINARY IN HARUKI MURAKAMI’S THE WIND-UP BIRD CHRONICLE

“Queer time” is a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance. “Queer space” refers to the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics.

-Judith Halberstam, In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives

Written originally as the short story, “The Wind-Up Bird and Tuesday’s Women,” which was expanded into a serialized, two-book novel in 1994 and then lengthened with a third book over a year later, The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle represents Haruki Murakami’s numerous attempts to grapple with the idea of identity and relationships in postmodern Japan. At its most basic level, the novel is about a man, Toru Okada, who is searching for the housecat that ran away just before the narrative begins. Toru’s wife, Kumiko, makes it clear to him that in many ways the cat represents their marriage when she says, “I want you to understand one thing … That cat is very important to me. Or should I say to us. We found it in the week after we got married. Together. … He’s very important to me, a kind of symbol” (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 47-8). When soon after, Kumiko also mysteriously leaves Toru, it becomes clear that the two disappearances are intrinsically tied together—in other words, to reunite with Kumiko, Toru must first find their cat. Still, the novel’s American-English translator, Jay Rubin, remarks (in a Japanese article quoted and translated by scholar Michael Seats) that Toru’s strange journey amounts to more than simply getting his wife back. Instead, “his search for [Kumiko] 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” (qtd. in Seats 275). The latter part of Rubin’s statement seems to be of utmost importance to Murakami because—totaling 607 pages in the American edition—the scope of the novel is
massive, covering ground from various parts of Japan to the mines of Siberia to the sweet waters of the island of Malta, and spanning Japanese history from the Imperial expansions of the pre-WWII era to the cyberpunk Tokyo of the mid-1980s. In light of this, Toru’s quest is quite clearly more than just a hunt for a missing cat, or even his wife. The search sets in motion a series of surreal, seemingly nonrelated, and often bizarre chain of events that calls into question the mere possibility of genuine human identity or understanding, leading Toru through time and space that is gendered and reversed, real and imagined, in dream and memory, within and between. As Murakami ultimately progresses towards the temporal and spatial understanding that Judith Halberstam discusses above, leaving behind “frames of bourgeois reproduction” and instead investing in the idea of “queer counterpublics,” Toru’s journey begins to approach the possibility of understanding and connection (Halberstam 6).

As discussed in the first chapter, Murakami’s works have often been described as “nationality-less” (mukokuseki) and this seems to stem, in part, from his ostensibly Americanized attitude and writing style, thus bastardizing the pure literature of junbungaku. This sets up an important distinction, a dichotomy between the two literary forms which aligns quite neatly along the binary of East/West. Though each culture defines these categories differently, common among them is the idea that objects, people, occupations, and even types of space are generally coded as feminine or masculine, with a higher value usually given to the male counterpart. Similarly, in the binary of East/West, the West has coded itself as superior and therefore masculine, while the East takes an inferior, feminized role. For Murakami, a product of these tensions seems to be the confusion in gender, embodiment, and sexuality and whether it is even possible to fit into the normative structure that prizes maleness, whiteness, and straightness—and if so, which culture’s rules to follow. In the book, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America*, David Eng discusses “the numerous ways in which articulations of national subjectivity depend intimately on racializing, gendering, and sexualizing strategies” (3). These strategies are deployed by the West to subjugate the East, whether through geographical, militaristic, or cultural imperialism, thus cementing the signifier “white” as privileged (and even “natural”). Eng goes farther by arguing that the West has not only coded itself as masculine but also heterosexual, so that “a theory of heterosexual development cannot be easily disassociated from racial regulation [and] that heterosexuality gains its discursive power through its tacit...
coupling with a hegemonic, unmarked whiteness” (13). In other words, Eng is proposing that the East has been conceptualized as necessarily queer—in the more derogatory sense of the word—and that the strict binaries that govern sexual subjectivity are further compounded by value judgments placed on the East by the West.

To underscore this idea, Eng’s intervention begins with an epigraph from M. Butterfly: “I am Oriental. And being an Oriental, I could never be completely a man” (1). As Eng explains, the most poignant point of this quote is that it is the Chinese male character who defines himself as less than a man and uses this as a starting point to discuss how the East is hailed as a feminized subject:

While the formation of the minority Asian American subject takes place on the material terrain of disparate social relations, the processes through which the marked Asian American male subject is interpellated and stitched into the national fabric are sustained through the register of an imaginary whose force of seduction and lure of fantasy create a fiction of identification as seamless equivalence. (23)

In other words, this is not just the way that the West sees the East; it has become the way that the East sees itself. Presumably, this notion of Althusserian interpellation becomes aggravated when the culture that is being hailed also has a so-called “identity crisis,” as scholars like Rebecca Suter (discussed in the previous chapter) have argued is the case with Japan. Murakami’s characters do, at first glance, seem to follow this Orientalized take on gender, but his self-conscious reflections on the formation of the individual subject, particularly in terms of embodiment and space, would seem to suggest more than that. When placed in a setting which is strongly gender-coded, the characters in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle inevitably fail to perform the “right” gender, essentially because there is confusion on which notion of gender they are supposed to adopt: Japanese or American.

To be more precise, in fact, if we are to take Eng’s reading of the M. Butterfly quote as our framework, the distinction becomes a bit more complicated; instead of being forced to choose between Japanese and American ("completely a man"), the choices are actually presented as Japanese vs. the American view of Japanese subjectivity. Discussing this very process in her groundbreaking book, Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others, Sara Ahmed explains how Asian subjectivity has been “oriented” around whiteness:

spaces become racialized by how they are directed or orientated, as a direction that follows a specific line of desire. It shows us how the Orient is not only imagined as ‘being’ distant, as another side of the globe, but also is ‘brought
Thus, if the West’s influence is so extensive that it compounds the difficulties in negotiating the rigid binary structures, it is no surprise that Murakami navigates his characters’ journeys through the liminal and queered instead. In light of this idea, this chapter will argue The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle demonstrates Murakami’s awareness of the interpellated stance on Japanese embodiment, in that he initially conceptualizes his characters through Western stereotypes of Japanese gender and embodiment. Furthermore, I will argue that Murakami instead moves towards commitment to the self by navigating the characters through the liminal, queered conceptions of time and space that Halberstam defines in the epigraph of this chapter.

“NOT ONE DEAD END BUT TWO”: GENDERED SPACES AND THE ENFORCEMENT OF THE FRACTURED IDENTITY

In the opening pages of the novel, Toru Okada is cooking spaghetti—a Western meal—in his home in suburban Tokyo and receives a phone call from a mysterious woman who asks for ten minutes of his time so that they can “understand each other” (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 5). Even from the very first lines of the book, it is evident that Murakami is setting up the instability of identity when caught between competing cultures, a point he makes clear when Toru wonders: “Understand each other? Understand each other’s feelings in ten-minutes? What was she talking about? … What were we supposed to understand about each other in ten minutes? What can two people understand about each other in ten minutes?” (6) Though the short time frame is clearly questionable, what is perhaps harder for Toru to comprehend is the idea of understanding another person (he mentions it four times), especially when he later admits that even after six years of marriage, he can’t claim to understand Kumiko. This initial scene sets up the primary tension of the book: the spaghetti, the strange woman, and the call for personal connection working together to remind Toru that he must, as Matthew Strecher writes, commit to the self in order to make authentic connections. Still, another notable aspect about this opening scene is that Toru is in the kitchen at ten-thirty in the morning on a weekday, a time when most middle-aged adults are at work. Within a few pages, Toru explains that he is at home because he recently quit his unfulfilling job as a “professional gopher” for a law firm—a move that Kumiko, who has a
high-paying job as an editor for a corporate magazine, not only approved of but suggested: “Which meant that even if I stayed home and took care of the house, we would still have enough for extras such as eating out and paying the cleaning bill, and our lifestyle would hardly change” (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 10). Here, Murakami is carefully characterizing Toru as a housewife figure, whose “lifestyle” is being paid for by his wife’s high-powered position in exchange for keeping the house.

Judith Halberstam mentions that “[f]eminist historians have claimed for some thirty years that … a separation of spheres graphically represented the gendered logic of the public/private binary and annexed middle-class women to the home, leaving the realm of politics and commerce to … men” (8). In similar fashion, Toru’s “sphere” doesn’t really extend past the immediate radius around his home: he cleans, he runs errands for Kumiko, including paying bills and picking up her dry-cleaning, he has dinner ready for her when she gets home, and he sits and listens to her talk about her day at work. Even Toru’s way of blowing off steam is another domestic chore: when he becomes agitated, as he does when the mysterious telephone woman calls him, the only way he can calm his nerves is by compulsively ironing dress shirts—an almost absurd nod to the figure of the perfect housewife. Furthermore, this choice of activity seems to reinforce an Orientalized vision of Japanese male subjectivity because, as David Eng explains, “[f]rom [a] historical vantage point, the high concentration of Asian American male immigrants in what are typically thought of as ‘feminized’ professions—laundries, restaurants, tailors shops—further illustrates a material legacy for the intersectionality of gender and race” (17). In this context, it’s hard to see Murakami’s characterization as anything but a deliberate portrayal of Toru as feminized figure, thus defining the house (and, by extension, the suburban neighborhood where they live) as a castrated space, where Toru’s maleness is questioned by his lack of agency and the ways in which he becomes prone to the whims of just about everyone he meets. This is contrasted with the masculinized space of downtown Tokyo, with its rapid commerce and phallic protrusions into the sky, which serves as Kumiko’s domain, further reinforced by the fact that she has an office affair and soon after leaves Toru—an almost clichéd reference to the high-powered male.
Instead of seeing Toru as feminized, Japanese scholar Chikako Nihei characterizes Murakami’s male protagonists as “herbivorous” in her article, “Resistance and Negotiation: ‘Herbivorous Men’ and Murakami Haruki’s Gender and Political Ambiguity”:

The term sōshuko-kei danshi [herbivorous] generally denotes young men who, resisting traditional standards of masculinity, are less ambitious in their workplace, willing to save money rather than buy brand items or cars, and more likely to share an interest in fashion and sweets with their girlfriends than to pursue sex … [this] has invited criticism of men’s loss of conventional Japanese masculinity, especially from the earlier generation that idealizes “carnivore-type” masculinity. The herbivores’ differences from the older generation have been regarded as a sign of ignorance of traditional Japanese values. (63, emphasis added)

While the term “herbivorous” might initially seem to be in conflict with the idea of Toru as a feminized male because, as Nihei hints, it describes a burgeoning redefinition of masculinity, what is important for my purposes is the final lines of above quote—not only do herbivores seem to threaten the perception of Japanese masculinity, they also problematize ideas of tradition. In fact, Nihei goes on to discuss how these young men are shaped by, and resistant to, the carnivorous masculinity of the “postwar salaryman,” which “depends on the relationship with his sengyō shufu (full-time housewife) counterpart, and demands, as an essential part of normative masculinity, the male gender role of ‘provider’ or ‘breadwinner’ (daikokubashira) as a husband and father” (64). Noting that this conception of carnivorous masculinity began in the postwar period of rapid industrial and capitalist growth, it seems that this may be a yet another product of Western cultural imperialism that Murakami is attempting to subvert. By depicting Kumiko as the carnivorous breadwinner and Toru as the herbivorous housewife, Murakami suggests that the bourgeois conceptions of gender and embodiment are obsolete and impractical; likewise, the fact that this couple is unhappy even in their switched roles additionally indicates that the interpellated stance on Japanese sexual subjectivity is equally useless.

To return to the first few pages of the novel, when Kumiko calls soon after the telephone woman and reminds her husband to look for their missing cat, Toru begins a journey that initially leads him through the suburban space of their immediate neighborhood. Toru starts in the alleyway behind the house where Kumiko last saw the cat, but he explains that the space is more of a void than anything else:
It was not an “alley” in the proper sense of the word, but then, there was probably no word for what it was. It wasn’t a “road” or a “path” or even a “way.” Properly speaking, a “way” should be a pathway or channel with an entrance and an exit, which takes you somewhere if you follow it. But our “alley” had neither entrance nor exit. You couldn’t call it a cul-de-sac, either: a cul-de-sac has at least one open end. The alley had not one dead end but two. (Murakami, *Wind-Up Bird* 12)

During his day-to-day activities as a housewife, Toru moves through a neighborhood that is defined as a feminine space, but here the “alley” is described as a queered space, in that it defies the logic of binary classification. Additionally, the final sentence of the quote mentions “not one dead end but two,” which recalls dichotomous logic and hints that these opposing paths contain no real resolution. Thus, the alley becomes an anomaly, a queered space which is neither/nor, within and between, and this becomes especially true when we consider how alleys are commonly associated with the illicit activities of prostitution, cruising, drug use, and even homelessness—all of which challenge normative states of being and carry with them high levels of risk and danger. To put it another way, alleys are typically conceived of as marginal or subversive because of the above-mentioned practices. This does important queer work because it undermines the positive and negative designations of space and mirrors Karen Tongson’s investigation of the suburban landscape surrounding Los Angeles, *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries*, which argues that, “[i]n the suburbs, everything remains, or at the very least appears the same,” and yet, in “suburbia’s tidy yet nebulous sprawl, even this representational field has been marred by strange and wild things growing where they shouldn’t” (19, 5). In other words, though suburban landscapes are generally characterized by a uniformity or sameness that is often reflected in the inhabitants, queered spaces and practices still exist, and they do important work in challenging the established order. While the alley will become especially significant later because it is at the other end where Toru finds a dry well (much more on this to come), for now it is mostly important to mention as similar to the nether-ness of Toru’s gender performance: caught between opposing value systems that cannot possibly lead anywhere, Toru becomes stuck in an uninterrupted loop with no entrance or exit.

Like the “alley,” Toru himself is unclassifiable, unable to fulfill the binary definitions of gender—especially when those binaries are further racialized by the interpellated understanding of Orientalist perceptions of gender. A good example of this is a pair of arguments he has with Kumiko, both of which cast doubt on Toru’s ability to properly fit into
the opposing roles of either husband/protector or housewife/nurturer, and in doing so, they further reinforce Toru’s earlier thought that human understanding seems impossible. Throughout their six year marriage, Toru never notices that Kumiko has a strange distaste for blue tissues and flower-patterned toilet paper and that she hates beef stir fried with green peppers, so when, in his housewife role, he goes to buy those items and prepare that dinner, Kumiko accuses him of not being properly observant and nurturing (read: “female”) of her quirks. Again, the scene is an almost hyperbolic nod to the reversal of traditional roles: Kumiko comes home late from her corporate job, opens a beer and sips on it as she watches Toru cook her dinner, and immediately picks a fight about his housewife skills, admitting only later that she is taking out her bad mood on him because she is exhausted. However, refusing to offer such a neat reversal of heteronormative roles, Murakami complicates things further when Kumiko mentions that her period is approaching, which obviously cannot be the case for a typical “postwar salaryman.” But perhaps more importantly, this admission seems to signal an understanding of herself that is viewed through the misogynistic lens of PMS as the reason for groundless mood swings. Thus, Kumiko, too, appears to be unable to reconcile her own identity in the binary system and how it functions in the intimate connection of a marriage.

This scene comes just a day or so after his role as a protector (read: “male”) is questioned when he is unsuccessful at finding the cat and even less so at comforting Kumiko, who thinks the cat is dead. When Kumiko leaves him soon afterward—without taking any of her things or giving him an explanation—Toru sees these events as the turning point in their relationship: “Only much later did it occur to me that I had found my way into the core of the problem” (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 31).

The core of their problems, he surmises, is that even after a six year marriage filled with events that should have brought them closer together, he has barely scratched the surface of understanding her, and possibly never will. Interestingly, Toru characterizes this in terms of space:

Maybe this was it: the fatal blow. Or maybe it was just the beginning of what would be the fatal blow. 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. I was standing there holding a cigarette lighter, its tiny flame showing me only the smallest part of the room. (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 30)
Once again, Murakami is demonstrating that the loss of self can be reflected in space—in this instance a large, darkened room. Many scholars of this novel agree that Kumiko is a shell version of herself, a dissociated entity who lives partly in Toru’s world and partly in a shadow place, thus making her the telephone woman from the opening pages. Matthew Strecher is one of these critics, and he also uses the quote above to support this reading: “Toru’s inability to recognize the voice of the ‘telephone woman,’ despite the fact that she knows everything about him, fits a regular pattern; his admission in the passage above cements our suspicions that the quest in this novel will be for Toru to bring himself into direct contact with her hidden, unrecognized ‘core consciousness’” (“Magical Realism” 289). Furthermore, the above description clearly foreshadows the later scene when Toru’s astral self is searching through the darkened Room 208 for the telephone woman, armed with nothing but a weak penlight. Though a lengthy discussion about this scene is reserved for later in this chapter, it is important to note that Kumiko’s self has also been bifurcated, and the two halves must be reconciled before a resolution between husband and wife is even possible.

As Kumiko is largely absent for the majority of the narrative—she leaves Toru at the end of Book One and is only partially present before that—Toru and the reader are instead left with a series of stand-ins, more fractured individuals that Toru must attempt to connect with before he can find his wife. Matthew Strecher notes that one of the symbolically closest alternates for Kumiko is Creta Kano, the sister and assistant to the metaphysical detective Kumiko hired to find the missing cat (“Magical Realism” 289). Soon after meeting her, Toru discovers that she has been “defiled” by Kumiko’s older brother and namesake for the runaway cat, Noboru Wataya. As is typical for Murakami when one character tells another one their life story, Creta Kano’s tale comes out slowly and circuitously and is broken up over several scenes. As the character herself admits, this is partially because the memory is too painful to confront all at once and partially because the connections between events cannot be fully made until they are spoken out loud and then reflected upon at length before continuing. Moreover, this also introduces a temporal shift in the novel because as the reader is flung between the present narrative and Creta’s story several times, the two timelines must be sustained in the reader’s own memory. This disjointedness is a common postmodern literary device, but Elizabeth Freeman’s *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*
argues additionally that “historical and temporal disjunction … define and enable queer sociability” (122). In this context, Murakami’s use of temporal disjunction introduces competing chronologies, narratives, and perspectives, all of which shape a new understanding of how interrelated our lives are and how important the idea of commitment really is. While Creta Kano’s account is one of the more minor uses of queered temporality in the novel, it is important to note because hers is one of many long stories that Murakami provides, each one introducing a new disjunction that transports the reader towards a “queer sociability.” Moreover, each divergence from Toru’s story not only challenges the privileged position of the main (read: grand) narrative, but perhaps even of the binary system in which higher values must be placed.

Like many of Murakami’s storytelling characters, particularly the women, Creta Kano begins in her youth and recalls a feeling of total isolation. This arises from the constant and excruciating physical pain she had endured all her life: “And when I say ‘pain,’ that is exactly what I mean. Nothing mental or metaphorical, but physical pain, pure and simple” (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 91). Though she claims that there is nothing metaphorical about her pain, surely the same standard cannot be held for Murakami’s use of this pain, which, from her repeated claims of isolation and the inability to connect with those around her, seem to be a psychosomatic manifestation of the ontological pain of the loss of identity. Next, Creta Kano relays that after an unsuccessful attempt at suicide, she woke to find that she no longer felt pain, and in fact, became completely numb to all sensation. Swinging from one opposing side to the other, Creta found that her life was just as empty in numbness as it was in pain, though she now had mounting debt from medical bills and the car accident she caused to try to end her life and is forced to turn to prostitution to pay them.

As she did not have any connections to the world of sex-work, Creta Kano began her career as a prostitute by soliciting strangers in bars and on the streets. This went on until one night, when I was propositioning men by the station, two men grabbed me from behind. … The dragged me into a back street, showed me some kind of knife, and took me to their local headquarters. They shoved me into a back room, stripped my clothes off, strung me up by the wrists and proceeded to rape me over and over in front of a camera. (98)

For years, scholarship about sex work has described a hierarchy that is largely split on geographical terms—between inside and outside forms—with the former possessing a higher degree of agency and safety. Streetwalking is typically viewed as one of the most dangerous
forms of prostitution, attributed to the levels of control that are associated with types of space: the hooker on the corner vs. the escort in the hotel. Along these lines, what is important to note is that this violent event actually signifies Creta’s entry into the “inside” world of prostitution, as she is forcibly blackmailed and recruited by these same men to work for them. However, just as her transition from constant pain to complete numbness held no ontological relief, this transition from one side of the spatial binary to the other does not so easily conform to the aforementioned rules of safety associated with the indoors.

Creta Kano’s new position with these men leads her to a suite at an upscale downtown hotel, where she meets Noboru Wataya, a high-class john (again, Kumiko’s older brother), and is “defiled” by him. Though the meaning of this word choice is not immediately clear, it becomes evident as Creta recalls the scene: the non-sexual atmosphere, the “strange and disturbing” massage that seemed to search for her core being, and the insertion of a large foreign object that penetrates her and extracts something from within her, splintering the self in a simultaneous display of pleasure and agony (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 299). Describing this process, she continues:

In the midst of this pain and pleasure, my flesh went on splitting in two. There was no way for me to prevent it from happening. Then something very weird occurred. Out from between the two cleanly split halves of my physical self came crawling a thing that I had never seen or touched before. How large it was I could not tell, but it was as wet and slippery as a newborn baby. I had absolutely no idea what it was. … I knew that I should not let this happen, that I should not allow my very self to spill out this way and be lost forever, but there was nothing I could do to staunch the flow. … Everything that had been inside me was outside now. (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 301-2, emphases mine)

Again, we see Murakami carefully working through issues of the binary in this passage, particularly in terms of inside/outside, self/other, and pain/pleasure. As Creta admits, the intense pain she endures allows for her to really experience sexual pleasure for the first time in her life—so intense, in fact, that she confesses to drooling and losing complete bodily control. By bringing to mind BDSM practices in this scene, Murakami challenges normative

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4 See Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex” and “The Trouble with Trafficking.” Rubin alludes to the fact that this delineation between inside and outside types of prostitution form the grounds for the fierce debate on agency and sex work, particularly in terms of decriminalization. For more on this debate, see Ronald Weitzer’s “Flawed Theory and Method in Studies of Prostitution” and Melissa Farley’s response, “Prostitution Harms Women Even if Indoors: Reply to Weitzer.”
conceptions of pleasure and desire, which provides the groundwork for what is perhaps the most important opposition in this passage: the characterization of events as the birth of a new self while simultaneously feeling stripped of something at the very core. This seeming contradiction speaks volumes for the queer notion that binary thinking is unresolvable, especially because Creta Kano refers to this as an act of defilement even though she received pleasure from it.

Furthermore, to return to Matthew Strecher’s earlier claim that Creta Kano serves as a sort of stand-in for Kumiko, this act of defilement by Noboru Wataya, then, becomes the closest we (or Toru) come to finding out exactly what happened to Kumiko. Strecher remarks that “[s]he is, we eventually learn, imprisoned by her brother, who eliminates her ability to act on her own volition by stripping her of her core identity. We do not actually see this operation performed on her, but we learn of it from the narrative of another character, Kano Creta” (“Magical Realism” 289). If, as Strecher notes, a similar process has happened to Kumiko, Murakami seems to be suggesting that Toru can learn more about his wife by listening to others as they bear witness to their own pain and confusion in navigating the fractured self. Furthermore, it introduces another level of temporality into the story, as Creta’s experience is superimposed onto Kumiko’s to make one whole, their respective halves having been secreted away by Noboru Wataya. While I once again want to save an extended discussion of this for the section on the dreamlike Room 208 in second half of this chapter, it is important to note for now that Murakami has set up a narrative that seems to function in several different temporal spaces at once: the present-day narrative, the recalled memories of Toru and others, and the seemingly separate personal and historical events which are somehow overlaid on one another—to name a few. Elizabeth Freeman’s earlier notion about temporal disjunction opening up the opportunity for “queer sociability” is evident in the way in which storylines from all over the world and throughout 20th century history converge on one couple’s marriage, and this further indicates a sense of interconnectedness that certainly seems to advocate for a shift from detachment to commitment.

As if to reinforce this idea, another significant storytelling character appears at Toru’s home on precisely the same day his wife leaves him, although he doesn’t realize this last part until later. Toru is visited by Lieutenant Mamiya, an old army friend of Mr. Honda, the man
who counseled Toru and Kumiko before her parents would consent to their marriage. Though Mamiya has only been sent to deliver the news of Honda’s death and endow the couple with a final gift from his will, he ends up telling the story of how he and Mr. Honda came to meet. The account Mamiya tells, which comprises the two chapters named “Lieutenant Mamiya’s Long Story,” parts 1 + 2, is set in the late 1930s during the invasion of Manchuria and the Nomonhan Incident (in Japan, one of the most infamous examples of failed Japanese imperialism). Though it may go without saying that war and imperialism are things that are typically coded as masculine—many women around the world were not allowed to do combat duty until the second half of the 20th century, and a large number of countries still do not allow it—Murakami reinforces this idea by only making one mention of women in the 37 pages of Mamiya’s story: “We’d go out drinking and carousing every night, and we’d visit the cafes that had the White Russian girls” (Wind-Up Bird 136). The vast unforgiving space of Manchuria is cast as an arctic frontier comparable to America’s Old West. However, Michael Seats, author of Haruki Murakami: The Simalcrum in Contemporary Japanese Culture, also describes the setting as “quasi-divine” and notes that “for the Japanese of that epoch, [there was] an almost mythic space denoted by that geographical region” (62).

Indeed, Mamiya characterizes the scenery in much the same way while simultaneously acknowledging how space can shape subjectivity:

Sometimes, when one is moving silently through such an utterly desolate landscape, an overwhelming hallucination can make one feel that oneself, as an individual human being, is slowly coming unraveled. The surrounding space is so vast that it becomes increasingly difficult to keep a balanced grip on one’s own being. … The mind swells out to fill the entire landscape, becoming so diffuse in the process that one loses the ability to keep it fastened to the physical self. That is what I experienced in the midst of the Mongolian steppe. (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 139, emphasis added)

Paramount to this excerpt is the idea that gendered space not only has the ability to shape one’s identity, but it can also strip the self away. The Cartesian focus on the separation between mind and body becomes especially important in the fracturing of self Mamiya experiences because his life as a soldier depends on his ability to tap into the commonly masculine characteristics of aggression and violence. This breakdown of Cartesian dualism, then, opens up an opportunity for a new understanding of the self that is not rooted in the binary, though Murakami suggests that this is not an easy or painless process.
For instance, the diffusion of the self Mamiya experienced in the male coded atmosphere of war is an ominous sign—particularly the use of the word *unraveled*, which becomes painfully evident when he is selected as part of a four-man detail to cross the river into enemy territory. The assignment is a mystery to three of the four men involved, who are merely there as tactical and security support for a man named Yamamoto, who seems to be on an intelligence mission. They reach the opposite bank and camp for a few days before they are ambushed by the Mongolians—Honda senses the attack and escapes, the other man is killed, and Mamiya and Yamamoto are captured. The two men are interrogated and it is quickly discovered that Yamamoto is the leader of the group, and he is submitted to a particularly horrendous form of torture: being skinned alive. Mamiya is forced to watch as the other man is literally being “unraveled,” his male identity in this masculine-coded space being stripped away “like skinning a peach” (*Murakami, Wind-Up Bird* 159). With excruciating detail, Murakami describes the captors removing every inch of skin in strips, as if trying to leave nothing of Yamamoto’s embodied identity behind: “After that he skinned both legs, cut off the penis and testicles, and removed the ears. Then he skinned the head and the face and everything else” (159). Consciously aware of the emasculating implications of what they were doing, both the soldiers *and* Murakami take care to make sure that Yamamoto is fully castrated—or, as they say, stripped of his manhood. Again, this recalls the Orientalist notion of Japanese masculinity as necessarily feminized and lesser than the unmarked white male, particularly when we consider that the man who is leading the counter-mission against Mamiya’s group is a Russian named Boris the Manskinner. While Russia is not typically conceived as part of the West, Boris’s whiteness and his general disposition of aggressive masculinity are clearly meant to oppose the vulnerable and racially castrated positions Yamamoto and Mamiya are in.

Though this is not the end of Mamiya’s tale, I find it important to return to two small points made earlier. First: this story is being told to Toru on the exact same day that his wife leaves him, and he finds out later that she was having an affair. This is a common trope for Murakami, who implements the notion of being cheated on as one of the most emasculating experiences for men—in fact, one of the phrases that is most bandied about in these circumstances is precisely the idea of being “stripped of manhood.” Again, it seems as
though this may be a conscious choice to cast his characters as cuckolds in a nod to the Orientalized view of Asian men as racially castrated.

The second point I want to return to is the gift that Lieutenant Mamiya has brought for the young couple from the deceased Mr. Honda. When Toru unwraps it, he finds a “fancy Cutty Sark gift box, but it was too light to contain a bottle of whiskey. I opened it, to find nothing inside. It was absolutely empty. All that Mr. Honda had left me was an empty box” (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 172). Though this may be seen as a metaphor for Toru’s marriage, and there is certainly plenty to support that idea, what is most notable is that Murakami goes so far as to gender-code the empty package by purposely choosing an expensive, imported whiskey, connoting not only maleness but the kind of maleness that is rooted in power, wealth, and, perhaps most importantly, the West. This is particularly interesting because, at the same time, he tells the reader that this symbol is “absolutely empty.” The space inside the box is a void, thus suggesting that perhaps these binary definitions of gender—whether they are Orientalized or not—are likewise meaningless and empty.

To return to Mamiya’s tale, once Yamamoto has been completely skinned and is finally dead, the captors decide that Mamiya is not “worth torturing for information. Not worth keeping alive as a prisoner” (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 160). Having watched his compatriot flayed alive, Mamiya has also feels stripped of himself and doesn’t put up a fight when they decide to throw him down a deep, dry well. He passes out on impact, but wakes up to feel “some kind of spray hitting me. At first I thought it was rain, but I was wrong. It was urine. The Mongolian soldiers were all peeing on me where I lay in the bottom of the well” (163). Mamiya’s initial confusion between rain and urine sets up a distinction between purifying and defiling that foreshadows his coming experience in the well, and indeed, calls back to Creta Kano’s similar experience in Noboru Wataya’s hotel room. Much like Creta’s experience, Mamiya is being confronted with the abject, which Julia Kristeva defines in her seminal essay, “Approaching Abjection,” as that which “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). This quote seems rather poignant for Mamiya’s situation because he has unlawfully crossed a border into dangerous territory, but it more significantly resounds with the spatial and temporal liminality of the scene, where binaries of gender, identity, embodiment, and culture have become unraveled. Most importantly, being sprayed with the
soldiers’ urine is both a demeaning experience and an abject one, as bodily fluids are one of the most common sources of abjection. However, because the abject resides in the in-between, it allows for a collapsing of distinctions between subject/object or pure/defiled—even disgust/desire or dominant/submissive, as urination is a common fetish practice. As it did in Creta Kano’s story, this queering of normative boundaries opens up the opportunity for a similar kind of rebirth in Lieutenant Mamiya.

Though he cannot keep track of time, Mamiya is down in the well for almost three days, alone in darkness and despair. The space is characterized as a void where neither heat nor cold can reach, no food or water is available, and even light cannot penetrate except but once a day, brilliant and fleeting. On the verge of death and unfixed from normative rules of space and time, Mamiya becomes more vulnerable and open to a sense of self that could not be achieved in his rigidly gendered role of soldier. The fragmentary moment of blinding light is the only thing Mamiya has to look forward to in the well: “The light of the sun shot down from the opening of the well like some kind of revelation. In that instant, I could see everything around me. The well was filled with brilliant light. A flood of light. The brightness was almost stifling: I could hardly breathe” (Murakami, *Wind-Up Bird* 165). After spending so much time alone in the dark, Mamiya has begun to question his own subjectivity, having already had it “diffused” by the vast landscape and then stripped away with Yamamoto’s skin. Now, as a non-subject in a non-space/time, his only chance at glimpsing the self comes from the light that shines down on him: “I had a marvelous sense of oneness, an overwhelming sense of unity. Yes, that was it: the true meaning of life resided in that light that lasted for however many seconds it was” (166). Here, Murakami seems to be hinting at the idea that there is a (perhaps only momentary) chance for cohesive identity formulation. The most obvious reading of the light’s symbolism is the notion of enlightenment, but it is important to note that Mamiya suggests that the particular qualities of the light could only be possible in the liminal space and time that he inhabited. Thus, combining the idea of the Cutty Sark box as symbolic for the emptiness of Western masculinity construction with the void-like space of the Mongolian steppe and the bottom of the well, it seems that what Murakami is suggesting is that the sense of oneness may only be possible when the binaries of East/West and feminine/masculine are queered.
“PASS THROUGH THE WALL SEPARATING OUR TWO WORLDS”: QUEER TIME AND SPACE AS CONDUIT TO CONNECTION

As I hope to have demonstrated in the previous section, Murakami carefully works through the gendered binaries of space and time, particularly in the first book of the novel, problematizing and ultimately proposing a queering of their definitions. Because Lieutenant Mamiya’s experience in the well takes place at the very end of Book One, it marks a definitive shift for the rest of the novel, moving away from heteronormative concepts of space and time. Still, there are certainly elements before that scene (like the closed-off alley or the mysterious world of the telephone woman) which foreground the fact that, as Tongson asserted in a passage quoted earlier, there are still “strange and wild things growing where they shouldn’t” (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 5). In other words, it is no coincidence that as novel becomes decidedly and progressively more liminal and queer—particularly in the second and third books—Toru begins to approach a sense of self that enables him to become more assertive in his search for Kumiko. This section, then, will examine some of the more overtly queered geographies and temporalities that Murakami provides in order to allow his characters to achieve a new consciousness, a space and time to heal the fractures that are caused by the complicated and interpellated binary structures of Japanese culture. This mirrors Elizabeth Freeman’s discussion on the healing capacity of “erotohistoriography”—a queered understanding of time that is a “counterhistory to history” and “treat[s] the present itself as a hybrid” (95). Freeman asserts that erotohistoriography is a “reparative mode of criticism,” which “honors the way queer relations complexly exceed the present, insisting that various queer social practices … produce forms of time consciousness—even historical consciousness—that can intervene into the material damage done in the name of development, civilization, and so on” (120). In other words, just as Lieutenant Mamiya was only able to approach a “sense of oneness” after being unfixed from traditional rules of time and space, so too must Toru and others like him.

After hearing Mamiya’s story, Toru senses the need for a similar unplugging from normative spatial and temporal concepts, and he decides to begin the quest to find his identity (along with the cat and his wife) at the bottom of a well. This certainly can be seen in gendered terms as a penetration of the earth—and an unsuccessful one, at that, because of the well’s dryness—but it should be mentioned again that the well is located at the far end of the
aforementioned “alley,” which has been established as a queered space. Instead, the well becomes a prominent example of Halberstam’s “queer renderings of postmodern geography” that lie both “within and between” (5). As it can only be accessed from the alley and resides on the abandoned land of the Hanging House, a neighborhood enigma that has housed residents who all suffered horrific events, the well becomes the fulcrum for change in the novel, largely because of its liminal qualities, as Rebecca Suter discusses: “a dried up well in the backyard of an abandoned house represents a passage to another world, halfway between dream and reality, where [Toru] tries to solve the problems that concern him in ‘real life’ and to find his wife, who disappeared at the beginning of the novel” (162). Like Lieutenant Mamiya, Toru spends three days at the bottom of the darkened well, disconnected from the governing rules and logic of the outside world: “I fell asleep a few times and woke up just as often … Without changes in the light, time wobbled by like a wagon with a loose axle. My cramped, unnatural posture robbed my body of rest in small, accumulating doses. Each time I woke, I would check the time on my watch. Its pace was heavy and uneven” (Murakami, *Wind-Up Bird* 263). At the bottom of the well, even one of the most enduring and overt symbols for linear time, the watch, fails to regulate and reinforce the normative structure, and it is only once Toru becomes unfixed from that strict chronology that he can attempt to reorganize his memories to try and make meaning.

In between waking and dreaming, or doing both, Toru reflects back on his relationship with Kumiko and his failures as a husband—which include not being there when she had an abortion, both emotionally (he doesn’t want her to have it) and physically (he was out of town). Memory has long been discussed as an ephemeral space, but it has also been noted for its unreliability. Elizabeth Grosz, for instance, asserts that our memories tell us more about ourselves in the present than being an accurate representation of events: “Memory is the present’s mode of access to the past. The past is preserved in time, while the memory image, one of the past’s images or elements, can be selected according to present interests” (121-2). This is clearly the case for Toru as he pieces together his history with Kumiko, sliding each memory into place as if it were a puzzle that needed to be put together in the correct order to be solved. At the bottom of the well, through sensory deprivation and memory immersion, Toru is attempting to force the same kind of realization that Lieutenant Mamiya had, though this is obviously something that cannot happen from sheer will.
Instead, Murakami moves one step further towards the queer by transitioning Toru into another kind of world: “Before dawn, in the bottom of the well, I had a dream. But it was not a dream. It was some kind of something that happened to take the form of a dream” (Wind-Up Bird 241). Like memory, dream sequences are often discussed in terms of the ephemeral, the in-between, and Murakami is well-known for utilizing them throughout his oeuvre. However, here we see that he goes an extra step to call into question whether it is actually a dream or not. By describing it as “some kind of something,” Murakami is queering even the liminality of the dream space by blurring the lines between dream, reality, and hyperreality. In his dream—for lack of a better word—Toru finds himself transported from the well to the same large, fancy business hotel he has visited before in dreams, where he met and slept with the mysterious (and faceless) telephone woman. As I hope to have demonstrated earlier in this chapter during the discussion of Creta Kano’s defilement, the hotel room is a crucial space for the superimposed experiences of both Creta and Kumiko, and the remnants of Kumiko’s fractured self appear to be imprisoned in the darkened Room 208. In fact, hotel rooms seem to hold a particular significance for Murakami and often play a large role in his works. By nature, a temporary, transient space, the hotel room symbolizes for Murakami a place outside of the representational code. Because of its relative anonymity, the hotel room can—and in Murakami’s work does—host any number of subversive practices (prostitution, drug use, casual or group sex, and so on). Responding to this, Murakami’s characters consistently try new things in hotel rooms that they might not be willing to experience in a normative setting, suggesting that the space allows for the self to be stripped away and remade any number of times, thereby putting pressure on heteronormative modes of operation. But if that were not enough, the reminder that this imagined world exists at the bottom of a dry well (which is itself at the end of an alley with no entrance or exit) unquestionably underlines its queerness.

Realizing that his whole ordeal started with the telephone woman’s initial phone call while he was cooking spaghetti, Toru sets out to find her again in Room 208 because he believes she holds the key to him and Kumiko finally “understanding each other.” Though he is told that “this is the wrong time” and that he doesn’t “belong here now,” underscoring the forced timing and thereby suggesting that the queered spaces require a level of consciousness that he has not yet achieved but will, Toru keeps searching until he finds Room 208 and the
telephone woman (Murakami, *Wind-Up Bird* 242). He finally does find her in a darkened room where she is only a silhouette, and she also tells him that he shouldn’t be there at that time, giving him a kiss before sending him away: “Soon everything was gone: the woman’s tongue, the smell of flowers, the need to come, the heat on my cheek. And I passed through the wall. When I opened my eyes I was on the other side of the wall—at the bottom of a deep well” (247).

It is only after Toru comes back to the surface that he realizes the significance of this episode, mostly because it has left a physical remnant on him. The place where he passed through the wall and back into the well is marked by the heat on his cheek, and it is precisely in that spot on his face that a large bluish black mark is formed. Like Mamiya, his experience in the well changes him tremendously, even at the level of his body, and it is at this point that Toru not only becomes determined to win his wife back but also to be the agent of his own destiny. He is recruited for a job by a mother/son team, respectively named Nutmeg and Cinnamon—though these are clearly not their real names, a signature-Murakami nod to the untenable nature of identity. Nutmeg and Cinnamon run a metaphysical treatment center called “the fitting room” where unidentified women pay huge sums of money to enter a darkened room where Toru is blindfolded. Silently, these upper-class housewives lick his purple mark until he ejaculates in his pants and they are healed of various “ailments,” many of which seem to be existential in nature.

The masked identities of the proprietors and clients, as well as the anonymous, pseudosexual interactions that happen in the darkened room, are reminiscent of the exchanges that take place in the sexual spaces of Delany’s *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. Delany asks, “Were the porn the theatres romantic? Not at all. But because of the people who used them, they were humane and functional, fulfilling needs that most of our society does not yet know how to acknowledge” (90). Similar to Delany’s notion, the space that Nutmeg and Cinnamon provide too becomes queered, functioning as a secret and safe place for these women to fulfill the needs they cannot acknowledge. However, while Delany seems to be suggesting that these needs—whether they be rooted in issues of sexuality or the many other ontological crises of modernity—might be met in a safe place for non-normative sex acts, Murakami’s version seems to take this one step further. Though the situation is somewhat sexual and Toru does ejaculate in the process, the interactions between him and
the anonymous women are decidedly unsexy. Many of the clients are married women, and one can presume that they have at least somewhat regular access to sexual intimacy, so the almost-clinical characterization of these appointments seems to be an attempt by Murakami to underscore the idea that the “needs they cannot acknowledge” will never be fulfilled within the bounds of the binary system. Furthermore, the fact that these women lick the precise location of contact with the queered reality of Room 208, the bruise-like mark on Toru’s cheek, recalls Elizabeth Freeman’s earlier notion about the reparative qualities of liminal space and time, as it heals them even by proxy.

Though Toru’s attitude about helping these women is unsurprisingly blasé, working for Nutmeg and Cinnamon more importantly provides him access to the Hanging House, where the dry well that he sat in for three days is located. With the financial backing of Nutmeg and Cinnamon, Toru buys the Hanging House and moves the “fitting room” business there, so he can spend a few hours every day sitting at the bottom of the well and trying to make it into Room 208. Though he dedicates time and mental discipline to trying to reach the room, he cannot get farther than breaching the wall with his marked cheek before he is kicked out. While this is initially unsuccessful, the acquisition of the Hanging House additionally gives Toru access to another space, which at the time (1984-85) was extremely new and rare: the internet, and more specifically, the chat room. In *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces*, Juana Mario Rodriguez mentions that “cyberspace is an imagined terrain. Cyberspace is never one. There is no there out there” (121). Excluding webchats and other very recent technologies, verification of identity or claims of persons on the internet is tenuous, which makes it both a democratized and queered space. Much like the hotel rooms discussed earlier, the anonymity of the internet allows for individuals to reimagine and redefine themselves without the constraints of binary logics that dictate gender, age, race, and sexuality. In a chat room, Rodriguez argues, there is a feeling of “disembodiment, [and] this sense of being there and not there simultaneously, allows for other pieces of identity to develop and emerge […] Once inside, however, the body is imagined liberated from the moors of physical reality. Likewise, the psyche is also allowed to come undone, to release the texts of identity continually under production” (123). While Elizabeth Grosz does not see the internet as a disemboding entity, arguing that one can never truly live outside of the body, she echoes the notion that its power comes from the fact
that it is in-between: “In their nascent incompleteness, indeed in a form still more dreamlike than actual, these technologies are ripe, as it were, for various imaginary schemas, projected futures, dreams, hopes, and fears” (75). While many are bemoaning the internet as end of authentic human connection—myself included—what Murakami seems to have in common with the above scholars is the belief that the internet opens up a space with new possibilities for connection that are not possible in what Grosz describes as “lived, everyday space” (75). Thus the chat room becomes a queered space where, like the Mongolian steppe, the well, and Room 208, Toru can attempt to formulate a sense of self outside the binary definitions that restrict and define him. Likewise, this seems to be precisely the reason why Kumiko chooses a private chat room as the space for their first and only real-time communication since she left him.

Without the constraints of who they are supposed to be as man or woman, husband or wife, without even being sure that the person they are speaking to is who they think it is—indeed, the phrase “catfishing” has entered the popular lexicon in the internet age—the computer “beeps and a message appears on the screen, informing me that the connection has been made and the computer is ready for a two-way communication” (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 485). Prior to this, the only communication Toru had with his wife after she left him was one “Dear John” letter sent through the mail and a hostile meeting with Kumiko’s brother, Noboru Wataya, who insisted that Toru sign divorce papers and ignored Toru’s pleas to see Kumiko in person. Unable to face her husband in person, Kumiko instead turns to the internet, perhaps because, as Rodriguez notes, “the enigmatic aspects of words flying through space can often allow us to imagine a more intimate connection” (121). Though the conversation starts out disheartening for Toru, he begins to feel this intimacy with his wife creep back into him, so much so that he becomes convinced that he can see her:

I can feel her silence through the monitor. Like heavy smoke, it creeps in through a corner of the screen and drifts across the floor. I know about these silences of Kumiko’s. I’ve seen them, experienced them any number of times in our life together. She’s holding her breath now, sitting in front of the computer screen with brows knit in total concentration. … I hold my breath and stare at the screen the way Kumiko is doing. The two of us are linked together by the heavy bonds of silence that pass through the wall separating our two worlds. We need each other more than anything, I feel without a doubt. (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 490)

There are several notable things about this passage. As already mentioned, the chat room allows the couple a (non)space to come to terms with one another outside the binary system,
and it is interesting to note that Murakami takes care to work through this passage in dualities: she holds her breath, he holds his breath; she stares at the screen, he stares at the screen; even the phrase the “two of us” at the beginning of a sentence is paralleled by “our two worlds” at the end. But rather than signifying separateness, the use of dualities here gives off a mirrored effect, as if it were one subject with two reflections. Toru seems to be acknowledging this by knowing Kumiko’s reactions so well that he starts to inhabit them, attributing this to the link they have through “heavy bonds.” Moreover, the final thing to note in this excerpt is the phrase “pass through the wall separating our two worlds,” which clearly recalls the work that Toru is trying to do at the bottom of the well.

Shortly after this internet conversation with Kumiko, Toru is able to effectively pass through the wall in the well and gain admission to dreamlike, liminal space of Room 208, where he again searches through the darkness armed with only a weak penlight. When he finally finds her, he speaks to the silhouetted telephone woman again and tells her that he believes she is really Kumiko. “Yes, I think you are Kumiko,” he says to her while sitting in the darkened room, “Because then all kinds of story lines work out. You kept calling me on the phone from here. You were trying to convey some kind of secret to me” (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 576). The telephone woman plays along with his hypothesis, neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and Toru realizes the space is shaping him, bringing him closer to the truth: “Perhaps the power of darkness had filled in the blank spots in my imagination” (580).

Though Matthew Strecher’s analysis of the book (discussed earlier) seems to conclude that they are the same person, the question of whether the telephone woman is actually Kumiko is never definitively answered. It can be assumed that she is, at the very least, a version of Kumiko—and perhaps, too, of Creta Kano, as well as the number of other dissociative women Toru encounters. Without a face or form that is distinguishable from shadow, she is a being that seems to have been made in this netherworld of the dream hotel, constructed in a place free of the binary, both “within and between.” And though in the dream, Toru is not able to get the telephone woman to leave the hotel room with him, when he wakes up back in the well, it is has become so wet that he is in danger of drowning. In other words, in this penetration of the earth, Toru has essentially performed “male” successfully for the first time in the entire novel—although this is ultimately achieved by doing queer acts in queer spaces.
Lastly, it is necessary it to end this chapter with what is perhaps one of the clearest markers of the shift into a queered temporality in the novel: the cry of the titular wind-up bird. Though it is never actually seen by anyone, its cries are heard throughout the novel by several different characters, starting with Toru in the very first chapter: “There was a small stand of trees nearby, and from it you could hear the mechanical cry of a bird that sounded as if it were winding a spring. We called it the wind-up bird. Kumiko gave it the name” (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 9). This first mention of the wind-up bird comes within a few pages of Toru’s first contact with the telephone woman’s queered reality, signaling the beginning of the journey to reconcile the self. And yet, even though Toru explains that the bird’s name came from his wife, when the narrative shifts into a totally new perspective in the third chapter of Book Three—narrated through the third-person character only known as “the boy,” who is more than likely Cinnamon as a young boy—Murakami provides virtually the same description: “It sounded like someone winding a huge spring. Who could be winding a spring in the middle of the night? No, wait: it was like someone winding a spring, but it was not really a spring. It was the cry of a bird” (Wind-Up Bird 357). Not long after, the boy also mentally refers to it as the wind-up bird. The bird’s mechanical cry alerts the boy to the strange happenings at the base of the tree outside his window, where two men appear to be burying something. This short chapter, titled “What Happened in the Night,” is one of the many temporal shifts in the third book that take the reader completely out of Toru’s narrative and into seemingly unrelated ones, and yet, Murakami takes special care to link this story with the larger narrative through the use of the wind-up bird. Furthermore, the boy’s story continues a few chapters later (“Is this Shovel Really a Shovel?”) as he is dreaming—again, Murakami adds yet another layer of liminality to the narrative—about going down to the base of the tree and excavating what ends up being a still-beating heart. In the dream, the boy returns to his bed and finds that he is already sleeping in it, that he has become a bifurcated self. The experience of encountering his fractured identity shocks the boy so much that he goes mute, literally being stripped of his voice in the binary system.

Toru and the boy, however, are not the only ones to hear the cry of the wind-up bird and its ominous portents. When Toru’s fitting room employer, Nutmeg Akasaka (mother of Cinnamon) is telling him the story of her life and family, she details one of the most brutal accounts in the novel, aside from the skinning of Yamamoto: the military-sactioned
eradication of the predator population at a zoo during the retreat from Manchuria, in the chapter “The Zoo Attack (or, A Clumsy Massacre).” The queer temporality of this account is unquestionable, as Nutmeg is telling a story about her father that occurred after the last time she saw him alive, as she is miles away, sailing back to Japan on a refugee boat with her mother and dream-living her father’s experiences back in Manchuria. Through his eyes, she watches as her father, a veterinarian at a zoo, is commanded to “liquidate” the dangerous animals in order to keep them from getting loose in the imminent attack and causing more havoc. Since there is no poison, the veterinarian and a small troop of soldiers are forced to brutally shoot the massive tigers, leopards, wolves and bears. In the midst of this massacre, one of the soldiers is asked to enter the tiger cage and verify that the animals are dead, and the point of view switches yet again, the dreaming Nutmeg now inhabiting the young soldier’s mind: “One cicada, then another, began to cry again, as if finally revived. Soon their cries were joined by those of a bird—strangely distinctive cries, like the winding of a spring: Creerea. Creerea” (Murakami, Wind-Up Bird 403). The shift from the veterinarian to the young soldier is certainly strange enough, but when Toru’s attention is peaked at the reference to the bird and its unique cry and he interrupts Nutmeg’s story, Murakami further queers the limits of memory and storytelling:

“A bird that winds a spring?” I asked, looking up from my food.
“A bird that winds a spring?” said Nutmeg, repeating the words exactly as I said them, then curling her lips just a little. “I don’t understand what you’re saying. What are you talking about?”
“Didn’t you just say something about a bird that winds a spring?”
She shook her head slowly. “Hmm. Now I can’t remember. I don’t think I said anything about a bird.” (404)

Adding on to the varying degrees of separation in this account, Murakami seems to be suggesting here that Nutmeg is inhabiting the story rather than simply telling it. In other words, the cry of wind-up bird might carry with it the ability to transgress time, space, and consciousness altogether.

Perhaps more importantly, it might have the capacity to link these seemingly disparate ideas, as Toru discovers when he is on Cinnamon’s computer in the Hanging House and comes across a series of documents named “The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle,” which appear to have been written by Cinnamon. The first document Toru opens is another installment about the veterinarian in the zoo—this time using Cinnamon as a conduit—and
similarly details an account of the wind-up bird’s cry. Though Toru can only open one document at a time and cannot gain access to any of the others at this moment, he again marvels at the idea that yet another person has knowledge of the bird and that this, too, seems to mark a connectedness between their stories. This is further cemented when, in one of the final chapters of the book, he gains access to the documents and chooses the last one, which turns out to be a letter from Kumiko, describing how she must kill her brother in order to reconcile the void in herself and ultimately hinting that there might also be a chance for the reconciliation of her and Toru’s marriage.

In sum, the cry of the wind-up bird marks a shift into queered space and time in the way that the above stories converge on one another, their histories, perspectives, and events overlapping to create a seemingly cohesive whole, “The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle” or *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. The play between the two titles—one as an element of the story and the other as the story itself—seems to suggest a liminality even at the level of simply reading the text. The auditory element of the wind-up bird’s cry, then, provides a gateway into a parallel, queered world that the characters must navigate through in order to find themselves and one another. And this gateway, perhaps, leads to a world where two moons hang side-by-side in the sky.
CHAPTER 3

“NEW SCENERY, NEW RULES”: QUEERED SPACE AND TIME, NON-NORMATIVE SEX, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A NEW SELF IN MURAKAMI’S 1Q84

All these models [of normativity] assume a domino theory of sexual peril. The line appears to stand between sexual order and chaos. It expresses the fear that if anything is permitted to cross this erotic demilitarized zone, the barrier against scary sex will crumble and something unspeakable will skitter across.

-Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex”

Non-normative sex acts are defined by Gayle S. Rubin in the seminal essay “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality” as including anything that crosses the line outside of the “charmed circle” of sexuality, which is generally coupled, heterosexual, married, and for procreation only (152). Published in 1984, the essay used a series of diagrams to describe deviancies from the norm—the “outer limits”—that included the types of sex that, in all likelihood, many (if not most) people were having (Rubin 152-153). At the same time, homosexuality, casual sex, masturbation (with or without toys), S/M, cross-generational sex, and other activities that lie outside the circle were gaining more traction in the public sphere, and many of these acts have since become openly practiced—though, as one look at right-wing media will certainly attest, that does not necessarily translate to widespread acceptance. As Rubin explains in the epigraph above, these acts are often touted in mainstream culture as perverse or depraved, and those who engage in them are marginalized, ostracized, and typified as a threat to the established order. Set in the same year that Rubin’s groundbreaking essay was published, Haruki Murakami’s most recent novel, 1Q84, provides the reader with many of the aforementioned non-normative sex acts—along with others, such as incest, which might actually reside in spaces even further out than the “outer limits” of acceptability, see Figure 1.
Though his oeuvre does not shy away from issues of sexuality, *1Q84* is perhaps Murakami’s most sexual novel, consisting of dozens of scenes that push the boundaries of normalized behavior in order to put pressure on the established binary of acceptable/deviant sex. Just as Rubin’s diagrams characterize these opposing proclivities in terms of space—the inner/outer circles, the acts that lie beyond the “wall”—Murakami, too, seems to be concerned with how physical and geographic space informs the sexual behaviors of his characters. Moreover, the way Rubin’s graphs are drawn out, particularly Figure 2 “The Sex Hierarchy,” imply that these behaviors inhabit a literal and physical space on the margins. The farther out the act, the more unreal or “unnatural” the space it occupies. Known for his use of surrealist and dreamlike settings, Murakami provides the reader with the types of liminal spaces that Judith Halberstam’s *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* calls “queer renderings of postmodern geography, [where] the notion of a body-centered identity gives way to a model that locates sexual subjectivities within and between embodiment, place, and practice” (5). This spatial concept allows for an unmooring from the binary system and provides the characters with an opportunity to come to terms with their sexual preferences, and perhaps themselves, for the first time.

Moreover, the novel features many temporal shifts that occur on a structural and a narrative level that can additionally be read as queer. Introducing the idea of queer time in *Time Binds*, Elizabeth Freeman asserts that
nonsequential forms of time … can also fold subjects into structures of belonging and duration that may be invisible to the historicist eye. … even cultural non-nationalist belonging is a matter of affects that inhere, in many ways in shared timings, and I stake my claim for a counterpolitics of encounter in which bodies … meet one another by chance, forging—in the sense of both making and counterfeiting—history differently. (xi)

Here, Freeman is arguing that unshackling ourselves from the linear conception of time opens up new possibilities for connection, and Murakami’s use of nonsequential time in the structure and the story echoes this notion. For instance, while the alternating chapters following protagonists Aomame and Tengo might seem at first to follow a somewhat traditional set of rules, the way that time interacts between the two perspectives warps and wavers, and the reader is often left wondering if events are occurring in a simultaneous or staggered fashion. Even this is further complicated in the third book when Ushikawa (the cunning and ugly private detective discussed briefly in my first chapter) is introduced as a third alternating perspective, subverting the structural rules that Murakami established for himself in the first two books, as well as adding another layer of complexity to the already distorted sense of chronology. This is not only a structural intrusion but a narrative one, along with the many other familiar devices that Murakami uses to subvert traditional modes of time: dream sequences, memories, long stories recounted to the protagonists, even pages-long passages excerpted from Marcel Proust. As discussed at the very outset of this project, the most profound temporal shift in the novel is the transference of the characters into the
fictional world of 1Q84, where two moons hang side-by-side in the sky, “both making and counterfeiting […] history differently,” (xi) as Freeman writes. Perhaps more precisely, 1Q84 is overlaid onto the year 1984 and redefines the setting on both temporal and spatial terms, as it is not only a parallel world but a simultaneous one. Thus, the chief claim of this chapter is that it is precisely because the majority of 1Q84 takes place in the queered time and space of the titular parallel reality that makes it possible for Murakami to deliver what is arguably the most hopeful and connected conclusions in his oeuvre so far.

Murakami’s repeated undermining of normative conceptions of space and time thus allows for the characters, and perhaps even the reader, to finally grasp a sense of understanding and acceptance of not only the non-traditional sex act but also of the participant(s). This is an important point because the heavy focus in this book on the sexual subjectivities of the characters suggests that the good/bad logic of sexuality that Rubin discusses above is a crucial binary opposition standing in the way of human connection. Adding to this is the Western gaze, which (re)defines Asian sexual subjectivity in its own terms, as Sarah Ahmed explains: “The Orient here would be the object toward which we are directed, as an object of desire. By being directed toward the Orient, we are orientated ‘around’ the Occident. Or, to be more precise, the Occident coheres as that which we are organized around through the very direction of our gaze toward the Orient” (116). Feminists have been discussing the implications of being cast as a desired object for decades, the male gaze solidifying patriarchal hegemony, and here we see the same thing happening from West to East. The intersection of the binary structures that regulate sexuality with the Occidental gaze thus leaves individuals in an extremely precarious position, and Murakami’s attention to sexual practices, particularly non-normative ones, suggests that these are crucial obstacles in the way of cohesive identity construction and genuine human connection.

As discussed in the previous chapter, The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle began by reversing gendered conceptions of space and time to challenge the binary before moving into larger questions of how queering these definitions can lead toward connection. The fact that 1Q84 features queer acts taking place in queer spaces and times from nearly the outset, on the other hand, suggests further movement toward the notion of “commitment” that Matthew Strecher discussed earlier in this project (“Critical Stage” 863). This might initially seem like a contradiction because, as Rubin points out in her inclusion of the term coupled in the inner
circle of her diagram, the notion of commitment is certainly a heteronormative construct. Indeed, Michael Cobb takes this even further in “Bitter Table for One,” the introduction to his book, *Single: Arguments for the Uncoupled*, when he suggests that prolonged single life does such important work to challenge heteronormative modes of living that he “began attaching the letter ‘s’ to the LGBTQ abbreviation (LGBTQS) so [he] could affiliate those who were ‘single’ with the ever-elongating list of nonmajority sexualities that deserve more sustained attention, political interventions, and cultural investigations” (5). While it seems that for these scholars, commitment and queerness are at odds, it is important to note that Murakami’s commitment stage is primarily advocating for a connection to the world that might only be possible by bridging gaps between individuals first. In other words, the end goal is not necessarily to couple off in romantic pairings, but instead, to find a site for connection, even “friends, colleagues, pets, ideas, beliefs, or things” (Cobb 1).

Therefore, by minimizing the presence of the “real” world of 1984—which, in my reading of the novel below, only exists for a few pages at the beginning and end of the massive volume—it is my belief that Murakami has gone even farther to suggest that the normative rules governing space, time, sexuality, nationality, and identity production are so useless as to not merit much attention or page space. As such, this chapter will focus primarily on issues of sexuality—how we perceive non-normative sex acts, how those activities are shaped or changed by the spatial and temporal considerations, particularly queer ones, and how Murakami continually disrupts the traditional binaries in order to allow Aomame and Tengo to come to terms with themselves in order to reconnect with each other.

**Q IS FOR QUEERED: QUEERED GEOGRAPHIES AND REALITIES**

Split between the alternating perspectives of Aomame, a female physical trainer who moonlights as a contract killer, and Tengo, a male writer who gets caught up in a not-so-ethical scheme to rewrite a young girl’s novella, *1Q84* provides a fairly balanced (and fairly large) amount of page space for the sexual exploits of each character. Additionally, Murakami contemplates the natural and manmade spaces the characters inhabit during their moments of sexuality. This is an important aspect to consider because, as Elizabeth Grosz discusses in the introduction to *Architecture from the Outside*,...
Grosz resists this notion and instead seeks to rethink space in terms of embodiment and desire. Likewise, many of the scenes in the novel take place in the settings that recur throughout Murakami’s oeuvre as places with great transformative power—dreamscapes, memories, corridors, and other interstitial arteries that cut through a mental or physical geography. Resisting a sense of neutral space, Murakami instead emphasizes a queered spatial and temporal understanding that lies in the “in between” places, starting with the opening chapters of each main character.

The book opens with Aomame on her way to assassinate a businessman at a high-class Tokyo hotel but stuck in a traffic jam on an expressway in the back of what she describes as “no ordinary taxi” (Murakami, 1Q84 5). The immediate introduction of a character in a blocked channel mirrors what Karen Tongson describes when she discusses Southern California’s network of cloverleaf freeways in Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries: “Once created to keep the flow of traffic moving on and off the major arteries of transit to and from cities and suburbs, cloverleaves now (as many other architectures created with convenience in mind) have become the source of what they sought to prevent: congestion, confusion, and aggravation” (7). From the outset, Murakami provides a setting that is quite literally congested, confusing, and aggravating. Still, he goes further to cast it with his trademark surreal quality—not only is the freeway blocked, but the car’s seats are too comfortable, the driver has a peculiar way of speaking, and the stereo’s sound quality is more rich and deep than the typical taxi as it plays the opening fanfare of Leoš Janaček’s Sinfonietta, music that gives Aomame “an odd, wrenching kind of feeling … a sensation that all the elements of her body were being physically wrung out” (Murakami, 1Q84 6).

Janaček’s composition opens with bold brass and moves into a complexity that exceeds the typical fanfare structure—evidenced by the fact that it requires a brass section nearly triple the size of a usual orchestra, which is another example of Murakami’s favoring an aesthetics of excess. Juxtaposed with this is the post-tonal quality of the piece, which in music theory describes a move away from the normative conceptions of tonality, challenging the binary of consonance/dissonance. The feeling of being “wrung out” that Aomame experiences, then, is
a result of feeling caught between the opposing forces in the music, which certainly recalls the frustration of living in the binary. As discussed in the first chapter, Murakami is well-known for incorporating jazz and classical music into his novels, often as a device that sets off bizarre events, and this is no exception: Jánaček’s composition is a diegetic motif that recurs throughout the novel, and in this initial scene the strangeness of the piece begins to work even at the level of Aomame’s physical body.

Perhaps this serves as the reason for her taking the advice of the unusual driver when he informs her that she will not be able to make her appointment in time, directing her instead to get out of the cab and walk down the crowded expressway to a turnout, where she can climb down the service stairs to the street below and take a subway or surface-street taxi from there. This is an odd suggestion, particularly because Aomame knows that it must be against several ordinances for a cabbie to let a passenger out on the congested freeway. However, she is battling the linear sense of time that moves forward regardless of whether one is stuck in a traffic jam and must choose an alternate path. Here, the blockage hints at the futility of attempting to move toward the self on a path that is predetermined by the binary—both in the route it will take and in that, according to Murakami’s older works, such a route will ultimately lead nowhere. The confluence of the jammed freeway and Jánaček’s post-tonal composition ultimately creates a moment of opportunity for Aomame to make a choice she would likely not have made otherwise. Without thinking much about it, she follows the cab driver’s advice, but not before he says to her, “But don’t let appearances fool you. There’s always only one reality” (Murakami, *IQ84* 9).

Before moving on, it’s important to take some time to evaluate that statement, especially because this is the precise moment that Aomame begins to shift into a queered geography and temporality. Not long after she exits the cab in the middle of a traffic jam, Aomame notices that, despite what the driver said, there are small shifts in the appearance of her reality. First, the standard police-issued guns have changed after a gunfight with a radical cult in the rural mountains, an event that everyone but the usually keen and diligent Aomame remembers. But more significant than this is another change that she picks up on eventually: that another moon hangs in the sky, “a small, green, lopsided moon, nestled shyly by the big moon like an inferior child” (Murakami, *IQ84* 211). Tracing back time, Aomame comes to the conclusion that it was on the expressway turnout, just moments after being told that
reality was a fixed and stable idea, that she is shifted into a new world, one that she names *IQ84*. In her discussion about the queer qualities of cloverleaf overpasses, Tongson mentions that the geographic space of a freeway is both rife with danger and possibility, requiring

an elaborate choreography between vehicles and drivers. Rather than merging directly onto the flow of traffic with the aid of lights and signals, the cloverleaf offers an interstitial lane on which vehicles traveling at different speeds and at cross-purposes—some exiting, others entering—negotiate their transactions of motion within a death-defying instant. (8)

Though the expressway that Aomame steps out onto is packed tightly with stopped cars, it is nonetheless an extremely risky thing to do—in fact, one of the most often touted rules of driving is to *never* exit the vehicle on a freeway, even if it seems safe to do so—and Tongson’s discussion sheds light on the fragile and intricate balance that dictates the safety of the passengers. By breaking the normative rules that govern the geographic space of a freeway, especially during the part of the day when it is filled with vehicles, Aomame finds herself in a space and time that she isn’t supposed to inhabit without a car.

This certainly challenges normative conceptions of time, space, safety, and even public/private behavior—as Aomame gets a feeling of exhibitionism/voyeurism from the eyes of the other passengers on her the entire time—but Murakami goes further to explicitly insert a literal moment of queerness. Aomame’s mind flashes back to a night of lesbian experimentation with a close girlfriend in college, distracting her as she makes her way down the access stairway:

-as she brought back the images of herself and Tamaki touching each other that night, Aomame felt some small, deep part of herself growing hot even as she made her way down the windswept stairway. Tamaki’s oval-shaped nipples, her sparse pubic hair, the lovely curve of her buttocks, the shape of her clitoris: Aomame recalled them all with strange clarity.

As her mind traced these graphic memories, the brass unison of Jánaček’s *Sinfonietta* rang like festive background music. (Murakami, *IQ84* 29)

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5 Though Aomame comments that the “Q is for ‘question mark.’ A world that bears a question,” meaning that she is not sure of the world she now exists in, the larger logic for the novel’s title is that the word *kyu* in Japanese is translated as the number nine (Murakami, *IQ84* 110). This wordplay not only alludes to the famous Orwell novel but also suggests that the year 1984 has been replaced by a parallel world in which the normative rules of sexuality and space might no longer apply. In other words, for the purpose of my argument, Q might also stand for queer.
Though this memory is seemingly unrelated to walking on a busy freeway, Murakami uses it to add an extra layer of liminality (which he will continue to do throughout the book) by introducing a dreamspace to the already queered geography of the expressway turnout. Aomame’s detailed recollection of sexual experimentation with her now-deceased friend seems to come from nowhere, taking her by surprise, and the auditory element of Jánaček’s music appears to have been the trigger. In other words, the confluence here of space, a temporal shift to memory, and the non-normative sexual act solidifies Aomame’s shift into the parallel world of *1Q84*, disrupting the idea that there is “only one reality.”

Though he doesn’t realize that he, too, inhabits this parallel world with two moons in the sky until much later in the novel, an argument can be made that Tengo makes the transition into the queered reality of *1Q84* in the early stages of the narrative—especially since he plays a large part in creating this world. The initial scene from Tengo’s perspective features him having drinks with his editor, Komatsu, as the latter pitches the idea of Tengo rewriting a seventeen year old girl’s debut novella, *Air Chrysalis*. The dry and enigmatic young author, Fuka-Eri, had entered a writing contest with a story that takes place under a sky with two moons, and though the tale captivates both Komatsu and Tengo, who are involved in judging the contest, they agree that the writing is too awful to win. In agreeing to Komatsu’s morally questionable proposition and undertaking the rewrite of *Air Chrysalis*, Tengo is unwittingly drawn into the nebulous and far-reaching web of actions, events, and a cast of characters that include his estranged father, Komatsu, Fuka-Eri, the aforementioned radical and militant cult, and eventually, Aomame.

Negotiating Tongson’s “transactions of motion” in a perilous dance that resembles those cloverleaf interchanges, Tengo’s entrance into the world of *1Q84*, like Aomame’s, is also marked with a temporary passage into liminal time and space. The chapter opens on him as he is being seized by a memory from when he is an infant: “His mother had taken off her blouse and dropped the shoulder straps of her white slip to let a man who was not his father suck on her breasts” (Murakami, *1Q84* 14). As mentioned in the previous chapter, memory is well-known for its unreliability because it relies on the heavily subjective modes of individual perceptions and recollection, and Murakami plays with this idea by calling Tengo’s memory into question on several levels. For instance, though the initial remark that the man with his mother is “not his father” seems to hint at some sort of judgment for
committing adultery, Murakami is quick to mention that since he was only one and a half, Tengo could not have yet been capable of assigning this a negative value. Furthermore, Tengo recognizes that this age is far earlier than the memory recollection for most people, and thus the hazy space of Tengo’s memory is further queered—as it cannot be clearly defined as memory, dream, projection, or even pure fiction.

Frequented by the attacks where he is transported back to the crib as an infant watching his mother in the midst of a sexual act, recasting the primal scene as threatening, Tengo cannot control his body or mind and is forced to endure the trance until it runs itself out: “His eyelids were clamped shut. Sounds grew distant, and the familiar image was projected onto the screen of his consciousness again and again. Sweat gushed from every part of his body and the armpits of his undershirt drew damp. He trembled all over, and his heartbeat grew faster and louder” (Murakami, *IQ84* 14). In itself, this description is heavily sexualized, and it seems to hint at something beyond Tengo’s lack of judgment: the memory may even turn him on. This is later confirmed when he asks his married girlfriend to wear a white slip and let him suck on her breasts—and almost immediately ejaculates. Immediately ashamed, Tengo realizes that the memory stirs something deep within him while simultaneously recognizing this yearning to act out the scenario in his memory falls far outside of Rubin’s charmed circle, so when his married girlfriend asks him if she should wear a white slip again, he is quick to shut the idea down (Murakami, *IQ84* 174-175).

Nonetheless, to return to the first manifestation of the attack—while Tengo discussing the rewrite of *Air Chrysalis* with Komatsu—it marks a definitive shift into a new temporality. Just as Jánaček’s *Sinfonietta* brings about a memory of a sexual experience with an old friend, serving as the device to shift Aomame into the new, queered geography of *IQ84, Air Chrysalis* and Tengo’s only memory of his mother also become a bridge into this world: a liminal, sexualized space where non-normative sex acts can be performed without judgment, but also perhaps as place where they might be explored further.

“AN INTENSE PERIODIC CRAVING FOR MEN’S BODIES”:
**HOTEL ROOMS AS QUEERED SPACE AND TIME**

Having established the queered space of the wider world of *IQ84*, Murakami then moves on to the smaller, individualized places that can shape the sexual activities and attitudes of his characters and challenge the normative models of time and space. Just as
corridors and other arterial passages discussed above serve as settings with great transformative power throughout his oeuvre, hotel rooms also play a huge role in a typical Murakami work, and this is certainly the case for *IQ84*. Particularly in the context of the previous chapter’s discussion on Room 208, where the location in space and time could only be accessed by an unmooring from binary logics, I intend to read the key scenes that take place in these rented rooms through a queered lens. Aside from the clearly liminal Room 208, though, it seems that all hotel rooms inherently exist in an “in between” space and time because their function is necessarily temporary and transient, a parallel reality that is not actually a home environment but purports itself to be. Indeed, though they may have slightly different features depending on the kind of establishment, hotel rooms all tend to look and feel the same regardless of where or when they are inhabited—a simulacrum of time and space where the same idea is copied over and over and over. Whether it be at a small business hotel, an elite high rise hotel, or an infamous Tokyo love hotel (which is featured prominently in Murakami’s commitment-stage novel, *After Dark*, and often rented by the hour), these rooms seem to represent for Murakami a manmade space that—again, resisting Grosz’s earlier observation about the misconception of architecture as neutral—is inherently sexualized. With this baseline, Murakami then goes further to cast these rooms as potentially queer by emphasizing their timelessness, their transience, and their anonymity, which allows the characters to enact their non-normative desires and, usually, to achieve a new understanding of themselves.

As mentioned, Aomame’s opening sequence finds her on the way to the Shibuya section of Tokyo, where arrangements have been made for her to enter a particular business man’s hotel room on false pretenses and assassinate him as retribution for abusing his wife. Interestingly, Murakami casts this action, too, in terms of space: the euphemism that Aomame uses with the dowager, her reclusive and well-funded employer, for these murders is “to send to the other side,” or even, “to move to another world” (*IQ84* 53, 220). Having climbed down the stairwell of the expressway turnout and into the new world of *IQ84*, Aomame finally makes it to the business hotel and manages to kill the man without any problems. The technique Aomame uses to murder this man and others like him—penetrating the back of the neck at the base of the brain with an extremely sharp needle—is almost sexual in nature and allows for a rethinking of embodied space: “The important thing was to
bring the palm down lightly, almost tenderly, at exactly the right angle with exactly the right amount of force, without resisting gravity, straight down, \textit{as if the fine point of the needle were being sucked into the spot with utmost naturalness}” (Murakami, \textit{IQ84} 36, emphasis added). While this penetration is certainly a reversal of gendered norms, what is perhaps more important is that the act of killing releases in Aomame an intense sexual appetite that Chikako Nihei (discussed in the previous chapter) might characterize as “carnivorous,” particularly because her desires are often depicted through metaphors about hunger. As if the hotel room represents a realm of non-normative impulses that require being acted upon, she immediately goes from one hotel to a different one across town, placing herself at the hotel bar in order to cruise for a casual partner. Looking to calm her nerves after the act of taking a stranger’s life, Aomame feels impelled to \textit{connect} with a different stranger, one that she has no intention of developing a further relationship with. This very dynamic is examined in the chapter on gay cruising and barebacking in \textit{Unlimited Intimacy} by Tim Dean. Dean discusses the idea that the value in cruising is its simultaneous intimacy and anonymity: “tricking—casual anonymous sex or one-night stands—turns strangers into lovers so briefly and perfunctorily that it rarely compromises their status as strangers […] In cases such as these, sex occurs between individuals whose status as strangers remains constant” (180). Indeed, once Aomame narrows down her sexual partner for the night, her inner dialogue confirms that she doesn’t want to know anything about his work or life—the only things that do interest her about the man is his nearly bald head, his Kansai accent, and whether he has a “decent sized cock […] on the big side” (Murakami, \textit{IQ84} 59).

Still, the pairing of the two above anonymous encounters in hotel rooms becomes even more illuminating when Aomame is lying in bed with the bald man after sex and begins to daydream about killing him, too:

\begin{quote}
Aomame felt a strong urge to plunge her sharp needle into that special place. \textit{Maybe I should really do it}, the thought flashed through her mind. The ice pick was in her bag, wrapped in cloth. The needle that she had spent so much time sharpening was covered by a specially softened cork. It would have been so easy, just a quick shove of her right palm against a wooden handle. He’d be dead before he knew what hit him. No pain. It would be ruled a natural death. (Murakami, \textit{IQ84} 62)
\end{quote}

Here, Murakami has taken special care to conflate the two acts that have taken place in two hotel rooms across town from each other. The simultaneity of impulses that Aomame
experiences here implies that though these activities might seem extremely different, they both access the same part of her inner workings. This is perhaps not very surprising because the juxtaposition of sex and death has long been established through the psychological framework of *la petite mort* and even sex acts like autoerotic asphyxiation—a practice that certainly challenges normative conceptions of desire, as well as pushing (and sometimes crossing) the line towards death. However, Aomame’s pairing of impulses is sex and *murder*, which not only makes the theoretical quite literal but also deviates even further from Rubin’s charmed circle. This forces a rethinking of normative assumptions about sexuality, particularly because there is no narrative judgment about whether these are “normal” associations to make.

In other words, Murakami’s evenhanded treatment suggests that these impulses are natural for Aomame, especially when it is revealed later that the first man Aomame ever killed was the husband of her good friend and one-time lover, Tamaki Otsuka. Abusive and domineering, Tamaki’s husband had subjected her to such cruelty that she eventually committed suicide, so Aomame sought revenge by killing him with her trusted ice pick, and “[i]t was after this that Aomame came to feel an intense periodic craving for men’s bodies” (Murakami, *IQ84* 169). Again, this detail is revealed with such a blasé attitude that it almost seems to question why this would even be up for debate. Furthermore, not only do the separate acts of murder and a woman seeking out a man for casual sex lie outside of what is usually considered acceptable, but the conflation of the two into something that drives Aomame’s sexual appetite undoubtedly puts pressure on the realm of the “normal.” In fact, by depicting these non-normative desires with such nonchalance, Murakami is suggesting that our individual desires should be formulated by our own experiences and conceptions of good or bad, instead of the conservative societal boundaries that Rubin’s charts identify. Thus, in combination with discussion on Room 208 from the previous chapter, the long passage above establishes hotel rooms as a queer space and time where the non-normative impulse can be practiced, providing the opportunity to escape from the rigid binary structures that govern the realm of desires.

In light of this, the most poignant scene in the novel that takes place in a hotel room is the climactic moment when Aomame meets and eliminates Leader, the figurehead of the previously mentioned insular and cult-like organization, Sakigake. The dowager and
Aomame have deemed it necessary to “send [Leader] to the other side” because they discovered that he raped several prepubescent girls under his command—his “shrine maidens” (more on this later) (Murakami, *IQ84* 53, 422). Using her everyday profession as a physical trainer and muscle-stretching expert as a cover for the assassination, Aomame is called to the elite and expensive Hotel Okura to treat Leader’s incapacitating physical pain. Once again conflating sex and murder, Murakami also casts this deed as a quasi-sexual act. As she enters the room, Aomame thinks about how she feels “[j]ust like a whore,” in that she is about to be compensated for flesh-to-flesh contact with Leader (418). This paid contact works on two levels: first, she is hired to work on and even massage—a common euphemism for prostitution or sex work—Leader’s body; second, and more significantly, she is generously compensated by the dowager for the bodily contact that will ultimately end Leader’s life.

Further solidifying the resemblance to prostitution, Aomame enters the suite and goes almost directly into the bathroom to change her clothes, though not before Leader’s bodyguards—Buzzcut and Ponytail—search her bag and find her lacy underwear (but not her murder weapon). This sequence of events certainly hints at the impending act of sex, but it further sets up an undercurrent of danger that runs throughout the entire scene. As described in the previous chapter’s discussion of Creta Kano, the levels of control within sex work in terms of space usually delineate a hierarchy that is largely split between inside and outside forms of prostitution, with the former possessing a higher degree of agency and safety. If we are to look at Aomame’s situation in these terms, she might be put into the category that possesses the most control, in that this analysis hints at the often-touted idea that the more insolated and higher-class the space—such as the highly orchestrated and clandestine location of this meeting place—the more agency the sex worker has. However, the idea of risk is still largely associated with all forms of prostitution, and the danger in this scene is palpable, the two lethal bodyguards becoming a reminder to Aomame that she is still negotiating perilous terrain. Discussing the idea of risk in sex work, Gayle Rubin draws an analogy between prostitution and queerness. Though she first acknowledges that it is not an exact parallel, she goes on to observe that

> [p]rostitutes and male homosexuals are the primary prey of vice police everywhere. Like gay men, prostitutes occupy well-demarcated urban territories and battle with police to defend and maintain those territories. The legal
persecution of both populations is justified by an elaborate ideology that classifies them as dangerous and inferior undesirables who are not entitled to be left in peace. (Rubin 158)

Here, Rubin notes that prostitution is governed by many of the same heteronormative regulations as homosexual desire. Because of this, the two groups are viewed as similarly subversive, and the “territories” they inhabit are equally threatening to the established order, and thus, queer. Moreover, just like mainstream perceptions have shaped the legal risk that prostitutes and queer populations alike are prone to, the same thing might be said about the mass perceptions of the other kinds of risks to which both groups are supposedly predisposed: moral degeneration, disease, and above all, violence. In the same regard, Murakami uses the menacing presence of Buzzcut and Ponytail to underline the threat of violence against Aomame, and this is further reinforced when Aomame recalls that her new friend, Ayumi, was recently strangled to death in a hotel room after having anonymous (and possibly paid) sex.

However, rather than serving as ominous signs that she should retreat, these elements of danger confirm Aomame’s convictions, ultimately enabling her to enter the darkened bedroom and begin working on Leader’s prone body. Again, making the connection between Aomame’s work and prostitution explicit, Murakami writes, “Thirty minutes later, they were bathed in sweat, panting like lovers who have just had miraculously deep sex” (IQ84 440). Reinforcing the link between sexual desire and murder, it is only after this pseudo-sexual encounter that Aomame is finally ready to plunge her needle into the base of Leader’s brain. The power—healing, sexual, and violent—that Aomame has in this circumstance provides a sense of agency that counters the traditional narrative of prostitutes, whether they work outdoors or indoors. Furthermore, Aomame’s true purpose for being in the hotel room is enough to provide her with complete control over the surroundings. Nonetheless, when she attempts to bring her hand down on the ice pick perched above Leader’s neck, she finds that she cannot.

Before entering the bedroom, Aomame had been told by Buzzcut that she was entering “a sacred space” (Murakami, IQ84 396). Though she doesn’t initially understand this comment, she discovers its truth when she cannot physically act on her directive to kill Leader, despite his revelation that he knows about her orders and wants her to carry them out. The two then proceed to have a deep and personal conversation of the kind that is generally
associated with post-coital “pillow talk,” and Leader discloses several important pieces of information: that he knows of her long-standing and undying love for Tengo, whom she hasn’t seen or heard from since they were in grade school together; that Tengo, too, has not forgotten Aomame and is also in love with her; that Tengo has ghost-written *Air Chrysalis*, an act which will bring them closer together because the publication of the novella has opened a portal that drew Aomame into the altered reality of *1Q84*; and finally, that the young author, Fuka-Eri, is Leader’s estranged daughter, who escaped from Sakigake and wrote the story in an attempt to destroy the power of the Little People, the god-like manifestations of will that Leader and Sakigake follow, who hold significant power in the world with two moons. This last revelation about the Little People certainly adds a fantastical dimension to the story, but Andō Reiji (in a Japanese article quoted by Matthew Strecher) argues that they also serve as a narrative device that hints at the depersonalizing effects of Western influence in postwar Japan: “[Reiji] goes on to argue that the enigmatic ‘Little People’ (an ironic pun on Orwell’s ‘Big Brother’), who seek to exert control over the human world, actually represent ‘the latent greed of the *petit bourgeoisie*’ in the late capitalist era” (qtd. in Strecher “Critical Stage” 862). Though Reiji’s observation includes the punned name as side note (deriving from the larger pun of the novel’s title), it is still a crucial insight in that it recalls a foundational idea from the start of this project: that Murakami’s inclusion of Western signposts demonstrates a frustration with the interpellated stance on Japanese identity formation. Furthermore, Reiji likens the Little People to the middle-class masses, the mainstream to which the dominant binary logic is aimed. This helps to explain why the queer acts of Aomame, Tengo, Fuka-Eri and others are so threatening: anything that challenges middle-class, heteronormative structure must not be tolerated.

To underscore this idea, as the above “post-coital” conversation is happening, a fierce storm is going on outside that Leader attributes it to the anger of the Little People, who seem to sense his impending death at Aomame’s hands. The storm is so concentrated on their location, in fact, that it floods the subway stations in the area. While the flooded train station is an important point I will reserve for later in this discussion, especially in terms of embodied space, it is important to mention the storm here because it further renders the setting that Aomame is inhabiting as queered, a liminal space under the control of an
ambiguous entity like the Little People. Along these lines, Elizabeth Grosz theorizes that queer conceptions of time and space are ripe for moments of heightened change:

The space of the in-between is the locus for social, cultural, and natural transformations: it is not simply a convenient space for movements and realignments but in fact is the only place—the place around identities, between identities—where becoming, openness to futurity, outstrips the conversational impetus to retain cohesion and unity. (92)

Recognizing that Aomame’s presence in the hotel room with Leader has a tremendous potential to shift their established order, the Little People continue to cast a torrential rain upon the landscape, which only ceases when Aomame finally brings her hand down on the wooden handle of the ice pick, thus sending Leader to another world.

“AMBIGUOUS CONGRESS”: QUEERING THE LIMITS OF THE CHARMED CIRCLE AND REPRODUCTIVE TIME

Even though the above scene has many sexual undertones, it should certainly be recognized that no actual intercourse of any kind occurs between Aomame and Leader. Regardless of that fact, Murakami seems to acknowledge that a queered space does not follow normative rules, and the very unreal sex between Aomame and Leader has very real consequences. Several weeks later, when Aomame is holed up in a discreet apartment, hiding out from the Sakigake followers who are hunting her down for the murder, she realizes that she has become pregnant and has no doubts as to who the father is: her beloved and long-lost Tengo. This seemingly impossible circumstance pushes against the notion that, as Judith Halberstam explains, “[r]eproductive time and family time are, above all, heteronormative time/space constructs” (10). Indeed, conceiving a baby is often discussed in terms of the “right” time and place for the sperm to meet the ovum, and barring technological advances in insemination, this generally includes a mother and father who share the same time and space during the act of sex and presumably also share in the nine months of gestation—possibly the most salient expression of linear, heteronormative time. Instead, when we consider how Tengo’s sperm came to impregnate Aomame, it becomes clear that Murakami is taking special care to subvert these notions on several levels.

While the scene that Aomame is in the hotel room with Leader takes place over several chapters, Tengo’s own alternating chapters take on a different, sped-up sense of temporality. As Aomame seems almost frozen in the moment with her hand suspended above
Leader’s neck, weeks go by in Tengo’s narrative, starting with an impromptu decision to go visit his ailing and estranged father in Chikura, a few hours by train outside of Tokyo. On the trip over, Tengo reads a story called “Town of Cats,” which features a young and curious male traveler—not unlike Tengo himself—who stops in a fully furnished and functional empty town, only to discover that at night it is ruled by cats, and he is an unwelcome intruder. As noted earlier, the concept of intrusion is important because of its spatial and temporal implications, in that Murakami uses it as a way to access the in-between. As such, when the young man decides to leave at the end of the story, he finds that the train that brought him there will no longer stop, no longer recognizes the cat town as a fixed geography or temporality:

The sun begins to sink. It is time for the cats to come. He knows that he is irretrievably lost. This is no town of cats, he finally realizes. It is the place where he is meant to be lost. It is a place not of this world that has been prepared especially for him. And never again, for all eternity, will the train stop at this station to bring him back to his original world. (Murakami, 1Q84 405)

Like the young man, Tengo’s curiosity has drawn him in to a queered time and space, where he is simultaneously bound up in its will and viewed as an unwelcome entity. To solidify this idea, when Tengo later discovers that there are two moons in the sky—existing in this alternate reality exactly as he had described in the rewrite of Air Chrysalis—he, like Aomame, decides to give this parallel world a name and thus deems it the “cat town.” Existing in a temporal space that doesn’t follow a normative set of rules, a world that provides more “question marks” than answers, Tengo seeks guidance in any place he can find, and the visit with his father in the nursing home resolves some questions while simultaneously presenting him with new, more tenuous ones. It is not until he is back in Tokyo and Fuka-Eri shows up at his apartment that he begins his long journey to approaching understanding, intuiting that the strange young girl is a key: “he had recently entered a new frame of mind, and that was to assume that anything Fuka-Eri said might be true” (Murakami, 1Q84 451). Fuka-Eri, who is seemingly the only authority on the Little People and the world with two moons but nonetheless unable or unwilling to talk freely about it, instinctively understands that Tengo now exists in the cat town, or 1Q84, and offers a solution: “‘We should be together,’ Fuka-Eri said. ‘Join forces’” (428).

What that means does not become clear until later that night when the Little People’s brutal storm is thundering in the sky—the same torrential rain that is simultaneously flooding
the subways near Aomame—and Tengo wakes up naked, fully erect, and not in control of his own body. Fuka-Eri is also naked and straddling him with a vacant expression on her face, and Tengo is powerless to stop her when she begins to have sex with him. Though she is seventeen and not actually a child, Tengo is nearly twice her age at thirty years old, an age gap that seems to hint at the category on the outer limits that Rubin defines as “cross-generational.” As if to stress this point, Murakami emphasizes Fuka-Eri’s youth in the scene: “Where there should have been pubic hair there was only smooth, bare white skin, its whiteness giving emphasis to its utter defenselessness. She had her legs spread; he could see her vagina. Like the ear he had been staring at, it looked as if it had just been made only moments before” (IQ84 478). Furthermore, when Tengo worries that he is not wearing a condom, Fuka-Eri assures him she cannot get pregnant because she has not yet started her period, thus underscoring her youth. All of this suggests a sexual dynamic that certainly puts pressure on heteronormative behaviors, especially since the way that Fuka-Eri is depicted presents a girl much younger than the age of seventeen, which might even call to mind for some readers issues of child molestation or statutory rape. However, in this queered reality of IQ84, the event is rendered as strange but not remarkable (in the literal sense of the word: neither Tengo nor Fuka-Eri mention it the next day), and rather than being arousing for either participant, the intercourse is instead cast as a perfunctory action to stop the Little People from stirring—just as Aomame, on the other side of town, is attempting to do the same thing by killing Leader.

Of course, as mentioned above, the larger repercussions of the sexual act between Tengo and Fuka-Eri extend over to Aomame, who becomes pregnant on the same night, presumably by Fuka-Eri becoming a surrogate body for Aomame as she kills the young girl’s father. Here, the fact that the Little People have cast a storm on the landscape becomes especially important, as fluids have long symbolized sexual activity and fertility: lubrication, perspiration, and ejaculation. Though Aomame attributes the flooding of the metro stop to the Little People cutting off her modes of escape after Leader’s murder, it might also represent the idea of conception, as fluids rush into the womblike cavern of the underground stations, much like the flooding of Toru’s dry well in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle. Lastly, the train tracks form a network of transportation between different parts of the city—much like the cloverleaf exchanges that Karen Tongson discussed earlier—that seem to be queer as
well, especially since the underground of any city is a notorious place for non-normative modes of being such as panhandling, drug use, performance art, and even cruising. In light of the above points, the flooding of the train tracks seem to directly facilitate Aomame’s impregnation from many miles away and through the fractured, surrogated body of the young Fuka-Eri. To touch back to Halberstam’s earlier quote, we see that in this queered temporal geography of *1Q84* (or the cat town), even standard rules of logic, embodied space, and “reproductive time” no longer apply, so the enforcement of heteronormative sexuality becomes not only unnecessary but infeasible.

Before Leader dies, he attempts to rationalize his rape of young girls and in the process confirms that his own daughter was his very first victim, though Murakami certainly puts pressure on that label. Explaining to Aomame that the events of *Air Chrysalis* are based in truth—the Little People came out of a dead goat’s mouth and taught young Fuka-Eri to weave an air chrysalis, out of which a shadow version of herself (the *dohta*) was born, ushering in the world with two moons—he describes his incestuous relationship with his daughter as *not* rape but as having “congress with her […] an ambiguous term” (Murakami, *1Q84* 465). Earlier in the novel, when the dowager is informing Aomame about one of the other victims, Tsubasa, she explains that Tsubasa, Fuka-Eri, and two other prepubescent girls have all served as Leader’s shrine maidens, helping him through sexual intercourse to hear the voice of the Little People. Leader’s organization, Sakigake, is known for its isolationist attitude and secluded setting up in the mountains, and even though it may seem like a rural community, the complete withdrawal of the cult from larger society eschews even the binaries of urban and rural, placing it in an in-between space that challenges the normative logics of sexual practice and identity production. Defining the spaces in-between in *Architecture from the Outside*, Elizabeth Grosz asserts that

> [t]here is a certain delicious irony in being encouraged to think about a strange and curious placement, a position that is crucial to understanding not only identities, but also that which *subtends and undermines them, which makes identities both possible and impossible*. The space of the in-between is that which is not a space, a space without boundaries of its own, which takes on and receives itself, its form, from the outside… (91, emphasis added)

This places the Sakigake compound in a further liminalized space within the already-queered world of *1Q84*. Additionally, Aomame’s inability at the beginning of the novel to recollect the violent shootout between Sakigake affiliates and the police that resulted in changing the
standard-issue guns for officers (mentioned earlier) calls into question the temporal existence of Sakigake, as well, because it appears that the cult did not exist in the normative 1984. This spatial and temporal queering reinforces further Leader’s notion of “ambiguous congress” when he explains to Aomame that his shrine maidens were not, in fact, the original young girls (or mazas) but instead the shadow doppelgangers that arose from an air chrysalis, their dohtas. In typical Murakami form, the bifurcated embodiment of the shrine maidens speaks to the idea of a fractured self, in that it overtly recalls a dualism and further suggests that the multifaceted and competing binaries simply cannot be housed in one body. Furthermore, the fact that the sexual act took place with the astral body also puts pressure on the normative policing of issues like statutory rape and incest because the dohtas do not fit into the traditional binary structures of self/other or mental/material.

Thus, not only does the space in which the sexual act takes place lie in the in-between but so too do the identities of the participants. The Little People’s air chrysalis, then, is capable of a similar process that Noboru Wataya instigated in Kumiko and Creta Kano in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle: bifurcating the self into a material and an astral body. Just as Toru’s sex with the telephone woman in his dreams is somehow connected with his wife and Creta, the idea of Leader having “ambiguous congress” with his daughter and other young girls—which in any other context would certainly lie on the very farthest reaches of Rubin’s diagrams—belyes any concrete definition and circumvents traditional moralities about sex. So when Aomame attempts to directly interrogate whether or not Leader raped his own daughter, the only possible response is a queered one: “The answer to that question, finally, is both yes and no” (Murakami, 1Q84 465).

“IT FEELS TOO GOOD TO BE REAL”: NEW CONCEPTIONS OF TIME AND SPACE FOR THE REIMAGINED SELF

As mentioned earlier, the temporal simultaneity of the two paired scenes discussed above—Aomame’s encounter with Leader and Tengo’s encounter with Fuka-Eri—results in a pregnancy that Aomame is certain can only be fathered by Tengo, even if they have not seen each other in two decades. Moving forward from that synchronized moment, though, the perceptions of space and time drift in vastly different ways for the two protagonists, especially as Ushikawa’s perspective gets added to the alternating chapters in the third book.
Hired by the cult-like Sakigake to track down Leader’s murderer, Ushikawa represents an element of danger that has long been associated with inhabiting queer time and space. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, Ushikawa’s perspective adds a new temporal dimension for the reader that subverts normative conceptions of time, especially as it further undermines the already vacillating chronologies of the two established perspectives. Moreover, it also adds literal space between Aomame and Tengo in terms of pages, making their reconnection seem less imminent. And yet, though Ushikawa’s pages represent an interruption in the storylines of the separated lovers, his chapters are devoted to piecing together the connection between the two, so while Aomame and Tengo seem further away from each other, they are at the same time getting closer together. As I have suggested throughout this project, the conclusion of *1Q84* represents what is surely the most hopeful and connected endings Murakami has provided thus far in his career, and the complication that Ushikawa’s presence adds to Book Three seems to be an acknowledgment that the notion of commitment is not so easy to attain, but it can be achieved if one is willing to fight for it. And yet, as Rubin alludes in her charmed circle,

This darkest-before-dawn technique is used by Murakami throughout the final book of the novel, including the way that the three perspectives attain a geographical closeness in the third book that hints at resolution while simultaneously making it seem less likely. All three perspectives converge on Koenji, the quiet Tokyo neighborhood where Tengo has been living throughout the novel. Ushikawa moves in to a sparse ground-floor apartment in Tengo’s building to spy on him in hopes of finding Leader’s killer, while at the same time Aomame is hiding out in a rented apartment a few blocks away, completely unaware that she is so close to Tengo’s home—and, in turn, to the predatory Ushikawa. However, Murakami complicates this supposed geographical closeness with temporal and spatial shifts that further divide the lovers as they attempt to reunite. For instance, though his apartment is in Koenji, Tengo is not actually in it (though Fuka-Eri is) because he has again traveled a few hours away to Chikura, for an extended stay with his father, who is a coma and expected to die soon. Not only is Tengo physically far from Aomame, but the narrative speed at which his chapters are paced is so much faster and so far removed from the sluggish pace of Aomame’s existence (as she repeats the same routine over and over again in her self-imposed quarantine) that it creates a disjunction that seems hard to surmount. Elizabeth Freeman has
discussed this kind of anachrony under the term “temporal drag,” which carries with it “all the associations that the word ‘drag’ has with retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past on the present” (62). Though Freeman is discussing temporal drag in epistolary fiction, Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in particular, she notes that the erotohistoriographic rethinking of time carries with it “the very queer possibility that encounters with history are bodily encounters, and even that they have a revivifying and pleasurable effect” (105). In this context, what ostensibly seemed like discordance between the interwoven narratives is actually a queer reconceptualizing of time that allows the estranged lovers to achieve a closeness that would not have been otherwise possible.

This temporal drag continues as Tengo returns from Chikura after his father dies, and the spatial focus turns to a small neighborhood playground, onto which Aomame’s secluded balcony looks. Earlier in the novel, Tengo had visited the park and climbed to the top of the slide in order to get a better view of the two moons hanging in the sky, and Aomame caught sight of him just as he was leaving. Shut up in her small apartment in the third book, pregnant Aomame spends night after night shrouded in a blanket on her balcony, waiting for Tengo to return, but “[a]s Aomame kept a close watch on the park, the moons kept a close watch over her” (Murakami, *IQ84* 608). Murakami underscores the queer characteristics of the park by emphasizing the presence of the two moons and the world of *IQ84*. However, this choice of setting has its own queer associations: much like a crowded freeway is not supposed to be inhabited by individuals not inside a vehicle, the normative conceptions of a park restrict its use to certain times (daylight) and by certain individuals (children and their parents). Thus, anything that does not fit these parameters is often considered deviant, such as a single man frequenting the park late at night. This in itself has queer connotations because darkened parks are often prime places for gay cruising, much like rest stops and public toilets. For Samuel Delany in *Time Square Red, Times Square Blue*, these sites offer a place for contact between people of varying races, orientations, genders, classes, and many other walks of life, but more importantly, they become the basis of a sense of community—or to put it in the terminology that dominates Murakami scholarship, a space that becomes important in the development of *commitment* to others.

Indeed, this notion of the importance of queered spaces in establishing contact seems to also be the case for Murakami, as the park eventually (after hundreds of pages) becomes
the place for Aomame and Tengo’s long-awaited reunion. Before this can happen, though, Ushikawa (as both a representative of the obstruction between them in terms of space, time, and an element of danger) must be eliminated. In other words, while Ushikawa’s appearance in the narrative initially seems to drive the lovers even further apart, this is a necessary step towards queerness before they can eventually come back together. Thus, when Ushikawa is killed and Tengo can finally return to the double-moonlit park, Aomame breaks her self-imprisonment and goes out to meet him, and Murakami emphasizes the liminal qualities of the meeting:

[Tengo] was suddenly aware of someone sitting beside him, holding his right hand. Like a small creature seeking warmth, a hand slipped inside the pocket of his leather jacket and clasped his large hand. By the time he became fully aware, it had already happened. Without any preface, the situation had jumped to the next stage. How strange, Tengo thought, his eyes still closed. How did this happen? At one point time was flowing along so slowly that he could barely stand it. Then suddenly it had leapt ahead, skipping whatever lay between. (Murakami, 1Q84 895)

In this scene, the temporal shifts in perception are overt and emphasize a non-normative awareness of the way that time, and even contact, work. Though Tengo has been told to expect Aomame, this still hasn’t fully prepared him for the fact that he will actually be able to reconnect with her, and her presence comes as a surprise to him. For readers who are familiar with Murakami’s past works and their seeming insistence on the impossibility of self-actualization and authentic human interaction—even in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, where Toru Okada approaches an understanding of commitment, this journey is incomplete—Tengo and Aomame’s long-delayed reunion is certainly surprising in and of itself. Furthermore, after nearly 900 pages and twenty years of being apart, the fact that “the situation had jumped to the next stage” so quickly is almost jarring. And yet, Murakami seems to be suggesting here that though there are numerous constructions of “the normal” in terms of the binaries of East/West, male/female, gay/straight, traditional/modern, and space/time that get in the way of individual subject formation and genuine human connection, queering these definitions can quite abruptly change our entire perspective on whether these obstacles can be surmounted.

To solidify this idea, the very last chapter of 1Q84 represents a final shift in Murakami’s oeuvre away from detachment and towards commitment. In concluding his panoramic analysis of Murakami’s career, Matthew Strecher comments on the author’s
progression on identity and commitment from his first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*, to the recent *1Q84*:

Just as readers are urged to attend to the wind, we are urged now to climb deeply into our inner wells and listen to the inner voice that emerges from the darkness there. Whether that story represents the voice of the collective unconscious, as some have contended, the voices of gods and oracles (as in *1Q84*), or something more personal, Murakami appears convinced that those who lend their ears will gain wisdom and self-understanding. (“Critical Stage” 864)

In similar fashion, the alternating chapters of *1Q84* seem to comprise two voices attempting to have a conversation about identity production. Unlike the shifting and detached perspectives of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (mentioned briefly in the first chapter of this project), which symbolize the impossibility of ever connecting to the self or another, the alternating chapters of *1Q84* themselves hint at the importance of commitment to one another. This investment in commitment is solidified in the final chapter, which joins the two perspectives of Aomame and Tengo into one unified voice, as they set off together to the highway turnout where Aomame first shifted into the world of *1Q84*. Hand in hand, the two lovers take the reverse of Aomame’s original path into the two-mooned world—up the ladder and back out onto the freeway—and end up back in a world that is orbited by a single, solitary moon. However, Murakami is quick to question whether this is truly the 1984 that existed before, one that was strictly governed by the normative constructions of binary logics, when Aomame wonders: “Could this be another, altogether different place? Did we move from one world to yet another, third world? … Where new riddles and new rules await us?” (*1Q84* 920) In suggesting that this new world is yet unknowable, Murakami is acknowledging that the potential outcomes of queering the binaries have yet to be discovered, but that they are worth pursuing because they can ultimately lead to a new and potentially radical understanding of the world.

Unsurprisingly, one of the final acts of the book is Aomame and Tengo finally having sex (in an expensive hotel room, no less), and this is important for several various reasons, the most obvious of which is that the act of sex is a literal union of two people that overtly symbolizes the idea of connection. Even in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, though Toru and Kumiko were actually married, Murakami never depicted the couple actually having sex (with each other, at least), which reinforces the incompleteness of their respective journeys back to one another. However, in this totally new world—one that is neither the normative
1984 nor the two-mooned *IQ84*—Aomame and Tengo have finally overcome the binaries that restricted them and are able to reach an understanding of themselves that allows them to commit to one another. Underscoring this idea is the dialogue they have with one another during sex:

“Is it like you imagined?”
“I still can’t believe it’s real,” Tengo admitted. “I feel like I’m imagining things.”
“But this is real.”
“It feels too good to be real.” (923)

While this certainly refers to Tengo’s elation at finally being with Aomame, what this more importantly indicates here at the end of the book (and of my project) is the idea that a totally new conception of the self—one that is not moored in the demoralizing and depersonalizing rigidity of the binary system—has emerged for these characters, accounting in part for Tengo’s amazement. While the novel ends a mere two pages later and we as readers are not able to see what this new conception of self actually looks like, it is easy to see how unshackling from normative logics might also feel “too good to be real.”

This good feeling is something that Murakami has certainly progressed on in his career, from his initial advocacy for societal detachment to eventual investment in commitment, and it seems that he is continuing to do so with his newest novel, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, which was published in Japan in 2013. Though it is not due in translation in the States until later this year, prominent Japanese literary critic and Murakami scholar, Norihiro Kato, has already flagged its significance to Murakami’s body of work. In an online interview with *The Asahi Shimbun*, Kato asserts that the new novel marks an important point in Murakami’s commitment stage because of the possibilities it opens for future writings: “*Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki* is an imperfect novel that needed to be written as such to allow the author to reach a new paradigm” (qtd. in Matsubara). While what this means remains to be seen, Kato seems to be indicating that although the titular character is so devoted to the idea of commitment that he goes on the “pilgrimage” named in the title to reconnect with the three friends who severed relations with him after high school—a kind of commitment that is not necessarily bound up in the idea of romantic coupling—a fully reconciled and unified version of the self is still unattained in Murakami’s newest novel. And yet, Kato hints that *Colorless Tsukuru* builds on the other works in the commitment stage of Murakami’s career and is a necessary step towards creating a “new
paradigm” in identity production. As of now, the only option is to wait and see what the future holds for Murakami and the unified self: whether he believes that it is truly possible, what it might look like, and indeed, what part queer conceptions of space and time play in reconciling it.
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