

**Encounter, Incoherence, Recollection:
Reparative Possibilities in Contemporary Japanese Speculative Fiction**

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: Encounter, Incoherence, Recollection: Reparative Possibilities in Contemporary Japanese Speculative Fiction

This dissertation makes a reparative intervention in the fraught relationship between Japanese speculative fiction media that circulates globally in translation and the anglophone audiences that it reaches. The analysis responds to how contemporary imaginaries about Japan have been informed by a combination of images disseminated through a history of orientalist speculation that persists in the reception of contemporary Japanese media and popular culture. This dissertation unsettles these orientalist models of speculation and envisions the hopeful possibilities embedded in the speculative. Through a methodology that employs Eve Sedgwick's theories of reparative reading, the dissertation offers a queer reorientation of the speculative encounter—one that reimagines not only the relationship between self and other, but also the relationships between text and translation, source and adaptation, and presence and futurity. The dissertation's comparative analysis of various contemporary Japanese speculative fiction media objects makes visible the reparative or hopeful possibilities of speculation and gestures towards a speculative model that inspires positive affect and envisions a politics of the imagination. Through this, the dissertation finds that a reparative model of speculation is urgently needed to address both the history of orientalist speculation and our collective responsibility to the many possible futures that may lead from the contemporary moment.

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INTRODUCTION

How to read in dark times? The Humanities are under attack, right-wing populism is on the rise around the globe, capitalism seems without alternatives. There is no shortage of possible disasters to be paranoid about.

- Irina Kalinka, “Reading in Dark Times: Toward a Queer Politics of Repair” (2023)

“For me *I’m* the self, and *you’re* the object. For you, of course, it’s the exact opposite... by exchanging self and object, we can project ourselves onto the other and gain self-consciousness.”

- Murakami Haruki, *Kafka on the Shore* (2002)¹

This dissertation makes a reparative intervention in the fraught relationship between Japanese speculative fiction media that circulates globally in translation and the anglophone audiences that it reaches. My analysis is a response to how contemporary imaginaries about Japan have been informed by a combination of images disseminated through a history of orientalist speculation that persists in the reception of contemporary Japanese media and popular culture. This dissertation aims to unsettle orientalist models of speculation in order to envision the hopeful possibilities embedded in the speculative. This requires a queer reorientation of the speculative encounter—one that reimagines not only the relationship between self and other, but also the relationships between text and translation, source and adaptation, and presence and futurity. In doing so, I consider contemporary reinterpretations of the theories of speculative thinkers such as Hegel, Marx, and Freud alongside works of Japanese speculative fiction that both destabilize and resonate with these theories. I proceed with an understanding of “speculative fiction” as

¹ “Watashi ni totte wa watashi ga jiko de, Hoshino-chan ga kyakutai na n da. Hoshino-chan ni totte wa mochiron gyaku da ne. Hoshino-chan ga jiko de, watashi ga kyakutai. Watashitachi wa kō shite otagai ni, jiko to kyakutai wo kōkanshi, tōsha shi atte, jiko ishiki wo kakuritsu shiteiru n da yo.” (Murakami, *Umibe no kafuka*, vol. 2, pp. 98-99). Translation by Phillip Gabriel.

formulated by Japanese feminist and queer speculative fiction scholars such as Harada Kazue and Iida Yūko as “an expansive term used to describe works that counter the dominant imaginaries” (Harada 11-12). The Japanese speculative fiction media objects brought together for comparative analysis in this project share an investment in making visible the reparative or hopeful possibilities of speculation and gesture towards a speculative model that inspires positive affect and envisions a politics of the imagination.

In December of 2017, Logan Paul (b. 1995), a US American social media influencer and YouTuber, traveled to Aokigahara Forest near Mt. Fuji in order to film a travelogue for his “Tokyo Adventures” series. Paul is captivated by the forest’s reputation as a haunted “Suicide Forest,” and his video seems to drip with anticipation for a *Blair Witch Project* (2016) style encounter with the vengeful ghosts of J-Horror films like *Ringu* (1998). However, the events that follow in the video and its aftermath instead produced an incoherent friction between Paul’s speculative imaginaries of this “haunted forest” and its material reality. During his time camping in Aokigahara, he encounters the corpse of an individual who has committed suicide. Judging by the footage that follows, for Paul, this may have at the time seemed like hitting the proverbial “content jackpot.” Paul filmed the corpse and his melodramatic reaction to its discovery and uploaded the completed travelogue to YouTube.

As could be expected, and as Paul himself likely intended, this controversial video went viral to an absurd degree. Within the first 24 hours of being uploaded, the video reached over 6 million views, speaking to both Paul’s alarming popularity and a general fascination with Japan’s image on the anglophone internet as a site where the speculative can become real. After extreme backlash by both the Japanese government and wider public opinion, the video was demonetized

and eventually taken down,² though it may remain in perpetual circulation on darker corners of the internet. In response to the controversy, Paul tweeted in January of 2018 that his actions were “misguided by shock and awe.”³ Paul then released his apology video “So Sorry” days later, which has in the intervening seven years received over 64 million views. We can only speculate ourselves as to how much money the original video and this “apology” has made and continues to make for Paul in revenue from YouTube, his sponsors, and from other media outlets as a direct result of the attention he gained from this controversy in the first place.

I interpret from Paul’s video and its controversy the culmination of a history of speculative encounters between the US and Western Europe and its fabricated image of Japan. In fact, we might view Paul’s video as a shadow cast by Lafcadio Hearn’s (1850-1904) own recording of his journey to Japan over a hundred years earlier.

Hearn was born in Greece, moved to Ireland where he was orphaned, and then emigrated to the United States in the 1870s. For much of his life, Hearn found himself an outcast for his background as a half-Greek half-Irish orphan, his physical disability (blindness in his left eye and near-blindness in the other), his transgressive behavior such as his short-lived interracial marriage in Ohio in 1874, and his cultivation of “weird” sensibilities (Manning 262). It wasn’t until 1890 when Hearn came to Japan ostensibly for work that he found something like a home. He quit his job soon after arrival, married a Japanese woman, and remained in Japan until his death in 1904. Here he wrote his magnum opus *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894), a collage of impressionist travelogues detailing Hearn’s experiences in Japan, particularly his encounters

² YouTube also faced criticism for failing to remove the video in the intervening 10 days it took for Paul to remove the video himself.

³ Tweet from @LoganPaul on Twitter, January 1, 2018. The phrase “shock and awe” bears a worrying connection to the 2003 US military doctrine for the invasion of Iraq, further imbricating the “speculative” with systems of violence.

with folklore and ghost stories. This book became widely read by Hearn's contemporaries in the West due to a growing "*Japonisme*" among European artists and cultural figures. After his death, Hearn became something of a Japanese darling, where his works in translation remain popular to this day.

In his analysis of Hearn's life and work, Paul Manning writes that Hearn's "Japan writings, especially his retelling of Japanese weird tales... helped make Japan familiar to Western audiences as a ghostly place" (Manning 263). Such retellings can be found, for example, in the chapter of *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* titled "Of Ghosts and Goblins" where Hearn humorously writes "I shall take heed not to dwell in the wilderness, because I have seen Japanese goblins, and I do not like them" (Hearn 637). In this chapter, Hearn accompanies his Japanese companion Kinjurō to a festival where a number of "kwaidan"⁴ are being told and performed. Manning notes that Hearn "is not actually talking about real ghosts and goblins, but a tableau of Japanese media forms that made ghosts and goblins visible and tangible... which he encountered in a sideshow exhibition" (Manning 266). This "media mix" that makes the speculative Japan visible to Hearn anticipates the late-20th century international "Cool Japan" craze over Japanese manga, anime, and videogames that similarly made the speculative and the supernatural of Japan seem tangible to the world. While the ramifications of Hearn's work establishing Japan as a site for Western speculative imaginaries to run wild cannot be ignored, I find myself charmed by Hearn's lifelong obsession with the "weird." Manning seems to agree, writing that "Hearn found Japan to be ghostly largely because he found *everything* to be ghostly, himself included" (263).

⁴ Jpn. 怪談, "*kaidan*," literally "ghost tales."

However, when the Pacific War erupted between the United States and Japan in December of 1941, knowledge about “the enemy,” no matter how speculative, became hotly sought after by the US government. Here we might note that the etymological root of “speculate” comes from the Latin “*specula*” or “watchtower.” The speculative gaze can be an instrument of violence for establishing and maintaining authority over a region, much like a sentry’s gaze from a fort’s watchtower. As such, when US-American anthropologist Ruth Benedict published her wartime research on Japan as *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), we see the shadow of Hearn darken. Benedict’s work is an example of anthropology from a distance. When Benedict wrote this book, she did not speak Japanese, nor had she ever visited Japan. Instead, Benedict relied on her own speculative interpretations of translations of Japanese novels in order to make sweeping and materially consequential claims about the “nature” of the “Japanese psyche.” For example, Benedict’s analysis of Japanese culture led her to make recommendations to President Truman on how to best deal with the emperor regarding the terms of Japan’s surrender. Evidently, Benedict’s understanding of Japanese culture reflects an orientalist’s attitude towards the Other’s essentially mysterious ambiguity:

The Japanese are, to the highest degree, both aggressive and unaggressive, both militaristic and aesthetic, both insolent and polite, rigid and adaptable, submissive and resentful of being pushed around, loyal and treacherous, brave and timid, conservative and hospitable to new ways. (Benedict 2).

Benedict has been criticized widely both in Japan and beyond for the orientalist attitudes and moralistic spin injected into her interpretations of Japanese culture.⁵ David Morley and Kevin Robins describe this sort of speculative orientalist production without linguistic comprehension as “Far Orientalism”—a critique they also level at Lafcadio Hearn for his book *Japan: An*

⁵ See Doi (1974), Rosenblatt (2004), Burman (2007), Nozaki (2009), Holt (2014), and Xiang (2018)

Attempt at Interpretation (1904) and Roland Barthes' *L'empire des signes* (*The Empire of Signs*, 1970). For Morley and Robins, the Far Orientalist "has been seduced by the elaborate and arcane rituals of Japanese culture... [where] Japan functions as a locus of self-estrangement and cultural transcendence." (Morley and Robins 161).

We can read this function quite clearly in Roland Barthes' book. At first glance, *The Empire of Signs* can be read as a travelogue about Barthes' three trips to Japan in the mid- to late-1960s. These trips coincided with a significant turn in US American and Western European interest in Japan, marked by Japan's coerced transformation from Oriental enemy into a bastion of Western capitalist economic and ideological interests, combatting the spread of communism in Cold War-era East Asia. Barthes was the first major intellectual figure from the European academy to publicly visit Japan after the Second World War. This trip parallels an increase of interest in East Asia among the French academy, particularly among the tight-knit community that arose around the avant-garde French literary journal, *Tel Quel*, such as Barthes himself and Julia Kristeva.⁶

Though the book may appear to be a travelogue, upon closer inspection, the book attempts to resist this clear-cut classification. Barthes declares from the beginning of the text that he does not speak Japanese, knows almost nothing about Japanese history or culture, and is living "*Le rêve*" (the dream) of inhabiting a language-culture as one who can understand it only as an outsider looking in (Barthes 13). Instead of writing about his time in Japan explicitly, Barthes veils his work as an exploration of a speculative "Japan" or what he calls "*Là-Bas*" (Faraway)—a fantastical world where linguistic and cultural signs collapse into their own

⁶ For another example of a Francophone book of the time concerning a speculative (mis)reading of East Asia, see Julia Kristeva's book *Des Chinoises* (*About Chinese Women*, 1971).

vacuum of meaning (9). Barthes therefore reveals more about his own speculative fantasies of a system free from signification than anything concrete about Japanese culture and society.

Barthes describes this fantastical system as “*l’idée d’un système symbolique inoui*” (the idea of an unknown symbolic system) which he just happens to call “Japon” (Japan). He then goes on to describe a number of unmistakably Japanese cultural events, objects, and occasions (10). These ruminations on cultural forms range from food to *bunraku* puppet theater, to the “elaborate and arcane” custom of bowing and the literary form of *haiku* poetry, and end with a blurry view of the *Zengakuren* student movements of the late 1960s. Though Barthes couches his book in claims that he cannot describe Japan, cannot represent it (and has never even photographed it, despite his numerous included photographs proving the contrary), his book is nonetheless recognizably *about* Japan even when it purports not to be. The traces of Japan that exist in “Faraway” mark the very impossibility of signifying the full lived experience of Japan. When faced with this impossibility, instead of *not* representing Japan, Barthes uses his position as a renowned cultural critic and scholar to publicly *speculate* about what Japan might as well be.

A similar speculative gaze sutured with Far Orientalism can be seen trained on Japan from the US during Japan’s Bubble-era of the 1980s and early-90s over a “techno-orientalist” futurity which depicts the threat of Japan becoming the economic and technological superpower of the future while the West goes into coeval decline. As Morley and Robins write in their chapter “Techno-Orientalism,” this perceived threat of Japan as the future “provoked a defensive response from the West” (Morley and Robins 149). These attitudes reached a critical mass in

1989 when the former LDP⁷ politician Shintaro Ishihara directly addressed these Western anxieties in his essay “The Japan That Can Say No,”⁸ which explicitly challenged the West’s apparent superiority on the global stage (in *Nihonjinron* tones).⁹ We can read these techno-orientalist, speculative anxieties quite clearly in the representation of a dystopian techno-futurist Japan and East Asia in Western media objects from the era, such as William Gibson’s sci-fi novel *Neuromancer* (1984), Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982), the table-top roleplaying game *Cyberpunk* (1988), and even seemingly harmless caricatures like the evil ninja overlord Shredder from the children’s comic book series *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1984). Of course, echoing Logan Paul’s curiosity towards the “haunted suicide forest” of *Aokigahara*, published statistics of urban Japan’s high rates of unhappiness, overwork, and attempted suicides only further fueled this techno-orientalist anxiety.

Present-day Japan remains caught up in a unique history of speculative Far Orientalist thought. We can see this history traced from early writers like Lafcadio Hearn and Ruth Benedict, through Roland Barthes and the techno-orientalists of the Bubble Era, to the contemporary speculative fiasco of Logan Paul’s ill-omened video. Japan has been imagined in the West through the eyes of Far Orientalists as a place where the imagination can run wild: ghosts and monsters abound in the wilderness, the cities are cyberpunk dystopias, and Japanese people are mysteriously and unknowably alien. These images of Japan are not neutral or one-sided, and Japanese political and creative projects such as “Cool Japan” to boost Japan’s global soft power through stimulating international interest in the country lean into these speculative fantasies. The image of the late Japanese prime minister Abe Shinzo’s appearance dressed as the

⁷ LDP or Liberal Democratic Party is Japan’s long-ruling conservative and nationalist political party.

⁸ “No” to *ieru Nihon*. Originally published in 1989, and then translated by Frank Baldwin in 1991.

⁹ *Nihonjinron* is a genre of conservative, ethnocentric, and nationalist thought in Japan that claims Japanese identity is unique from and superior to other ethnic and national identities.

Nintendo videogame character Mario at the opening ceremony of the 2016 Rio Olympics springs readily to mind. This exemplifies how the Japanese government's support of the persuasive utility of speculation as a form of soft power imbricates it in the perpetuation of Japan's various speculative images abroad.

The global reception of speculative fiction media from Japan is similarly embroiled in this history of speculative orientalist production, and the uncritical consumption of this media in translation inadvertently perpetuates these orientalist images of Japan. When we look at the Japanese-language media objects that are most popular with Western audiences today, we see a trend of speculative fiction media objects at the top: fantastical media-mix intellectual properties like Pokémon, *isekai* (other world) and otherwise speculative fiction anime and manga, Murakami Haruki's magical realism novels, *hentai* pornography,¹⁰ fantasy and cyberpunk videogames, and J-horror movies fraught with ghosts like the ones that fascinated both Lafcadio Hearn and Logan Paul. The "Japan" in the imagination of US American students of Japanese language and literature, for example, is in part informed by this speculative mosaic, and, as Logan Paul's video exemplifies, misreading Japan in this way has the potential for serious consequences for both speculator and speculated.

In his book *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (2011), Nicolas Mirzoeff comments on the material power that structures of visibility can exert. He writes that visibility, or patterns of observing and representing objects, bodies, and terrain, "sutures authority to power and renders this association 'natural'" (Mirzoeff 6). Speculative orientalist modes of looking at

¹⁰ *Hentai* (Jpn. 変体, short for 変態性欲 *hentai-seiyoku*) "sexual perversion" or "perverted." Also refers to a genre of drawn and animated pornography. Mark McLelland notes that "it is the 'virtual' (deliberately non-realist) manner in which [*hentai*] manga and anime worlds are presented that allows characters to go beyond conventional depictions of gender, sexuality, and embodiment" (McLelland 7).

and imagining Japan organize into a system of looking that operates through the logic of knowledge-power, or what Mirzoeff calls a “deployment of visibility” (48). When these one-sided speculative visualities train their sights on Japan, the association made between Japan and the speculative orient is naturalized, and the assumption that Japan can be made to be a speculative object of Western imagination becomes naturalized along with it. As Sara Ahmed comments in her chapter on orientalism in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), patterns of thought towards Oriental otherness are “determined by orientations that have already been taken and repeated over time” (Ahmed 117). If one-sided speculative regimes of imagining Japan remain unquestioned, they become a path of least resistance for other uncritical thinkers to follow. Indeed, the classical orientalist structure of an observing and cataloging Occident and observed and archived Orient tacitly persist in this system of visibility.

While the degree of Logan Paul’s insensitivity is severe, the attitudes his actions represent are nothing new or outside the norm in the contemporary online discourse about Japan from outside Japan, as further evidenced by the popularity of “Weird Japan,” “Cute Japan,” and other monikers that naturalize an essentialist Japanese otherness in a way that Naoki Sakai describes in *Translation and Subjectivity* as reified “culturism” (Sakai 17). The specific Japanese media circulated and enjoyed by western audiences in translation play an undeniable role in the maintenance of this speculative orientalist visibility. What is needed to address this is what Mirzoeff calls a “countervisibility,” i.e. a vision of Japanese speculative media that counters this linear model and gestures towards actual reparative possibility. As Mirzoeff concludes, reparative possibility in the speculative gaze requires “a time in which my claim to the right to look is met by your willingness to be seen. And I reciprocate” (309). In sum, this requires

theorizing a more equitable speculative engagement—what I will come to describe as a “specular encounter” in Chapter One.

The word “encounter” energizes this dissertation. The verb can mean “to unexpectedly experience or be faced with (something difficult or hostile)” or simply “to meet someone or something unexpectedly,” and the noun-form refers to such a meeting (Oxford). Its original usage in Middle English referred specifically to a meeting with an adversary, though in contemporary English its usage has widened substantially. It is the ambiguity of the encounter that fills it with speculative potential. An encounter can just as easily be an “encounter with death” as it can a “fated encounter” that changes someone’s life for the better; it can be a serendipitous reunion with a long-lost friend or an unexpected run-in with the police.

In *Dungeons and Dragons* and other classic tabletop roleplaying games, an “encounter” is an event that the players come across determined by the Game Master (often at random with a roll of a 20-sided die). We might here remind ourselves of Slavoj Žižek’s conception of an event as any occurrence which forces one to reconsider what is possible.¹¹ These encounters can range from an ambush by hostile goblins to a mysterious traveler with arcane advice for the party to a peddler selling rare and magical items. “Encounter design” is a key element of videogame creation, as well. In a videogame such as FromSoftware’s *Bloodborne* (2015), an encounter can be understood as the arrangement of all actors, objects, and terrain in a particular area of play-space, with the outcome of the encounter determined by the player avatar’s actions within that space. A game’s level designers construct its world by connecting encounters to encounters like

¹¹ See Žižek (2014).

a 3-dimensional connect-the-dots puzzle. However, while game designers can place these pieces together and have them run within the set limits of the game's algorithmic determinants (what we might call the game's systems), the encounter can only take full shape through the contingency of an individual player's phenomenological experience and interaction with these systems. A player might tackle the encounter in a way the game's developers neither intended nor foresaw as possible, or perhaps might find ways to circumvent the encounter altogether by exploiting gaps in the logic of the game's procedures, systems, or even its very code. The contingency inherent within encounters both in videogames and in life can be exemplified by videogame "speedrunning" hobbyists, who intentionally deconstruct or circumvent most if not all of the preconstructed and developer-intended encounters in a game in order to complete it as quickly as possible.¹² In this sense, encounters animate games in perhaps just the same way a string of meaningful yet contingent encounters suture together the story we tell ourselves of who we are.

Ultimately, we come to know ourselves and become known to our others through the encounters we have on the line of our life. Speculative thought is fraught with theorizations of these sorts of encounters. In Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the encounter between Self and Other is the crucible where identity is forged. For Alexandre Kojève in his reading of Hegel, this encounter inevitably results in a violent struggle between humans for the other's recognition of one's self-certainty (Kojève 15-16). However, rather than strictly a struggle for power, Gillian Rose considers the generative potential embedded within the supposedly violent encounter,

¹² A particularly (in)famous example is *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (1998) on the Nintendo 64. Speedrunners can beat the game in under five minutes by utilizing an exploit of game memory known as "stale reference manipulation," which forces the game to execute arbitrary code strings written by the player's in-game actions, ultimately warping the player to the end credits sequence without beating even one of the game's numerous dungeons.

writing that the “subordination of one to another in possession and appropriation is dualistic... When the contradiction between the definition and the reality becomes apparent, the means... is re-cognized as... a formative experience... in the transition to a new definition of oneself” (Rose 85). Similarly, for queer theorist Sara Ahmed in her queer reorientation of phenomenology, the encounter—particularly with a queer object—can be a source of cathartic reorientation off of the straight line. It is in these latter theorizations of the speculative encounter that are the life spark of my own analysis.

For example, we might interpret the encounter as it is dramatized in the Japanese speculative fiction short story “*Kagami*” (“The Mirror,” 1983) by Murakami Haruki. In the story, which I analyze at greater length in Chapter One, a former night watchman at a primary school in Japan details the events of one strange night at the school. That night, during the course of his regular rounds, the unnamed watchman comes across a mirror that he’s never seen before. At first rationalizing its unexplainable presence, he then realizes that something is terrifyingly off about this mirror. He stares at it for a while, completely transfixed by the strange sense that his reflection is not really him, until he perceives the reflection move, prompting him to move in turn. The nightmare is shattered when the watchman, in a fit of fear and panic, destroys the mirror with his wooden sword. The narrator concludes his story by admitting that since that day, as if running from this shadow he encountered and shattered in the mirror, he has not kept a single mirror in his house.

We might read this story as an account of Kojève’s violent encounter extended to the extreme, and such a reading might continue to expose the violence latent in lingering structures of speculative orientalism. As I have already described earlier in this introduction, orientalist models of speculation vest the power of meaning-making and ordering primarily on the one who

is doing the speculating. When the night watchman chooses to destroy the mirror, he realizes one possible end result of this linear speculative gaze—domination and violence. There has been much work to expose how the gendered, colonial, or orientalist gaze can be violent.¹³ There has also been a proliferation of research into the politics of this speculative gaze in the specific US-Japanese context.¹⁴ This faith in exposure certainly has an important role in contemporary critical theory and academic production. In fact, we could conceivably read this above story in order to expose a latent anxiety in Murakami's writing of Edward Said's notion of how the Occident and the Orient "reflect" each other in the context of what Emily Apter describes as the "transnational translation market" (Said 15, Apter 99).

However, queer theorist Eve Sedgwick reminds us that "this highly compelling tracing-and-exposure project represents a strategic and local decision, not necessarily a categorical imperative" (Sedgwick 124). This dissertation takes its methodological impetus from Sedgwick's essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," in which she calls for a consideration of a mode of reading that resists the impulse to perpetuate a "hermeneutics of suspicion" ad nauseum. Instead, Sedgwick advocates for "reparative reading," or reading that places its faith not in exposure but in amelioration through a small theory of positive affect. She writes that reparative reading can be "[n]o less acute than a paranoid position, no less realistic, no less attached to a project of survival, and neither less nor more delusional or fantasmatic," but that a reparative mode simply "undertakes a different range of affects, ambitions, and risks" (150).

¹³ see Said (1979), Spivak (1988), Bhabha (1994), Chow (2006), Ahmed (2006), Mirzoeff (2011), Karatani (2014) and many more.

¹⁴ see Sakai (1988), Morley and Robins (1995), Miyoshi (1998), Lye (2005), Napier (2007), Roh (2015), and Freedman (2021).

Heather Love further defines the specific range of these affects, writing that reparation is “on the side of *multiplicity, surprise, rich divergence, consolation, creativity, and love*” (Love 237). These comparatively small, intimate affects energize reparative reading. One further advantage of reparative reading practices is their ability to meet speculative fiction on its own terrain—the realm of the speculative. As Irina Kalinka writes, reparative reading has the potential to enable “the reader to play with the ‘what if’ and conceive of the world of the text as being configured around radically different lines than expected, creating surprising openings, and making alternative ways of being thinkable” (Kalinka 132). Kalinka goes on to describe how reparative reading “understood in this way, is a kind of ‘politics of the imagination’” (133). Tara Forrest defines this “politics of the imagination” further as “not only a desire to denaturalize the current state of affairs, but to cleave open a space within history’s so-called march of progress toward the future within which possibilities of both the past and the present can be explored anew” (Forrest 17). Therefore, though a conventional view might associate paranoid reading more closely with “the political” and reparative reading with “the aesthetic,” I want to upend this misconception and show how reparative analysis can perform explicitly political work.

If we were to return to the Murakami story above, a reparative reading might instead reorient us towards the broken mirror glass. We might then ask ourselves, “what could have happened if instead of violence, the narrator chose to embrace the figure of himself he encountered in the mirror?” Instead of running from the figure in the glass—acting as if he can hide from his own object-self by turning away from every opportunity for reflection—what if the narrator turned to face it? As Sara Ahmed writes, “[d]epending on which way one turns, different worlds might even come into view” (Ahmed 15). Could such a world make possible the simultaneous recognition of the narrator’s and his shadow’s self-certainty? If we simply follow

the well-trodden lines of paranoid reading by time and time again (re)exposing the potential orientalist violence latent in the dissemination and reception of Japanese speculative media in translation, then answering this question becomes an impossibility. Rethinking the paranoid reading of the story above, how might translation and source be able to recognize the self-certainty of each other? Yes, such questions are beyond the realm of the “real”—after all, the story ends before the narrator encounters his reflection again. Still, precisely because of the seeming impossibility of these questions, they exist in the realm of the speculative.

Reading in this way might be criticized for “misreading” the text or literally attempting to “repair” potentially intended aporias created by the author themselves. However, it is important to note that for Sedgwick, the nature of reparative reading is “additive and accretive... it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object” (Sedgwick 149). Therefore, a reparative reading mode would resist the impulse to declare a single “correct” reading. Reparative reading does not aim to close the circle of interpretation or “finish” the reading of the text. It is, however, distinct from intentionally misreading the text, as well. Rather, as Kalinka suggests, reparative reading “actively creates the book that is *needed* out of the one that was *given*—not out of ‘mere’ pleasure, but to allow for particular kinds of *formerly unthinkable pleasures* that are not politically neutral or unconcerned” (Kalinka 132, emphasis mine). Reparative reading is therefore interested in creating a wider range of thinkable interpretations within a text rather than declaring a single, authoritative reading. Conducting this creative widening of hermeneutic possibility latent within a text can lead to startling political consequences which may have been out of reach in the “intended” or canonically “correct” reading. Kalinka concludes by arguing that this “act of creation” allows the reader to think through “various utopian possibilities—the

end of capitalism, postcolonial futures, or queer families for example—in the present” (Kalinka 133).

Speculative fiction is the terrain where these non-normative creative possibilities come to life (or perhaps, come back from the dead). In my analysis of these Japanese speculative media objects, I rely on Sedgwick’s “reparative reading” mode to explore how speculative fiction can defamiliarize entrenched assumptions about reality and, beyond just that, demonstrate how such an exploration can realize small and yet imperative possibilities for positive affect. I take seriously Jose Muñoz’s claim that “hope” can be both “a critical affect” and a “methodology” (Muñoz 4). Furthermore, Harada Kazue’s methodological framework of feminist defamiliarization and queer reading are central to my analytical approach. Sara Ahmed’s conception of “queer objects” and how “moments of disorientation are vital” act as the starting points from which I (re)orient my analysis off the straight line (Ahmed 157). Finally, theory and fiction are not cordoned off from each other in my analysis, as I will find that literature will have just as much to say about theory as the other way around. As Veronica Hollinger writes, theory and fiction are “reciprocal echoes and restatements: they suggest information about each other and serve to defamiliarize each other” (Hollinger 23). These are precisely the sorts of methods that I aim to apply in the chapters to come. While this dissertation does entertain the ideas of Eurocentric thinkers like Hegel, Marx, and Freud, it aims to do so in a way that destabilizes their large “master theories,” rendering them into small, precise, and contingent “small theories” rather than totalizing forces.

Chapter One, “Specular Encounters – Reading the Mirror of Translation” begins by comparing mimetic representation, or representations that make overt claims to realism, with the

nonmimetic representation of speculative fiction in order to theorize the “specular encounter.” Though both speculate and specular share an association with the Latin root of “*specere*” or “to look,” specular owes its direct etymological precursor to the reflective “*speculum*” or “mirror” instead of the linear “*specula*” or “watchtower” gaze of speculation. Therefore, specular encounters are foregrounded by their own reflectivity. Key to an encounter with a mirror is the presence of the reflected object’s own gaze back onto the viewing subject. Through a reading of Murakami Haruki’s short story “Kagami” (The Mirror), this chapter argues that the relationship between the world of reality and the world of speculative fiction can be understood as a specular encounter between reality and its mirror-image. In order to clarify the nuances of the specular encounter, this chapter then identifies and defines several mechanical operations that all mirrors—literal or figurative—perform in order to be identifiable as a mirror. The chapter then analyzes how translation itself can be understood as a specular encounter between a source text and its translation through an analysis of the mirrored typography in Abe Kōbō’s novel *Hako otoko* (*The Box Man*), unsettling linear relationships of self and other, trauma victim and traumatic memory, and text and translation. The chapter concludes by analyzing the translation of *The Box Man* by E. Dale Saunders alongside Murakami Haruki’s novel *Umibe no Kafka* and its translation *Kafka on the Shore* by Phillip Gabriel in order to demonstrate the stakes and possibilities of the specular encounter of translation and the harmful patterns that obfuscate its hopeful realization on the global translation market.

Chapter Two, “Transmedial Incoherence – Disorientating Adaptations in the Japanese Gothic” extends the argument of Chapter One by considering the specular encounter between source and adaptation as it plays out in the context of the “Japanese Gothic.” The chapter begins with an analysis of the reception of Miyazaki Gorō’s adaptation *Gedo Senki* (*Tales from*

Earthsea, 2006) of Ursula Le Guin’s *Earthsea Cycle* fantasy novel series. Le Guin describes the film as “incoherent” because of its seeming inconsistencies with the source material. However, my analysis aims to problematize this linear “incoherence” by demonstrating the unique trajectory taken by adaptations as ricochets off of their sources. The chapter then analyzes two case studies of contemporary media objects of the “Japanese Gothic” with this element of adaptation in mind. First is the Gothic-themed light novel *Hanamonogatari* (Flower-Story, 2009) by Nisio Isin and its 2011 animated film adaptation. Because of the inclusion of a curiously queer *atogaki* (afterword) by the author at the end of the novel, I argue that the novel *Hanamonogatari* can be read as a queer *shishōsetsu* (I-novel). However, the adaptation attempts to act as a “straightening device” to set the queer themes of the novel back onto the tracks of a heteronormative *nichijō* (everyday). Through a reparative reading of this problematic film, I aim to reclaim the *atogaki* from the background of the film and bring it to the fore. The second case study is of the Japanese Gothic-horror videogame *Bloodborne* (2015). I compare this game to the various Gothic source texts that inspired it, such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and H. P. Lovecraft’s “The Outsider” (1921). This videogame uses a combination of audiovisual, haptic, and procedural systems to expand on the themes and motifs of these classical Gothic texts. I argue that through the verisimilitude that the game establishes between player avatar and player, the game directly accomplishes what Gothic horror has long attempted to achieve. The game forces the player to encounter themselves as the reflection of the horrifying monstrosity they sought to defeat.

Chapter Three, “An Ambiguous Apocalypse – (Re)productive Dystopias, Queer Futurity” deals explicitly with specular encounters between the present moment and the various representations of the future depicted in speculative thought and speculative fiction. This chapter

offers a critique of what Harada Kazue describes as (re)productive futurism, or a society's belief that a good future is contingent on its citizens being both productive in an economic sense and reproductive in a biological sense. To make this critique, I analyze the complexities and possibilities for imagining alternatives to this specific sort of heteronormative, neoliberal futurity. Jose Muñoz describes this alternative as "queer futurity." I compare how possibilities of a queer futurity are imagined and represented in three speculative fiction works that each contain an ambiguous affective relationship with the end of the world as we know it. First is *Earthlings* (2018) by Murata Sayaka, which tells the story of three nonconforming individuals who experience childhood sexual trauma in a hyperrealist depiction of contemporary (re)productive Japan. The ending of this novel imagines a vision of queer futurity that is explicitly and even violently post-humanist. In comparison to this ending, I look at the US American novel *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* by Alexandra Kleeman (2015), which offers a similar vision of escape from a hyperrealist (re)productive dystopia. The main character attempts to flee this world, but succeeds only in envisioning a future of "normalcy" that looks exactly like the world she left behind. While the category of "the human" is kept in Kleeman's vision of queer futurity, it fails to truly reach beyond (re)productivity. Finally, I end the chapter with a reading of FromSoftware's videogame *Dark Souls 3*, which enables the player to become the very agent of its world's teleological end. The player can decide between two possible endings at the game's conclusion: either sacrifice themselves to fuel the fire of another generation in the perpetual (re)productive cycle of growth and decay that governs the world's metaphysics, or let the fire burn out and usher in an ambiguous darkness without the flame. *Dark Souls 3*'s vision of an ambiguous apocalypse offers a glimmer of hope for a future beyond the violence of its (re)productive present, and by enabling the player to author this queer future, the game invites

the player through its procedural rhetoric to consider their own responsibility to their present world and its multiplex possible futures.

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CHAPTER ONE

Specular Encounters – Reading the Mirror Effects of Translation

(Suddenly it occurred to me. Somewhere I remembered having seen exactly the same scene as this.)

- Abe, Kōbō, *The Box Man*¹⁵

When an English-speaker reads a novel like Abe Kōbō's *Hako Otoko* (1973) in translation as *The Box Man* (1974), there is an understood assumption that what is being read is in some way transparently transmitting the original Japanese text. However, as has been noted by translation theorists like Gayatri Spivak (2000) and Lawrence Venuti (1995), a translation is only a single interpretation of the source text, and the translator must now implement an entirely new language-world to render this interpretation legible. Similarly, post-structural thinkers of translation theory like Jacques Derrida (1985) and Lydia Liu (1999) have destabilized the very ground on which some of translation's foundational assumptions such as the source text's primacy have been built. This leaves us as critical readers of literature in translation questioning just what it is we are reading and how it might relate to the original text at all, but not all readers are so critical. The ambiguities concealed in the background of this question can be found in spaces where in the rush to read (and commodify) translated texts, we "fall prey... to the tendency to zoom over the speed bumps of untranslatability in the rush to cover ground" (Apter 3). Without an awareness of the impossibilities of translation, a reader of translation has the

¹⁵ "Futo omotta. Dokoka de, kore to sikkuri na kōkei wo mita omoe ga aru." Abe, Kōbō, *Hako otoko* (1973, trans. *The Box Man* by E. Dale Saunders, 1974). Translated text reads "Suddenly it occurred to me. Somewhere I remember seeing exactly the same scene as this," but with the line flipped upside down. The Japanese original has each individual character rotated 90 degrees clockwise.

potential to be imbricated in this language power imbalance. However, in this chapter I argue that translation offers more to its reader than just the impossibility of the “perfect” translation. Translation offers its reader the possibility of a specular encounter with their language rendered as other—enabling what Theodor Adorno describes as a “sublation” or reconciliation between subject and object. This is accomplished through what I will define in this chapter as the “specular encounter.”

Literary translation and literary representation share a similar libido for transparency. In Erich Auerbach’s masterwork *Mimesis* (1946), he opens a clear space for comparison between the styles of mimesis in the literary canon of Western literature, operating with the understanding that these works appear to refer to the reality experienced by their author or at least make a “claim to absolute authority” over the nature of this reality (Auerbach 15). Like Venuti’s “invisible” translation, Auerbach’s assumptions about mimetic literature relies on the conceit of transparency to make the “real” appear accurately represented. However, in this framework, what do we make of the protagonist in Haruki Murakami’s short story “Kagami” (1983, trans. “The Mirror” by Phillip Gabriel, 2006) switching places with his reflection, or in *Umibe no Kafuka* (2002), where a character’s shadow can make independent actions apart from its caster? Where do we place its character Nakata, who can speak to cats and summon fish to fall from the sky? What about in *Hako otoko* where the reality it represents is as fragmented as shattered glass? Of course, there are aspects of all three texts that do appear to be representations of our world: Murakami’s late 20th-century Japan and Abe’s sociopolitical commentary on unseen homelessness. As David Wellbery writes in *The Specular Moment*, “even unreality has a history” (Wellbery 13). These moments where the world depicted in these texts intercepts our own and yet refracts off of it, refusing the transparent transmission of reality as representation, suggests

the contingency of the category of “mimetic.” Instead, these texts represent a speculative world that offers a glimpse into our world’s distorted mirror-image. This is what I will come to describe as the specular encounter—an encounter with one’s mirror-image that forces the subject to consider themselves as an object of reflection. When a text’s reflectivity becomes foregrounded, forcing the reader to confront their literary reflection, we might see a specular encounter in language. This chapter argues that translation and speculative literature share this potential for specular encounters. By reading against “transparency” and instead facing the objects that float into view as our distorted reflections contained in the window glass, there is reparative possibility to achieve reconciliation between subject and object, text and translation.

There are stakes in the specular encounter, particularly when literature becomes translated. In confronting our reflection in a mirror, as when we notice our cast shadow, we come face to face with our object-self—a glimpse into our reality as what Adorno describes as a “differentiated” but simultaneous subject and object (Adorno 247). Through what I define in this chapter as the three “mirror effects,” mirrors contain our reflected image as object, distorted and inverted, and have the potential to allow a confrontation with our own body—and by extension our own subjectivity—from the outside. As I aim to demonstrate in my reparative reading of speculative literature in translation, a translation can produce a figurative reflection of our object-selves. Reading in this way not only takes the reading subject out of herself and opens a space for consideration of reflective objectivity, it also reveals the source text as subject reflected in the textual mirror, producing a doubled reflection of reader and text contained together as sublated subject-objects.

The cursory reading of translated texts, as mentioned above, has the potential to destabilize what I will call the “subjectivity” of the source text. I turn to Theodor Adorno’s

critical theory in order to explicate this instability. Adorno, in his essay “On Subject and Object,” refutes the separation of subject and object as an ahistorical inevitability. Rather, as a result of what he describes as a “coercive historical process,” Western subjectivity justifies a domination through assimilation of its object by reducing “the object to itself; subject swallows object, forgetting how much it is object itself” (Adorno 246). In his essay, he calls for a movement towards a peace that requires the sublation of this subject-object division, describing this as “the state of differentiation without domination, with the differentiated participating in each other” (247). Sublation between subject and object is a place of reconciliation and differentiated unity, resulting in peace between self and other. Adorno suggests that the moment subject recognizes its own reflective objectivity as “a consciousness objectified to itself” through self-reflection is the first teetering step towards a differentiated sublation—a peace where subject and object hold each other as loving equals (Adorno 249).

“Differentiation without domination” resonates with translation theorist Emily Apter’s idea of positive transnationalism as “the conglomeration of world cultures arrayed side by side in their difference,” as she writes in her book *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Apter 99). She employs this phrase while meditating on the systemic violences occurring within the translation and circulation of translated texts on a market. There seems to be a desire on the translation-market for a “transnationally translatable monoculture” and for an “increased motility of global culture” (Apter 99). In a stark echo of Adorno’s “coercive historical processes,” Apter asks the question “to what extent ‘foreign’ writers of ambition are consciously or unconsciously writing for international markets” (99). A “foreign writer” to the West’s dominant subject is systematically coerced to bend their writing into recognizable shapes to ease the process of absorption into the undifferentiated subjectivity of Western modes of reading. A commodified

translation on the anglophone world literature market is expected to, in the words of Lawrence Venuti in *The Translator's Invisibility*, “[produce] the illusory effect of transparency that simultaneously masks its status as an illusion” (Venuti 5). For example, English readers anticipate opening a book of translated Japanese and it reading just as comfortably as the latest novel of Dan Brown or J. K. Rowlings. This practice prioritizes the ease of mastication and assimilation of the translated text by the reader over a communication of the text’s untranslatability.

Bringing Adorno back into the discussion, if we define the “subject” in what Adorno calls “idealist terms” as what “either constructs the objective world out of an undifferentiated material... or... engenders the world itself,” than we might see how the Western English-reading individual could be read as subject with its object-Other being those world texts that the reading subject “repressively makes... like itself” (Adorno 247). In this case, for Adorno, in order to reach the peace he envisions between the sublated subject-object, we as readers of English-translated world literature must find a way to receive and transmit “the communication of what is differentiated” (Adorno 247). I argue that this communication of the differentiation between subject and object in translation can occur if we read a translation as a specular encounter with the distorted reflections of the subjectivities of both the translated language and of the source text together contained as differentiated subject-objects within the translation-mirror’s frame.

Figures of Translation in “Kagami” and *Hako Otoko*

To conceptualize this translation-mirror, I will start by comparing how Murakami’s short story “Kagami” and Abe’s novel *Hako otoko* make figures of their afterlife in translation. These texts

each depict a translation-like experience that affects the subjectivity of the narrating character of each. These translation figurations show us the violent consequences of undifferentiated subjecthood that can occur on the transnational translation market. However, they also suggest the reparative specular encounter that has the potential to grow out of translation.

“Kagami” by Haruki Murakami was first published in the collection *Kangaroo biyori* (*A Perfect Day for Kangaroo*) in 1983, and then included in translation in the 2006 collection *Mekurayanagi to nemuru onna* (trans. *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman* by Jay Rubin and Philip Gabriel). This very short story involves a former night watchman at a primary school in Japan detailing the events of one strange night at the school. The story is framed as a ghost story told by the host of what appears to be a dinner party of some sort. The conversation has turned to paranormal experiences, and the narrator comments that he’s “still never seen a ghost,” but because he’s the party’s host he decides to share “an experience that scared me out of my wits” (Murakami 56). The narrator then tells the story of his time after high school in the 60s when he bummed around Japan. The young narrator takes a job as a night watchman at a tiny school in the Niigata Prefecture. One night, he begins his rounds as normal, but suddenly he rounds a corner and the following internal monologue occurs:

What the—? I thought I’d seen something in the dark. I broke out in a sweat. Regripping the wooden sword, I turned toward what I saw...

And there I was. A mirror, in other words. It was just my reflection in a mirror. There wasn’t a mirror there the night before, so they must have put in one between then and now... It was a long, full-length mirror. Relieved that it was just me in a mirror, I felt a bit stupid for having been so surprised... I put my flashlight down, took a cigarette from my pocket, and lit it. As I took a puff, I glanced at myself in the mirror...

I suddenly noticed something odd. My reflection in the mirror wasn’t me. It looked exactly like me on the outside, but it definitely wasn’t me. No, that’s not it. It was me, of course, but another me. Another me that never should have been...

I stood there for a while, dumbfounded. My cigarette slipped from between my fingers and fell to the floor. The cigarette in the mirror fell to the floor, too. We stood there, staring at each other. I felt like I was bound hand and foot, and couldn't move.

Finally his hand moved, the fingertips of his right hand touching his chin, and then slowly, like a bug, crept up his face. I suddenly realized I was doing the same thing. Like I was the reflection of what was in the mirror and he was trying to take control of me. (From the translation "The Mirror" by Philip Grabriel, 58-59).

"Wrenching out the last of" of his strength, the narrator breaks the bonds holding him in place and smashes the mirror with his wooden sword (59). Then, he flees to the security office where he locks the door. The next morning, he discovers that there wasn't any mirror at all. "The cigarette butt" he had tossed "as well as [his] wooden sword" are both still there on the ground. "What I saw wasn't a ghost," the narrator concludes, "It was simply—myself. I can never forget how terrified I was that night" (Murakami 60). He mentions that whenever he thinks of this story, he has the thought that "the most frightening thing in the world is our own self," and then ends by saying that he doesn't own a single mirror in his entire house (60).

In this story, we can read a dualistic relationship between our world—what we might call the mimetic world—and the non-mimetic world of the story. In Murakami's short story, our mimetic world encounters the non-mimetic world as alien and abject, forcing us to hesitate in putting the pieces of its identity together. In other words, there is a dichotomy akin to a subject and its mirror image. What is mimesis versus non-mimesis is identifiable because of its relationship to its other in reflection. As Martin Horstkotte writes in his essay "The Worlds of the Fantastic Other in Postmodern English Fiction," "one of the most prominent features in [speculative literature] ... is the depiction of the worlds of the other" (Horstkotte 318). He notes that in the speculative text "the fantastic other always resembles the self to a certain extent...

there is always a certain degree of otherness in the self and of the self in the other” (Horstkotte 320). Like a subject confronting itself in reflection as an object-other in a mirror, the mimetic world encounters its non-mimetic mirror-image in the speculative textual mirror.

Murakami is a singular author on the global literary stage. As Murakami scholar Matthew Strecher writes in his monograph *The Forbidden Worlds of Haruki Murakami*, “as Murakami’s popularity as a writer has grown around the world, scholars and critics have been drawn increasingly to his writing style, his apparent rejection of belles littres... his probing into the human psyche... and his encyclopedic knowledge of music (particularly jazz)” (Strecher 1-2). While Murakami’s popularity around the world has been growing, his reception in Japan has been more chilly. The Japanese literary establishment “were nonplussed from the beginning by his... nonstyle... and some found his prose lacking in depth... Murakami was just a little too ‘cool’ for their comfort” (2). Furthermore, as Strecher writes elsewhere, “Murakami’s prose style... carries with it a strikingly *international* ambience” (Strecher, “Beyond ‘Pure’ Literature” 356). This ambience is created through linguistic strategies such as his use “of the first-person pronoun ‘I,’” often omitted in literary Japanese, which lends his texts “a rather un-Japanese atmosphere, almost as though it were translated from English” (Strecher, “Beyond” 356). On the translation market, Murakami’s texts are often more popular than they are in Japan. This leads one to consider how Murakami’s texts might be caught within the unequal power dynamics on the transnational translation market.

Translation theorist Emily Apter notes that Murakami has been grouped in with the category of the “‘multiculti,’ ‘native’ or ‘minority’” writer of widely translated texts. “These categories,” she goes on to elaborate, “can help launch or spotlight word-class writers... also cling like barnacles to their reception and afford constrictive stereotypes” (Apter 98). Apter fears

the day when the “increased motility of global culture” makes even these labels obsolete, stating that even “very locally grounded works are acknowledged to be readily consumable by international media” (Apter 99). What this all means is that Murakami and other “‘foreign’ writers of ambition are consciously or unconsciously writing for international markets, building translatability into their textuality” even when this results in the author being “openly accused of pandering to the interests of commercialized internationalism” (Apter 101). Strecher’s analysis of Murakami’s writing style above seems to condemn Murakami fairly conclusively in this regard. Murakami’s style of English-sounding Japanese and his inclusion of “multiculti” signifiers can be seen as an anticipation of his inevitable translation into English and other “Occident” languages.

“Kagami,” however, is fairly non-Western for a Murakami story. There’s no mention of jazz or Western fashion labels, no strange out-of-place literally-translated English idioms in Japanese (which as we will soon see are quite common in some of his other works), and the story even contains references to Japanese contemporary history and takes place in the rural Niigata Prefecture instead of the transnational metropolis of Tokyo. It is notable, then, that Murakami chooses this particular story to express his anxieties about the mirror. In a specular reflection of the phenomena Strecher and Apter identify above concerning Murakami’s relationship to his global audience, Murakami (as an extension of his first-person narrator) fears most of all “the ambush of alterity; the threatening prospect of *seeing yourself in translation*” as someone else’s reflection in a mirror (Apter 95). Once Murakami’s stories are translated in another language, they have escaped his linguistic control. Instead, someone else—his translator, his foreign reader—is now in the position of acting as the subject of the mirror, with Murakami’s text as their reflection. The story can be read as a specular dramatization of Said’s notion of the

Occident and the Orient operating as reflections of each other, with the power lying primarily on the side of the Occident, in the context of the transnational translation market.

Said's book deals with how the reality of an imagined location called "the Orient" has been positioned as a space caught within a hierarchical relationship with another imagined space called "the Occident." Europe, positioning itself as occident in this relationship, has a vested interest in the creation and perpetuation of this discourse because "European culture gained in strength... by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate" (Said 3). This relationship where these "two geographical entities... support and to an extent reflect each other" has been used as a "corporate institution for dealing with the Orient," with "dealing with" here meaning "dominating, restructuring, and having authority" over Europe's Other (5, 3). The power dynamics that exist in this relationship enable Europe to Orientalize their Other "not only because it was discovered to be 'Oriental...' but also because it *could be*—that is, submitted to being—*made* Oriental" (5-6). What is important to consider here is how the Occident sets the Orient up as its reflection. If we view this relationship from Murakami's position as a Japanese author widely read in translation in "Occident" languages, we might imagine how this specular encounter between the night watchman and his reflection mirrors the dynamics of representation described in Said's book.

In order to unpack this specular encounter in translation, I now turn to *Hako otoko* and its own figure of a reflected self in translation. In doing so, I will begin to theorize the "mirror effects" that enable the specular encounter, both in literal mirrors and in metaphoric mirrors such as what we will come to call the "translation-mirror." *Hako otoko* is a novel that resists easy summary. It begins with a newspaper clipping detailing the displacement of a community of unhoused people in Tokyo, and this primes the reader for the allegorical tale to come. In the

surrealist world of *Hako otoko* there exists entities called “box men,” who are basically homeless people who wear a human-sized cardboard box over their bodies. By wearing a box in this way, these people become invisible—not because they are literally unseeable, but because the people around them would rather not see them. By cutting a viewing panel into the box, the box man gains a powerful position of being able to see without being seen in return. The novel, told in the form of a collection of notes (a combination of notes scribbled in the journal of the primary narrator “the photographer” and literal inscriptions made on the inside of the cardboard boxes of various box men), recounts the stories of these box men and the sociopolitical reality that brought about their existence.

In *Hako otoko*, the narrator, a photographer who dons a cardboard box to become a box man, relates a strange parable to the reader of his notes that make up the novel. This is the parable of the shellweed dream. In telling this parable, the novel’s textual subject makes a figure of the possibilities and impossibilities of its own afterlife as an object in translation. In the shellweed dream parable, when one falls asleep near a strange plant called shellweed, “they say you dream of being a fish” (Abe 31, from E. Dale Saunders’ 1974 translation). When one dreams of being translated into fish form, one at first delights in the weightlessness of swimming freely through the water, but eventually one comes to miss the feeling of having feet. Once this process starts, one realizes that they are not a real fish but are rather a fake fish, and then “the bag of scales is insufferable for the fish” (32). The fish tries to wake up from the dream, but a fish has no easy means of waking up, and is trapped as a fake fish forever. However, the photographer notes that a box man is somehow immune from this fish dream because he is already fake, saying “The fake me becomes something not at all myself when I put on the box” (Abe 36).

Indeed, later in the novel, the photographer gets into an imaginary argument with the fake box man (who is also a fake doctor) when the following exchange occurs regarding the authorship of the notes we are reading as the novel *The Box Man*:

“‘If we suppose that you are the author, then the box man becomes simply a figment of the imagination’ [the photographer says].

‘Well, then, suppose I am trying to impress on you the fact that he doesn’t actually exist in order to prove his irreality.’” (106)

And finally, near the end of the novel, the photographer says to the nurse, “‘I confess... I was a fake’” (161).

A dream, it could be said, is a sort of vital mirror where the dreaming subject has a specular encounter with their subconscious mind as an object. In this dream-mirror, the fake fish is a reflected object of the photographer’s box man self—a mirror-me. The true author of the notes, be it the photographer or the fake doctor or some other narrator, that we read as the translated novel *The Box Man* is unknown even in the story. The photographer imagines, reimagines, and is himself imagined by the other characters in the story at various points—one author replacing the others with little to no differentiation between them. Knowing with one-hundred percent authority who is real and who is fake is impossible. As Andrew Hock Soon Ng writes in his essay “Confronting the Modern,” the box man is “an uncanny configuration who is at once human and inhuman, a self whose *subjectivity* is profoundly compromised by the fragmenting mirror... to the point of becoming objectified” (Ng 320). There is no one true “box man” but rather a kaleidoscope of possible box men, akin to the multiplex possible interpretations of a source text in translation. This box man self, just like the fish, is a self of ambiguous authenticity.

Furthermore, the box, like the fish, is a way to uncomfortably contain the self into an object, just as translation is a way to oftentimes uncomfortably contain a language-world in a different language as an object of translation. If we compare this to the literal Japanese novel *Hako otoko*, we can first imagine Abe, the author-subject, translated and contained into book-object form as *Hako otoko*. This book acts like the box that contains the photographer. When this text is translated into another language as *The Box Man*, the box that originally contained the author (*Hako otoko*) has been reflected in a mirror akin to the dream-mirror of the shellweed dream, with its mirror-me (*The Box Man*) now donning a new container that has only an ambiguous relationship with the original (the dream fish). As the photographer considers in verse, “from the human chrysalis that is the box man, / Even I know not / What kind of living being will issue forth” (41). The text of *Hako Otoko* is a box man chrysalis, unable to figure the living afterlife of translation that issues from it as *The Box Man*. One box of only dubious relationship to the subject contained within it begets a new box that itself only has a dubious relationship to the box that came before it. Translation, as figured in *Hako Otoko*—and dramatized by its translation into *The Box Man*—is the dream fish of a box man.

Here we might be able to imagine the impossibility of translation figured in the text of *Hako otoko*. The language world of the original text becomes contained uncomfortably in an object unfit to its anatomy, like the fish containing the dreaming subject. In this figure, the authenticity of translation to its original would be as dubious as the authenticity of a text to its author. However, this would leave us in a position where the problem of the original and translation being equally unknowable would seem to appear. While this free play of authenticity can occur at the level of the text, some readers of translation pause before accepting the idea that this free play exists in the reality of author-text-translation. Although we might here recall the

notion of “complementarity” in the translation theories of thinkers like Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin. Translation theorist Lydia Liu writes in her book *Tokens of Exchange* (1999) that complementarity “enables a powerful critique of the metaphysical ground of traditional semantics that has long dominated the translation theories of the West” (Liu 14). As such, we can consider this figure in *Hako otoko* as a starting point for engaging with complementarity within the text-translation relationship to avoid getting caught up in the need for “equivalence” between meanings across languages (13). *Hako otoko* figures translation as a process that uncomfortably contains the source text into a complimentary translated text, not one that makes equivalences. The dream fish is not the “same as” the photographer box man but is rather something he becomes only as a result of the specular encounter with his dreaming mirror. The translated text, like the fish dream of the box man, reflects, distorts, and contains its source-text subject within the translated object. As we will now see, a mirror has these exact effects on its viewing subject: reflecting a subject as a distorted object contained within in its frame. These effects—what I will henceforth refer to respectively as *reflection*, *distortion*, and *containment*—are the three “mirror effects.”

Mirror Effects of the Translation Mirror

As must be considered throughout our reading of specular encounters, a physical mirror exists in physical space with recognizable and predictable mechanical effects. We might think of these effects as a mirror’s “modes of operation.” These mirror effects are how mirrors manifest or come into being, and their effects are what make mirroring possible in the first place. The physical mirror has many forms and not every mirror has the same appearance or purpose.

Nonetheless, there are certain similarities of function among all mirrors. In simplest terms and by definition, a mirror is “any polished surface that diverts a ray of light according to the law of reflection” (Britannica). A mirror also distorts whatever it reflects according to these laws. Further, a mirror necessarily contains the reflection in its frame. What it is that a mirror reflects, distorts, and contains is always the reflected subject, and in doing so, these mechanisms of the mirror bring the reflected subject out of itself have the potential to make possible Adorno’s vision of a differentiated and objectified subject. However, like the night watchman in Murakami’s short story, this aspect of the mirror also threatens to replace the physical with the virtual. As Gilles Deleuze argues in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, “the mirror-image is virtual in relation to the actual character that the mirror catches” and this virtuality threatens to “absorb the entire actuality of the character” (Deleuze 70). This conflict between the supposed transcendent subject of the mirror and its assumed immanent reflected object is at the heart of the violence of the mirror encounter. We will return to this dilemma, but for now I’d like to establish that that the mirror is defined by its relationship as an object off of which light is reflected, and the subject of this reflection confronts itself going beyond the bounds of its subject-position, becoming an object held in the frame of the mirror. This confrontation is at times violent, at times ambiguous, and, as I argue, has the potential for reconciliation, as well. As we will see, because translation reflects, distorts, and contains a subject in this way, it can be said to possess these “mirror effects.”

Let us begin pinning down the specifics of these three mirror effects as they function in physical mirrors by examining the mirror scene of *The Box Man*. In the chapter titled *Kagami no naka kara* (trans. “In a Mirror”), the photographer, wearing his box, journeys to the hospital at night to return the money given to him to destroy his box. Once he arrives, he notices a light on

in a window and decides to peek inside. However “the window was rather high and the lower half was frosted glass” preventing him from looking in (Abe 44). The photographer retrieves a car’s rear-view mirror from his bag. He stretches one arm through the viewing window of his box and positions the mirror in such a way that he can look through the top half of the window. From this position, he writes “I was able to view everything at an almost perfect angle” (44). However, what he saw through the mirror becomes distorted in his recollection of the scene. He remembers “there were two people in [the room]... Other things were merely the reflections of mosaic fragments, compounded, as in the eye of some insect.” These two people are the nurse, who was “stark naked,” and unfathomably, another box man identical to himself. Then, spliced into the text of the book itself, appears the following typographical non-sequitur:

(this
(Suddenly it occurred to me. Somewhere I remembered having seen exactly the same scene as

(Abe 45)

From the outset, we can immediately see the mirror’s obvious mechanical function of reflection. To what extent we can trust the narrator of *The Box Man* is up for debate. However, the narrator remains consistent insofar as when he writes scenes that he himself is present in, he writes them as if he is physically there. Therefore, we would not be able to see the scene within the hospital if the photographer could not himself see its reflection in the mirror. The mirror, in this way, enables a subject to glimpse the otherwise out-of-sight. For a further example, a subject’s own face remains perpetually unseen unless viewed in reflection (or in the

photography-mirror). A non-English language world, too, can only be viewed by the monolingually English-speaking subject as a reflection in the translation-mirror. The desire for what Emily Apter describes an increased “motility of global culture” can be read as a desire for all of the world’s cultures to be viewable in a single translation-mirror’s reflection. So here we have the first mirror effect: reflection, the redirection of an image that makes visible what otherwise would be in the moment out of sight for the viewing subject.

Distortion is the intentional or unintentional warping of an image in reflection. The image redirected by a mirror is not a one-to-one recreation of the original image, but rather a distorted image. The distortions that an image undergoes vary from mirror to mirror (a rear-view mirror does not invert top and bottom the way the reflective surface of a spoon does). Nonetheless, these distortions follow a pattern of production. A lateral flip, for instance—where right becomes left—occurs frequently in conventionally mirrored images. Written on the car mirror that the photographer is using in this scene might very well be the recognizable phrase “Objects in mirror are closer than they appear.” In the example above, the images reflected in the rear-view mirror grow mosaic and diffuse the further the narrator looks from the two people in the center of the image. Distortions *inevitably* develop in reflection, no matter how clear and well-designed the mirror. However, some mirrors are designed with intentional distortions, such as a makeup mirror that enlarges its reflected image. The translation-mirror functions similarly “in the act of wholesale translation into English” (Spivak 371). This mirror often intentionally distorts all the languages of the world into what Gayatri Spivak in her essay “The Politics of Translation” calls “a sort of with-it translate” as part of the market desire for a universally translatable monoculture (Spivak 372). This language-distortion has the effect of making “literature by a woman in Palestine... resemble... something by a man in Taiwan... the rhetoricity of Chinese

[resemble] Arabic... [and the] cultural politics of the capitalist Asia-Pacific [resemble] devastated West Africa..." (Spivak 372). In this manner, the second mirror effect is that of distortion. An image reflected by a mirror is not the same as if it had been viewed unreflected.

The third mirror effect is that of containment. The reflected image is held within the frame of the mirror, containing it in a boundary. This boundary need not be equal in area to the actual size of the reflected image, as a mirror is capable of reflecting a scene far larger than it itself is. The narrator's rear-view mirror takes the entire room of the hospital, two adults, and all the other sundry items within the room and contains them within its few inches-long plastic frame. Mirrors have borders, lines of demarcation that limit what is reflection and what is outside of reflection. Furthermore, mirrors, in containing the reflection, capture what it is they reflect and translate it into a two-dimensional plane. The subject of the reflection must be set into the frame of the mirror in order for their reflection to be visible to the subject. As discussed above in *Hako otoko*'s figuring of its own translation, *Hako otoko*'s subject is contained within the translation-mirror as *The Box Man* in such a way as to make its subject visible to the English-reader. This is the final mechanical function of a mirror—containment of what is reflected within the boundaries of the mirror.

Now, with these three mirror effects of the physical mirror parsed out, we can begin to develop a method to read what acts like mirror through causing these mirror effects. As suggested above, that which is said to act like a mirror *need not itself be* a literal mirror. The three mirror effects above—reflection, distortion, and containment—perform quite well even without one. Let us begin to play with this by imagining how the upside-down typography from *The Box Man* above possesses these mirror effects, revealing the photographer's childhood trauma to the reader in a specular encounter. By demonstrating a reading of a figured mirror in

this way, we can come to understand the process through which reading reflections acts as a means to encounter what is concealed in the mirror. Once we have oriented ourselves towards the path to this space for communication with an object-self, we can follow it to carry out a reading of the translation-mirror.

Distortion is obvious, and it is what clues us in that perhaps a specular encounter is taking place. *A mirror can be well hidden*, as in a funhouse where one wanders a maze of mirrors searching for the spaces between—smudges on the mirror’s glass betraying its presence. So we begin with the distortion of the inversion of the text, as in a concave mirror, forcing one to physically grapple with the book to read it properly. The Japanese original finds its text similarly distorted; however, rather than a vertical inversion, this distortion manifests as a ninety-degree rotation. As we will later see in greater detail, this evidences a mirror-within-a-mirror—that in fact this English translation above is held in a doubled mirror as a doubled reflection. For now, let us focus on the English translated text within the context of the English translation itself. And therefore the distortion this text underwent through reflection is, for the time being, simply the lateral and vertical inversions of the text. While 90-degree rotations are not the usual distortions of literal physical mirrors, the mirror effect of distortion can nonetheless be identified here. Because these typographical non-sequiturs (90 degree rotation of characters in the Japanese and 180 degree vertical flip of the line in the English) are only found in this single line from the chapter titled “In a Mirror” which deals explicitly with mirroring and mirror images, reading these typographical distortions as the result of a metaphorical mirror seems uncontroversial.

Containment, too, can be seen quite clearly upon careful consideration. The distorted text is contained between the open and closed parentheses. These curved lines of demarcation suggest the concave mirror that produces the lateral flip above, and furthermore the distortion begins and

ends at the points where these parentheses open and close. There, in the space between parentheses, a reflection has been fixed in place—in this case a literal reflection of a character thinking back on an odd sense of *déjà vu* that strikes him as he furtively gazes with the rear-view mirror into a place where he does not belong. This cerebral reflection forces the narrator to consider himself and his past as events that can only be conceptualized as objects in reflection. These reflections are printed onto the two-dimensional container of the page of the notebook that the narrator is writing on.

And so, we need only to pinpoint the reflected image by answering the question: *What is it we are able to encounter now in reflection that was up until this point kept out of sight?* This question is the formative zone of the specular encounter because concealed-revealed in every mirror is a reflected subject-object. Let us begin by undistorting the text: “Suddenly it occurred to me. Somewhere I remembered having seen exactly the same scene as this.” This image in reflection triggered a cognitive echo of some event in the photographer’s life. To trace this echo, we must orient ourselves towards a locus of trauma. What we are hearing in the narrator’s voice are words spoken by the “story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality... that is not otherwise available” (Caruth 4). So writes Cathy Caruth in her opus *Unclaimed Experience* to build a theory of trauma through Freud’s supposition of a trauma’s recurrences as concentric reflective echoes in the psyche of its victim (Caruth 1).

The photographer endured a trauma in his past that reveals itself to both him and the reflection-oriented reader in this mechanically mirrored text. Namely, when the photographer was a child, he constructed a cardboard-and-mirror apparatus that he uses to peep on the bathroom of the piano teacher who lives next door. This results in a reversal where the piano teacher catches him and decides that ““it would be best to make you [the photographer as a child]

experience the same feelings that you caused me” (Abe 156). She forces him (with only her invisible gaze through the peephole of an interior room) to strip in front of her, which ends in him passing “seminal emission” as she watches anonymously (Abe 158).

Inside the frame of this mirrored text, we can see the traumatic pleasure of this event reflected back to the photographer. The box that the photographer wears and the mirror he uses to look through the hospital window are a distorted reflection of the cardboard periscope his child-self used. Inside the hospital room, we have an unseeable box man watching a naked woman, as a distortion of the reflected trauma of the naked boy being watched by the unseeable woman from behind the closed door. These distortions to the reflective memory are, for Caruth, indispensable to the recalled history of trauma. Caruth writes that “historical memory... is always a matter of distortion, a filtering of the original event through the fictions of traumatic repression, which makes the event available at best indirectly” (Caruth 15). The photographer is unable to directly account for the trauma of his childhood, able to testify to it to the reader only under the pretense of a hypothetical “Case of D,” and recall it only through the inevitable distortions of the mirror (Abe 149). The awakening to scopophilia the child experiences at the beginning of the event and then encountering it in reflection by the unseen gaze of the piano teacher through the door ultimately leads the protagonist down the path to becoming a box man.

This distortion of the naked boy being seen by the anonymous woman becoming the anonymous box man seeing the naked nurse suggests Freud’s understanding of the instinctual vicissitude of “*The turning around of an instinct upon the subject’s own self*... exhibitionism includes looking at his own body” (Freud 124). In seeing the naked nurse through his rear-view mirror, the photographer re-experiences being seen by the piano teacher, or as the photographer confesses in a marginal note “exhibitionism is merely the act of visual rape reflected in a mirror”

(Abe 87). When one encounters their specular reflection it is also akin to being viewed by that reflection. When the reflection gazes out at the reflected subject, “the one who is looked at looks back... the person who was looking becomes the one who is looked at” (Abe 81). The reflected subject becomes an object both contained in the mirror as a distorted reflection and an object of this reflection’s gaze.

The photographer’s constant fixation on seeing rather than being seen finds its source in this moment of uncontrollable objectivity, where the piano teacher absorbed him into her gazing subject, translating his naked body through her subjective lens, and forcing the one who looked to become the one who is looked at. This is the danger of Adorno’s undifferentiated subject. In forcing the child to become only object, stripping him of his subjectivity, the piano teacher left lasting wounds on his identity that ultimately led him to become a box man. This is the paranoid reading of the specular encounter—like in “Kagami” above. The violence of being replaced by one’s reflection or being stripped of one’s subjectivity has the potential to do epistemic damage to the self. So too can this damage the identity of the translated texts on the global translation market when the English-speaking readers simply expect non-English texts to read as if they were written in English. By doing so, one not only denies the subjectivity of the translated-text object but assumes a relationship of subject-object, reader-text that is violently disjunctive, with reader imagined as only subject and text as only object to be consumed. In order to break out of this dominating relationship and imagine reparative alternatives for the specular encounter, we must do more than simply propose a reversal of the hierarchy of subject and object, akin to the piano teacher reversing the intentions of the peeping boy back onto him. We might ask ourselves, what would it mean for the piano teacher to have constructed a response that allowed

the gazing boy to experience what it means to be made object without robbing him of his subjectivity entirely?

Reading reflections in the manner above opens up exciting possibilities for analysis when we consider the fluidity of the mirror effects. The important moment in this reading is chasing the reflected subject to its source. By following a reflection to the source, we orient ourselves towards a communication of what is differentiated between subject and object that leads to Adorno's vision of the peaceful union of subject and object. For, as revealed above, no reflection is without subject, and in being reflected a subject is made object, becoming a sublated union of subject-object. If we begin to expand our toolset by recognizing new mirrors, such as the translation-mirror, so too do we expand our potential to discover previously unseen, unheard reflected subjects speaking the language of "what is differentiated." Through a specular encounter with the mirror, the reflected subject-object communicates something previously unheard to both the subject of the reflection and the listener in the same way that a mirror, through reflection, makes visible that which was previously unseeable.

I now pose the question to my reader that this whole force-of-play has been dancing around since I began this reading game: *What happens when we consider the translation process itself to exert mirror effects?* It meets all of our criteria, after all. The original text is the reflected subject, the inevitable translation erosions are the distortions (not to mention the entirely new language the subject has been transposed into), and the physical medium into which the source text subject has been translated (book, article, subtitle, signage, website, etc.) is the reflection's container. What I am proposing is a shift in orientation towards a queer position from which to consider the translated text. From this orientation, deviant to the normalized line of English translation as a

homogenized part of the English-speaking subject, there is the potential to envision both the English-reading subject and the source-text subject contained together as a sublated subject-object in the frame of the translation-mirror.

It is notable that the Japanese chapter title from *Hako otoko* that contains the mirrored text above is entitled “*Kagami no naka kara*” (From within a mirror) (Trans. “In a Mirror”) because the preposition “*kara*” does not, in fact, directly equivocate to “in.” Rather, “*kara*” can be better understood literally as “from.” In this sense, what we are seeing in the chapter is that

which is coming from a mirror or is seen because of the mirror. Reading the chapter is already akin to reading a mirror. The reading subject both sits within the mirror looking out, like the box man looking into the hospital, and she reads the chapter only as a result of what the box man sees in this mirror. Consider the mirrored text in Japanese, which appears as follows:

(Original quoted text can be seen in Figure 1). “*Futo omotta. Dokoka de, kore to sokkuri na kōkei wo mita oboe ga aru.*” (Abe, *Hako...* 70).

Whereas the English text read as if inverted in a concave mirror, the Japanese original is written with each character rotated ninety-degrees clockwise. Though normally a Japanese novel is written top to bottom, right to left, in order to undistort this text, the Japanese-reader must rotate the book ninety-degrees and read left to right, as one would read a novel in English. By reading the Japanese this way, the Japanese reader reads in a manner that is, itself, a figure of the manner in which the English reader reads the book. In this sense, the

(ふと思った。何処かで、これとそっくりな光景を見た憶えがある。)

Figure 1 - The mirror text from *Hako otoko*.

Japanese-reader encounters their own language as other in the Japanese original—their language staring back at them as object in a typographic mirror.

When the English reader rotates their own translated copy of *The Box Man*, they too are forced to grapple with the book as the Japanese reader has, reading it at an odd angle from left to right. In this moment, there is a translatable communication of a universal experience: rotating a book and confronting it from an unusual orientation. No matter what sorts of distorting translation practices take place in the translation-mirror, when we read this section attuned to the language of reflection, we can be made to understand something of both our own language and the Japanese original concealed-revealed in the translation-mirror as subject-object.

Furthermore, when either the Japanese-reader or the English-reader comes across this upside-down text on the page, the text forces them to encounter their own language rendered unreadable, unintelligible, and ultimately Other until the reader makes this reflective turn, rotating the text and encountering it as one reads from or because-of a mirror. In this moment, when the both the Japanese-reader and the English-reader un-distorts the text, they have a specular encounter of their own language contained in this typographic mirror. We can comprehend the doubled-reflection game at work in the cohesion of this encounter with one's own language as Other *and* the reflective processes that altered the Japanese-original distorted text into this distortion-prime English-translated text. In other words, the reader of the Japanese experiences a specular encounter with the typographic mirror text in "*Kagami no naka kara*," then the process of translation puts the original text through the mechanics of the translation-mirror, and finally the reader of the English translation encounters the reflection of *this reflection* in their own specular encounter with the typographic mirror text in "In a Mirror." And through

this the English-reader has the potential to encounter herself as well as the Japanese-reading Other both contained together as subject-objects in this doubled translation mirror.

This moment of doubled reflection is significant—when the language of reflection communicates not only the reflection’s concealed reflected subject, but also when the viewing subject is revealed to herself as reflected object contained in the mirror. The two discrete reflections become one. Two subjects become together Object...

Self | Other | *Self*

Text | Translation | *Text*

Half-Cast Translations in *Umibe no Kafuka*

As profound as this moment has the potential to be—where self and Other share a specular encounter with each other as subject-objects in the translation mirror—the global translation market has made reading this translation-mirror more difficult by marring its surface through certain normalized translation practices in dominant languages. These scuffs to the mirror occur when source texts are all translated invisibly into a translateese that makes all the world’s cultures read as one transnational monoculture. We can find evidence of these practices in both *The Box Man* and Murakami’s *Kafka on the Shore* (Orig. *Umibe no Kafuka*). However, it is notable to point out how these two texts have experienced these erosive translation processes in different ways and under different circumstances, affecting one text much more than the other. As we will discover, not all of these translation practices are necessarily hostile, and in fact some indeed hold the intentionality of the source text close to heart, but they are inevitable when a text is translated for a market.

Hako otoko is a relatively obscure novel when compared with some of Abe's other works such as *Suna no onna (The Woman in the Dunes)*—which gained international notoriety in part because of its 1964 film adaptation written by Abe, directed by Teshigahara Hiroshi, with music composed by Takemitsu Toru. *Hako otoko* was written and translated nearly fifty years ago, at least a decade before the international successes of Japanese pop novelists in translation (such as Yoshimoto Banana, Murakami Ryū, and Murakami Haruki himself). It was thus saved from some of the worst of the translation practices that come along with the expectation of pop-status. Although, a 2024 film release of *Hako otoko* recently debuted in Japan after a successful run at the 74th Berlin Film Festival. Only time will tell if *Hako otoko* maintains its relative obscurity with English-language audiences.

In stark contrast to *Hako otoko* stands Murakami's 2002 novel *Umibe no Kafka* (trans. *Kafka on the Shore* by Phillip Gabriel in 2005), which, aside from winning multiple international book awards such as the 2006 World Fantasy Award, is one of Murakami's most popularly successful novels in translation. The novel tells the story of a fourteen-year old boy named Kafka Tamura, who runs away from his abusive father and the Oedipal prophecy that has been made about his life. In his flight from destiny, Kafka only manages to enact the very curse his father placed on him—sleeping with his sister, falling in love with his mother, and, through his shadow-self, murdering his father. Kafka's story is paired with the story of an elderly disabled man named Nakata who is missing half of his shadow and goes on a bizarre quest to mend it. *Umibe no Kafka* is in many ways a story about specular encounters with the Other, and through this confrontation there is a sort of sublation into a higher form of consciousness. As the philosophy-major prostitute says to the truck driver Hoshino, ““For me *I'm* the self, and *you're*

the object. For you, of course, it's the exact opposite... by exchanging self and object, we can project ourselves onto the other and gain self-consciousness'" (Murakami 274, trans. Gabriel).

These subject-object, self-other exchanges and similar specular encounters exist throughout the novel. For instance, in the prologue of the novel, Kafka, one of the novel's protagonists, prepares to run away from home. Here in his father's office he shares a conversation with a mysterious character named Crow, who, as we find out later in the novel, is not really there. Rather, Crow is Kafka's shadow made manifest, capable of acting as an agent. Crow is Kafka's other-self literally objectified as a separate persona. To Kafka in this scene, however, Crow is simply a person with whom he shares something like a brotherly friendship. At times, however, this relationship appears a little strange. Kafka and Crow frequently repeat words and thoughts back to each other. Furthermore, typographical nuances make Crow's long monologues appear in bold, like shadows of the text, and occasionally this voice overcomes Kafka's first person narration in a jarring shift to second person.

These uncanny occurrences are all designed to clue the reader into the unique relationship between self and shadow that appears in the prologue and continues throughout the novel. However, in the English translation, the very first clue of this relationship has been broken up like a mirror with a crack running through it. In the Japanese, the line reads as follows:

「そのときはそのときで考える」と僕は言う。

、 、 、 、 、 、 、 、 、 、 、 、 、 、 、

「そのときはそのときで考える」と少年は手のひらにのせて重みをはかるみたいに、僕の言葉をそのまま繰り返す。

“Sono toki wa sono toki de kangaeru” to boku wa iu.

“Sono toki wa sono toki de kangaeru” *to shōnen wa te no hira ni nosete omomi wo hakaru mitai ni, boku no kotoba wo sono mama kurikaesu.*

(Murakami, vol. 1, 6)

Note both how the two bracketed lines are identical and the typographical nuance of the line of commas between them. These commas above the characters in some Japanese texts act like italics in English texts, and in this case they serve both as emphasis, making Crow’s sarcasm come through clearly in the text, and as the line of a surface upon which Crow’s perfect shadow of Kafka’s words has been cast, or the frame of a mirror where Kafka confronts his own specular image in reflection. Crow directly repeats Kafka, and the further dialogue tag makes this clear with the words “*boku no kotoba wo sono mama kurikaesu*” (he repeats my exact words).

However, the published English translation reads:

“I’ll think about that when the time comes,” I say.

“*When the time comes,*” Crow repeats, as if weighing these words in his hand.

(Murakami, Gabriel 3)

It is notable that even in English, the wavering characters in italics might suggest the distortions that accompany shadows cast on uneven surfaces or reflections made in a pool of water. Therefore, this typographic mirror could communicate even in translation. All the same, the translation has made a subtle but nonetheless impactful alteration to this textual mirror. The English translator made the choice to render only half of the Crow’s utterance in a translation strategy Danish Murakami-translator Mette Holm calls “condensation: [the translator] *translates in a shorter way*” (Holm 129). Furthermore, the translator also “*leaves out a unit of meaning*” in a technique Holm calls deletion when he trims down Crow’s dialogue tag. Let us consider why the translator employed these strategies when translating this exchange.

In English, verbs require subjects in completed sentences. This is not so in Japanese. This allows Crow to directly repeat Kafka's words in Japanese and still make sense even though Kafka buries the subject in his statement: "*Sono toki wa sono toki de [boku ga] kangaeru*" ("[I will] think about that time when it is that time," trans. mine). However, if the same were done in English, a literal translation of Crow's repetition would have to read "I'll think about that when the time comes." This might have been strange to an English reader because, after all, Crow is not the one who is supposedly going to be doing the thinking. A literal translation of the sense of Crow's words might have been something like "You'll think about that when the time comes." The issue with this is that it makes the dialogue tag odd—no longer is Crow repeating Kafka's words back to him!

So to solve this problem, the translator chooses to have Crow repeat only half of what Kafka says. Except that now the shadow cast on the page through the typographic nuance has been rendered half-cast. Perhaps this wouldn't matter in some books, but in *Umibe no Kafuka* there *are* characters with only half a shadow (like the bumbling but good-hearted old man Nakata and the mysteriously charming Miss Saeki), and Kafka is not one of them. Thus, rendering Kafka and Crow's exchange in this manner obfuscates the signpost Murakami has left for the canny reader to stumble upon by making Kafka resemble other characters. As we will see, forcing Kafka to resemble other characters through translation decisions is a pattern that the translation repeats frequently. In order to produce a translation easily readable to the English-speaking subject, the world of the novel must be suggestively altered. These sorts of obfuscations make our job as readers of the translation-mirror more difficult. What was once a clear and obvious encounter with self and shadow becomes something else—something only half there.

These sorts of half-cast translations results in a scuff on the translation-mirror that makes encountering the specular more difficult. In prioritizing the readability of the translation, the translator has also, whether intentionally or not, prioritized the English-reading subject's ease of absorption of the source text object. To read through this half-casted shadow, we must pay deeper attention to Kafka and Crow's relationship as the novel continues, especially to the points where we see the strange typography and point-of-view changes manifested in Crow's narration.

For instance, in the final chapters of the novel, Kafka enters another world accessible to this one by going through a deep forest only when a mysterious metaphysical entrance stone is opened. Here in this other world, Kafka has a reunion with the woman he is in love with, Miss Saeki, who also might be his mother. Similar to the photographer in *Hako otoko*, Kafka has been trying to work through a childhood trauma of forced objectivity. His mother inadvertently inflicted this trauma on him in youth when she, taking his sister with her, abandoned him with his malicious father. After the two communicate a close and meaningful dialogue where each shares their interior world with the other, the following exchange occurs:

「ねえ、田村くん、あなたは私のことをゆるしてくれる？」...

「佐伯さん、もし僕にそうする資格があるなら、僕はあなたをゆるします。」

お母さん、と君は言う、僕はあなたをゆるします。そして君の心の中で、凍っていたなにかが音をたてる。

“Nee, Tamura kun, anata wa watashi no koto wo yurushite kureru?” ...

“Saeki san, moshi boku ni sō suru shikaku ga aru nara, boku wa anata wo yurushimasu.”

Okaasan, to kimi wa iu, boku wa anata wo yurushimasu. Soshite kimi no kokoro no naka de, kootte ita nanika ga oto wo tateru.

(Murakami, vol. 2, 471).

“Kafka—do you forgive me?” ...

“Miss Saeki, if I really do have the right to, then yes—I do forgive you,” I tell her.

**Mother, you say. I forgive you. And with those words, audibly,
the frozen part of your heart crumbles**

(Murakami, Gabriel 442)

In this moment, we see a specular reconciliation between the subjects of Kafka and his mother, with the Crow’s bold text acting as a sort of point of demarcation delineating precisely where this moment of subject-object reconciliation occurs. In a way, Crow’s text here acts as a mirror, allowing the subjects of Kafka and his mother Miss Saeki to come together as sublated subject-objects. Crow—Kafka’s mirror-me—reflects Kafka’s words, with a noticeable distortion of both the bold text and the use of “*okaasan*” ([my] mother) instead of Miss Saeki’s name. Furthermore, the text’s point of view shifts in this reflected passage into second-person. This “you-turn” forces both Kafka *and* the reading subject to confront themselves as an object contained in this typographic mirror. Reading this passage through the language of reflection, we can come across a similar doubled-reflection that we saw in the *Hako otoko* mirror text. This you-turn reads clearly in both Japanese and English as a confrontation between textual subject and reading object that, through the translation mirror, becomes a doubled reflection in the English-translation. In spite of the earlier half-casted shadow, if a reader attunes themselves to reading the specular encounters in the translation mirror, this subject-object reconciliation can still be understood.

Let us move our analysis to a different sort of obfuscation of the translation-mirror, the translator’s frequent anglicizations of the characters’ dialogue compared to anglicizations of Kafka’s narration. In the novel, Oshima is a cool, extremely intelligent, cultured young androgenous, transgender man who works at the library where Kafka ends up living. He is

perhaps Kafka's greatest ally and closest friend throughout the novel. At one point in the novel, the two are discussing Kafka's sexual relationship with the fifty-year-old head librarian, Miss Saeki. Oshima, when explaining the inevitability that the two would fall for each other, says to Kafka,

「そして、田村カフカくん、そこに君が現れた。キュウリのごとくクールに、カフカのごとくミステリアスに」

“Soshite, Tamura Kafuka kun, soko ni kimi ga arawareta. Kyūri no gotoku kuuru ni, Kafuka no gotoku misuteriasu ni” (Murakami, vol. 2, 232).

“But then *you* showed up, Kafka. Cool as a cucumber, mysterious as the real Kafka” (Murakami, Gabriel 335).

This is notable because, in the Japanese, the English idiom “cool as a cucumber” *actually appears*: “*kyūri no gotoku kuuru ni*” (“as cool-ly as a cucumber,” trans. mine). This is not at all an expression commonly used in Japanese, and Oshima using it here is quite jarring and yet is emblematic of Oshima's personality—demonstrating his worldliness, intellect, and disregard for cultural norms. However, when translated this way, the idiom “‘blended back’ into the English” (Holm 129).

Holm, in her analysis of Murakami translation techniques, writes that “[Murakami] has a habit of anglicizing the Japanese language.” While the anglicisms suggest what Apter might view as Murakami's consideration of the future English translation of his text, these anglicisms are, ironically, not easy to translate into English because their “‘foreignness’ gets lost” (Holm 129). While indeed true that the foreignness gets lost, its noticeable out-of-placeness could still be potentially translatable if the translation had not already been full of anglicized Japanese in places where Murakami did not intend as the text became homogenized into a transnational

English-speaking monoculture. These anglicizations are a result of a translation strategy Holm calls adaptation where a translator “recreates the effect [of the original], entirely or partially” (129). These sorts of translations logically re-render the sense of the Japanese into an identifiable, digestible English phrase or idiom. In doing so, the translation conceals the rhetoricity of the source text, overcoding it with a “with-it tranlatese” that is easily homogenized by the English-reading subject.

For example, when Kafka and Crow are talking in the prologue, Crow asks Kafka,

「出どころのあたりの誰かの引き出し—というところかな？」

“*Dedokoro no atari no dareka no hikidashi—to iu tokoro kana*”

(Murakami, vol. 1, 6)

“I imagine you’ve started by rifling drawers, am I right?”

(Murakami, Gabriel 6).

The expression “rifling [through] drawers” is a common English expression that means to dig through desk or cabinet drawers in order to look for something. In Japanese, such an expression does not exist in the same way. In the Japanese text, the Crow says “*Dedokoro no atari no dareka no hikidashi*” (“it came from the drawer of someone around here,” trans. mine) which he follows by the rhetorical question “*to iu tokoro kana?*” (“do you mean such a place, I wonder,” trans. mine). The meaning is the same—Crow questions if Kafka stole the money from his father’s study—but by altering the rhetoricity of the original in this way, a certain element of English-ness is injected into the speaker that was not intended in the original text. Certainly, the published translation reads smoother, but this is at the cost of sandpapering the character’s Japanese so that it reads like native English.

These sorts of anglicizations appear frequently in the translation of Kafka's internal narration. Here are only a couple of the many examples: the casual "When I come to" (Murakami, Gabriel 69) for the clinical 「意識が戻ったとき」 "*ishiki ga modotta toki*" (Murakami, *jō* 140, "When consciousness returned," trans. mine), or "the sunlight wash over me" (Murakami, Gabriel 151) for the poetic 「日溜りに身をひたす」 "*hidamari ni mi wo hitasu*" (Murakami, *jō* 280, I immerse my body into the pool of sunlight, trans. mine). The original Japanese in these two examples is quite beautiful and literary. "*Hidamari*" (sunny spot, *lit.* "pile" or "pool" of sun), in particular, is more of a *kakikotoba* or "literary word," not the sort of phrase commonly spoken by a teenager. Furthermore, in this sentence, "*hidamari*" is modified with the particle "*ni*" which marks into what the narrator is being "*hitasu*" (to immerse, steep, moisten). Rendering this phrase as the familiar "wash over" ignores the sense in the original of Kafka *entering into* that which is immersing him, like a teabag into tea, rather than the sunlight being poured onto him. Entering into the sun here, rather than the sun simply washing over him, foreshadows his later entrance into the other world further into the woods where he is doing his sunbathing. While this anglicization makes Kafka's experience in the sunlight easily recognizable by the English-speaking subject, these sorts of anglicizations mar the truth of Kafka's experience and erode the story's rich symbolism, not to mention how they scuff the translation-mirror.

Back to the original point of the "Cool as a cucumber" line. Had the translation not already been full of these sorts of oftentimes curious anglicizations, the line above might have jumped out at the reader as out of the ordinary and potentially even characteristic of Oshima. The reason that Oshima saying "cool as a cucumber" is so effective, in ways that the forced anglicizations of Kafka's narration is not, is that it suits his character to speak in that manner.

English readers can't identify how Oshima saying "cool as a cucumber" is a very Oshima-esque way to speak because *all of the characters* speak like Oshima—in this sort of anglicized translatese.

Similarly, the numerous and often humorous anglicizations of the truck driver Hoshino's countless reiterations of the Japanese expression 「参ったな」 "*Maitta na*" (I give up) also suit his character and are perhaps the only way to meaningfully translate this phrase's flexible utility. It is at times translated as "Jeez" (209), later in the same chapter as "Man alive" (211), and even "Gimme a break" (446). These varied anglicizations of the phrase suit the humor of Hoshino's rough, streetwise character.

On the other hand, smooth anglicizations of Kafka's oftentimes surprisingly literary Japanese overcode the bright, soft-spoken Kafka into some sort of "with-it" English-speaking teenager. If we are have a specular encounter with someone hidden in the frame of the mirror of translation, it is important to remember that the self we are reading in translation might have been distorted by these sorts of smooth anglicizations. We are thus to be wary of them when they appear in a translated text.

Now let us turn to the counterexample of *Hako otoko* which is not at all reliant on anglicizations. Rather, Abe's unsettling, oftentimes even alienating Japanese is translated with more rhetoricity throughout the novel. Consider the following translation of a section where the narrator interrogates his imagined reader about their knowledge of the elusive concept of the "box man:"

For example, in your case, I'm sure you've not yet heard of a box man. Though there can't be any statistics, there is evidence that a rather large number of them are living in concealment throughout the country. But I've

never heard that box men are being talked about anywhere. Evidently the world intends to keep its mouth tightly shut about them.

Have you ever actually seen one?

Let's stop fooling each other now. Certainly a box man is hardly conspicuous. He is like a piece of rubbish shoved between a guardrail and a public toilet or underneath a footbridge. But that's different from being inconspicuous or invisible. Since he is not especially uncommon, there is every opportunity of seeing one. Surely, even you have, at least once. But I also realize full well that you don't want to admit it.

(Abe, Saunders 8).

The narrator's relentless interrogation of the reader here can feel oddly unsettling. Especially the occasionally bizarre sentence formations such as "Let's stop fooling each other now." In the Japanese this sentence reads, 「白を切りあうのも、その辺までにしておこ
う」 ”*shira wo kiri au no mo, sono hen made ni shite okō*” (Abe 15, Let's feign ignorance up to here, trans. mine). The two sentences are syntactically similar. In English, “Come now, let's stop fooling around” is a common construction of the logical meaning of this sentence that would fit with the narrator's style of speech, but the translator insisted on putting the temporal condition at the end as it appeared in the original Japanese. In “The Task of the Translator,” Walter Benjamin writes that “a real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original... this may be achieved... by a literal rendering of the syntax” (Benjamin 81). This unusual rhetorical rendering of the logical meaning of this sentence has a profound and arresting effect on the English-speaking reader. We can read clearly the upsetting intensity of the narrator's inquisition in part because the original was not covered by a reconfigured syntax. It is notable that the phrase “*Shira wo kiru*” is itself an idiomatic expression in Japanese—lit. “to cut the white,” or to play innocent or feign ignorance. To translate one idiom into a complementary English expression,

“to fool each other,” might be something like an anglicization, but it is one that achieves a similar effect to the original.

In Abe’s Japanese, as well, a reader might get the sense of something alien and off-putting. The sentence “Have you actually seen one?” originally reads 「では、見掛けた事は——」 ”*De wa, mikaketa koto wa—?*” (well then, have you happened to have seen...?, trans. mine) shares the sudden startling confrontational tone of the English. The sentence ends before the question has been asked, forcing the reader to confront themselves with the full question on their own. Furthermore, “*Mikaketa*” and “*koto*” have both been fully written in *kanji* (Chinese characters used in Japanese) even though these words in this context are usually written out in contemporary Japanese fully in *kana* (Japanese phonetic alphabet). This choice to write these words with *kanji* would have been normal for writers of the generations before Abe. However, by the time Abe is writing in the 70s, 「事」 ”*koto*” (thing) was conventionally written out as 「こと」 when not referring to the noun “thing.” In this case, the construction “*X koto wa*” uses “*koto*” as a sort of conceptual filler to communicate the question of “have you had the experience of *X*.” In these situations, “*koto*” does not really mean “thing” but is rather performing something like a syntactical function. In Murakami’s text, we can see every instance of this same construction has “*koto*” written out in *kana* rather than written in *kanji*. Rendering it in *kanji* gives a Abe’s Japanese an old-fashioned or elevated style.

The English translation cannot rely on subtleties like *kanji-kana* relationships to communicate this elevated, outdated tone. In this way, an unavoidable erosion of the original Japanese takes place. The English translation attempts to employ precise off-putting and unusual vocabulary and sentence constructions to evoke a similar effect. A translation, as suggested by

Hako otoko's figuring of its own afterlife in translation, can never comfortably capture the complete identity of the source text, and as such its relationship to the identity of its source is a distorted one at best. The translation-mirror inevitably distorts the text it reflects. We cannot read in English the experienced effect of Abe's *kanji* usage in translation, but we can read the echoes of it in the mood of the English. To these echoes the reader of specular reflections must attune themselves. What we encounter might not be the sound-in-itself but rather a reverberation of sound carrying sonically the resonances of the original that have been distorted, amplified, or muffled by the translation-reverberation, just as, for Caruth, trauma is only re-experienced in these sorts of distorted reverberations.

The examples above evidence the scuffs and smudges that appear on the mirror of translation through the erosions of the English-speaking translation market. Things got lost *en route* like half of Kafka's shadow, some things got added where they weren't before like the many anglicizations of Murakami's Japanese, and some things tried to stay the same but nonetheless were unavoidably altered like the intentional *kanji*-usage in *Hako otoko*. Reading the half-casted translation-shadow forces us to consider the inevitable distortions of the reflection contained in the translation-mirror. We might read these as echoes of the abrasions that the process of translation caused on the Japanese novels through homogenizing translation practices, in a similar way to how the undifferentiated subject of the gazing piano teacher wounded the child photographer's subjectivity in *Hako otoko*.

The translation-reading subject tends to miss how the commercial translation practices have resulted in a domination over what it sees as the source text object on the translation market through erosive translation practices that coercively make the source text read as if written by a

homogenized, translatable monoculture. However, as Adorno writes, this “historical separation must not be... magically transformed into an invariant” (Adorno 246). The illusion of subject and object as separate and unequal can be overcome through a sublation into subject-object in the “communication of what is differentiated” (247). It is precisely through encounters with the specular in the translation mirror that I imagine this communication to take place through translation.

Translation is the medium for this communication. Through translation, the reading subject is made to listen, or rather to be spoken through with the voice of the Other. Translation is the mirror where the English-speaking subject sees and is made to see itself as “a consciousness objectified to itself” through self-reflection (Adorno 249). Here, in the frame of the translation-mirror, encountering specular reflections of ourselves, we may come to understand the silence cutting between subject and object. As Spivak envisions, it is precisely through translation that “meaning hops into the spacy emptiness between two named historical languages” — where we can experience an “otherness... differed-deferred into an other self who resembles us... and with whom we can communicate” (Spivak 370-71). In order to communicate with our other self, we must read translation not as simply an extension of our own language-subjectivity, but as a mirror where we may confront our own language and the source language contained together as a sublated subject-object.

The distorting practices of the translation market, where English-speaking subjectivity has denied the subjectivity of the source texts it translates, leave scuffs on the surface of the text that mar this translation-mirror. However, beneath this, like the blood flowing past the site of an old scar earned in childhood, there is a vital emergence where consideration of object-self and textual-subject can be viewed in reflection in the specular translation-mirror. Once oriented

towards this space—once we stand confronting the translation-mirror—only then may we begin to train ourselves to hear the voice of our other, a self like us speaking through the mirror in the language of reflection. Through this communication, we may one day reach the peace that Adorno conceives of as subject and object differentiated without one dominating the other, or what Apter imagines as the world's cultures standing united in their difference.

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CHAPTER TWO

Transmedial Incoherence – Disorientating Adaptations in the Japanese Gothic

Much of it was, I thought, incoherent...

- Ursula K. Le Guin, “*First Thoughts on Gedo Senki*”

Watashi wa konna koe ja nai.

- Nishio Isin, “*Atogaki*” from *Hanamonogatari*¹⁶

As discussed in the prior chapter, the identification a subject may find in their reflection is contingent upon speculative leaps of indexicality. Something is inherently *me-enough* in my reflection to make it identifiable as myself, and a reflection that is not behaving as expected will shatter this speculative bridge—as what happens between the night watchman and his haunted reflection in Murakami’s short story “Kagami.” When a source text becomes adapted into another medium that makes overt claims to be representative of its source, a similar fracture of the specular encounter can be found, often leading to what my reader may have experienced themselves at some point: a disappointingly uncanny adaptation that spoils the ties between itself and its source. Misrecognition becomes coded as the defining aspect of these adaptations: “that character isn’t how I pictured them.” This failure to identify the source in the adaptation’s reflection can be read as a failure to properly orient the adaptation in line with its source. Disorientation of this sort has the potential to cause what Sara Ahmed calls the “queer effect” of “diagonal or oblique lines” (Ahmed 61).

¹⁶ “My voice isn’t like this,” (translation mine).

US American author Ursula Le Guin found herself in this position upon watching the 2006 Studio Ghibli adaptation of her *Earthsea* cycle of fantasy novels. This animated film adaptation directed by Miyazaki Gorō and titled *Gedo Senki* (literally “Ged’s War Chronicle,” translated back into English as *Tales from Earthsea*) provoked a perhaps relatable reaction from the original author of the series. In her published “First Response” to the film, Le Guin writes,

Much of it was, I thought, incoherent. This may be because I kept trying to find and follow the story of my books while watching an entirely different story, confusingly enacted by people with the same names as in my story, but with entirely different temperaments, histories, and destinies. (Le Guin, Archive)

The discomfort Le Guin describes here can be felt as the disconnect between what was assumed to be recognizably “selfsame” with the source and what instead performs as “other” in the adaptation. The film has many attributes that make it identifiable as an adaptation of Le Guin’s novel: the names of the characters and places, certain aspects of the plot, the title of the book series used as the title of the English release of the film. However, much of the film might be perceived as, in Le Guin’s words, “incoherent” because of its differences. Most obviously, it is noticeably darker in tone than Le Guin’s original work, considers themes quite distinct from the books, and, as Le Guin implies above, the film blends together a number of different plotlines and characters from the novel series without maintaining the chronology of or consistency with the source material. That Le Guin is the author of this work only adds to this potentially disorienting effect. These are the characters she created, after all. In a real-world echo of the fictional Gothic horror trope of the creation going against the wishes of the creator, Le Guin encounters the twisted Frankenstein’s monster of her formerly obedient characters acting against what she assumes to be their nature—a reflection behaving quite unlike its source.

However, instead of dwelling on the incoherence of adaptation (and perpetuating potentially orientalist speculative relationships between essentially “coherent” Western source texts and their essentially “incoherent” Japanese adaptations), this chapter aims to disorient this “incoherence” in order to find reparative value and possibility in dissonant adaptations and achieve a reconciliatory moment between source and adaptation, self and other, and author/reader and text. This chapter investigates these sorts of potentially incoherent encounters of the source and its adapted other as they play out in the transmedial adaptation of what Japanese literary scholar Charles Shirō Inouye calls the “Japanese Gothic” (Inouye 442). This chapter isolates two case studies from the corpus of the contemporary Japanese Gothic in order to disentangle the stakes of the transmedial encounter: first the remediation of the gothic-themed light novel *Hanamonogatari* (2011) by Nisio Isin as the 2014 animated movie *Hanamonogatari: “Suruga Debiru”* by Studio Shaft, and secondly the 2015 Gothic horror videogame *Bloodborne* by FromSoftware Studios. These case studies taken together offer a narrative of the various transmedial relationships between source and adaptation that condition the transnational encounters found within the matrix of what Glennis Byron coins the “Globalgothic” in his edited volume of the same name (Byron 3).

Inouye’s essay on the Japanese Gothic begins with a warning: “Aesthetic descriptors help us make sense of human expression, but their easy applicability to all cultures is questionable” (Inouye 442). Reflecting on the difficulty scholars have had in pinpointing the limits of the Gothic within specifically Western and European contexts, Inouye argues against neatly applying what might be called the “classical Gothic” onto Japanese contexts. Instead, Inouye contends that Gothic themes and aesthetics might not be essentially rooted in this “classical Gothic” canon. For Inouye, a more inclusive and useful term to discuss the presence of Gothic themes in Japanese

contexts is his use of “Pangothic” to refer to the ways in which what might be called Gothic thematic and aesthetic vocabulary and motifs developed both independently and derivatively across multiple geographic points and historical moments. He writes that, “Japanese culture is profoundly Gothic, if we are allowed to widen the meaning of the term appropriately: from classical Gothic to Pangothic” (444). It is this definition of Japanese Gothic that I find useful for this chapter. Rather than viewing Gothic horror stories told in Japan as essentially derivative or adaptational such as limiting the scope of what counts as “Japanese Gothic” to only the explicitly derivative like the *Hellsing* manga series (1997-2008), or to only the explicitly adaptational like Itō Junji’s graphic novel retelling of *Frankenstein* (2018), I want to consider the Japanese Gothic on its own terms. In the context of the Japanese Pangothic, Inouye identifies its potentially fundamental qualities: “the supernatural is neither good nor bad, neither strictly beneficent or malevolent.” He continues in his definition of the Japanese Gothic as follows:

In sum, the Japanese Gothic cannot be considered apart from various animistic assumptions about reality: the centrality of fear as both reverence and horror; the bivalent ambiguity of supernatural beings that can be either *kami* or *yōkai*, depending on how they are propitiated; the multiplicity and commonplace nature of both gods and monsters; the serious and playful nature of encounters with such beings; the intimate and lyrical relationship between a person and an environment that is populated with the supernatural; the importance, therefore, of space and the visual; the nonsymbolic nature of signs that indicate the sacred and the space in which they occur; an emphasis on the local and concrete over the general and abstract; and the porous barrier between gods and human beings, and between the living and the dead. (Inouye 452).

Each of the “animistic assumptions” above will be exemplified in greater detail in the analysis to come. Of particular note is Inouye’s contention of the “bivalent ambiguity” of encounters with supernatural entities, which will become central to my analysis of the two case studies of Japanese Gothic adaptations. As we will see in the case studies to come, a life-or-death Faustian

bargain with a horrifying *akuma* (devil) can also evoke melancholy feelings of queer love lost and found and lost again, and rather than simply being monsters to destroy, a horrifying nightmare creature can become one's own identity and may even turn quite *kawaii* (cute) with the appropriate adornment:



Figure 2 – A tiny ghoul called a "Messenger" from *Bloodborne* (2015) joyfully clutching a white ribbon gifted to it by the player avatar.

This ambiguous bivalence intrinsic to Inouye's Japanese Gothic finds its imperfect reflection in Le Guin's response to the perceived incoherence of *Gedo Senki*. The ambiguity of *Gedo Senki*'s perceived success/failure as an adaptation of the *Earthsea* cycle and Le Guin's reaction to it are a particularly compelling point of departure for this investigation of transmedial encounters in the Japanese Gothic because of how this encounter dramatizes what Samuel Weber

theorizes of transmedial translation in his essay “A Touch of Translation.” Here, Weber argues that translation “always involves not merely the movement from one *language* to another, but from one *instance*... to another instance” (Weber 65). In Weber’s theory of translation—one that claims to reveal “the relationship between the linguistic medium and other media”—transmedial translations underscore how media today ruptures from the linear Aristotelian model of transparent transmission into a bifurcated, refracted, and speculative model. Translation “grazes the original, touches it without taking hold” and then “glances off... to follow the trajectory that results... [from] the tangential encounter of two different languages at a *specific historical place and time*” (Weber 76-77). What Le Guin finds in the transmedial translation of her novels is just such a ricochet. However, in the dialectic encounter between the specific instances of these two texts, the alterity of the adaptation’s trajectory negates something of the original and motions towards a new direction—one contingent on the specific historic and cultural conditions of its creation. In this sense, the adaptation becomes its own text that is related to the original only at this point of initial contact.

Certainly, *Gedo Senki* finds its point of contact with the world and characters of Le Guin’s novel, but the trajectory it takes from this striking point has just as much to do with the film’s creators (Miyazaki Gorō and his team at Studio Ghibli), the time of its creation in the early 2000s, and its place of creation in post-bubble Japan at the height of the international animation craze. In the essay “Connecting Fantasy Worlds and Nostalgia: Miyazaki Gorō’s Animation Movies,” M. Grajdian notes that in “the particular context of post-Cold War Japanese animation,” the name Miyazaki is most readily associated with Gorō’s “illustrious father, Miyazaki Hayao” (Grajdian 112). This relationship inevitably stained the critical reception to Miyazaki Gorō’s animated features (of which *Gedo Senki* was the first). Tom Mes and Francis

Agnoli argue as much in their own article on Miyazaki Gorō's work, writing that media outlets "played up the father-son rivalry for publicity purposes... ensuring that the only name on people's lips would be 'Miyazaki'" (Mes and Agnoli 210). Mes and Agnoli continue to identify how "at least with the US critical reception of *Tales from Earthsea*... Gorō is almost universally identified as Hayao's son," and furthermore they conclude that the "mixed-to-negative critical reception for *Tales from Earthsea* further emphasizes the growing reputation of the elder Miyazaki as a master of Japanese animation within US critical circles."

The dissonance felt between the expectations of critical acclaim that accompany the animated work of Studio Ghibli with a Miyazaki at the helm and the supposed failure of Miyazaki Gorō (a landscape designer by training) to live up to these expectations offers a notable parallel to Le Guin's own response to the film. Indeed, fans of Studio Ghibli's work both domestically and abroad found themselves disoriented by the incoherence between the "dark, pessimistic atmosphere" of *Gedo Senki* and the "hopeful tones of social engagement and praise of life as the most valuable asset one possesses... which are often found in other animation works released by Studio Ghibli" (Grajadian 117). For example, the film begins with a startling scene of Oedipal patricide when the protagonist Prince Arren slays his father, which Grajdian notes is a "highly shocking beginning in an ideological world which praises respect... towards male ancestors" (119). Might we read this decision of Miyazaki Gorō's to begin with the explicit depiction of a startling scene that gets relegated to the background in the novel series as a rejection of patrilineal obligation and the patriarchal order writ large? Perhaps even a renunciation of the ties to one's creator, like what the monster declares to Victor Frankenstein on the mountaintop? As intriguing as questions such as these may be, any sort of psychoanalysis of Miyazaki Gorō is far beyond the scope of this chapter. In any event, the Gothic themes and

mostly hopeless atmosphere of the film, the liberal reinterpretation of the source novels' characters and plot, and the "alleged lack of consistency and depth" of an animation director's debut work disturbed the transparent transmission of source to adaptation for fans of the novel series, frustrated attempts by film and cultural critics to construct a narrative of an intergenerational Miyazaki dynasty, and disappointed fans of Ghibli films more broadly for *Gedo Senki's* perceived failure to match the ethos of the studio's other works (117). What we might take away from this analysis is the centrality of expectations to the experience of an adaptation. Adaptations seem to make certain promises to their audiences, and the failure to make good on these perceived promises leads to the queer effect of their incoherence. I now turn to the first of my two case studies of adaptations of the Japanese Gothic to both problematize and recollect something of reparative value from this incoherence.

***Hanamonogatari*: Transmedial Reconciliation in the Queer I-Novel**

The penultimate scene of the animated Gothic-themed fantastical-realist film *Hanamonogatari* (Flower-story, finale of *Monogatari Second Season*, 2014) by Studio Shaft (adapted from the 2011 light novel of the same name by Nisio Isin) depicts a high-stakes, one-on-one game of basketball between two queer high school girls. One of these girls, Numachi Rōka, is the ghost of the middle school crush and former basketball rival of the other girl, the protagonist, Kanbaru Suruga. Numachi does not remember that she took her own life some years ago, does not know that she is dead, and continues to haunt the earth as a collector of both suffering (*fukō no shūshu*) and the mummified body parts of the Devil (*Akuma-sama*), with which she one-by-one replaces her own body parts. These furry, ape-like body parts grant wishes in the most terrible way to

those who wish upon them—a clear allusion to the monkey’s paw of the eponymous 1902 Gothic horror short story by W. W. Jacobs. The two girls are playing over the Devil’s head, the most important part. In something of a Faustian bargain, if Numachi wins, she will absorb the power of the Devil’s head and perhaps becomes the Devil herself. If Kanbaru wins, Numachi must give up on her search and ascend to the afterlife, and the Devil’s body parts are destroyed.

I read this scene as the culmination of a specular encounter between Kanbaru and Numachi. Numachi represents, for Kanbaru, a could-have-been of her own life. A major stress injury sustained during basketball practice ultimately led to the collapse of Numachi’s life—leading to her athletic scholarship being revoked, moving out of town away from her friends, and exacerbating her already strained family relations—ultimately leading to her suicide. Kanbaru, as well, a former high school basketball team captain, spent the past year before this encounter sitting on the sidelines due to an altogether supernatural injury sustained to her arm—caused by a wish that Kanbaru made on the Devil’s mummified hand. During this time, Kanbaru had the support system of her two *senpai* (upperclassmen) Araragi Koyomi and Senjōgahara Hitagi, but *Hanamonogatari* takes place at the beginning of Kanbaru’s final year of high school. Her upperclassmen have already graduated and left her, and this instability weighs on her throughout the animated film. It goes without saying that, as an orphan in the care of her cold and distant paternal grandparents, with memories of her late abusive mother haunting her dreams, Kanbaru’s familial relationships have their own set of tensions.

However, in spite of these similarities, it is the differences between herself and Numachi that most unsettle Kanbaru. Kanbaru is described as an “optimistic girl” (*mae muki na ko*), not quite bright enough to excel on her college entrance exams (despite her voracious appetite for

reading BL novels¹⁷), whose dedication and love for her two *senpai* act as motivation to help those in need. Numachi, on the other hand, is cynical and brooding, and a literal connoisseur of schadenfreude. Even though Numachi's ghost seems to be quite happy in the quagmire of this misery, Kanbaru decides that she "cannot bear to look at" (*watashi ga omae wo mite irarenai*) Numachi and resolves to exorcise her ghost.

That the two girls are queer, and that there is some lingering unresolved romantic tension between the two is foregrounded throughout the novel. Numachi even teases Kanbaru by suggesting that the two girls kiss, and that further, Kanbaru secretly wants Numachi to hold her down and kiss her by force. It is always the fear of being seen by others that holds back Kanbaru's desire. Heteronormativity is a girder felt tangibly by the character, and its imagined gaze orients her away from her desire. The heteronormative line becomes positioned in the novel as both expected for Kanbaru's future but also as counter to Numachi, the supernatural, and the speculative generally. After telling Kanbaru the story of how she became a collector of Devil parts and misery, Numachi tells Kanbaru to forget about her, move on past this miserable story, and concludes:

Seizei genki de yatte kure. Nanka kō..., juken shitari, tomodachi wo tsukuttari, kareshi wo tsukuttari, shūshoku shitari, kekkon shitari, kodomowo sodatetari ... sōiu ningenppoi koto wo shitekureyo. Sore wa watashi niwa dekinakatta koto dakara.

Live your life cheerfully and to the fullest. What would you call it... take entrance exams, make friends, find a boyfriend, get a job, get married, raise children ... do that sort of

¹⁷ "Boys' Love" or BL (ビィエル, *biieru*), also known as *yaoi*, are literature and visual media about queer romance and sexuality between gay men, often featuring *bishōnen* (beautiful boys), typically marketed to women. Notable authors who popularized this genre in the Post-war period include Hagio Moto (b. 1949) and Takemiya Keiko (b. 1950).

human-like stuff for me. Because that's what I couldn't do. (Nisio 202-203, Translation mine).

As we will later unpack in depth, Kanbaru does not accept this trajectory laid out for her by Numachi and instead decides to face Numachi in the one-on-one game I described above. Sara Ahmed might describe Kanbaru's "*monogatari*" (story, narrative) told through *Hanamonogatari* as a recording of "being out of line" with the heteronormative "straight line" through life as described by Numachi (Ahmed 79, 82). The film ends with Kanbaru cutting her hair back to a boyish length suited for basketball, giving up on her entrance exams, and resolving to do what she loves: playing basketball.

With the context in place, let us return to the one-on-one game. I find that it is no stretch to describe a game of basketball as a dance. If we accept Hegel's position that rhythm "results from the oscillating midpoint and unification of both" accent and meter, then the rhythm of basketball might emerge as a midpoint and unification between the meter of its rules and the accent of individual player freedom within and against these rules (Hegel, trans. Pinkard, 39). Meter in music is a regulated time signature represented mathematically as a function of number of beats per measure over the unit of the beat. For example, a traditional waltz meter is represented as $\frac{3}{4}$ —three beats per measure, with the quarter note taking the beat. A waltz is likely the most boring example of a dance because its meter and its accent line up such that the natural accent of the meter (**one**, two, three; **one**, two three) mirrors the accent of the dance step (the first step being the strongest and largest step in the dance). A waltz-version of basketball would be something like a formal, professional match, where the rules of the game structure the player's actions almost entirely. Kanbaru and Numachi's one-on-one, meanwhile, could be

thought better as a tango. Like tango, it is intimate, just the two girls playing a single possession game of one-on-one. Further, it is syncopated (in music describing an accent that falls off of the metric beat), for Kanbaru wins this one-on-one by making a move decidedly outside the rules of normal play. She passes the ball to her opponent Numachi, creating an opening where she is able to swiftly take the ball back. Finally, like tango, their one-on-one game is performative, and in the film is almost campy. With the ball now in her possession, Kanbaru makes the move that she had previously said was against her own rules, the dunk. Numachi does her best to dramatically block this dunk, but Kanbaru overcomes her, and the two girls fall together as, in the novel's animated film adaptation, the music swells to climax. After the game, the girls laugh and open up about their feelings. The film's music becomes reflective (the song titled "*sotsugyō*" or "graduation"), and we might understand this moment as one of repose after the revel of their dance.

The most significant moment, however, comes just at the end of this repose. Kanbaru looks down to see that, where Numachi had been lying on the gym floor just moments ago, now lay the scattered Devil parts that Numachi had collected. Numachi's ghost has finally been put to rest, and all that remains of her are these mummified appendages. One particular shot from the film stands out. As Kanbaru bends down to collect the Devil's body parts, the animation lingers

on a particular shot of Kanbaru's hand clasping the Devil's hand as she picks it up off the ground:

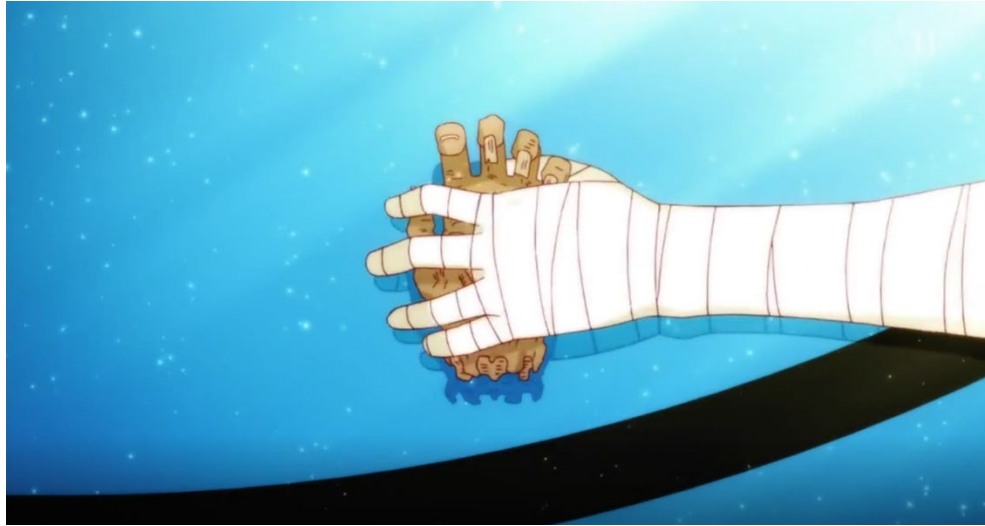


Figure 3 - Kanbaru reaches out to "recollect" the monkey's paw that had for the past year belonged to her until Numachi stole it.

This moment of collection is also one of *recollection* in several senses. First, this moment is a literal re-collection of the Devil's body parts, once collected by Numachi but now scattered across the gym floor to be picked up by Kanbaru. Second, echoing the mirror scene from *Hako otoko* as unpacked in the prior chapter, this moment marks a recollection of memory, for as Kanbaru picks up this hand, she recalls her until now forgotten days in middle school and her crush on Numachi, saying "I didn't hate her, I was jealous of her" (*Watashi wa Numachi ga kirai dattan ja nai. Watashi wa aitsu ga urayamashikattan da*). Kanbaru has been criticized throughout the novel by Numachi for forgetting their time together in middle school because of the new crush she developed on her *senpai* in high school.

Most importantly, this moment signifies a Hegelian *recollection*, or what I might call a specular encounter, between Kanbaru's Self and her Other(s)—both Numachi and the Devil

whose hand she embraces in the shot above. The reconciliatory embrace of this hand in particular can be read first as Kanbaru embracing Numachi and by analogy embracing her own queer desire. The hand did only moments ago belong to Numachi. However, before the hand was Numachi's, it belonged to Kanbaru herself, and her late mother before that. The bandage tape on Kanbaru's arm in the shot had been used as a disguise to cover up the fact that, for the past year, Kanbaru's human arm had been replaced with the Devil's arm as a consequence of the wish she made. Numachi stole this hand from Kanbaru and gave her back her human hand, freeing Kanbaru from her curse and allowing her to return to playing basketball. This brings us to the second reading of this reconciliation: in embracing the Devil's hand as in the shot above, Kanbaru is also simultaneously embracing her past self, and in doing so *recollects*, in a Hegelian sense, a cohesive whole of self-certainty from the tumult of the specular encounter between herself, Numachi, and the Devil. Kanbaru, in this single gesture, seems to come to accept and reconcile with her queer identity, her past mistakes, the abusive mother who has since left her behind, and her own uncertain and non-normative future. She does not absolve herself of her past sins, nor does she declare her innocence. From this moment, Kanbaru is instead able to resolve herself to indeed live her life "*seizei genki de*" (cheerfully and to the fullest) but on her own terms, not along the heteronormative line set out for her.

Taken at face value as above, my reading of this scene in the novel and its animated film adaptation above might be interpreted as a beautiful and optimistic representation of nonnormative identity formation. However, I have intentionally left out a number of key details of the animated film and its presentation of queer subjecthood in order to propose this queer reading. Instead, I would now like to turn back to face the incoherence of this film as an adaptation, one with its own trajectory striking off of its source material. I argue that the

animated film adaptation of Nisio Isin's light novel subtly acts as what Sara Ahmed calls a "straightening device" to force a recording of an "oblique" or queer desire line back onto the tracks of the heteronormative "straight" line (Ahmed 23).



Figure 4 - The illustrated box cover (illustration by VOFAN) of the Hanamonogatari light novel. Here we can see Kanbaru's monkey's paw-possessed left arm.

In the light novel, there is an additional queer recollection that gets relegated to the background in the animated film. After the final chapter of the novel, there is an *atogaki* (afterword, postscript) that is signed as being written by Nisio Isin and not by the narrating character Kanbaru as the rest of the novel presents itself. In this *atogaki*, its author meditates on the difference between the “*jibun ga omou jibun*” (the self-imagined self) and the “*mawari ga omou jibun*” (the self as imagined by others). Nisio writes that “*jibun ga omou jibun to mawari ga omou jibun ga icchi suru hito to iu no wa tabun inakute*” (perhaps a person whose self-imagined self is in unity with their self as imagined by others does not exist) (Nisio 270). The

author of the *atogaki* provides an example that some of us are probably familiar with, hearing a recording of our voice and thinking “*watashi wa konna koe ja nai*” (My voice isn’t like this). It is this break that leads the author of the *atogaki* to consider that even though these two versions of the self are out of sync, “*dochira ga tadashii to iu koto de wa nai n darou naa to wa omoimasu*” (I think the question isn’t which one of these selves is the correct one). Rather, the author concludes that “*tsukitsumereba jibun nante mono mo nai, jibun rashisa nante mono mo nai*” (if we follow this argument to its end, there is no such thing as the self, and there is no such thing as self-ness) (271).

This *atogaki* might remind its reader of Jorge Luis Borges’ own deconstruction of the singular authorial self in his short work “Borges and I.” In Borges work, the “*mawari ga omou jibun*” of the author is literally the one “that things happen to.” This name “Borges” goes on to become a part of the literary tradition, while the “*jibun ga omou jibun*” of the novelist only has death to look forward to. However, these two selves are irresolvable; as Borges concludes, “I am not sure which of us it is that’s writing this page” (Borges 324).

Similarly, I am left speculating, as I hold the book open on its final page with the signature 西尾維新 (Nisio Isin) printed along its terminal edge, which of the novel’s two I-narrators is imagined by Nisio’s *atogaki* to be the *jibun ga omou jibun*, and which is the *mawari ga omou jibun*. What are the implications if we cannot know which Nisio it is “that’s writing this page?” It is this question that lingers with me as I watch the anime adaptation of *Hanamonogatari*, which leaves no room in its runtime to contain this self-deconstructive *atogaki*. Who am I reading, and further, who am I now watching? When the author writes in this entangled *atogaki* that “*Kanbaru Suruga-san ga katari-be to iu jiten de sude ni iroiro gokai ga umareteite, shoujiki osoreteimasu*” (In all honesty, I fear that at the instant of Kanbaru Suruga’s

narration, a number of misunderstandings have already been born), what sort of *gokai* (misunderstanding) do they mean? If we take the *atogaki* at its word that there is no wholly unified self, and therefore that the writing *jibun* (self) of the *atogaki* (supposedly that of Nisio) and the written *watashi* (I) of the rest of the novel *Hanamonogatari* (supposedly that of Kanbaru) are irreducible to a single authorial self, then normative understandings of the relationship between author and narrator become refracted into an alternative—and as I argue, queer—relationship.

Taking Nisio's *atogaki* seriously, I suspect that the *gokai* Nisio writes of being born (*umareteita*) from Kanbaru's narration is the assumption that we are reading simply the fictionalized account of an imaginary character, and not something more closely understood as an imagined-self representative who might exist as a *jibun ga omou jibun* who can be interpreted as the author of this work. Indeed, what if we are to interpret Kanbaru as a sort of queer self-representative for Nisio? Taking this queer reading of the *atogaki* as a starting point for a queer reading of the novel *Hanamonogatari* and its adaptation into the 2014 animated movie of the same name, a playful discursive space opens up where what Suzuki Tomi calls the "I-novel discourse" in her book *The Novel and the Self* can be productively reimagined to perform a gesture of speculative queer subject (re)formation.

While Suzuki states that the *shi-shōsetsu* (I-novel) is normatively understood as "an autobiographical narrative" in which the author recounts "faithfully the details of his... life in a thin guise of fiction," I want to take up her claim that "[a]ny text can become an I-novel if read" using a particular I-novel reading mode (Suzuki 1, 6). The self to be reclaimed through this reparative reading is that of the anime's re-presented Kanbaru, who, in the anime adaptation, has become the victim of a pernicious form of epistemic violence through the objectifying and

sexualizing drawn-male gaze. In interrogating this violence, I consider the consequences of Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze (Mulvey 1975) and Nicholas Mirzoeff's notion of visual ordering (Mirzoeff 2011) on the imagined I-novelist's ability to faithfully communicate the affective landscape of her interior experiences to the audience.

Hanamonogatari the light novel is the eighth book published in the *Monogatari* series by Nisio Isin. This series overall contains a wide range of *monogatari*, which recount stories about various encounters between Japanese suburban teenagers and diverse “*kai-i*” (apparitions, oddities) that range from classical Gothic vampires and monkey's paws to Japanese *yōkai* and *shikigami* (a spirit used in *onmyōji* sorcery). The naming convention of the stories in the series is likely a reference to the seventeenth century “*hyakumonogatari*” style of storytelling,¹⁸ with each *monogatari* in the series usually told by a different narrating character. These titles usually contain a portmanteau of its story's subject matter with the word “monogatari” (story, tale), such as *Bakemonogatari* (Monster Story, 2006), *Kizumonogatari* (Wound Story, 2008), and *Nisemonogatari* (Imposter Story, 2009). *Hanamonogatari*, in particular, is likely an allusion to the 1916-1924 *Hana monogatari* (Flower Tales) serialized collection of lesbian romance stories by Yoshiya Nobuko. The narrator of *Hanamonogatari* is Kanbaru Suruga, one of the many side characters introduced in the earlier series. In this way and more, *Hanamonogatari* is a queer addition to the series. The central protagonist of the *Monogatari* series and its most frequent first-person narrator, Araragi Koyomi, is a straight, male-performing character (perhaps a much closer fit to Nisio's *mawari ga omou jibun*), while Kanbaru is introduced as a self-identifying *yuri* (lit. lily flower, but in this context used as a colloquial word for a lesbian).¹⁹ Taking these

¹⁸ Lit. “hundred stories,” a round of ghost stories told in a circle with each member holding a candle that gets extinguished one by one as storytellers finish their tales.

¹⁹ “*Watashi wa yuri na no da*” (You ought to know that I'm *yuri/lesbian*) (Nisio, *Bakemonogatari* 341, translation mine).

details into account, *Hanamonogatari* can be read as an I-novel that bends the usual gender relationship between narrator and author. Suzuki writes that “the reader’s expectations concerning, and belief in, the single identity of the protagonist, the narrator, and the author of a given text ultimately make a text an I-novel,” and that it is this mode of reading “that assumes that the I-novel is a single-voiced, ‘direct’ expression of the author’s ‘self’ and that its written language is ‘transparent’” that defines this reader’s expectation (Suzuki 6). With Nisio’s *atogaki* troubling the possibility of a single-identity, single-voice occupying the category “self,” we must make certain caveats to Suzuki’s definition to read *Hanamonogatari* as a queer I-novel.

Rather than assuming a single-voiced and direct expression of Nisio’s self in *Hanamonogatari*, I want to destabilize the assumed authority of “Nisio Isin.” After all, as Japanese literary scholar and queer theorist J. Keith Vincent writes of Mishima, “[r]eading [an author] as queer does not require that we read him as having had sex with men,” but rather queer reading “is wary of binarisms of all sorts, the first among these being ‘homosexuality’ vs ‘heterosexuality.’” (Vincent 70). Similar to disrupting the binarism of these hierarchical sexuality categories, a queered I-novel reading mode upends the assumed hierarchy within the author/narrator pair. The point of queering the I-novel reading mode is not to make any sort of claim about the living subject Nisio Isin, nor to assume a possibility of understanding the “author” behind the work. I am not arguing that Nisio the author is actually a lesbian basketball player and to do so would be absurd. However, I am arguing that reading *Hanamonogatari* as a queer I-novel enables us to envision Kanbaru as more than simply a character in a story written by someone nothing like her, and further, a queer mode of reading the self might be the only way to engage Nisio’s *atogaki* on its own terms. It is in this relationship between imagined-self and authorial self that I believe a queering of the I-novel reading mode finds a productive application.

Kanbaru and Nisio are two distinct entities, and yet they are linked in the act of writing. Is it Kanbaru or Nisio that writes the *watashi* (I) of Kanbaru's interior narration in *Hanamonogatari*? In this queered I-novel reading mode, rather than assuming a singularity of voice, the queer I-novel reader assumes a plurality of voices, a multiplicity of selves, and ultimately, a profound *contingency* of identity. This queer reading mode makes questions like the above one defunct because the answer is *always both*. Moving forward, I treat Kanbaru and Nisio as just two facets of a compounded authorial "I."

In *Hanamonogatari*, Araragi and the rest of the central characters of the series have graduated from high school and moved on to their new lives in college, leaving Kanbaru alone as the only person left at Naoetsu High School who knows all the details of the various supernatural *kai-i* (ghost, apparition, mysterious entity) encounters over the past year.



Figure 5 - Kanbaru introduces herself to the audience in the animated film.

In her 1998 book *Karera no monogatari: Nihon kindai bungaku to jendaa* (*Their Stories: Modern Japanese Literature and Gender*) Japanese queer theorist Iida Yūko argues that self-representation through narrative is central to recording the queer experience (Iida 1998). Notably then, Kanbaru tells the reader from the start that she is writing *Hanamonogatari* to share what she explicitly describes as “*watashi no hanashi to, kanojo no hanashi da*” (my story, and her story, Nisio 12). While the antecedent of this *kanojo* (she/her) pronoun is initially vague, it becomes clear that Kanbaru is here referring to Numachi. I argue that this bivalent “*hanashi*” from the opening chapter and their shared history of traumatic injury and encounters with the supernatural link Kanbaru and Numachi in much the same way Nisio links the *jibun ga omou jibun* and the *mawari ga omou jibun* in the *atogaki*. In tying these two together from the beginning, Kanbaru’s opening chapter performs a similar gesture to Nisio’s *atogaki*. The *monogatari* (story) of *Hanamonogatari* is from its outset plural, just as the self for Nisio cannot be totalized into a single identity. Both the *watashi* and the *kanojo* of Kanbaru and Numachi are together contained in a story that belongs to both of them.

Of course, by the time *Hanamonogatari* begins, Numachi is already long dead, and Kanbaru’s encounter with her ghost serves as the inciting incident of the plot. The Japanese Gothic is filled with stories of vengeful ghosts of women wronged. As Samantha Landau writes in her article “Passionate Women, Vengeful Spirits: Female Ghosts and the Japanese Gothic Mode,” female ghosts are “of major importance to Japanese literature and folklore” (Landau 6). Landau notes that one of the major patterns of behavior of these female ghosts is how they “wreak vengeance through spiritual possession” and “engage in haunting behavior in order to testify about the wrongdoings done to them” (20). Numachi’s ghost would likely fall into the category of a *yūrei*, or “a human-like [ghost] that is often mistaken for a living person,” as

Kanbaru does not realize that Numachi is dead until she hears from another character about the details of the suicide (8). However, because of the queer romantic history between Kanbaru and Numachi, Kanbaru's relationship with this *yūrei* is what Inouye might describe as “bivanlent.” In this story, the supposedly horrifying vengeful ghost is also a romantic object.

One example of this bivalent encounter is when Numachi's ghost steals—but in doing so cures—Kanbaru's devil-possessed left arm, causing it to return to its human form. As unpacked in my close reading at the outset of this section, I take up the symbol of the devil's body parts as a recurring queer motif throughout the I-novel that represents Kanbaru and Numachi's “deviant” orientation towards both each other and towards deviance from heteronormativity writ large. During their encounters, two striking images emblemize the bivalent affective relationship between Kanbaru and Numachi. In Kanbaru's first meeting with Numachi's ghost, in response to Numachi's declaration that “*ima no watashi wa basukettobōru-pureiyaa de wa naku, sō, kaunseraa dakara ne*” (The “I” I am now is not a basketball player, yes, because I am a counselor, trans. mine), Kanbaru writes “*nagutta. Oodoroita, jibun ga konna kantan ni hito wo naguru ningen da to wa omowanakatta*” (I hit her. I was surprised, for I didn't think I was the type of person to so easily hit another) (Nisio 68). This strike is then followed by Numachi forcibly grabbing Kanbaru's chest in what Kanbaru suspects is a form of revenge. She describes the sudden uninvited fondling as “*soko ni namamekashii kanji ya, aibu suru kanji wa nakatta*” (there were no feelings of seduction or caressing there) (Nisio 71). However, Kanbaru reflects on this sexual encounter somewhat ambiguously, sending her *senpai* Araragi a text that reads “*mukashi no shiriai (onna no ko) ni oppai momareta*” (I got felt up by an old acquaintance [a girl]) (Nisio 75). After their meeting, Kanbaru's internal narration becomes oddly fixated on Numachi, wondering why she can't remember what happened between the two of them, and

hoping that they can meet again. It turns out, however, that this assault was simply a sleight of hand to enable Numachi to steal Kanbaru's devil arm.



Figure 6 - Kanbaru hits Numachi in the animated film (from Kanbaru's POV).

Then, in their second meeting, after learning from Kanbaru's story of how she became cursed with the monkey paw that Kanbaru is lesbian, Numachi says “*nee chuu shiyokka? ... watashi mo gasatsu na otoko no ko yori, onna no ko no hō ga suki na n da nee*” (hey wanna kiss? ... I also like girls more than boorish boys you know) (Nisio 149). This advance catches Kanbaru off-guard, and she finds herself unable to refuse as Numachi crawls across the floor towards her: “*nigeru koto wa itsu demo dekiru. Dekiru hazu na noni, sore ga dekinai*” (I can run away at any point. I should be able to, but I can't). Kanbaru pleads with Numachi, saying “*hi, hi, hito ga kuru kamo*” (a p-p-person might come) to which Numachi responds with “*konai yo*” (no they won't) (151). In the end, Numachi simply kisses Kanbaru lightly on the cheek and then

makes fun of her for being unable to resist. Numachi teases “*ma kenzen ni ikō, kenzen ni. Watashi-tachi wa mirai no aru wakamono na n dakara*” (Well, let’s get along wholesomely, wholesomely. We’re young kids with a future, after all) (151-152).



Figure 7 - Numachi propositions Kanbaru in the animated film (from Kanbaru's POV)

These two moments become key in my reading of the animated film as points where queer reorientations of the animated filmic gaze enable us to recover the novel’s interiority. Kanbaru’s ambivalent affect in response to these intense scenes of queer intimacy dramatize the sort of arrested emotionalism brought on by the reexperience of a forgotten trauma resurfacing long after its original occurrence. As Cathy Caruth writes in *Unclaimed Experience*, “trauma seems to be much more than a pathology... it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality... that is not otherwise available” (Caruth 4). Telling this story of trauma is “a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death*

and the correlative *crisis of life*” (Caruth 7). It is notable that Caruth uses the word “story” to describe trauma, as it resonates with Kanbaru’s desire to tell and have her story heard. In the bivalent emotional vacillation between the feelings of hatred in the smack and the feelings of desire in the kiss, we find a similar oscillation between the life and death of queer desire in Kanbaru’s affective yearning for Numachi. Whereas the desire to be kissed by Numachi is neutralized by the fear of being seen, the mirrored assault of the smack-fondle induces an urge to testify to another through text message. It is this paradoxical dualism that is, for Caruth, intrinsic to the phenomenological experience of a repressed traumatic memory—in this case, the forgotten romantic history between Kanbaru and Numachi that was cut short by the sudden tragedy of Numachi’s injury and later suicide.

The devil parts as representative of sexual deviance is best exemplified to my reader by the scene just following the kiss above. Kanbaru’s inner turmoil in her I-novel comes from the decision to either run away from or face problems, as represented by her decision to either do nothing about Numachi or to try to stop her from collecting the devil parts. As a foreshadowing of Kanbaru’s ultimate choice, Numachi tells Kanbaru “*“akuma no hidari-ude no koto nante wasurete, nikoniko shiawase ni ikiteikeba ii”*” (it would be best if you forget all about the devil’s left hand and go on to live a bright, happy life) (Nisio 152). As we discussed at the beginning of this section, this bright happy life that Numachi describes as one not involving an orientation towards the devil parts looks a lot like a patriarchal view of the heteronormative path. Of course, this is not the path Kanbaru takes.

In the next chapter, we will unpack this queer refusal of a heteronormative, (re)productive futurity in more detail. For the time being, what we can read, then, in this queer I-novel is the story of a young queer Japanese girl growing up and choosing to accept herself as

queer by facing the deviant line of her non-traditionally imagined orientation. That this story is written to include Nisio's *atogaki* suggests that the *jibun ga omou jibun* of the authorial imagined-self Kanbaru can be interpreted as a queer I-novelist, one that writes herself into existence. Therefore, there are serious stakes in Kanbaru's writing being read, and thus to her request to the reader in the opening chapter. Kanbaru's story acts like a map showing a path that turns away from the heteronormative "straight line" through life, a line that "is achieved through work, which rereads moments of deviation from the family line as signs of the failure of the homosexual subject to 'find its way'" (Ahmed 79). In Kanbaru's recording of her "being out of line" as an I-novel where she most assertively *does* find a way, she takes a recorded step down a path, and in taking that step Kanbaru makes this path that much more visible to those who would also orient themselves along this alternative route (Ahmed 82). As I will show, however, this mapping of a deviant path has been obfuscated in the anime adaptation, demonstrating the investment heteronormative societies put in keeping bodies "in line, often through force, such that any nonalignment produces a queer effect" (83). In this case, the force that remediates Kanbaru's refusal to align herself along the heteronormative path towards reproduction is the affective force of male desire made visible through choices made in the adaptation.

I now turn explicitly to the anime adaptation to discuss how in adaptation, certain elements of the story's affective presentation necessarily changed. While *Hanamonogatari* the novel is told from the interiority of Kanbaru's inner voice, the animated film is not limited in its perspectival representation of events to only the gaze of Kanbaru, but rather adopts a number of drawn perspectives including that of Kanbaru, Numachi, and other characters, as well. I have pointed out the perspective of the drawn camera in the figures I include from the animated film where relevant (see Figure 8 below). Furthermore, oftentimes the drawn perspective does not

match the gaze of an actual observing character but is rather drawn from the perspective of an unseen voyeur that follows the action from a distance. In reading the orientation of these varied viewpoints, I aim to problematize the adaptation's representation of Kanbaru's markedly personal and liberating I-novel.



Figure 8 - Kaiki lifts the defeated Kanbaru off the ground and back onto her feet (from Kaiki's POV). Note the first-person perspective details of Kaiki's arm drawn in-frame on the left.

For my first example, I present Figure 8 above, which shows Kanbaru being held aloft by the *kai-i* specialist and con man Kaiki Deishū. In this scene, rather than reading the interior monologue of the light novel's description of this moment,²⁰ we see Kanbaru holding back tears from Kaiki's perspective. Indeed, the drawn perspective of the shot seems to be at eye-level with Kaiki, with his left arm extending from the bottom left of the shot providing further orientation

²⁰ “*Nakitai. Keredo... koboresou na namida wo koraete ita*” (I want to cry. But... I endured the tears that threatened to overflow) (Nisio 104).

to show that we are inhabiting his perspective. In this sense, the animated film enables the viewer to occupy other subject-positions that remain inaccessible in the light novel.

The drawn gaze of the anime's "camera" seems to be foregrounded in the anime's shot constructions. We frequently see eye-like images gazing back at the viewer in both the construction of shots (such as an iris of construction equipment around the pupil of Kanbaru and Numachi as they have their first bivalent encounter) and in the visual representations of Kanbaru's surreal nightmares of her mother's voice. In Figure 9 below, we can see the camera gazing at an eye-shaped fountain of water that appears in Kanbaru's dream that, in turn, gazes back at the camera. This gaze-on-gaze reflectivity foregrounds the relationship between the viewer and the object being viewed. What these shifting perspectives do to Kanbaru is alter her position from the writing subject of an I-novelist—a position of inward-orientation to enable her to share the details of her cerebral experience with the reader—to an object of a gaze not her own. When we interrogate the sort of objectification Kanbaru experiences by this gaze, we might be led to consider the affects that emotionalize the experience of gazing on another.



Figure 9 – An eye appears in Kanbaru's nightmare, gazing back at the viewer and Kanbaru alike.

For instance, one of the most obvious affects that these new gazes exert on our experience of Kanbaru is a sexualizing one. Let us examine the influence this has on one of the scenes discussed above. When Kanbaru and Numachi share their illicit kiss, the kiss that Kanbaru feels ambivalent about because of her fear of being seen, this is how the shot is drawn in the anime (Figure 10):



Figure 10 - We spy on Kanbaru and Numachi's intimate moment (from a voyeur's POV).

Instead of viewing Numachi from the perspective of Kanbaru, we gain access to this intimate moment of conflicted queer desire by watching from a hiding place underneath the bleachers of the gym where this encounter takes place. We become, as the audience, the exact witness that Kanbaru fears may be present. In this sense, as a voyeuristic audience, rather than a reader of Kanbaru's I-novel testimony, we become implicated in the action of the anime. We become responsible for our gaze. However, it goes beyond simply the voyeuristic nature of this viewpoint, as this furtive perspective has a second more powerful affective influence on our experience of the action, namely, the visual regime of heterosexual male desire.

In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Mulvey discusses how the “mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order” through its insistence on a scopophilic fetishization of “the image of woman” (Mulvey 1956). She writes that this fetishization at its extreme “can become fixated into a perversion, producing obsessive voyeurs... whose only sexual satisfaction can come from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other” (1957). It is this active, controlling gaze that I am interested in, or what Mirzoeff calls in his book *The Right to Look* the “deployment of visuality and visual technologies... for ordering” (Mirzoeff 48). For, as my viewer will hopefully see, the gaze that the anime trains on both the body of Kanbaru and on the sexuality of Kanbaru’s and Numachi’s relationship is designed to order both their bodies and the affective reception of their bodies’ activity along heterosexual delineations.

In these next few figures (a few examples from numerous instances), the drawn-camera takes obsessive and fetishistic pleasure at gazing upon Kanbaru’s nudity and implied nudity. Whose viewpoint could we possibly be occupying in these scenes? These shots occur in the privacy of Kanbaru’s bedroom, so there is no one else to gaze on her body in this way, and the text of the novel does not suggest such a sexualizing self-orientation during these scenes, and yet the anime’s artists chose to represent Kanbaru in this way (Figures 11 and 12).



Figure 11 - Kanbaru's silhouetted nudity becomes foregrounded against the mess of BL novels cluttering her room (from a voyeur's POV).



Figure 12 - An upskirt caught on drawn-camera (from a voyeur's POV).

However, there is one instance where we do occupy the viewpoint of an actual individual who sexualizes Kanbaru's naked body within the interiority of her room—Araragi, the primary male-performing protagonist of the Monogatari series. As a running gag throughout the animated series, Araragi barges into Kanbaru's room while she is still asleep after being told by Kanbaru's guardians to go in. What transpires is an accidental encounter with Kanbaru's naked, sleeping

form. Here, we might find the answer to our question above: from whose viewpoint do the anime's studio imagine these voyeuristic shots to be.

Compare the sexualizing shots above to this shot from an episode of the first anime adaptation of the *Monogatari* Series, *Bakemonogatari*, and specifically episode six, "Suruga Monkey I" (Figures 13 and 14). This shot comes from the first time we are introduced to Kanbaru in the *Monogatari* series. The episode is told from Araragi's point of view, and we see a similar fetishization of Kanbaru's exposed athletic spats as we do in *Hanamonogatari*:



Figure 13 - In this shot from Bakemonogatari Episode 6, we see an echo of Figure 12 above (from Araragi's POV).



Figure 14 - The shot after Figure 12 shows us the “I” of the eye—Araragi.

Indeed, the image is repeated in the next shot (Figure 14), where we see the sexualized object reflected in Araragi’s eye, foregrounding, in much the same way as the *Hanamonogatari* anime adaptation, the “I” behind the eye of the gaze—specifically, Araragi’s “I.” Araragi’s perspective, a metonym of the straight male audience, has been mixed into the represented gaze of the anime adaptation of *Hanamonogatari*, even in scenes where he does not actually appear. Araragi’s gaze heteronormalizes the action of the story. Now, instead of being an ambivalent queer encounter between Kanbaru and Numachi, the kiss scene above becomes a sexual commodity to satisfy the imagination of the male gazing “I.” The female body, which was background to Kanbaru’s narration in the novel, becomes foregrounded, objectified, and sexualized in the anime. When Araragi replies to Kanbaru’s text about Numachi grabbing her boobs, his reply is strangely resonant with this: “*Boku mo mazete!*” (Mix me in, too!) (Nisio 75) (Figure 15). Studio Shaft have taken up Araragi on his request and have allowed him, and the

pernicious heterosexualizing affect that he is the supplement for, to be mixed into the texture of the anime's adaptation of Kanbaru's confessional I-novel.



Figure 15 - Araragi replies to Kanbaru's text about Numachi (textual intercut).

It is against this affective sexualization and heteronormalization of Kanbaru's body that I offer my queer phenomenological retelling of the anime. There are stakes in this retelling, as veiled within this anime is the *jibun ga omou jibun* of the queer-I of *Hanamonogatari*'s I-novelist. The anime has attempted to cover this self, to relegate her behind the normative gaze of the sexualizing male representative Araragi. However, by turning away from this gaze, by asking ourselves *whose gaze are we adopting*, I aim to reclaim this queer-I and bring the all-important queer *atogaki* back into the anime adaptation that chose to leave it out.

Kanbaru's written testimony is cited from the novel and included in the composition of the anime as textual intercuts that flash across the screen (see Figure 15 and 16). These cuts oftentimes come and go so quickly that there would be no way for a reasonable reader to

comprehend what has been written. The speed at which these shots come and go is further compounded by the choice to intentionally obfuscate the text by replacing *hiragana* with *katakana* and using odd phonetic renderings of grammatical *hiragana* and outdated *kanji* instead of the standard usage found in the source text. For instance, here is the very first shot of the anime which lasts less than a second (Figure 16). In it, we see the first sentence of the novel *Hanamonogatari* transcribed into an antiquated *kanji-kana* mixture: “*Kanbaru Suruga ga baka da to ifu hanashi wo korekara shiyō to omofu no da ga, kiite moraheru darauka*” (I’ll now tell you the story of the idiotic Kanbaru Suruga. I wonder if you’ll hear me out). This sentiment is of central importance to a queer reading of the I-novel, as it communicates Kanbaru’s desire to have her story heard. However, in its representation in the anime, this line has been concealed by the *kanji-kana* mixture and made near-illegible by the speed at which it comes and goes. But this line is not irrecoverably illegible, for, as Abe Mark Nornes writes in his article “Towards an Abusive Subtitling,” through digital streaming platforms, “we find a completely new viewing protocol made possible by video where the viewer halts the apparatus’s mindless march and reads subtitles at leisure” (Nornes 32). This deviant viewing practice, where the viewer takes agency over the constant stream of the anime, enables the viewer-reader to, with some difficulty, decode the citation from the first chapter of the light novel *Hanamonogatari* and become an active witness to Kanbaru’s testimony.

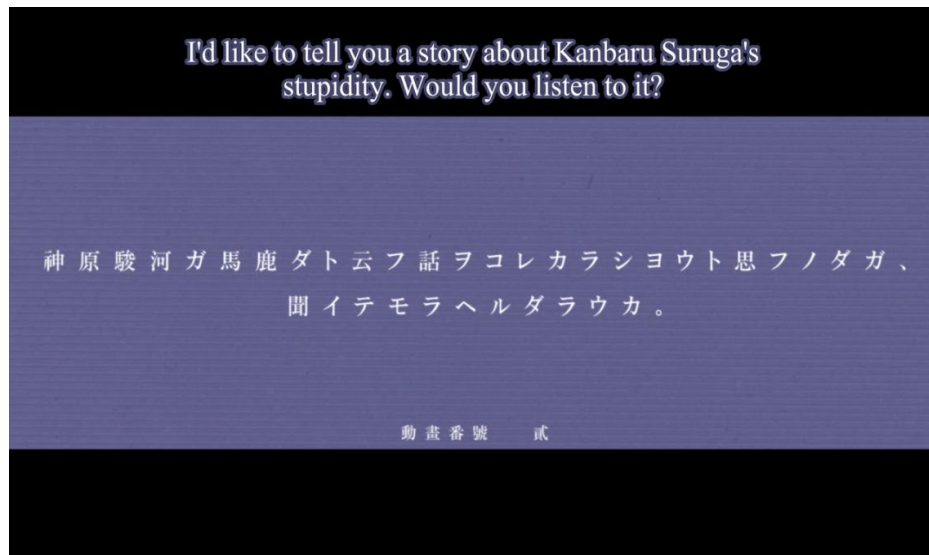


Figure 16 - The first rapid-fire shot of the animated film frozen in place (textual intercut).

It is this style of queered viewing that can enable the viewer to reclaim from the drawn-male gaze of the adaptation the all-important narrative that Kanbaru writes in her I-novel. As Mulvey comments, it is through “the tension between film as controlling the dimension of time... and film as controlling the dimension of space... [that] cinematic code creates a gaze” (Mulvey 1965). If we find avenues to resist the spatial-temporal perspectival regime of the anime’s cinematic order, then perhaps we can imagine a queer counter-visuality to challenge this order through innovative viewing practices such as pausing the stream or considering shots in inverted chronology.

Another queer element of the anime’s adaptation that becomes clear through a deviant viewing practice is the choice to swap the ending credits’ and the opening credits’ animated music videos. The ending animation that has been used throughout this season of the *Monogatari* series is instead played at the beginning of the anime adaptation of *Hanamonogatari*. In its place at the end of the anime, where in the novel we read Nisio’s *atogaki*, we find, as I argue, a

visualization of this *atogaki* legible to the reader who, similar to pausing the stream of the anime, adopts queer viewing practices.

Just before the scene where Kanbaru *recollects* Numachi's devil body parts from the gym floor discussed above, we see this shot of Kanbaru and Numachi lying on the gym floor after Kanbaru dunked a basketball on Numachi, causing both of them to crash to the ground (Figure 17). In a queer reversal of the kiss scene, this time Kanbaru is atop Numachi, and instead of kissing (as the voyeur-perspective camera surely yearns for them to do), they laugh at the result of their game of basketball. It is this laugh in the face of the voyeur camera that I read as a powerful moment of resilience to the heteronormative desire of the camera's gaze. No longer a performance for a male spectator, the laugh that Kanbaru and Numachi share alienates the viewer from their interior affective experience.



Figure 17 - Kanbaru and Numachi laugh in spite of the voyeur's gaze (from a voyeur's POV).

This brings me to the end of this queer rereading—the ending of the animated credits sequence. In it, we see scenes from Kanbaru and Numachi’s forgotten relationship from middle school, before the injury to her leg caused Numachi’s retirement. There is no dialogue in this sequence, but it is notable that the song that plays is titled “the last days of my adolescence.” During this sequence, we see a queer reversal of the slap scene above, with Kanbaru this time being the one to be slapped. This occurs as happening after Numachi is injured, as we see her now using crutches. In Kanbaru’s earlier slap (in the film’s presented chronology) we can hear the resonances of this earlier, forgotten slap (in the actual chronology of events) that Numachi gives to Kanbaru. In order to fix this chronology, the queer viewer swaps the places of the opening and ending cinematics, visualizing the queer history between Kanbaru and Numachi that resonates in their later actions.

Finally, in the last scene of the animated music video, we see a dreamlike representation of Kanbaru and Numachi facing off one last time on the basketball court (Figures 18 and 19). Notably, however, they are both wearing the same uniform but in opposite coloration: Naoetsu number 4. When they rush towards each other and each leap for the ball, the camera zooms out and the basketball court along with the two airborne players fades into darkness and a proliferation of *yuri* flowers envelops the court below them. These queer moments, when taken together, resonate with the novel’s *atogaki*. Kanbaru and Numachi each wearing the same uniform, each having experienced the devil’s hand as their own, are reconciled together as two

facets of an untotalizable self. The *watashi* and *kanojo* of the novel's first chapter are here depicted as the mirror-image of the other. This recalls Nisio's claim that an *icchi* (unity) between the *jibun ga omou jibun* and the *mawari ga omou jibun* does not exist. The Kanbaru and the Numachi written into the queer I-novel are each a reflection of the other, but cannot be reduced

into a single entity, just as Nisio and his imagined-self representative Kanbaru share the authorial burden of the creation of the text of *Hanamonogatari*.



Figure 18 - Kanbaru and Numachi mirror each other, wearing color-inverted versions of the same Naoetsu 4 uniform.



Figure 19 - The final shot of the anime. Non-totalized, ununified, but together, Kanbaru and Numachi's silhouettes float above a sea of lilies.

This queer I-novel faces a remedial affective change in its adaptation into the anime medium that produces an incoherent effect. This change is a heteronormalized and sexualizing gaze that does not exist in the novel's interior-orientated self-narration. The influence that this gaze holds over the testimony Kanbaru gives in her story is one of forceful reorientation back onto the tracks of a heterosexual *nichijou* (everyday), one where "lesbians" only exist as a sexual novelty to be voyeuristically gazed at and "mixed in" with, which produces friction with the novel's recording of a queer subjectivity taking a bold step off of the normalized line of a *ningenppoi*, i.e. reproductive, future. However, by reading the anime against its desire lines and adopting some queer viewing practices, we can still find the traces of the recollection between Kanbaru and Numachi, and by reflection, that which ties Nisio to Kanbaru in the queer *atogaki* of the light novel.

***Bloodborne*: Transcending the Limits of the Gothic in Haptic Play-Space**

I'd like to conclude this chapter with a discussion of transmedial incoherence in the Japanese Gothic horror video game *Bloodborne*. This section aims to highlight the transnational and transmedial networks running through the Globalgothic, encountering through this movement across borders, mediums, and languages a reflection of itself not always behaving as expected. My analysis of an adaptation into the interactive medium of videogames expands on what Erin Graff Zivin introduces in her article "Transmedial Noise: *Babel* and the Translation of Radio" as the ways in which "translation [can] signal a certain kind of kinship or proximity of the senses" in the "place where they touch, where one is exposed to the other" (Graff Zivin 167-168). Translating the Gothic into Japanese and adapting it into a video game clarifies a certain sensory

closeness. Namely, this is how the haptic sense of touch can be utilized in video games to communicate what in classical Gothic texts had to be relegated to the textual, and later audiovisual, realm of the object.

Videogames today are both an audiovisual and a haptic medium. A game's audiovisual components are obvious even to a non-playing spectator. However, the haptic component of videogames might not be apparent to someone who has never picked up a controller themselves. Contemporary video games such as *Bloodborne* on the PlayStation 4 make use of rumble features such as that found on the Sony "Sixaxis" controller to send overtly haptic signals to the player's hands, such as when their avatar takes damage. Less obvious is the organization of the player's body, controlling their avatar as they move through game space with corresponding inputs in the controller (though more recently popularized "VR" games have foregrounded this relationship). In order to overcome the horrifying obstacles that the game throws at the player, the player must literally master the game's systems and use their physical body to get the job done. The combination of these two sensory interconnections between player and game leads to a construction of haptic verisimilitude between player and in-game avatar that cannot possibly exist as cleanly in other mediums. The "contact of the senses," to borrow Graff Zivin's terms, that takes place—between a player's physical actions, their avatar's corresponding behavior in-game, and the audiovisual and haptic feedback the player then receives in turn—extends the reparative gesture speculated above between *Hanamonogatari* and its adaptation. The classical Gothic realizes in this Japanese Gothic videogame adaptation what it had set out to do from its inception: trigger the amygdalin response in the reader/viewer in order to communicate its themes of humanity's own monstrosity. This response is realized in its completion within the *Bloodborne* play-space when the player inevitably masters the game's systems and overcomes

their fears—ultimately themselves becoming through their actions the very Gothic horror monstrosity that had terrified them at the beginning of their playtime.

In the burgeoning field of videogame studies, there has been a push among scholars of Japanese cultural studies to define and categorize certain games as “Japanese games.” In her book *Japanese Culture Through Videogames*, Rachel Hutchinson looks “back over 50 years of games from Japan” and finds how the games’ developers “reflect, and reflect on, Japanese contemporary society and what concerns the Japanese people” through their games (Hutchinson 6). Similarly, Mia Consalvo in her book *Atari to Zelda: Japan’s Videogames in Global Contexts* invests in answering the question “What does it mean to call something a Japanese game?” (Consalvo 65). Her conclusion—that at “anything other than very broad levels, it becomes tricky to say what counts as a Japanese game”—is the central difficulty in this sort of national analysis of videogames (66). Contemporary mainstream games, such as those produced by the game studio FromSoftware, are transnational, multimedia texts that resist most classical analyses by any single school, be it literary analysis, film analysis, or even code-based program analysis. Videogames function as an assemblage of this multimedia array. In much the same way, game development, in all but the smallest of projects, is a diverse, multinational project. A game developed by the “Japanese” studio FromSoftware, for instance, might have attributed in its credits 3D-artists from Japan, programmers from Taiwan, producers from the United States, and animators from South Korea. Is it enough that the director of the studio’s 2015 game *Bloodborne*, Miyazaki Hidetaka, is himself nationally Japanese for the game as a whole to be called a Japanese game, much less an example of the Japanese Gothic?

This question is further problematized by how the game does not fit into the archetypes of a typically “Japanese” game as imagined by Western players. Though *Bloodborne* is classified

as an action/role-playing game (RPG), it does not fit in neatly within the genre subcategory of the “Japanese” RPG (usually shortened to JRPG) such as Square Enix’s *Final Fantasy* series. The game forgoes an anime-style fantastical art design for a gruesome, Victorian-Gothic style and setting, and further its gameplay has more in common with so-called “Western” RPGs like Bethesda’s *Elder Scrolls* series in that it follows a single, player-controlled and customized avatar piloted in real time rather than a party of adventures that are given orders in a turn-based combat system. All of this suggests to me that *Bloodborne* is a game that resists the simple classification of a “Japanese” game. In the argument that follows, I will offer a transnational analysis of *Bloodborne*, interrogating how themes from Anglophone Gothic horror have flowed across national boundaries to both infuse the game and become influenced by what Inouye calls the “animistic assumptions” of the Japanese Gothic. Rather than a game that must be fit into essential categories of national identity and “Japanese-ness,” *Bloodborne* is instead a conduit for the Globalgothic. Further, as an adaptation of Gothic themes into an interactive medium, *Bloodborne* exerts certain media effects on the reception of these Globalgothic themes by its player.

In writing this analysis, I will turn to one of the foremost works of Anglophone Gothic literature, Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus* (first published anonymously in 1818 and again in 1831) as a point of comparison. As Susan George points out, Shelley’s novel “is generally recognised as the first sf [science fiction] novel” (George 164). However, as the Norton Critical Edition of *Frankenstein* foregrounds, the novel is also a landmark achievement in the “Female Gothic” (Norton 222). These two categories of Science Fiction literature and Gothic literature are not as disparate as they may seem. Maggie Kilgour writes in *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* that Gothic literature often thematically depicts

“resistance to the ideas of rising, progress, and development, either historical or individual” (Kilgour 37). These same themes of the dangers of unchecked progress are commonplace in sci-fi, as well.

What makes Shelley’s novel particularly relevant as a point of comparison with *Bloodborne* is its countless adaptations and interpretations. Because of its many remediations from film (such as James Whale’s iconic 1931 film) to comics, toys, and to even other videogames (*The Island of Dr. Frankenstein* [2009]), Shelley’s novel and its famed monster, alongside other multimedia Gothic characters like the titular vampire in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), have been solidified as an international Gothic icon, and they have therefore contributed to the transnational Gothic thematic imaginary. Furthermore, the game’s atmosphere and setting draw clear inspiration from the adaptations of classical Gothic texts like *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Dracula* (1931) into visual culture (Figures 20 and 21):

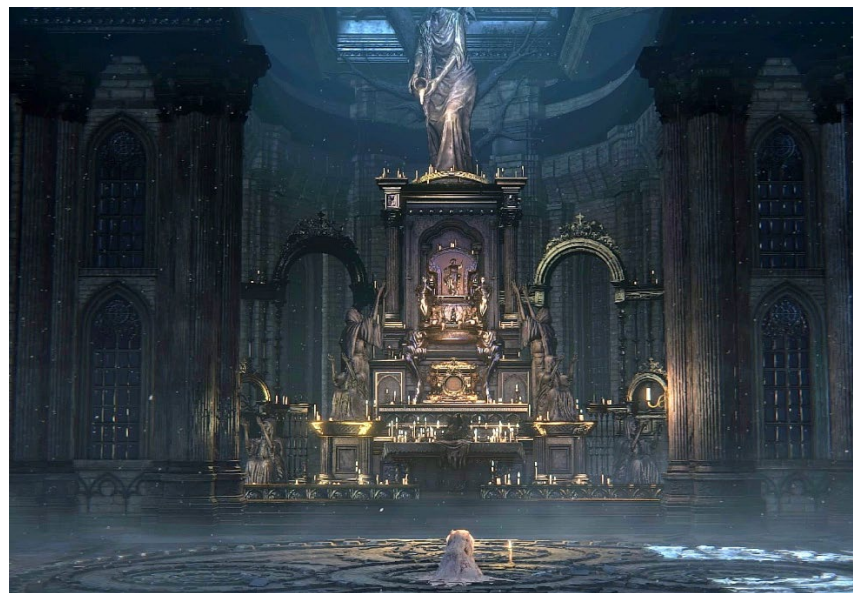
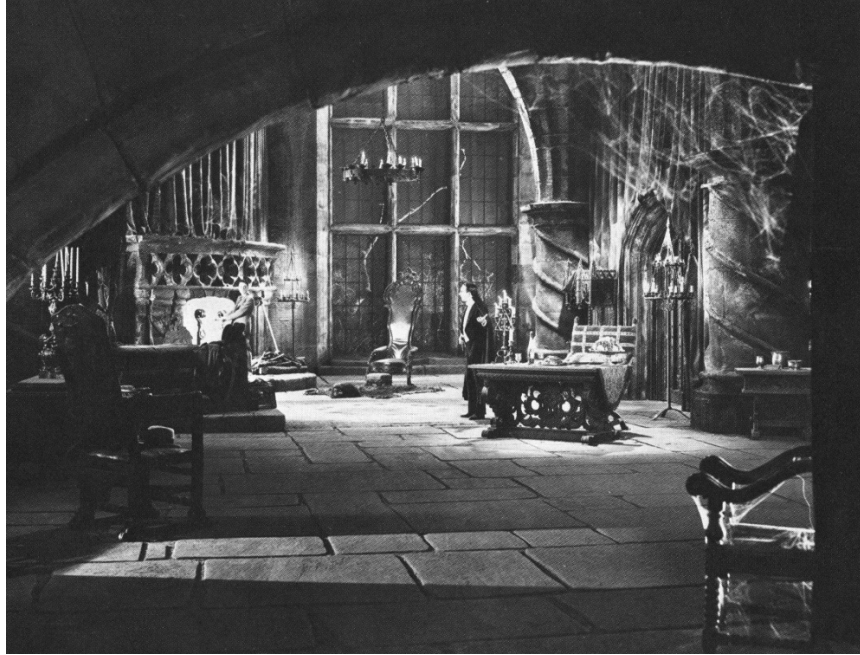


Figure 20 and 21 - Compare the set from *Dracula* (1931) above to *Bloodborne's* Grand Cathedral below.

The creators of *Bloodborne* are explicit in citing Gothic horror as a major inspiration for both the game's atmosphere and narrative. In an interview by Future Press published in the game's official English language strategy guide, Miyazaki states:

I think that *Bloodborne* has aspects of both Gothic and Cthulhu-style horror, but it's the former that's depicted from the start and provides a guide for the game's visual feel. That's because Gothic horror is based more in the world of reality. ("Interviews," Fextralife)

The Gothic themes present in *Bloodborne* beyond its visual setting and atmosphere include the dangers of unchecked discovery mentioned above and more generally the consequences of a subject's confrontation with the abject (see Figure 22). In analyzing these themes, I am guided by Julia Kristeva's book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980) where she defines the abject and offers numerous examples of its presence in art and literature.



Figure 22 - The Gothic setting and visuals of Yharnam in *Bloodborne*. Note the player avatar, the Outsider, in the bottom left.

Bloodborne is a difficult game to both narrativize and summarize. This is partly the fault of the medium and partly a quality of *Bloodborne*'s particular style of storytelling. *Bloodborne* tells what media scholar Sebastian Domsch describes as a "non-linear, embedded narrative" or "narrative as archaeology" (Domsch 114). In *Bloodborne*, rather than experience a narrative across the runtime of the game as one might with a film, players discover the game's narrative

across the game's space through the narrative architecture of the game's design (Jenkins). In this sense, *Bloodborne*'s narrative is "told *in* and *through* space" as the player explores the game's world (Domsch 122). The game is littered with narrative clues hidden in the world and buried in item descriptions or optional dialogue lines that, when processed as a whole, become legible as the game's narrative. Taken individually, these clues are functionally meaningless as a coherent narrative, but when read together across multiple playthroughs of the game, much like a crime for a detective or the nature of a ruin for an archaeologist, these clues become collectively meaningful as a narrative after the fact. Therefore, when summarizing this game's story, I am summarizing a narrative experienced non-linearly, spatially, and across playthroughs.

In *Bloodborne*, the player takes on the role of a customizable avatar called the Outsider. Canny readers of Gothic fiction will recognize the allusion to Lovecraft's 1921 short story "The Outsider"—a story that Miyazaki took clear inspiration from for a key moment in the game that will be discussed later in this chapter. The Outsider visits the fictional, Victorian London-esque city of Yharnam²¹ to receive a special form of sacred healing practiced there called Blood Ministration, where an individual receives a transfusion of mysterious blood that is said be a panacea for all ailments. Yharnam is a city consumed by a never-ending hunt. In a typically Gothic motif, this Blood Ministration, while being an all-curing panacea also has the side effect of transforming its users over time into unsightly beasts. The Healing Church, authorities of Yharnam and founders of Blood Ministration had employed beast hunters to stamp out any signs of infection before they could spread. However, as time went on and blood healing became ubiquitous, the spreading infection of beastly transfiguration became unmanageable. Soon the

²¹ The name "Yharnam" bears a striking resemblance to H. P. Lovecraft's fictional setting of Arkham. This homage is even more obvious in Japanese, with the similar Japanese spellings of *aakamu* (アーカム) and *yaanamu* (ヤーナム). Though the Massachusetts town shares little visual similarities with the game's presentation of Yharnam.

common citizens of Yharnam were forced to take up any weapons they could find and engage in a never-ending hunt against their own beastly kin, even as they turned night by night into beasts themselves. When the Outsider arrives in Yharnam, they are warned by a fellow hunter that “there are no humans left.”



Figure 23 - Beastly humans patrol the streets of Yharnam on the night of the hunt.

The Outsider is searching for a substance called paleblood, which turns out to be related to the Great Ones—Lovecraftian beings that live in a plane apart and control the fabric of reality. Specifically, paleblood refers to the Moon Presence, who is a Great One of incredible power that reigns over nightmares. When the Outsider received their blood ministration at the start of the game, rather than turn into a beast, they are chosen by the Moon Presence to become a Hunter bound to the Hunter’s Dream. These specially chosen Hunters cannot die. Rather, when they die in Yharnam, they instead wake up in a liminal space called the Hunter’s Dream, a place unstuck

from waking reality. Here, the Hunter can “reawaken” at a point before their death and try again. This is the narrative’s diegetic explanation for the game’s system of respawn points.

As the Outsider explores Yharnam’s darkest secrets in search of paleblood, they uncover the work of the Mensis Scholars, who are attempting to use a special ritual on this never-ending night to create their very own Great One by impregnating a waking woman with the child of a Great One, an imitation of a communion conducted many years ago that resulted from the first contact between the Great Ones and humans. After the Outsider slays the ritual’s guardian Rom, the Vacuous Spider, the seal is broken separating the waking world of Yharnam and the nightmare realm of the Great Ones. Yharnam is then infiltrated by the nightmare first birthed by the spectral Queen Yharnam, who long ago was the first unwitting victim forced to bear children by a Great One (see Figure 24).



Figure 24 - The Outsider encounters the specter of the Queen Yharnam after defeating the Vacuous Rom. Her ghostly white garments are stained with blood from the horrid birthing ritual the queen was forced to endure.

This ghost of Queen Yharnam is a mysterious, recurring figure in *Bloodborne*, and little is known of the specifics of her fate. Once again, like in *Hanamonogatari*, we find in the Japanese Gothic text a female specter whose wrongful death results in a haunting. Japanese literary scholar Tanaka Takako argues in her essay “*Yūrei wa naze onna bakari ka*” (“Why are there so many female ghosts in Japan?”) that female ghosts are often closely bound up in historical gendered trauma, such as the shift that took place in the feudal era as violent patrilineal military systems of power replaced matrilineal structures (Tanaka 44-70). The *yūrei* of Queen Yharnam similarly represents this very sort of historical trauma that those in power would rather forget. Queen Yharnam was the ruler of a precursor society that existed long before the contemporary Yharnam of the game’s present. The Pthumerians, as their society is known, were the first to discover and attempt to harness the power of the Great Ones, which came at a horrific cost. The Pthumerian society only exists in old, buried ruins of the once great civilization deep beneath the Yharnam of today. It was in these long forgotten tombs that the first of the Mensis Scholars discovered the healing powers of the blood of the Great Ones. That Queen Yharnam continues to haunt the Yharnam of today suggests that, like Numachi in *Hanamonogatari*, her haunting behavior represents a desire for both vengeance for the misdeeds she faced in the past and also for the story of her horrible fate be heard.



Figure 21 - Concept art for Queen Yharnam.

After the ritual seal is broken by Rom's death, eldritch entities appear in Yharnam's streets and the boundary between dream and reality frays and falls apart. The Outsider journeys to the deepest reaches of the nightmare created by the Mensis Scholars, finds Mergo, the Nightmare Newborn created by them, and silences its harrowing cry by slaying its wet nurse. Upon doing so, the Outsider finds that the Hunter's Dream is now ablaze and Gehrman, caretaker of the Hunter's Dream, offers the Outsider a choice. The eternal night is now coming to an end and dawn will soon break at last. Gehrman tells the Outsider to submit their life, allowing them to reawaken under the new day's sun and finally be free of the never-ending cycle of death and reawakening in the Hunter's Dream.

If the player chooses to submit their life, the narrative ends here. If they refuse, they battle Gehrman and take his place as the caretaker of the Hunter's Dream. However, if the player finds and collects three secret items called "One Third of an Umbilical Cord" hidden in the

remotest reaches of the game's narrative space, the player can receive the game's true ending by slaying Gehrman and then defeating the paleblood Moon Presence who descends from the moon after Gehrman's death. After the player slays this final boss, they are reborn as a newborn Great One, presumably taking Moon Presence's place at the ontological center of the game's dreamlike metaphysics.



Figure 26 - The Outsider confronts Moon Presence.

Frankenstein tells a narrative that can be summed up much more simply. The Adventurer Robert Walton, while on an expedition to find the northern pass through the Arctic Ocean, discovers instead a strange pair of dogsledders racing across the ice. One of whom is Dr. Victor Frankenstein whose narrative we read through Walton's letters to his sister. With a combination of Enlightenment science and alchemical magic, Frankenstein is able to breathe life into a body stitched together from numerous corpses. He is so horrified at his creation that he flees the room and abandons it upon creation. This turns out to be a grave mistake, as the monster develops

rapidly, gaining intelligence and language by hiding out near a farmhouse and eavesdropping on its occupants. Frankenstein's monster receives nothing but mistreatment and abuse from humans, even after he becomes erudite enough to converse with them, so he gives up hope of ever living alongside humanity. When Victor refuses to make a mate for the monster so that they could leave and live somewhere apart from society, the monster swears revenge and slays all who Victor holds dear. The end of the novel has Victor chasing the monster across the Arctic, where he finally meets his end. The monster, too, upon visiting the corpse of his creator, reflects that he too will soon die. He jumps off Walton's ship and is soon "lost in darkness and distance" (Shelley 189).

The Gothic themes of the danger of unchecked discovery present in the narratives of *Bloodborne* and *Frankenstein* might be apparent from summary alone. In *Bloodborne*, the Healing Church used the discovery of the healing properties of the blood harvested from a Great One found deep in the tombs beneath Yharnam (Ebrietas, Daughter of the Cosmos, and likely the offspring produced by the communion between the Great Ones and the Queen of Yharnam), as a scientific means to prolong life. This discovery, however, proved to be too much for humans to use responsibly, and the monstrous plague served as punishment for their hubris. Similarly, in *Frankenstein* Victor's pursuit towards "the enticements of science" without concern for the consequences of creating life led ultimately to his downfall (Shelly 54). It is warning against this pursuit of dominion over the natural world that motivates Victor to tell his tale. When Robert says to Frankenstein that "[o]ne man's life or death were but a small price to pay... for the dominion I should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race..." Victor responds "[h]ave you drank also of the intoxicating draught? Hear me... and you will dash the cup from your lips" (37).

This warning against the pursuit of scientific domination also finds a space in *Bloodborne*'s narrative. The player views a cinematic flashback depicting the moment Lawrence, the founder of the healing church, left Master Willem, head of the college Byrgenwerth where the scientific potential of the Great One's blood was being researched. Willem reminds his former student Lawrence of the adage that guided their research into the power of the Great One's blood: "We are born of the blood, made men by the blood, undone by the blood... fear the Old Blood." Lawrence then takes his leave of Willem, and now left alone Willem repeats "By the gods, fear it, Lawrence!" In both narratives we see the Gothic theme of the consequences for overreaching the bounds of careful scientific discovery. Each argues that when discovery would be used to dominate the natural world, there is the potential that it will instead lead to ruin. Lawrence ignores Willem's warnings to fear the Old Blood, and as a result, he not only precipitates the downfall of all of Yharnam, but also himself ends up transforming into a terrible Cleric Beast, left to burn eternally in the Hunter's Nightmare.

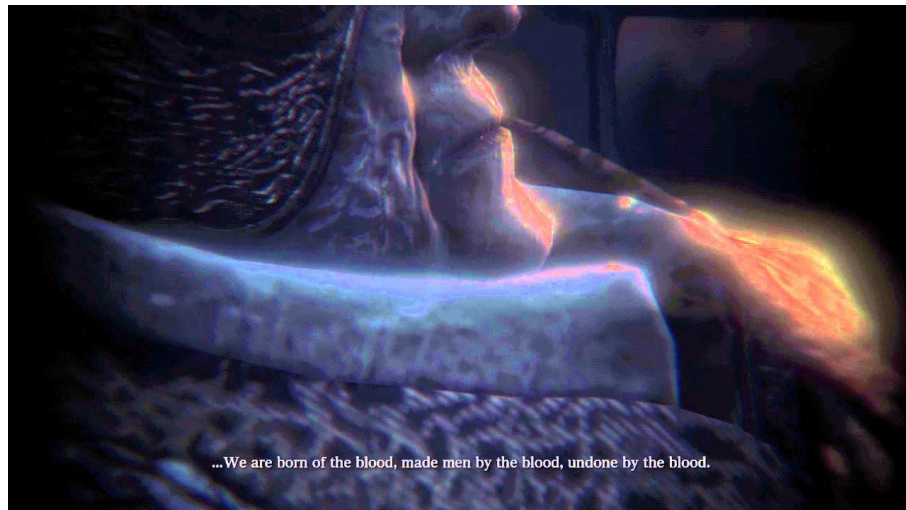


Figure 27 – A close up of Master Willem warning Lawrence of the dangers of the blood.

Narratively, both *Frankenstein* and *Bloodborne* interrogate the threat of unchecked discovery as a theme in the narrative. As above, this manifests in the written dialogue in both. A character warns through language another (or an implied reader or viewer) of the dangers of discovery. However, in *Bloodborne*, the game further operates with game processes that reinforces its narrative's theme. Pioneering videogame scholar Ian Bogost describes this as a game's "procedural rhetoric." Bogost defines procedural rhetoric as "the practice of using processes persuasively... Procedural rhetoric is a general name for the practice of authoring arguments through processes" (Bogost 2662). In *Bloodborne*, the argument that discovery can be dangerous is made in part through the process of its Insight mechanic.

Insight is a stat and currency in *Bloodborne* where, when a player discovers something about the game's world, such as reaching a new area or finding a hidden narrative clue, the player's avatar is awarded with variable points of Insight, represented in the upper right corner of the screen and marked by an eye-shaped symbol. The amount of Insight a player has determines certain aspects of the game's world such as the visibility of certain nightmare entities or the presence of a baby's cry added to the game's sonic environment ("Insight," Fextralife). For instance, in Figure 28 we see a large monstrous entity called an Amygdala clinging to the side of a cathedral.



Figure 28 - An Amygdala clings to the side of a chapel. Note the 40 insight in the top right. This monstrosity is invisible to player avatars with less than 40 insight.

In order to see this monstrosity, the player must have obtained at least 40 Insight. This location is in the Cathedral Ward, a level near the very beginning of the game. No matter what the player's decisions may be, it is impossible (without taking advantage of unintended glitches or exploits) to have 40 Insight by the time the player first reaches this point on their first playthrough. The first time the player discovers the presence of the Amygdala in Cathedral Ward will most likely be after they've already journeyed through the Forbidden Woods to the lost academy Byrgenwerth and slain Rom the Vacuous Spider. At this point, the waking world of Yharnam is literally impregnated by the nightmare Moon Presence at the beckoning of the Mensis ritual. The waking reality of Yharnam becomes a nightmare, and as such the sudden discovery of the presence of horrifying creatures like the Amygdala reinforces the narrative moment.

Furthermore, as the player receives more Insight by making more discoveries, the world of *Bloodborne* becomes more dangerous. New terrors like the Amygdala above appear, and certain monsters change in appearance and start to use even more deadly attacks. Indeed, acquiring more Insight requires the player to venture into darker and more dangerous areas in the game, facing more terrifying foes and increasingly lethal trials. Through the Insight mechanic, the game's systems operate in tandem with its narrative in order to express its Gothic themes to the player. Through this, the game's systems make an argument: discovering the secrets of the game's narrative space is dangerous. This argument mirrors that of the game's narrative overall, and as such, the interactivity of the game remediates the experience of this narrative. A reader of *Frankenstein* does not experience for themselves firsthand the dangers that Victor recounts to Robert, but like Robert, they fill the role of the audience of a parable. In *Bloodborne*, not only do the players hear the warning given by Master Willem to Lawrence, they are also able to learn for themselves the dangers of discovery through play. Affectively, then, the barrier between the experiences of the narrator and the reader in Shelley's novel is broken down in *Bloodborne*. The player is knitted into the narrative fabric of the game as an agent.



Figure 29 - Character creation screen in *Bloodborne*.

Teun Dubbelman comments on this peculiar aspect of videogame narratives in the essay “The Art of Being There: Artistic Practices of Presence in Narrative Media.” Dubbelman writes that the player avatar in videogames is conceived of as either a protagonist of a diegetic story or as an extension of the player. When “[c]onceived of as protagonists, they allow game designers to communicate the adventures of imagined protagonists, similar to actors on a movie screen” (Dubbelman 77). This is the mode of interpretation that informed my earlier summary of *Bloodborne*. The player controls their avatar of the Outsider, piloting them across the narrative space of the game. However, when the protagonist is “[c]onceived of as an extension of the player, they allow game designers to build elaborate fantasy worlds where players can venture out in for themselves” (77). It is this sort of double conception that drives the procedural rhetoric of *Bloodborne*’s systems. The player both pilots the Outsider as their representative in the game’s narrative *and* experiences the fantasy world of Yharnam for themselves as the avatar. The game accomplishes this through giving the player full customizable control over the name,

appearance, wardrobe, and actions of their avatar, creating a sense of closeness between player and avatar that other games eschew in favor of telling a more linear, cinematic story. Because *Bloodborne*'s narrative is told almost entirely non-linearly through its narrative architecture, *Bloodborne*'s protagonist can be simultaneously a player-avatar and a character in the narrative. The Outsider and the player discover the narrative of the game together, and therefore encounter the narrative's thematic elements in tandem. This is the most fundamental medial affect that the interactive medium exerts on the Gothic themes discussed above.

This aspect of *Bloodborne*'s medial presentation of its Gothic themes most influences the affective reception of a subject's confrontation with the abject, and the consequences of this confrontation. Though *Bloodborne* does not fit comfortably into the "horror videogame" genre, the interactive representation of this Gothic theme is one of the ways that playing the game can be such a deeply unsettling experience for the player. Let us first define the abject and discuss its representation in *Frankenstein*. Then, in remediation, we will see how *Bloodborne*'s interactivity redefines the experience of the abject.

For Kristeva, the abject is neither subject nor object, but rather functions just as "[t]o each ego its object, to each superego its abject" (Kristeva 2). The abject dismantles normative meaning-making systems as a troubling force. For instance, if I, a living body, should encounter corpses, they would "*show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live" (Kristeva 3). This is the nature of the abject, to expose the "*want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded" (Kristeva 5). The corpse exposes to me the stark contingency of my life, that a stinking corpse is not so different from me. I want to find meaning in being alive, and so I must thrust aside corpses by burial, cremation of the dead, etc. in order to maintain that separation. Similarly, in rotting food, excrement, or in all the things that a society pushes aside or that a

religion “purifies” we can find traces of the abject. This is not because “lack of cleanliness or health” causes abjection, but rather the abject is “what disturbs identity, system, order” (Kristeva 4).

In *Frankenstein*, it is how the “body [is] made spectacle, made grotesque or abject” that is at the beginnings of Victor’s pursuit of creating life (George 164). As he begins to “prepare a frame” into which he will “bestow animation,” Victor “was led to examine the cause and progress of... decay” and spent “days and nights in vaults and charnel-houses” (Shelley 55-56). Here, Victor discovers how “the fine form of man was degraded and wasted... the corruption of death succeeded the blooming cheek of life... how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain” (55). These transgressions between life and death, kept hidden buried beneath church yards or laid in darkened catacomb vaults are unearthed by Victor. Encountering these abject forms causes “the variety of feelings which bore” him towards completing his creation (57). Victor tells Robert that “my eye-balls were starting from their sockets in attending to the details of my employment. The dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of my materials; and often did my human nature turn with loathing from my occupation” (58). It in these places like the dissecting room and the slaughter house, normally kept out of public eye, that Victor faces the abject. The “turn with loathing” that he expresses his human nature experiencing is part and parcel of what Kristeva describes as an encounter with the abject. This “human nature” is rather Victor’s superego, the norms and boundaries he has been taught to uphold by his society that through this confrontation are torn down or blurred.

This encounter with the abject is then reexperienced when Victor completes his creation. Victor says to Robert “How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe... His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath” (Shelley 60). He goes on to state that

“I had worked hard for nearly two years... I had desired it with an ardor that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart” (60). That night, after fleeing from the monster and while fitfully sleeping in the courtyard, Victor has a dream where he sees his beloved Elizabeth “in the bloom of health.” He runs up to her and embraces her, but “as [he] imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death” (60). The monster, as does Elizabeth in his dream, blurs the line between the living and the dead. In the jaundiced skin that is stretched too thin over the monster’s innards, the skin-border that separates the sacred inside from the objective world outside is exposed to be only so thick. The line between life and death, as well, is made porous, with the dead spontaneously coming to life, and vice-versa. This confrontation with the abject fills Victor with horror and ultimately renders him unable to leave his bed for months, where he must be nursed by his friend Henry Clerval back to health.

These encounters with the abject form only part of *Frankenstein*’s affective force on its reader. The uncanny, as well, is central to Victor Frankenstein’s experience of his creation. The monster is so nearly human—it has all the proper parts in their proper places. And yet, the monster is decidedly *unhuman*. It is this unsettling encounter with the familiar made unfamiliar that is part and parcel of the uncanny for Freud. In his essay “The ‘Uncanny’,” Freud writes that the word “*unheimlich*” is obviously the opposite of “*heimlich*”... the opposite of what is familiar; and we are tempted to conclude that what is ‘uncanny’ is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar” (Freud 800). However, Freud goes on to argue that, instead, it is the appearance of the unfamiliar in “something which is secretly familiar” that sparks the uncanny to life (811). Familiarity, not unfamiliarity, is central to the uncanny. What Victor finds most uncanny about the monster is the ways that it resembles himself. Similarly, his nightmare of

Elizabeth is uncanny precisely because it is the familiar face of his beloved that becomes so abjectly decayed. The uncanny and the abject work together in Shelley's work to provoke a horrifying response.

Like how *Bloodborne* remediates *Frankenstein's* scenes of abjection, the uncanny in Shelley's novel also goes through potentially incoherent changes as it is brought across languages and mediums. As K.J. Donnelly argues in "Mashing the Medium: The Aesthetics of Screen Frankensteins," *Frankenstein's* uncanny effects are often themselves uncannily altered in its adaptations. They write that in filmic adaptations of *Frankenstein*, the monster is less "a fragmentary chimera than a hulking mindless golem... His mechanical movements, lack of facial expression betray a mindless, soulless, and partly dead character" (K.J. Donnelly 41). We will see how *Bloodborne* reinterprets the uncanny and its unsettling response in the player in the analysis to come.

The abject in Shelley's novel is that which troubles the binaries of inside/outside and living/dead. It is this abjection that most terrifies Victor about his creation, and it is here that Shelley's novel is at its most horrific. Similarly, the uncanny ways in which the monster becomes so similar to humanity with his intellectual capacity and inner life and yet is capable of such horrifying acts of violence further unsettle the reader. The abject and the uncanny work together to horrify the reader, with the abject unsettling normative boundaries between life and death, and the uncanny identifiable in how these unsettling motions appear in the familiar form of the human. These were the passages that most likely led Shelley to reflect on a nightmare she had before the novel's writing in her introduction of the 1831 publication, "Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavor to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away

from his odious handywork, horror-stricken” (Shelley 24). At the time, Shelley’s contemporaries asked her how she ““came to think of, and to dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?”” (19). These passages testify to how these scenes in Shelley’s story upset the contemporary norms of her society, and it is in this transgression that the abject is born.

As in the theme discussed before regarding the overreaching of scientific discovery, readers encounter the abject in Shelley’s novel at a distance, as a reader of Victor’s tale through Robert’s letters. The horrifyingly transgressive is thus far removed from the reader’s sensibilities and can be thought of as simply a ghost story or the narrative flourish of an unreliable narrator. It is horrifying, yes, to read of the monster’s profane birth, to read the descriptions of its jaundiced skin and grotesque movements, but this is not to experience the abject in itself. These themes of abject birth, however, can be read in *Bloodborne*’s narrative, as well, but they are experienced not as a record of a story, thrice removed from the abject in itself. The player must confront the abject as their avatar-self in the play space of *Bloodborne*.

The Mensis Ritual succeeds in birthing *something* from the nightmare, but it is no divine being. Rather, what forms as a result of the beckoning is The One Reborn, a boss that the player must defeat in order to proceed. The creature is introduced with a cinematic cutscene that plays prior to the fight beginning. In the cutscene, the player first sees black and hears the murmuring whispers of the ritual’s conductors as they chant profane incantations to beckon the Nightmare Newborn from the dream into the waking world. The screen fades in and the mise-en-scène contains the Advent Plaza where the ritual is taking place, a great cathedral-like structure with a wide open-air pavilion surrounded by raised causeways. In the surreally nightmarish sky, the moon cast in blood orange hues glares down at the Outsider as they step into the pavilion. The whispering grows louder as the camera pans up to focus on the moon itself, grotesquely enlarged

like a swollen, rotting fruit. The player sees one of the ritual's conductors, a corpse-like woman wearing a hooded red robe who begins ringing a bell. The bells form a chorus with the chanting, and the camera pans back to the moon. Before the moon, spreading like black mold across its surface, a strange dark cloud appears. Something begins to drip out of the cloud. We hear a wet, mushing sound as a corpse-like figure begins to descend from the hole in the sky—the birth canal of the nightmare. The figure is without skin, and we see its bones and muscles, all covered in that awful dripping fluid. With a lurch, we discover that the figure is attached to something much larger. A whole beast made entirely out of skinned corpses drops out of the hole in the sky. It's massive, just as large as the cathedral at the end of the plaza, and its mass slams into the pavilion with a wet thud. Liquid pools around it, and it begins to whisper and pull itself up. The camera lingers on its twisted musculature, the composite of corpses that make up its body, finally ending on a wide shot of the entire beast as it rears to height against the backdrop of the red moon. The screen fades to black once more, and then the battle begins. The player must now destroy this newly born monstrosity.



Figure 30 - The One Reborn standing at full height just after its birth.

Similar images of abjection animate the player's encounter with this foe as did Victor's own run-in with a monstrous birth. The skinless, living bodies unsettle the individual's desire for a clear interior and exterior to the self, and the birth of something so obviously dead upends the binaries between life and death. However, this abjection is experienced by the player as a mix of images, sounds, and interactive play space. Similar moments appear throughout the game, where the player must confront something revolting, terrifying, and abject as their avatar. This relationship between the player and the fearful entity is what Sebastian Möring considers in his essay "Distance and Fear: Defining the Playspace." He writes that "the objects of fear or that *which is feared* are harmful objects in the game space threatening an object in the game that is not to be hit, injured or killed" (Möring 234). These entities elicit fear in the player if "the harmful object is at an approachable distance from where it can be harmful or not" (235). Gameplay, for Möring, is that which occurs in this space. He calls this the "play space" and writes that "[b]etween the threatening entity and the threatened entity emerges a certain space

which I regard as the ‘play space.’” (231). This space must be maintained in order for the game to continue. If the space is not respected, then the player will be harmed and finally killed by the entity, ending play.

It is in this consideration of play space that I find most clearly the representation of the Gothic themes of an encounter with the abject within the interactive medium of videogames. The horrifying entities of *Bloodborne*, such as The One Reborn, cannot be run from, as Victor does with his creation, but must be fought. In order to do so, the player must enter “*striking distance*” with the fearsome opponent, putting themselves at risk in doing so (Möring 238). The player experiences affectively a life or death dance with their foe as their avatar. Of course, failure does not actually harm the player, but because of the relationship between player and avatar discussed above, death for the avatar is nonetheless an undesirable occurrence for the player. That these foes are so grotesque and horrifying means that the player must master their fears and face the root of their terror in order to proceed through the game.

As the player goes through the world brutally eviscerating monstrosities, they might reflect on the first of the games required boss fights. Here we see *Frankenstein’s* uncanny themes represented in the interactive medium. The first boss fight in *Bloodborne* is not against a horrifying beast or a gruesome amalgam of abject corpses. Rather, the first boss of *Bloodborne* is what at first appears to be a fellow sane hunter like the player avatar: Father Gascoigne, a religious leader of a neighboring city that came to Yharnam to assist the sick. However, when “assisting the sick” came to mean “eliminating the beasts,” Father Gascoigne took up an axe and a blunderbuss to help the Healing Church deal with its beast infestation. The hunters of beasts that the Church employed were given extreme quantities of the healing blood in order to triumph in their fights against the beasts. However, this ended up further exacerbating the problem, as

hunters began to transform into beasts themselves. The player avatar encounters Father Gascoigne near the end of his sanity. He is mindlessly carving up the corpses of his recently slaughtered prey, and when he hears the avatar approach, he begins to speak to them. Gascoigne says to the player, “Beasts all over the shop. You’ll be one of them, sooner or later...” Then he turns, revealing a shockingly human face, but his primal snarl betrays an uncannily bestial set of teeth (Figure 31). Halfway through the fight with a fellow hunter (this is the first time in the game the player is fighting an opponent with a similar set of skills to their own) Gascoigne’s bestial transformation catalyzes. He explodes into a mass of fur and muscle, and he starts swinging his massive claws where he had been using an axe before. This uncanny moment has the player fight a hunter very much like themselves who reveals themselves to be a beast all along. The player slays this former hunter (they have no choice if they wish to proceed through the game) and will go on to slay many more hunters (most of whom, unlike Gascoigne, are completely sane, not yet succumbing to beasthood by the time the player deals the killing blow).



Figure 31 - Father Gascoigne snarls at the player avatar before attacking them.

However, in doing so, the player might come to realize something. As the final ending of the game depicts, in slaying these beasts who were all once humans, the player becomes the very sort of monster that they once feared—just as Gascoigne did before them. The Outsider that the player controls is, themselves, the very thing the world of Yharnam is most terrified of—a man-slaying monster. The game never gives the player any reason to attack the citizens of Yharnam aside from self-defense, but as the game goes on, it is expected that the player slays beasts without reflection. Indeed, Gehrman tells the Outsider when they first meet not to think too hard about their actions, to just “go out and kill a few beasts, it’s just what Hunters do.” By doing this, the Outsider and the player along with them experiences self-abjection. When the player receives the final ending of the game, an ending that requires them to kill at least one non-hostile woman to acquire the necessary three umbilical cords, the player sees their avatar made into the very sort of monster that they had been killing all along. As Kristeva writes of self-abjection, “essentially different from ‘uncanniness,’ more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin” (Kristeva 14). Not only has the player failed to recognize the human in the beasts they’ve been killing, now they may fail to recognize the self in the monster they see onscreen. It is this possibility for self-abjection that is the most striking representation of Gothic themes in the interactive narrative of *Bloodborne*.

This bivalent moment where the player may be both horrified and empowered to find themselves to be the monster they had feared all along bears a striking resonance with H. P. Lovecraft’s short story “The Outsider.” In the story, the main character, who has never seen their own image before, ventures through the dreamlike castle of their birth, only to come across a mirror. Here, the narrator encounters their own reflection which bears such a horrid countenance

that the narrator concludes that “I know always that I am an outsider; a stranger in this century and among those who are still men. This I have known ever since I stretched out my fingers to the abomination within... a cold and unyielding surface of polished glass” (Lovecraft 1926). The true horror of this story is the realization that the reader experiences along with the narrator of the horrific truth of the monster behind the “I.” This reflective monstrosity also resonates with *Hanamonogatari*, where the pernicious heteronormalizing force of the “I” behind the animated film’s voyeuristic camera-eye reveals itself to be Aragagi and the audience along with him.



Figure 32 - The Outsider, now reborn as a slug-like baby Great One, is held by the Doll in the final cinematic of the game's third ending.

The videogame *Bloodborne*, developed by the Japanese studio From Software should not be read simply as an essentially Japanese game. Because of the game’s multinational development team, its inability to be fit into genre categories that are archetypically “Japanese,” and most importantly, its transnational Gothic setting and themes, reading this game as a node in a transnational cultural network is a much more productive method for interpretation. *Bloodborne* contains thematic elements of the Globalgothic, including thematic elements from Mary

Shelley's *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*'s Gothic aesthetics, Lovecraft's mythos, and narrative motifs of the Pangothic *yūrei*.

The interactive medium represents these themes with a number of consequential affective alterations, the most primary of which is the proximity of the player to the narrative. In a Gothic novel like *Frankenstein*, the reader is presented with a narrative that is removed from the here and now of their phenomenological reality. The frightening occurrences of the novel take place across the borders of ink and page, or on the other side of the film's screen. In the interactive medium, this same distance is not so easily maintained. Players of *Bloodborne* experience firsthand the terrors of unchecked discovery both through the game's narrative and through the game's systems and must face the terror of abjection by getting within striking distance of the things that frighten them. It is the player themselves that must pilot their avatar, the Outsider, through the narrative environment of the game. Taking this further, the interactive medium enables players to be themselves embroiled into the narrative as authoring actors, both experiencing and composing the narratives they play. This means that as readers of videogames, we must take the phenomenological experience of the player into account when interpreting their narrative.

Taking these case studies of *Hanamonogatari* and *Bloodborne* together, it becomes clear how the Globalgothic confronts the classical Gothic in various transmedial and transnational encounters. In the age of transnational cultural flows made possible by high-speed travel, mechanical reproducibility of culture, and the simultaneous transmission of data through the internet, considering an object consumed globally, like an animated film or a videogame, as an object that is somehow essentially national puts blinders on a nuanced understanding of that object. *Bloodborne* is a prime example of this, as it is a thread in the larger tapestry of the

transnational Gothic. As Colette Balmain argues in her essay “Pan-Asian Gothic,” Japanese Gothic media objects like *Bloodborne* and *Hanamonogatari* prove “that the relationship between East and West is not one of hierarchical dominance, but one... that demands a new way of thinking about the gothic in an age of globalization and cosmopolitanism” (Balmain 120-121). These transmedial encounters between source and adaptation that take place on this global stage might be incoherent at first, but through careful consideration, there exists immense potential for reparative encounters there, as well.

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Figure 21: https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/bloodborne/images/1/19/Bloodborne%E2%84%A2_20151013010910.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20151013164245

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Figure 24: <https://static0.hardcoregamerimages.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/bloodborne-queen.jpg>

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Figure 32: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aaAdI_IfrfM

CHAPTER THREE

An Ambiguous Apocalypse—(Re)productive Dystopias, Queer Futurity

“Shall we go outside? Our future is awaiting us,” Yuu said to us, and we nodded.

- Murata Sayaka, *Earthlings*²²

“... Where are we going?”

“Someplace nice,” I said. “Normal. We can live in a house with a roof and a kitchen, surrounded by neighborhood. We’ll both get jobs. We’ll never talk about them. We’ll watch TV together, things like that.”

- Alexandra Kleeman, *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine*

“The First Flame quickly fades. Darkness will shortly settle. But one day, tiny flames will dance across the darkness, like embers, linked by lords past... Ashen one, hearest thou my voice, still?”

- The Firekeeper, from *Dark Souls III*²³

As the final cutscene plays of “The End of Fire” ending cinematic of Japanese game studio FromSoftware’s videogame *Dark Souls III* (2016), the Fire Keeper speaks the above lines to the player avatar²⁴, referred to as the Ashen One, from beyond a black screen. “The End of Fire” is one of the three intended endings that a player can receive upon completion of the game’s main storyline. Depending on the player’s decisions and actions during their playthrough, one of three endings will play after the player defeats the game’s final boss encounter. “The End of Fire”

²² “‘Soto ni ikō ka? Boku tachi no mirai ga matteru.’ Yuu no kotoba ni, watashi mo otto mo unazuited.” Murata, Sayaka. *Chikyū seijin* (trans. Earthlings). Shinchosa, 2018.

²³ *Dāku souru III* (trans. Dark Souls 3), directed by Hidetaka Miyazaki, Isamu Okano, and Yui Tanimura (FromSoftware Studios, 2016). PlayStation 4.

²⁴ “Player avatar” is a term that denotes the controllable character of a video game. It is particularly useful in describing controllable characters in games where the playable character is unnamed and created by the player, usually in Role Playing Games (RPGs).

might be considered the most overtly apocalyptic of these endings—signaling the collapse of the game’s diegetic world system. It is the ending the player receives by intentionally failing in the task that has been set out for them—to reproduce the world system by sacrificing themselves to fuel the fire for the next generation to come. Instead, in this ending, the Ashen One works together with the Fire Keeper to allow the flame to go out once and for all, ushering in a time of darkness and uncertainty.

What makes this ending intriguing for my investigation into the speculative is that this apocalyptic ending is not explicitly a “bad” ending as might be found in many other interactive stories,²⁵ which often fit player actions into a binary of “good” and “bad” actions and reward (or punish) the player with a corresponding ending. These roughly fall on the utopia or dystopia binary, with “moral” game actions rewarded with the utopian ending, and “immoral” game actions punished with the dystopian ending. The end of the world as we know it is as dystopian of an ending as one can get, isn’t it? Furthermore, this ending marks a rupture with the prevailing social norm of the Dark Souls universe—that of perpetuation and reproduction of the world system. It is therefore no stretch to read “The End of Fire” as a rejection of what Sarah Ahmed describes as the “inheritance” of all subjects in heteronormative society—the promise to continue to reproduce the vertical line of the family and sustain the species life of humanity (Ahmed 86). In doing so, “The End of Fire” offers its players a possible vision of what I will later define as queer futurity.

However, in order to unpack the implications of “The End of Fire,” we must first discuss how we imagine our future, the consequences of patriarchal capitalism’s conventional futurity,

²⁵ For US-developed examples, see the recent *Fallout* series (Bethesda, 2012) and the *Mass Effect* series (BioWare, 2007). For Japanese examples, see the *Shin Megami Tensei* series (Atlus, 2004) and *Streets of Rage* (AM7, 1991).

and the queer alternatives that speculation and the specular encounter can offer us. Ultimately, we must come to understand this ending's peculiar speculative futurism—an ambiguous apocalypse—one that represents a disjuncture from the conventional futurity of both the game's world and our own, while offering an ambiguously mixed affect. This will be the topic of this chapter: how can a specular encounter between our world and its speculative possibilities offer critical alternatives for imagining our collective futures, and what might we stand to gain from such an imaginary. The media objects analyzed within this chapter each speculate the possibility of an alternative—what we will come to call queer—futurity that both critiques and nuances the conventional utopia/dystopia binary of capitalist realism.

Futurity is a system of thought for how a society, cultural group, or institution imagines its future. Futurity denotes a pattern of conceptions, a canon of imagery, of mythology, and of ideological givens that undergird this image of the future. We might call it simply the well of thought drawn from to imagine our futures. However, futurity does not describe a prophetic, natural expression of what the future *must be* as some sort of *fiat lux*. This is an important distinction to keep in mind. As Aimee Bahng warns in her book *Migrant Futures: Decolonizing Speculation in Financial Times* (2018), getting people to mistake “prophecy for truth, notational figure for value, or futurity for future” is one of the “god tricks” purveyed by “capitalist realism” to justify its perpetuation *ad infinitum* (Bahng 2). Futurity is a useful term for Bahng insofar as it highlights the “construction of the future” while simultaneously emphasizing “how narrative constructions of the future play a significant role in materializing the present.” Because futurity is both constructed and acts on the present, it necessarily possesses an ideological bent. There is a hegemonic futurity that valorizes some ways of imagining the future over others. For Bahng, this is the capitalist realist futurity all around us. It justifies certain actions that might otherwise

be seen as abhorrent, encourages some behaviors while demonizing the alternatives, and makes some paths visible while concealing others from sight.

Of course, capitalist realism is not the only discourse to exploit conceptions of the future in order to justify its perpetuation. Marx depends on the image of a horizon of a communist future to come in order to write his manifesto, after all.²⁶ However, what makes capitalist realism's mobilization of futurity particularly pernicious is how it "produces insecurity and consumerist desire" in order to make the future "a space of possibility" for unending expansion (Bahng 13). Capitalist realism views the speculative future with the violent, linear sense of the word speculative—as an object to be understood, controlled, and exploited.

In capitalist patriarchy, we might describe this particular sort of conventional, hegemonic futurity more specifically, by borrowing Japanese queer theorist Kazue Harada's term, as "(re)productive futurism." Building off of the concept of "reproductive futurism" from Lee Edelman's groundbreaking work *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Harada chooses to translate a key phrase in Sugita Mio's (a member of the Japanese House of Representatives) essay "LGBT *no shien ni do ga sugiru*" (Support for LGBT is excessive)²⁷ using this term "(re)productivity." Harada writes that embedded in Sugita's turn of phrase "*Seisansei*" is the assumption that "it is only heteronormative (re)productivity—having children—that contributes to society..." because "children will ensure the production of labor and economic activity to counter the country's low birthrate and aging population" (Harada 1). Indeed, in Harada's book *Sexuality, Maternity, and (Re)productive Futures: Women's Speculative Fiction in Contemporary Japan*, she uncovers how Japan's modernization was built on the expectation that

²⁶ See Marx and Engels 1848.

²⁷ Sugita Mio, "LGBT *no shien ni do ga sugiru*" in *Shinchō* 45.37, no. 8 (August 2018): 58-59.

in order for an individual to be a productive member of society, they must be both productive in an economic sense and in a biological sense—producing children. Thus, the “(re)” in “(re)productive” highlights how “reproductivity” can be constructed in these two distinct but complementary senses. In a (re)productive society, bodies that can produce surplus labor value efficiently and effectively—that is to say able-bodied, conforming, disciplined bodies²⁸—are valued more highly than disabled, undisciplined, nonconforming ones. Furthermore, reproductively viable bodies—those in heterosexual, reproductive pairings—are similarly valorized. After all, capitalism needs to reproduce both the means of production and the labor force whose surplus labor value will be capitalized on. In short, capitalist societies need—just as much as they need laboring bodies to begin with—able-bodied births to replace the labor that is lost to disability, retirement, and death. Furthermore, capitalist expansion depends on ever-growing economies and ever-increasing numbers of consumers.

In sum, Harada’s concept of (re)productive futurism is a particular sort of futurity that imagines society’s prosperous future as being dependent on sustained (re)productive expansion—raising birthrates, ever-growing economies, lengthening healthy employable lifespans, and so on. (Re)productive futurism promises us that our future is granted to us through producing our heirs (who will then go on to be exploited as labor and produce their own heirs), and social and political structures organize around making this future manifest. As Edelman writes in his landmark book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, in this vision of the future, the “Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention” (Edelman 6).

²⁸ Bodies that have been trained to follow orders, keep to a schedule, obey the law under threat of perceived surveillance, etc. See Foucault (1975).

When the utopic future is imagined as an ever-increasing wonderland of economic growth, modernization, technological innovation, and reproduction of the (able-bodied, racially pure) heteronormative family line, we might see (re)productive futurism at work. Harada specifically charts this sort of futurism in Japan of the early 20th century. For example, Harada writes that “the idea of (re)productivity featured as a common factor in the Racial Hygiene Policy (*Minzoku eisei hō*) of the 1930s and the 1940 National Eugenic Protection Law (*Kokumin yūsei hō*)” (Harada 5). These policies of ethnic purity and this nationalized eugenics program reveal, for Harada, a pattern of (re)productive futurism in modern Japanese policy and thought. The future secured for the pure-bred children of these programs would be bright, spotless, homogenous, and economically prosperous. As long as the working class labored tirelessly and women served in their role as “*ryōsai kenbo*” (good wives and wise mothers), then this future would be guaranteed, or so this (re)productive futurism seems to promise. In contemporary Japan, these (re)productive ideologies continue to cling to policy and cultural practice. Particularly visible in various efforts to address declining birthrates and the so-called “crisis of care,” the Japanese government and other conservative groups struggle to maintain this particular vision of the future.

Of course, while Harada’s work isolates the (re)productive futurist tendencies in modern Japanese society, I would like to consider the (re)productive futurism of contemporary patriarchal capitalist societies transnationally. Harada’s analysis of the specific conditions of this pattern of thought in Japan can help us to find similar patterns elsewhere. After all, these patterns of (re)productive futurism are plainly at work the world over, flowing with the colonial values that tag along with capitalist incursion into the (imagined endless) horizon of the global market. The pithy phrase “the children are our future” might remind us of how, in the United States, for

example, (re)productivity is valorized in sometimes tacit but oftentimes explicit ways. How many of us (particularly those who were assigned female at birth) have been asked about our future at various points in our life in these terms: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” or “How many children do you want to have?” or, more insidiously, “When are you planning to have children?” and “Don’t you think it’s time to settle down?” These stock questions exemplify the subtle (re)productive futurist tendencies of our culture. I do not think it is such a stretch to look at, for example, contemporary legislation around abortion access or zygotal personhood in much of the United States and see contemporary (re)productive futurist logic at work. Despite the aging image of the “American Dream” mythology of the hardworking White American man with his obedient wife, his smiling kids, and his white-picket fence, this fraudulent vision of a bright and (ethnically) clean future secured for our children continues to catalyze frictions in the US, exemplified in the all too infectious mantra of “Make America Great Again” (itself a vision of the utopic future that owes its imagery to (re)producing an imagined utopian past). The clashing anxieties of social conservatives—particularly among the ultrarich in tech and finance sectors²⁹—surrounding falling birthrates (and the very real impact this will have on their bottom line) on the one hand, and the increasing suspicion of the inherent value of the nuclear family unit and childrearing in general among young people on the other,³⁰ further exacerbate this tension. I argue that (re)productive futurism far exceeds simply being “alive and well” in contemporary capitalism. Indeed, it is better to say that patriarchal capitalism depends on an

²⁹ See Elon Musk’s tweet on August 20th, 2023 when he emphatically agrees with the statement that “Population collapse is the biggest threat to civilization,” for example.

³⁰ An example of which can be seen in the growing popularity of the Korean radical feminist “4B” movement among young US American and Japanese feminists. Its name comes from the Korean prefix “bi,” from the Chinese character “非,” which means “no” or “non-.” Its four tenants are 1. *bisekseu* (no sex with men), 2. *bichulsan* (no giving birth), 3. *biyeonae* (no dating men), and 4. *bihon* (no marriage with men).

ideology of (re)productive futurism in order to guarantee its perpetuation—literally to secure its future. Any threat to this ideological given becomes an existential one.

In Marxist terms, we might consider the centrality of (re)productive futurist ideology for the perpetuation of capitalism through social reproduction. Economic anthropologist Hadas Weiss suggests this to be so in her essay “Social reproduction as the reproduction of capitalism.” In *Capital* volume 1, Marx contends that the “social form of the production process...” must be “continuous, it must periodically repeat the same phases” (Marx 711). Marx here underscores how the “incessant renewal” of the “social process of production” implies that social production is “a process of reproduction.” Marx makes clear that reproduction of the social process of capitalist production (what Althusser will later describe as reproducing the means of production)³¹ is part and parcel of the capitalist system. (Re)productive futurity is always already embedded in any model of capitalist economics. Following this line of thought, Weiss argues, “Capitalist society differs from prior social systems in that its members... cannot reproduce themselves outside of the capitalist market,” and therefore, “the reproduction of capitalism also reproduces the compulsion and domination of the market, no less than it reproduces workers and capitalists, commodities and livelihoods” (Weiss 106). Any critique of (re)productive futurism is as such also a critique of the capitalist system of exploitation and domination supported by (re)productive futurism. As Weiss continues, “In capitalism, accumulation takes place through exploitation and domination. Social reproduction is the securing of optimal conditions for this process to be carried out” (108). Aimee Bahng echoes this sentiment, writing how when viewed through the lens of the speculative futures markets, “the mother’s labor would be considered

³¹ See Althusser (1971).

supplemental to the promise of the child's potential in the economy of human capital" (Bahng 82).

Addressing the frustration, hopelessness, and ennui experienced by the subjects of this pervading (re)productive futurism, Bahng writes that "it is heartening that the search for sociopolitical alternatives... is still on" (Bahng 18). This sentiment is echoed in José Muñoz's landmark 2009 work *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, where he begins with the now-iconic phrase "Queerness is not yet here... but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality" (Muñoz 1). Indeed, (re)productive futurity exists in a dialectical relationship with the horizon of what Muñoz calls queer futurity. Bahng continues, claiming "queer critiques, in particular, offer alternatives to the developmental and aspirational drives ascribed to heteronormative" futurity. Following a similar train of thought, Jack Halberstam writes that queer speculative fiction "use[s] space and time in ways that challenge conventional logics of development, maturity, adulthood, and responsibility" (Halberstam 13). Queer theorists like Muñoz, Bahng, Edelman, Ahmed, Harada, and Halberstam have demonstrated that there is radical political possibility in "queer failure, refusal, recalcitrance, withholding, and other techniques that disrupt" heteronormative (re)productive futurism (Bahng 19). It is this "refusal" of the "inheritance" of (re)productive futurism that is at the core of queer futurity. However, defining clearly what exactly is queer futurism becomes something of an elusive enterprise, as it appears at first (particularly when viewed through the lens of (re)productivity) to be oxymoronic. You can't have a future with no human bodies to inhabit it, right? And conventional, heterosexual reproduction appears to be the "necessary evil" as it were to secure the future of the species life of humanity. Edelman responds to this bluntly when he writes that his account of an alternative to (re)productive futurism is on "the side of

those *not* ‘fighting for the children,’ the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of” heterosexual reproduction (Edelman 6). So, where does that leave us—either a future of perpetual exploitation of life and land, or a barren society that winks itself out of existence? Muñoz would here likely remind us that central to any theorization of queer futurity is “the idea of hope, which is both a critical affect and a methodology” (Muñoz 4). Either way, clearly queer futurity has somewhat ambiguous affective possibilities.

It is thanks in no small part to the work of Harada in her exploration of Japanese queer women’s speculative literature that I am able to formulate an answer to this question at all. For Harada, the possibility of theorizing a queer futurity is most readily apparent in radical speculative literature. She writes that speculative literature “is an expansive term used to describe works that counter the dominant imaginaries of futures... [and] the imaginings by Japanese female authors of alternative futurities resist and disrupt patriarchal hetero-cis-normative institutionalized, nationalistic (re)productive futurism” (Harada 12). In my analysis of the speculative media objects to come, I rely on both Harada’s methodological framework of feminist defamiliarization and queer reading, and on my earlier framework of Eve Sedgwick’s “reparative reading” and Sara Ahmed’s conception of “queer objects” and how “moments of disorientation are vital” (Ahmed 157). Borrowing from Veronica Hollinger, Harada writes that her methodology is “to (re)read and (re)think the connections between feminist critical analyses and the concepts of queerness... in speculative fiction” (13). In the essay that Harada is citing from, “(Re)reading Queerly: Science Fiction, Feminism, and the Defamiliarization of Gender,” Hollinger writes that theory and fiction are “reciprocal echoes and restatements: they suggest information about each other and serve to defamiliarize each other” (Hollinger 23). Both critiques of (re)productive futurism and visions of queer futurity find rich terrain to sprout in

speculative literature. Harada's analysis is energized by this defamiliarizing effect. She writes that the queer speculative fiction she analyzes accomplishes this defamiliarization through its departure from "the concept of human-centered (re)production and sexual categories," and further that these works challenge "the heteronormative family system by critiquing the concept of... state-sanctioned (re)productive ideologies" (14). My analysis will follow a similar line, by seeking out those places in the speculative fiction text where (re)productive futurism is denaturalized and made disorienting, and where, as Ahmed reminds us, we might be "reoriented if the hand that reaches out finds something to steady" itself on (Ahmed 157).

Escaping a (Re)productive Future in *Earthlings*

I would like to begin my analysis of (re)productive futurism and queer futurity in speculative literature with a Japanese SF author Harada herself engages with as well—the contemporary Japanese novelist Murata Sayaka. Murata famously worked for nearly two decades as a convenience store *ten'in* (shopworker) before making her breakout appearance on the Japanese *junbungaku* (pure literature) scene. After being nominated for and winning literary prizes such as the 2003 Gunzo prize for new authors and the 2010 Mishima Yukio Prize, her 2016 novel *Konbini-ningen* (trans. *Convenience Store Woman*, 2018) was awarded the 155th Akutagawa Prize that same year, which thrust her into the international spotlight. Since then, the global translation market has rushed to make her work available in more than thirty languages. Harada writes that Murata has "consistently written about the themes of (re)production to create alternative (re)productive futures" (Harada 25). While Harada claims that Murata's work is not usually considered "SF or speculative fiction," she has become more interested in "creating more

alternative near futuristic worlds in recent years.” Harada finds Murata’s literature useful in her analysis of Japanese (re)productive futurism because of how Murata’s work “defamiliarizes the ideologies” of (re)productive futurism. “This defamiliarization,” Harada continues, “involves a sense of realism because of its foundation in contemporary social conditions” (Harada 109).

Building off of Harada’s line of inquiry, I’d like to focus on Murata’s 2018 novel *Chikyū seijin* (Trans. *Earthlings*, 2020, by Ginny Tapley Takemori) which goes uncommented on in Harada’s book, perhaps due to its recent date of publication. However, it might be argued that *Earthlings* does not fit neatly in the category of “speculative fiction” that Harada constructs in her book because it takes place in a near-contemporary Japan with no imaginary technologies or alternative societal configurations. I’d like to gently push back against this construction of the limits of speculative fiction by arguing that *Earthlings* is an example of what I will later define in more detail in this chapter as hyperrealist fiction—a form of speculative fiction that takes contemporary reality and turns the proverbial dials up to 11 to offer a speculative reimagining of the alternative present. Hyperrealist fiction is designed to make the tacit explicit, the underlying overbearing, and aims to shout the unsaid from the rooftops.

This statement alludes to what Ursula Le Guin writes about sci-fi literature in the 1976 introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969). Le Guin writes that science fiction “is not predictive; it is descriptive” (Le Guin xii). Good speculative literature works similarly. It examines the conditions of the world as they are and uses metaphor to allow the reader to see herself and her world in much the same reflective manner that a mirror might. We might call this a defamiliarization of the present, where our reality encounters a distorted mirror image of itself. It is this quality that binds speculative literature across genre and across geographic place and historical time. Murata Sayaka examines the contemporary world and exposes to her readers

through speculative metaphors the ways that “we already are” living in a (re)productive dystopia (Le Guin xv). Taking this into consideration, I hope my reader will soon understand how I can argue that *Earthlings* should be read alongside Murata’s other more explicitly speculative works.

While the dustjacket of the English translation might prominently feature a cutesy stuffed-animal hedgehog, do not be fooled by its transnationally marketable, “cute-Japan” exterior. Murata’s novel is, at its heart, a horror novel that makes the everyday reality of a hyperrealist Japan nightmarish by depicting the horrifying demands made of citizens of a (re)productive futurist society through the eyes of an asexual survivor of childhood sexual trauma. The novel’s story follows the perspective of its main character Natsuki during her childhood years as her family’s black sheep—or “*gomi-bako*” (dumpster) as she describes herself—juxtaposed with the perspective of her contemporary non-conformist adult self (Murata 51, translation by Ginney Tapley Takemori). Natsuki’s story is one of resistance to and escape from the seemingly insurmountable social pressures of contemporary Japan to conform, to be economically productive, to find a husband and marry, and ultimately to reproduce and continue the family line. My reader might be reminded here of the “*ningenppoi*” (human-like) path that Numachi lays out for Kanbaru in the prior chapter. However, Natsuki’s story is not one entirely of resistance; rather, Natsuki has come to believe that she, along with her cousin Yuu and husband Tomoya, are aliens, former inhabitants of a fictional planet Popinobopia, who have been stranded on earth and must fit in as quickly as possible in order to survive. Therefore, Natsuki spends much of the book trying to become brainwashed in order to fit in with human society. Despite her best efforts, the traumas she experiences as a child, as well as the absurdities of what it takes to “fit in” as an adult confound her attempts to be properly assimilated. Instead,

Natsuki's story takes her to the outside limits of ideology, of (re)productive futurism, and towards the horizon of something entirely new—a queer futurity.

Ostracized by her family, Natsuki yearns for some sort of social identity. She finds this through her imaginary friend “*Piyuuto*” (Piyyut, the stuffed hedgehog on the book's cover) who she believes is a magical agent that came from the planet “*Pohapipinbopia*” (trans. “Popinbopia”) to save the world from evil witches and monsters (Murata 6). From this hedgehog plushy, Natsuki is given a variety of magical powers (what a canny reader might identify as trauma responses and coping mechanisms) such as invisibility (asociality) and astral projection (dissociation). Her cousin and “*koibito*” (boyfriend), a gentle boy named Yuu, similarly believes that he is an alien from another planet because of the way he is treated by his abusive single mother (Murata 8). Yuu and Natsuki become close through their shared sense of being outsiders, but they can only see each other when they reunite each year at the family's annual *Obon* holiday³² which takes place in the rural mountain village of Akishina. As will be discussed in more detail later, Akishina is an important setting for the novel because it is imagined as closer to the outside of society's (re)productive ideology. The novel begins with one of their *Obon* meetings. This year, Yuu and Natsuki make a marriage pact with the following three stipulations: “1) *Don't hold hands with anyone else...* 2) *Wear your ring when you go to sleep...*” and most importantly “3) *Survive, whatever it takes*” (29-30).

Natsuki uses a metonym for state ideology—what she calls “the Factory”—to describe the effect of (re)productive futurism on the behavior of the citizens of the novel's hyperrealist

³² *Obon* is a summer holiday in Japan that is similar to a more somber version of the Mexican *Día de los Muertos* (day of the dead). Families gather, eat traditional meals, and welcome the spirits of their ancestors to join them for celebration and reflection.

Japan. Natsuki describes the factory as split into two distinct but interrelated parts. First is the “Wage Factory,” which utilizes the bodies and minds of its citizens to produce value through exploiting their surplus labor. Second is the “Baby Factory,” which regulates and ensures the continued reproduction of bodies to be exploited by the Wage Factory (Murata 36). These factories have specific roles leveled at, and constraining the actions of, its subjects, and these subjects of the Factory police each other to ensure that no one steps out of line. Direct state power, such as through what Louis Althusser calls “Repressive State Apparatuses,” is almost invisible in Murata’s novel (Althusser 78). Though what can be conceivably called crimes are committed in the novel, no police show up directly to enforce the law with violence, and no courts prosecute and adjudicate the accused of these crimes. Further, the Japanese government, with its local and prefectural politicians, Diet members, the Prime Minister, and even the jural figurehead of the emperor all go unmentioned in the novel. Instead, governmentality is reduced to this metonym of “The Factory” which might be read in Althusserian terms as an omnipresent but invisible State Ideology of (re)productive futurism. Natsuki describes it best as follows,

Mina, “kōba” wo shinji, “kōba” ni sennō sare, shitagatteiru. Karada no naka no zōki wo kōba no tame ni tsukai, kōba no tame ni rōdō shiteiru. Otto to watashi wa, “chanto sennō shite moraenakatta hito” tachi datta. Sennō sare sobireta hito wa, “kōba” kara haijo sare nai yōni enji suzureru shika nai. (Murata 138).

Everyone believed in the Factory. Everyone was brainwashed by the Factory and did as they were told. They all used their reproductive organs for the Factory and did their jobs for the sake of the Factory. My husband and I were people they failed to brainwash, and anyone who remained unbrainwashed had to keep up the act in order to avoid being eliminated by the factory. (Murata, Takemori 106).

As will be shown, this literary device of the metonymic “Factory” makes what is usually invisible—ideology—plainly visible within the world of the novel to the reader. This ideology is regulated and administered in the novel almost entirely through the work of “Ideological State Apparatuses,” and in particular the institutions of the family and school do the largest amount of ideological “policing.” To a lesser degree, cultural institutions like television dramas disseminate cultural scripts that characters in the novel are shown to follow (Althusser 81). We can read this clearly in the section above where Natsuki explicitly describes fitting in with the factory’s ideology as “*enji*” (acting).

In Foucault’s formulation of biopolitical power in *The History of Sexuality*, he writes that since the early-modern era, sovereign power over life has “evolved into two basic forms;” the first, “centered on the body as a machine” and the second focused on “the species body... births and mortality” (Foucault 139). The first of these forms sought to discipline the subject body in order to extract as much value from it as possible. In Murata’s novel, this can be read as the Wage Factory, or the “productive” half of (re)productive. The second, which seeks to guarantee the longevity not only of the individual life but also the species life, can be read as the Baby Factory. In this sense, the ideology made visible in the novel through its metonymy of “The Factory” is a biopolitical ideology of (re)productive futurism that manages and efficiently exploits human life through disciplining employed bodies and managing the sexual production of new life.

As a child, Natsuki comes to understand this biopolitical Factory as a physical presence that makes itself visible in the world around her. She reflects that even as a child she understood that her “town is a factory for the production of human babies. People live in nests packed closely together... just like the silkworm room in Granny’s house... and each contains a

breeding pair of male and female humans and their babies” (Murata 35). Once these babies reach a certain age (and here Natsuki’s reflection becomes explicitly futurist), the “children will also leave the factory and be shipped out... [and] trained how to take food back to their own nests [and their own children]. They become society’s tools” (35). She concludes by writing “I was a tool for the town’s good, in two senses... Firstly, I had to study hard to become a work tool... Secondly, I had to be a good girl, so that I could become a reproductive organ for the town” (40). The language Natsuki uses here simultaneously constructs the inhuman as organic, with the town’s houses compared to silkworm nests, and also conflates the mechanical with the biological, with the words “factory,” “shipped out” and “tool” used to describe the reproductive and nurturing behavior of human animals. This dualism suggests Foucault’s distinguishing between the mechanization of the human body’s potential for efficiency paired with the biological maintenance of the species life. As it continues throughout the novel, this dualistic language has the effect of both dehumanizing social actors and removing any sense of agency from their actions. Instead, the social actors of the novel read like algebraic functions, or more specifically like artificial intelligence with a pre-downloaded algorithm to follow.

Natsuki has a complicated relationship with this arrangement of society. She describes feeling “vindicated” at the beginning of fifth grade when she was taught sex education because it became clear to her that her “womb was a factory component and would couple with someone’s testes, which were also a factory component, in order to produce babies” (36). However, because Natsuki is not a typical, well-socialized societal subject, she encounters friction between the expectations of society and the reality of her experience. She writes that from “the perspective of the people in this Baby Factory, my very presence must be a nuisance” because without her magical powers, Natsuki describes herself as “a dead loss... I’d always been clumsy and ugly”

(39). Because of this, she is bullied by her mother and sister frequently throughout the childhood sections of the novel. This can be seen for instance on the day she goes to cram school wearing a black shirt. On the way to school, Natsuki and her mother run into a neighborhood woman. Her mother chides Natsuki in front of this woman by saying, "... just look at how she dresses! What a disgrace. We'll never be able to get her married off looking like that" (39).

However, this moment represents one of many moments where child Natsuki is misapprehended by society, where her small acts of independent agency are misread as rebellion against "The Factory" by her family and the social agents around her, and her family sanctions her for this reason. The actual reason Natsuki chooses to wear a black shirt that day is because her cram school teacher, the handsome and well-liked college student Mr. Igasaki, is actually a sexual predator who harasses Natsuki for the color of her underwear if he can see it through her clothes. However, whenever Natsuki tries to speak up against these predatory actions, she is once again misapprehended as being rebellious. A particularly chilling scene occurs where Mr. Igasaki finds one of Natsuki's used sanitary pads in the girl's bathroom trashcan, and he makes her change her pad in front of him while he watches in order to "make sure [she's] doing it right" (50). After this Natsuki races home in a panic. Her mother chides her for coming home without greeting her, and then Natsuki tries to get up the courage to speak out against Mr. Igasaki's predatory behavior. Natsuki explains what happens as best as she can, but Natsuki's mother fails to understand. Finally, her mother's anger boils over, and she shouts at her daughter, "I can't believe you're making out your teacher [to be] a pervert just because he told you off... It's not as if a teacher would take any interest in a child with an undeveloped body like yours... You're the dirty one, not him" (52-53). Natsuki's mother then proceeds to physically abuse Natsuki, a shocking resort to repressive state violence to ensure conformity to the state ideology. Here

Natsuki's mother is so deeply invested in the social script of what is normal and abnormal behavior, further compounded by her constant misapprehension of her daughter's acts of agency as acts of rebellion, that she inadvertently contributes to the trauma of Natsuki's childhood. In a game of social standing, the awkward, nonconforming child Natsuki cannot hope to have her word stand against the faultless image of her respected and attractive adult teacher.

It is this sexual predator that catalyzes Natsuki's already ambiguous relationship with human sexuality and the Baby Factory. At one point, Mr. Igasaki tricks the eleven-year-old Natsuki into coming to his home where he forces her to perform oral sex on him. After this, Natsuki loses the ability to taste—a trauma that lasts well into adulthood, describing it as Mr. Igasaki having destroyed or killed her mouth. The phrasing suggests Achille Mbembe's reading of Hegel's account of death. Mbembe writes that in order to become "truly a subject" the human being must first go through "the struggle and work through which he or she confronts death," and therefore subjecthood "supposes upholding the work of death... risking the entirety of one's life" (Mbembe 14-15). Natsuki, in being sexually violated and physically harmed by Mr. Igasaki, becomes a subject of (and subjugated by) the Baby Factory. In this scene, clinging to the marriage pledge she had made with her cousin Yuu to "survive, whatever it takes," Natsuki disassociates from the assault and finds herself floating high overhead watching the scene from above (Murata 61). Hiroshima University-based scholar of Japanese Studies Katalin Dalmi describes this scene best, writing that Natsuki's "detached state of consciousness helps Natsuki survive the trauma, but the event violates her bodily integrity" (Dalmi 37). While watching Mr. Igasaki use her body "as a tool" in this way, Natsuki has a realization. She reflects, "I'd thought I wasn't yet a fully fledged member of the [Baby] Factory, but actually I was one of its tools after all" (62-63). Mr. Igasaki's (re)productive desire for Natsuki's body interpellates her in an

Althusserian sense as a subject of the Baby Factory. In this moment, Natsuki comes to understand what it means to become subjected to The Factory—that it happens without your control, without your consent—and that the end result is violence. Recalling Mbembe once more, Natsuki’s revelation suggests how within a bio/necropolitical society “[s]exuality is inextricably linked to violence and to the dissolution of the boundaries of the body and the self” (Mbembe 15). That the scene is literally experienced through an out-of-body dissociation only further amplifies the resonance. Natsuki’s body has been “destroyed” in her words in order to satisfy the violent libido of the Baby Factory. As we will later see, Mr. Igasaki’s violent sexuality towards Natsuki is tacitly accepted by this society (emblemized by Natsuki’s mother’s above reaction) as, at worst, an unfortunate but unavoidable occurrence, but other types of sexuality (those sexualities that deviate from (re)productive ends) are demonized and persecuted by this same society.

Fearing that she might lose the rest of her body to Mr. Igasaki’s sexual violence, Natsuki decides to reclaim her bodily autonomy by convincing her cousin Yuu to have sex with her. Yuu is hesitant at first, but when Natsuki presses by asking him “Yuu, have you ever thought that your life doesn’t belong to you?” he finally responds by saying,

“Kodomo no inochi wa jibun no mono janai yo. Otona ga nigitteiru. Okaasan ni suteraretara taberarenai shi, otona no te wo karinai to doko ni mo ikenai. Kodomo wa minna sō da yo... Dakarak otona ni naru made, ganbatte, boku tachi wa ikinobiru n da.”
(Murata 94)

“Children’s lives never belong to them. The grown-ups own us. If your mom abandons you, you won’t be able to eat, and you can’t go anywhere without help from a grown-up. It’s the same for all children... That’s why we have to try hard to survive until we’ve grown up ourselves.” (Murata, Takemori 71)

This comment of Yuu's recalls the ever-important third promise of their childhood marriage pact, "Survive, whatever it takes." As mentioned above, this phrase becomes a mantra for Natsuki. In the scenes where she is being abused by her family or by Mr. Igasaki, Natsuki repeats this phrase over and over again in her mind. She writes, "The pledge I'd made with Yuu was seared onto the fiber of my being" (54). In the context of biopolitical and (re)productive futurist ideology, this pledge seems to fit with the mission statement of maintaining and efficiently mechanizing human life. However, the second part of that phrase "whatever it takes" might even include retreating from society, going against its doctrines, and speculating an alternative to a (re)productive future.

After they carry out their sex act, the naked children are discovered by their family members. The incensed adults violently separate the children. Natsuki is dragged off and locked in a storage shed. This whole experience with adults screaming at her is so ridiculous for her that Natsuki has to resist "the urge to burst out laughing" (88). Once she's in the shed, she reflects once more on her body. She writes,

Sono koto ga kokkei datta.

Otona wa kodomo wo seiyoku shori ni tsukau no ni, kodomo no ishin de sekkusu wo shitara baka mitai ni tori midashiteiru. Waraete shikata ga nakatta. Omae tachi nante shakai no dōgu no kuse ni. Watashi no shikyū wa ima kono shunkan, watashi no tame dake ni aru. Otona ni korosareru made wa, watashi no karada wa watashi no mono na no datta. (Murata 120-121).

It was ludicrous. Grown-ups used children to satisfy their sexual desires, yet the very idea of children having sex of their own volition sent them into a total fit. It was laughable. They themselves were just society's tools, after all! But my womb was still all mine. My body would belong to me alone until grown-ups killed me. (Murata, Takemori 89)

This reflection, along with the previous conversations with Yuu, draw a clear connection between Mr. Igasaki's sexual abuse and indoctrination into a biopolitical society of compulsory heterosexual (re)production. The adults are completely disgusted and enraged by Natsuki and Yuu's incestuous communion, which flabbergasts Natsuki. *Why indeed*, the reader might reflect alongside Natsuki, *do the adults seem so much more concerned with the consensual incest between children than the nonconsensual assault by an adult of a minor?* My reading is that Natsuki and Yuu's relationship can be interpreted as a queer one in the context of the world's hyperreal (re)productive futurist setting. One of the family members worries aloud as Natsuki is being dragged into the shed that she "could be pregnant" from the incestuous act (89). However, Natsuki isn't worried because "Yuu probably hadn't yet experienced the 'spermarche' [seitsū] that we'd learned about at school. His body was completely free of that sticky fluid that had come out of Mr. Igasaki" (90). The relationship between Natsuki and Yuu is non-(re)productive, and as such "queer" through the lens of (re)productive futurism, for at least two reasons. First, as a product of incest, a child produced by such a union would have a higher likelihood of birth defects, which would reduce the child's value to (re)productive society. The idea that their relationship is transgressive because of incest never occurs to the children. It is only because of the strong reaction of the adults that this aspect of their transgression even becomes apparent to Natsuki. Indeed, Natsuki is, for obvious reasons as a child survivor of rape by an adult, much more focused on the hypocrisy of the taboo of childhood sexuality rather than the taboo of incest. Second, if Natsuki is right that Yuu has yet to enter full pubescence, then their relationship would be incapable of making good on the promise of the heteronormative inheritance implicit in (re)productive futurism. It is important to note that Murata makes pains for the reader to be aware of Natsuki's own entry into pubescence (from the multiple mentions of her menstrual

cycle), such that even if Natsuki's body might be (re)productively viable, it is Yuu's prepubescent body that prevents their sex act from making good on the promise of heterosexual reproduction. Therefore, even though it repulses us utterly, we have to admit that Mr. Igasaki's violence against Natsuki *produces more value* from the perspective of a hyperreal (re)productive futurist ideology, and is therefore more acceptable to the conforming adults, than the childhood incest between Natsuki and Yuu. After all, Mr. Igasaki could in theory get Natsuki pregnant—something Yuu is not physically capable of—and we are only able to speculate that such a pregnancy would likely be celebrated by the Baby Factory. For the adults in Natsuki's life, consent has nothing to do with value to the Baby Factory.

Natsuki is still a child and does not have the words to express it yet, but as an adult she describes her sexual identity as asexual (*sei-kōi nashi*) (136). In her article “Murata Sayaka and Gender Queer” (*Murata Sayaka to jendaa-kuia*), Japanese queer theorist Iida Yūko defines “queer” (*kuia*) in the context of Japanese gender studies as “...a term that has mainly been used to make visible the diverse range of sexualities and to dismantle heteronormativity” (Iida 48).³³ We might therefore describe Natsuki as having a queer identity, one that actively opposes and resists heteronormative structures for gender and sexuality norms, and as such, in order to force her to fit, she must be broken, “brainwashed,” and ultimately disciplined into submission by (re)productive society. This feeling of losing agency over one's body in heteronormative society is mirrored in the experience of sexual trauma. This is the experience of one who does not fit neatly into the form of (re)productive futurist subjecthood, as embodied in the forced realization that, “My body was not my own” (188). However, the novel now turns to adult Natsuki's

³³ “Kuia to iu yōgo wa, shu toshite sekushuariti ni kakawaru ryōiki de, sono tayōsei wo kaika shi isei-ai-chūshin-shugi wo utsu tame ni yōirarete kita...”

response to these childhood events and her hunt for an outside—a queer futurist alternative to the violence of her society.

Natsuki's journey outside of the ideology of The Factory takes her outside of social control, and to the very limits of the category of the "human." Her steps outside begin small and are foiled at each turn by "envoys" that come from the heart of "the Factory" to discipline Natsuki and her fellow outsiders back into line (160). Natsuki as an adult, twenty years older than she was during the events of the childhood portions of the novel, is now married to another asexual person whom she met on a website called Surinuke (*Surinuke dotto komu*) (135). In Japanese, *surinuke* means to "slip through" or "elude" and this website caters to those non-conforming individuals trying to slip through society undetected. In this case, Natsuki was receiving incredible pressure from her family to marry and have children, and in order to slip out of this, Natsuki went on *Surinuke* and found her husband Tomoya's listing in the marriage section. He checked "NO SEX" and "NO CHILDREN" and writes that he "urgently seeks a marriage partner to escape family surveillance" (103). This family surveillance is a perfect example of the envoys who work to foil any attempt at sneaking out of the Factory. We will return to this concept of society's "envoys" in the analysis of *Dark Souls III* to come, so keep them in mind.

Tomoya is like Natsuki in that he resents society's pressures to conform. However, unlike Natsuki who does on some level desire to be fully integrated into society, Tomoya wants only to escape. He refuses to participate in the Baby Factory, and his inability to hold down a job implies his similar refusal to be productive to the Wage Factory as well. He and Natsuki together come up with the idea of the "*uchūjin no me*" (alien eye), a sort of queer alternative to (re)productive futurism. The alien eye refers to "the way aliens see human society" (Murata 169). The alien

viewpoint is hyper-rationalist, tends towards the objective, and strives to be ideologically neutral. However, as will be seen later, this alien eye becomes itself a counter-ideology with its own material consequences.

After Tomoya is fired from his latest job, the couple decide to take a short vacation in the Akishina mountains. Fed on stories of the place from Natsuki's childhood, Tomoya has constructed an idealized image of Akishina as a place that is "wild" and untouched by the metropolis and its rules. Akishina is what is known in Japan as a *genkai shūroku* or "critically depopulated village." This term, coined by Japanese sociologist Akira Ōno, refers to a village with more than half of its population at or older than the age of retirement. This village's infrastructure is beginning to collapse due to the lack of replacements for its dying population. Any young people born there at all swiftly relocate to the metropolises, leading to the (re)productive crisis that the Japanese government to this day is trying to manage and respond to. This leads Tomoya to reflect upon arriving in Akishina that "this place is an abandoned factory... A factory where nothing gets produced anymore" (156). This rural, depopulated village becomes, for Tomoya, the emblem of an alternative to (re)productive futurism. He completes his thought by saying, "I wish I could live the rest of my life here as a discarded, worn-out component" (156). In the context of what Harada Kazue critiques of contemporary Japanese (re)productive futurism, it makes sense that Murata might have chosen to juxtapose Japan's population crisis and the Factory's ideology of compulsory heteronormative (re)production.

Yuu, who is also out of work, now lives at the Akishina house. He and Natsuki have not seen each other since their childhood tryst, as their family forcefully kept them apart. No longer the out-of-place and rebellious alien of his youth, Yuu now sees himself as a fully integrated

member of society. When Natsuki and Tomoya arrive at the house, Yuu is taken aback by what he sees as the couple's idiosyncrasies, such as their insistence on sleeping separately and their cultivation of the "alien eye." At first, Yuu is resistant to but not appalled by Natsuki and Tomoya's desire to get outside of the Factory's control, viewing them as a pair of curious eccentrics rather than radicals. However, by the end of the novel, after the couple is threatened again and again by the envoys of the Factory, Yuu joins the couple in fleeing from society once and for all. The beginning of their fellowship is demarcated by an elaborate "divorce ceremony" where the three of them cast off the fetters of their "Earthling" existence in order to embrace their lives as "Popinobopians" (Murata 207).

During the fierce Akishina winter, the threesome of Natsuki, Tomoya, and Yuu flee once again to the Akishina house after making this pledge. The three see themselves as Popinobopians, not necessarily literal alien but adherents to an alien ideology. Natsuki writes that part of her "did think that I was actually an Earthling. Sometimes I thought being a Popinobopian was effectively a mental illness that I had needed in order to protect myself, and the only way I would ever recover was by becoming a slave of the Factory" (201). The upshot of Popinobopian being an alien way of relating to the world rather than an alien subject position is that Popinobopian ideology is contagious, transmittable through the same vectors that State Ideology is. When the questions of sexual desire and procreation come up (there is after all at least one member of each biological sex in the threesome), the group decides against it. "It would be using the womb as a tool. And that would mean that our testes and womb would not be our own, exactly like the Factory," the group concludes (217). Instead, Yuu decides that the three of them are "proving that you can become an alien through training." Tomoya then agrees by saying, "Training, not mating, is our method of multiplying," and "How wonderful would it be if

we could take our lives forward into the future infecting people with Popinobotitis!” (218). We see here a possible vision of queer futurity—a society that constitutes its (re)production through social and pedagogical/disciplinary vectors rather than exclusively biological ones.

This supposedly rationalist Popinobopian ideology has its consequences, however. When a pair of vengeful humans come to the Akishina house to get revenge on Natsuki for murdering Mr. Igasaki in self-defense, the three overpower their elderly attackers and kill them. Hungry, low on supplies, and cut off from the rest of society by a landslide triggered by a snowstorm and the village’s crumbling infrastructure, the group decides that the only rational conclusion would be to “freeze the Earthling meat while it’s still fresh” (234). The group comes to this conclusion through the lens of the alien eye, where humans can be seen as edible animals, and so they prepare to butcher the couple and cannibalize them. Natsuki agrees but she reflects that “in the back of my mind was the thought that if we did this, we would lose any chance of ever being accepted into the Earthling fold again” (234). The decision to cannibalize the humans suggests that the philosophy of the alien eye is akin to posthumanism, which decenters the human from the central place of authority and agency over the natural world.

The threesome butchers the two humans and decides to eat one that night as a celebration of sorts. Natsuki writes that she “could hardly wait to tuck into the man. It was the first time I’d felt such a fierce appetite since my mouth had been broken” (237). As I connected earlier, the symbol of the broken mouth and Natsuki’s lack of a sense of taste, which was caused by forced childhood sexual trauma, is linked to the ideological indoctrination into compulsive heteronormativity through the denial of one’s agency over their own body. When Natsuki eats the human meal that the threesome prepares and declares with shock “I can taste it!,” we can read this declaration as the point where Natsuki has fully and finally reached an outside of the

Factory's indoctrination. In her analysis of the childhood trauma in *Earthlings*, Katalin Dalmi suggests that "breaking the taboos of homicide and cannibalism helps Natsuki reconnect with her body..." [but] this physical recovery "comes at a heavy price. She loses her humanity completely" (Dalmi 39-40). Natsuki has regained full agency over her own body, mastery of her senses, but with the perhaps unintended consequence of leaving her identity as a human behind her forever. In this sense, then, Natsuki embraces what Kristeva describes as "self-abjection," in a somewhat similar gesture to the player avatar at the end of *Bloodborne*.

The novel ends soon thereafter, with the group being discovered by a rescue party after several weeks trapped in the mountains with no food but human meat to feed on. Their bellies are hideously distended, suggesting a sort of queer pregnancy that recalls their earlier conversation on ideological (re)production. The rescue party shrieks and is wracked with fits of vomiting from encountering the disgusting scene of the threesome, naked, emaciated, and surrounded by the gnawed bones of their cannibalism victims. "Are you... human?" one of the rescuers asks the threesome. To which Yuu responds as follows:

"Boku tachi wa, pohapipinpopopia seijin desu yo. Anata mo sō na no de wan ai desu ka? ... Daijōbu desu yo. Ima 184late de nakutemo, anata ni mo, kitto kono Sugata no anata ga netteiru. Kitto, sugu ni densen shimasu yo."

Anshin saseru yō ni Yuu ga chikyū seijin tachi ni hohoemi kaketa.

"Boku tachi wa ashita, motto fueru. Asatte wa, sore yorimo mata motto fueru." (Murata 314).

"We are from Planet Popinpopopia. You are, too, aren't you? ... This form of yourself is also dormant within you, even if it isn't evident now. It can infect you at any time." He smiled at them reassuringly. "Tomorrow we will multiply. The day after we will multiply more." (Murata, Takemori 246)

The novel ends with the three Popinpopopians holding hands and walking outside. The world glows like a sunrise on the horizon (could this be José Muñoz's horizon of queer futurity?) and

the shrieks of the humans “rang out to the far corners of the planet, setting the forests trembling” (247).

There is much to unpack in this ending: from cannibalism to queer pregnancy to reclaiming one’s body after it has been interpellated by heteronormative violence. In her analysis of the ending, Iida Yūko writes that Natsuki’s flight from the Factory towards the horizon of the unknown can be understood as an “escape towards the ‘posthuman’” (“*hi ichi ningen*” *e no dasshutsu*) (Iida 58). In her analysis, comparing *Earthlings* with Italian philosopher Mario Perniola’s theory of the posthuman, she writes, “There are certainly parts of Perniola’s theory of the posthuman that connect with Murata Sayaka’s world” (Iida 59),³⁴ particularly how he conceives of an “escape” from a sexed existence. However, Iida finds Donna Haraway’s theories more useful in unpacking the ways in which “the world of *Earthlings* joins posthuman beings together in familial interconnections” (Iida 90).³⁵ These posthuman families suggest Aimee Bahng’s search for “queer family formations” as a possible vision of queer futurity in speculative literature (Bahng 82). Indeed, Harada Kazue writes that Murata Sayaka “envisions an alternative (re)productive future by reconfiguring the process of pregnancy and the familial system” (Harada 108). As Haraway herself theorizes, posthuman replication “is uncoupled from organic reproduction,” and therefore, it is also perhaps uncoupled from (re)productive violences (Haraway 6).

With all of these celebratory readings of the ending of *Earthlings*, I am left somewhat unsatisfied. Something is missing. I have found in my teaching of this novel that the reactions of

³⁴ “Perunioora no posuto-hyūman ron ni wa, tashika ni Murata no sekai ni toojiru bubun ga aru. Tadashi dooji ni, perunioora ga ‘seibestu’ kara no dasshutsu wo ‘mono’ toshite no keiken ni keiki suru jootai toshite ronzzuru no ni tai shite, Murata no sakuhin ni oite wa, dasshutsu ga mokuteki toshite kakareteiru koto wa, kyoocho shite okitai.”

³⁵ “‘hi ichi ningen’ teki sonzai ga hiraku kazoku teki kankeisei ga shikoo sareteiru ten da wa, ‘Chikyuu seijin’ no sekai ni setsuzoku shiteiru.”

my students generally fall into one of two categories. Either the students read the ending as the tale of liberation and utopian queer futurity that is suggested by the scholarly interpretations above, or the ending is read as a cautionary tale as to what happens if individuals traumatized by sexual violence do not receive the sort of psychological care they need to overcome their trauma (which implies that they ultimately succumb to the Factory's brainwashing and make good on their inherited value to (re)productive society). I obviously have my issues with this second interpretation, though the fraught relationship between the administration of mental healthcare as a channel for disciplining nonconforming bodies goes beyond the scope of this particular chapter.³⁶ All the same, despite my many critiques of the second interpretation above, it is worth admitting that the ending is far more ambiguous than some of its commentators allow. Far from the utopian and hopeful queer futurity promised to us by José Muñoz, Murata envisions something far more ambiguous. We don't get to see what happens to Natsuki and her fellow Popinpobopians after they step out towards their horizon, but as one of my students once glibly speculated, "they lived happily ever after from inside a maximum-security prison." One thing is clear, however. In taking those steps out of the house towards their future, the three leave their humanity behind. The novel's vision of a hopeful queer futurity is conditional on a categorical rejection of "the Human" and all the violence such a rejection implies.

A posthuman transformation might be less a universal embrace of our inner cyborg sunshine machine and more a nonlinear and monstrous transformation that fully destabilizes the divine arrangement of humanity's place at the apex of natural existence. Though, as Steven Brown points out in *Tokyo Cyberpunk*, posthumanism is "an arena of contesting perspectives grappling with both 'humanism' and its 'post'" (Brown 157). The conditions of this "post"

³⁶ See Foucault (1978).

humanism remain mostly inchoate in Murata's novel. Nonetheless, what Murata's novel complicates are the "set of binary oppositions" that maintain humanity's place at "the center of things," such as "human/inhuman, self/other, natural/cultural... subject/object, us/them... and wild/tame," which can be seen quite clearly in the lifestyle that the "alien eye" makes visible for the threesome at the end of the novel (Brown 158-159). The first Popinobopians might get executed on the spot, but as Yuu suggests, Popinobopianism lies dormant in all of us as a possible line of flight from both (re)productive futurity and humanism more broadly. In this sense, the ending to *Earthlings* imagines one sort of queer futurity as a necessarily and perhaps even violently posthuman future.

What might a queer futurity look like without this rejection of "the Human?" What value is humanism to queer futurity, if there is any? Does an escape from (re)productivity require Iida's conception of an escape towards the posthuman? In order to answer these questions and further nuance the ending of *Earthlings*, I turn now to a comparative analysis of another speculative fiction novel that utilizes hyperreal representation to critique (re)productive futurism.

(Re)producibility, Commodified Identity, and Kleeman's Feminist Hyperreal

Near the end of Alexandra Kleeman's 2015 novel *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine*, there is a scene that takes place in the dressing room of a surreal reality game show called "That's My Partner!" where an entourage of women are all being made up to look exactly like a famous television actress. Once this procession of dressed up, wigged, cosmetically identical doppelgängers heads out on stage to participate in a dance number, the narrator, a woman named "A," who is also one of these doppelgängers, reflects "I looked for the blond lady contestant and

I found her everywhere, everywhere equally, there wasn't even one girl who looked more like her than another. The production department had done a really great job" (Kleeman 259). This moment contains in it a kernel of the (re)productive anxiety at the root of Kleeman's novel. In its nightmarish, hyperreal reimagining of present-day US America, our identities are really not that different, and the parts that are different can be changed, made up, dressed, colored, and tweaked until they become the same. Any individual spirit or essence within is an inaccessible ghost. Because of the proliferation of broadcast technology, the fetishization of grotesque consumerism, and—in a prescient anticipation of contemporary anxieties surrounding advancements in generative AI technology—a coeval rising alienation from any aura of essentialized humanity, Kleeman's book suggests that we might all have the capacity to take each other's place, and ultimately to become replicated and marketed as commodities to each other. Indeed, this novel aims to critique how, if we carry the logic of (re)productive capitalism to its absurd conclusions, identity, individuality, and even the category of "the human" are themselves commodities to be (re)produced and sold on the market.

You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine joins a number of other contemporary anglophone speculative fiction works to critique patriarchal capitalism's tendency to imagine the future as a (re)productive one. It joins novels like Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and its sequel *The Testaments* (2019), Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), and films such as Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006) in imagining a dystopian conclusion to contemporary (re)productive policies and cultural practice. Similar to Murata Sayaka's Japanese novel *Earthlings*, Kleeman's *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* scrutinizes patriarchal capitalism through a hyperrealist lens. The novel, however, focuses on an aspect of (re)productive futurism that I find goes underexamined in both Murata's novel and many of the other texts on the above

list. Namely, Kleeman's novel is more overtly Marxist in its critique of (re)productive futurism. In the analysis to come, I'd like to read Kleeman's novel alongside Murata's not only to have the two enter into dialogue over the perils of (re)productive futurism and possibilities of a queer futurity, but because, I argue, taking Murata's novel alongside Kleeman's in particular will be useful in unpacking the ending of *Earthlings*, in that *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* complicates *Earthlings*' controversial vision of one sort of ambiguous queer futurism.

That being said, I want to admit from the outset that I will find in the analysis to come that *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* is incomplete in its critique of (re)productive futurism. Its ending, in grasping for an alternative to the dystopian world it presents, only accomplishes a reification of (re)productive futurist narratives that are at the core of its dystopia from the outset (and perhaps that's the point). It fails, ultimately, in the mission statement Harada Kazue outlines above for speculative literature: to disorient, to disrupt, to offer alternatives; however, its failure is analytically insightful and might just further nuance this vision of a queer futurity.

Book jacket quotes from early reviews of *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* describe it as "unsettling" (Rivka Galchen), having a "gorgeous perversity" (Teddy Wayne), "like watching a body horror film" (Emily Gould), and as "a novel of alienation, paranoia, anxiety, and dread" (Benjamin Hale). Clare Saxby in her review "Are you weird or are you boring?" writes that the novel "explores a world in which commercialism, narcissism and conformism have coalesced to undermine a sense of self" (Saxby 24). These reactions to the novel suggest its hyperreal setting, which depicts a world very much like our own, in a time very similar today, as something of an uncanny doppelgänger of our own reality. The novel, like Murata's *Earthlings*, represents a contemporary hyperreal (re)productive dystopia. However, the focus of Kleeman's dystopic setting offers an intriguing nuance of our above discussion of (re)productive futurism.

Its focus lies in the psychological effects of a culture of (re)producibility, where individuals are not only valuable in their ability to be (re)productive, but also in their identities being (re)produced as commodities. Kleeman's novel lays bare the neoliberal capitalist valences underlying the biopolitical in (re)productive futurism, where individual identities, along with their progeny, are (re)produceable commodities in contemporary capitalism, to be speculated over on the futures market.

The novel begins with an epigraph from the English translation of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's masterwork *Mille plateaux (A Thousand Plateaus)*. The epigraph quotes the following passage in the original:

*It could be said that the orchid imitates the wasp, reproducing its image in a signifying fashion (mimesis, mimicry, lure, etc.) ... At the same time, something else entirely is going on: not imitation at all but a capture of code, surplus value of code, an increase in valence, a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp.*³⁷

This quote primes the reader for the (re)productive reinterpretation of the classic structure of the doppelgänger narrative that the novel will present. (Re)productions in this Kleeman's novel are "everywhere equally" (Kleeman 259). In the novel, as the epigraph suggests, rather than the doppelgänger growing out of the self, the self and the offspring in a sense become each other simultaneously. This is precisely how the wasp and the orchid each undergo an immediate and simultaneous becoming-other, ultimately trending towards a positionality that resembles self-double but is rather something else—a manufacturing of selves.

³⁷ On pourrait dire que l'orchidée imite la guêpe dont elle reproduit l'image de manière signifiante (mimesis, mimétisme, leurre, etc.) ... En même temps il s'agit de tout autre chose : plus du tout imitation, mais capture de code, plus-value de code, augmentation de valence, véritable devenir, devenir-guêpe de l'orchidée, devinir-ochidée de la guêpe (Deleuze and Guattari 17).

Kleeman's reinterpretation of the doppelgänger narrative also resonates with Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum. In his investigation into the absurdities of 20th century cultural production, *The Precession of Simulacra*, Baudrillard considers how culture has begun to "bear no relation to any reality whatever; it is its own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard 1487). For Baudrillard, reality has begun to be inflected by its simulated reflection, ultimately remaking the world in its image. Baudrillard discusses how 20th century society manufactures a "hyperreality" that becomes the reflected subject of reality. This "hyperreality" acts as a simulation of reality that "threatens the difference between 'true' and 'false'" (1484). Disney World, Los Angeles, the fashion industry, and other 20th century cultural institutions manufacture a simulation of the world that reality itself bends around and turns into—our sexual desires become oriented towards the fantasies reproduced in advertisements and pornography; our narratives for what is "America" become the dreamland reproduced by Disney World. Instead of Jean-François Lyotard's imagining of 20th century culture as a reflection on the terrible realities of its past, Baudrillard suggests that it is instead 20th century reality that exists as a terrible reflection of the subject-less simulacra (re)produced by these desire factories. In this manufactured hyperreality "it is no longer a question of false representation... but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real" (1492).

In my analysis of the novel, I aim to bring together Baudrillard's simulacrum and Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in order to show how gender and digital-age culture intersect to compound the formation of (re)productive futurism within neoliberal capitalism. The relevance of Benjamin's argument to the simulacrum begins with its comparability to manual reproduction versus technical reproduction. In manual reproduction "the original preserved all its authority; not so *vis à vis* technical reproduction"

(Benjamin 50). For the object in itself, like manual reproduction, the self is clearly the original and preserves its aura or presence. A simulacrum, on the other hand, “substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence” (51). In a sense then, we might consider how Kleeman’s story offers an account of how technical reproduction of individuality inflects a culture of (re)productivity. This is how in the novel, to quote Italian Marxist feminist Mariarosa Dalla Costa, “social ‘misery’ or ‘unhappiness’... has largely been realized everywhere” (Dalla Costa 111).

You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine tells the story of a woman named A who begins to suspect that her roommate, a woman named B, is trying to take over her life. A and B are already very similar. A states frankly that “[i]f you reduced each of us to a list of adjectives, we’d come out nearly equivalent” (Kleeman 7). However, what at first appears to be a straightforward case of mimicry becomes problematized by the world in which the story is set. Like the Deleuze and Guattari quote above, B’s mimicry goes beyond impersonation and takes the shape of a becoming-A of B, and a simultaneous becoming-B of A. In this hyperreal, consumerist hellhole, people resemble each other to such a degree that bodies and lives are fully interchangeable. After all, self-image in the novel is entirely defined through the precession of simulacra seen in advertisements on the ever-present television, so of course characters begin to resemble each other as they all trend towards becoming one with the image they see on the TV screen. As the novel goes on, we see the effect this has on A’s psychology as her mind and body deteriorate.

When A voices her anxieties about B to her boyfriend C, after B cuts her hair to be the same length as A’s, C replies that “[l]ot’s of girls look the same from behind... Like her,” he said, indicating someone on-screen in what looked like a tampon commercial. ‘I bet she looks like you from behind’” (Kleeman 45). Watching television and, more specifically, watching

commercials is what A and C do together most often. On these commercials, we see various images of how an individual must ideally appear to themselves and others. In these commercials and A's reaction to them, we see how individual self-identity is something that has been constructed for them through broadcast technology and marketing. A describes her relationship between being and appearing as trying to behave "exactly like people behaved" (33). In this scene where A and C are lying together on the couch, watching TV, A begins to question her identity. She writes,

Was there anything joining me to my life that was a matter of necessity rather than chance? It wasn't my body, which could be moved from place to place, job to job, fed nearly anything, partnered with anyone. It wasn't my mind, which seized the fake lives of television people with greater enthusiasm than it did my own. (33)

This disconnect that A experiences between her "mind" and her "body" recalls what Natsuki experiences in *Earthlings* through her subjugation by the Baby Factory—the sense that her body does not belong to her. However, rather than being interpellated as a subject of "the Baby Factory," A becomes an example of what Patricia Malone describes in her essay "I Can See Through You" as a the way in which, in contemporary neoliberal capitalism and as a result of the "extraordinary incursion of virtual technologies into everyday life..." there have been "substantial material consequences for the way in which subjects come to know themselves both as individuals and as social beings" (Malone 262). For Malone, in the post-postmodern, neoliberal capitalism of the 21st century, postmodern countercultural anti-consumerist logics hold less water. Instead, market logics have become so omnipresent that they have become a dominant form of common-sense. Citing Stuart Hall and Alan O'Shea's work, Malone argues that in contemporary capitalism "market logic became an organizing principle and rationale for every part of human life, even those previously seen as 'outside' or 'beyond' the reach of the

market” (Malone 263). What this means for A in *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* is that selfhood and self-identity are things to be produced and consumed on a digital marketplace of identity. A cannot know herself without a gesture of comparison with, and indeed, consumption of, the lives on screen. The omnipresence of the advertising broadcasts throughout the novel become a hyperreal metonym of the contemporary “attention economy.” Relating this back to (re)productive futurism, Malone argues that “the distinction between the public and the private collapses through the reconfiguration of the private sphere as a site of productive labor.” This implies, for Malone, that “(re)productive labor long marked as the domain of the female can no longer be obscured or seen as outside the forces of capital” (Malone 264). Indeed, in A’s above reflection on her identity, the idea of productive labor (moving “job to job”), and reproductive labor, (being “partnered with anyone”), are considered in nearly the same breath and are equally lacking in internal essence or value.

As another example, there is the phenomenon of the “Disappearing Dad Disorder” (38). Fathers disappear from their homes only to reappear months later wandering shopping malls or inhabiting the homes of other people hundreds of miles away from where they at first disappeared. One such case of a father disappearing from his blond wife and two sons ended when

...they found their missing person living in an occupied single-family home with a blond woman who closely resembled his abandoned wife, down to the navy-blue pumps and feathery bangs. The blond woman, whose husband had vanished a year earlier, was the mother of two young children, both male... The father was arrested by Pleasanton police... It turned out Pleasanton was also the name of the town from which he had originally disappeared, a town father north but similar in all other ways. (Kleeman 47-48).

As this passage suggests, it is not just the people who are identical and fully replaceable, but the landscape as well, which is one “made by humans but not for humans. Walk it and you always step someplace identical to where you stepped before,” which is a statement that, if you’ve ever spent any amount of time in US American suburbia or interstate towns, is uncannily familiar (Kleeman 110). This is a fully (re)produceable, simulacra world, made in the image of the world depicted on the omnipresent television screen. A, B, and C are all constantly glued to their television sets in this age of perfect mechanical reproduction that enables fully simultaneous broadcast to all television sets of exactly the same media. Hyper-consumerism modeled after television becomes the model of life, and the psychological breakdown of the dads who disappear seems to be one consequence of this. Marxist geographer David Harvey puts it well when he writes that “Capitalism messes with our heads as well as with our desires” (Harvey 75).

Makeup and other cosmetics recur as symbols of this dilemma, where the goal of the product is to more closely resemble the image presented through mass media. This is so extreme that without her makeup A says that “[m]y face in the mirror looked like someone else’s staring back at me through an open window;” however as she puts on her makeup, she writes that “I was looking more like myself every second” (Kleeman 54). An important turning point in A and B’s conflict comes when B demands that A do her makeup for her, in exactly the same way that A does her own makeup. A hides herself in her room on the appointed day for their slumber party makeover and debates whether she might try to just stay there forever. While here, in an echo of Yuu’s conversation with Natsuki about the lives of children, A reflects that “[a] woman’s body never really belongs to herself. As an infant, my body was my mother’s... Then there was sex, and a succession of years in which I trawled my body along behind me like a drift net” (71). She concludes her reflection on female subjectivity by saying “the outer layer would be the innermost

part of me, the thing that would evacuate me if stolen, the absolute core” (72). And so, when the night arrives and A finally does B’s make up for her, she comments that “[i]t was just like painting a portrait of myself... onto the face of another person” (77). A feels that she is literally painting her identity onto B. Of course, A did not arrive at this conception of her selfhood in isolation. She is fed this narrative by the never-ending stream of advertisements for beauty products, by actresses on television telling her what she ought to look like, and by living in a world where everything resembles everything else.

The climax of the book has A try to escape this world by joining a cult that believes “*there is nothing more hazardous to yourself than being yourself... That the quickest route to self-improvement is self-subtraction*” (Kleeman 193). Members of this United Church of the Conjoined Eater live in a compound that they cannot leave, constantly wear white sheets to cover their identities, and practice “unremembering,” which involves taking memories from your life before joining the cult and replacing all the details with elements from within the compound. All of this is in service of progressing towards “an ideal ghost state” (220). This ghost is the book’s symbol for the aura of individual selfhood. However, fully reaching this state literally requires one to forgo all traces of one’s individual identity and starve oneself to death, which for some months A attempts to achieve.

Like Murata Sayaka’s novel *Earthlings*, the alternative futurity imagined by the ending of *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* is ambiguous but for different reasons. A flees the cult, discovers that B has fully taken over her life in the meantime and is now dating C, and C has completely forgotten A to the point that he cannot even recognize her. A befriends a cult member named Chris who she decides to call C “[f]or short” (Kleeman 282). She realizes that “[h]e wasn’t the person I had dreamed of being with, but maybe that person could be built from the

raw material he contained” (281). Patricia Malone comments on this scene, writing that “A’s decision to ‘partner up’ with C stems from the... relational nature of attention... the necessity of the Other for the becoming of the self” (Malone 276). In this moment, A comes to the realization that “living wasn’t a matter of right or wrong or ethics or self-expression. There was no better way to live, or worse. It was all terrible, and you had to do it constantly” (Kleeman 280). In the end, she gives in to the world of endless replaceability, resigning herself to the very same process of over-coding her desires onto her interchangeable other that the world has done to her.

We get a glimpse of A’s own sense of futurity in this exchange. After agreeing to become A’s new boyfriend, Chris asks A,

“... Where are we going?”

“Someplace nice,” [A] said. “Normal. We can live in a house with a roof and a kitchen, surrounded by neighborhood. We’ll both get jobs. We’ll never talk about them. We’ll watch TV together, things like that.” (282).

Though the novel critiques the hyperreal (re)producibility of identity in contemporary neoliberal capitalism, its vision of a way out is startlingly pessimistic. A and Chris have nowhere new to go. Their imagination of a futurity beyond the horror of their world is simply a return to “normal.” It is a futurity that fails to reach an outside to (re)productive ideology in the way that *Earthlings* was able to at least gesture towards. It is in this sense that I view *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* as coming up short in the task of speculative fiction. Though it gives the reader much to speculate about through its hyperrealist depiction of neoliberal information-age capitalism, it fails to imagine alternatives.

It is notable that both *Earthlings* and *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* end with scenes of consumption. In *Earthlings*’ case we have the horrifying posthuman cannibalism scene,

while in *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine*, A's narration ends with a description of watching nature documentaries about arctic food chains. In this depiction of consumption, the ending of *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* does have one possible bright spot of positive affect. While reflecting on "videos... of sea lions" with "bodies mistakable for those of a human being" being eaten by polar bears, A is interrupted by the noise of "something scratching against the concrete floor" (Kleeman 283). A realizes that there must be rats nearby, and the novel ends with the sentence, "Life was everywhere, inescapable, imperative" (283). This moment seems to suggest that A's journey ends with a realization that life is more than the artificial (re)producibility of images—that underneath the images and the world made by humans but not for them, there is still life—life that she can be a part of (or rather that she can make a part of her). This moment, juxtaposed with descriptions of sea lions being ripped apart and eaten by polar bears, primes the reader to perhaps imagine A—who has spent the past hundred pages or so slowly starving to death while eating nothing but preprocessed and near-inedible snack foods—gripping a fat rat in her hands and taking a juicy and satisfying bite out of it. It is an oddly cathartic note to end on, while also reifying humanist structures—returning humanity to a perceived "natural" place in the circle of life, at the top of the food chain. So, while the ending does make pains to seek out a return to humanism in its world of commodified identity, it cannot ultimately break out of (re)productivity, and we can only imagine that A and Chris will soon return to their familiar place on the couch watching television commercials as faithful subjects of (re)productive society. The ambiguous apocalypse continues.

***Dark Souls III* and Letting the Flame Burn Out**

Now that I have at lengths unpacked the violences of (re)productive futurism and the stakes of imagining a queer futurity, as well as the difficulty in such an undertaking, I would like to end this chapter by returning to the image it began with—*Dark Souls III* and “The End of Fire.” In this final section, I want to speculate a little myself, bringing together Murata Sayaka’s and Alexandra Kleeman’s ambiguous novels with the ambiguity of “The End of Fire” ending of *Dark Souls III* in order to extend this discussion of (re)productive futurity and possibilities for a queer alternative. I find that the media effect that the interactive medium exerts on the player has revolutionary potential to spark the imagination to begin to imagine queer alternatives to (re)productive futurism. Like *Bloodborne* in the prior chapter, this is because of the players position as an authoring actor in the events of the game.

The *Dark Souls* trilogy is a series of critically acclaimed and notoriously difficult action role-playing games. These games have the player piloting a player-created avatar through a dangerous, medieval-fantasy world made up of a number of open-ended levels that are loosely interconnected in a continuous game world. The *Dark Souls* trilogy is famous for its intricately designed levels, which often loop back into themselves with shortcuts, secrets, and entire optional areas to be discovered. The player cautiously explores these levels by defeating or evading dangerous enemies and circumnavigating hostile environments until finally reaching a challenging “boss” encounter that must be slain to proceed to the next area. As the player progresses, they earn “souls” from the enemies they defeat which can be used to “level up” their avatar, increasing their strength and survivability. When the player avatar is inevitably defeated by these increasingly difficult adversaries, they are reloaded back to the last “bonfire” checkpoint they have unlocked, and all the enemies (except bosses) they had defeated are revived. The game’s combat system encourages a slow, methodical approach. Player controller inputs lead to

highly committal attack animations from their avatar (leading to whiffed attacks or overcommitments being easily punished by the enemy), and enemy attacks are similarly predictable and can be memorized and exploited with practice. These above game systems result in a start-and-stop style of gameplay loop, where the player advances to a checkpoint, explores the level as far as they can until they encounter a difficulty roadblock (usually a new boss), and must persevere death after death until they ultimately learn how to overcome the challenge.³⁸ As such, depending on the experience of the player and the amount of optional content engaged with, an average playthrough of *Dark Souls 3* can take anywhere between 15 to 50 hours to complete, with experienced players clocking in times far faster and inexperienced players on their first playthrough taking upwards of 100 hours.

All of this is to say, the average player is likely to be highly committed to their playthrough by the time they defeat the final boss; and therefore, they might feel some responsibility for the ending that they then receive. It is not like an individual run of a roguelike game like *Hades* (Supergiant Games 2018), where a playthrough of the game's three levels averages under an hour. Instead, the player is encouraged to become invested in their avatar's progress. As they level up and unlock and discover new weapons, magic spells, and abilities, their avatar will evolve from hardly stronger than an average mob enemy to a force to be reckoned with, taking on similarly titanic adversaries. The final boss of *Dark Souls 3*, the "Soul of Cinder" is a ghostly amalgamation of the countless literal demigods and champions

³⁸ This gameplay loop, first realized by FromSoft's *Demons Souls* (2010) and then popularized by its spiritual successor *Dark Souls* (2011) has become so iconic and iterated upon that it has spawned its own subgenre of action role-playing video games, known as the "Soulslike", which imitate or play off of this established gameplay loop. Examples of "Soulslike" games include FromSoft's own *Bloodborne* (2015), *Sekiro* (2019), and *Elden Ring* (2022), as well as games by other developers such as Team Cherry's *Hollow Knight* (2017), Neowitz's *Lies of P* (2023), Team Ninja's *Nioh* (2017), and CI Games' *The Lords of the Fallen* (2014).

throughout time who, like the player's avatar, have all surpassed the game world's other adversaries to reach this climactic apex.

In the extended *Dark Souls* universe, the world that is presently called Lothric (in *Dark Souls I* it was called Lordran) has been caught in a cycle of growth, decay, destruction, and then gradual regrowth. However, with the coming of the Age of Fire, man found a way to put off decay by sacrificing the life of a Lord of Cinder to the First Flame. A Lord of Cinder (or just Lord for short) is a being strong enough to serve as slow-burning charcoal for the fire, as opposed to a weak being who would burn up immediately. The Age of Fire became known as the Age of Man, led by Lord Gwyn, the first Lord to link the flame. Linking the flame is the euphemism used by many in the *Dark Souls* universe to refer to sacrificing one's body in order to keep the First Flame alight. Linking the flame put off, for a time, the inertia and entropy that is inevitable in the *Dark Souls* universe. Gradually the fire faded once more, only to be linked again by a new Lord (this being the events of the first *Dark Souls* game), and so on. By the time we reach the contemporary moment in *Dark Souls III*, the fire has been linked dozens, if not hundreds, of times. Kingdoms have risen and fallen, names have changed, castles have been built and collapsed, and still the single First Flame has been steadily burning, sustained by the sacrifices of Lords past. I read this sacrifice of the body for the sake of the perpetuation of an exploitative society as a metaphor for (re)productive futurity. Linking the fire needs two bodies, after all. The body of the "lord" and the body of the "fire keeper," a woman whose duty it is to stay by the First Flame to tend it and insure it never goes out (Figure 33).



Figure 33 – The Firekeeper sitting on the steps of Firelink Shrine.

The player in *Dark Souls III* is faced with one of at least two options at the end of their playtime: preserve the Age of Fire, that symbol of human supremacy over death, by sacrificing their own body and putting off the inevitability of destruction for a little longer, or to commit the “Grand Betrayal,” as it is known, by embracing the uncertainty of darkness without the flame (VaatiVidya). The first ending of *Dark Souls III*, and the ending that most players are likely to receive on their first blind playthrough of the game, is called “To Link the First Flame.” After the player avatar, the Ashen One, defeats the “Soul of Cinder,” they sacrifice themselves to perpetuate the Age of Fire, as countless Lords have before them. In effect, this results in the Ashen One becoming another piece of kindling to preserve the “Soul of Cinder” and the Age of Fire. This ending mirrors the main ending of the past two games in the trilogy.

In “The Downward Spiral: Postmodern Consciousness as Buddhist Metaphysics in the *Dark Souls* Video Game Series,” Paolo Menuetz reads this inevitable cycle depicted in the *Dark*

Souls universe as an allegory that expresses “an anxiety about living in a time where the meaning of our everyday actions and even society itself has become significantly destabilized” (Menuez 1). Menuez’s work draws connections between themes and imagery of the *Dark Souls* series, the social commentaries of Japanese cultural scholars such as Osawa Masachi and Azumi Hiroki, as well as the vast iconographic repository of Buddhist and Shinto imagery in order to unpack how the *Dark Souls* series is a “cultural artifact” that “reflects postmodern consciousness” of contemporary Japanese society (Menuez 140). Menuez argues that the “great success” of the *Dark Souls* series “despite its rejection of industry best practices” suggests that “its aesthetics and design have touched upon a common feeling amongst the many millions that play video games” (Menuez 132).

Extending Menuez’s analysis, I would like to argue that the nihilistic inertia that plagues the Age of Fire resonates with subjects of (re)productive futurist neoliberal patriarchal capitalism for precisely this very reason. The Age of Fire in our own world is in steady decline—emblemized by the horrors of the impending climate crisis, the breakdown of social systems in even supposedly “postmodern” states like the United States and Japan, the global rise of fascism and concurrent absurd rise of economic disparity, as well as, of course, the at times horrifying demands made on sexed subjects to be (re)productive. When as subjects we are asked to give up our bodies to “link the fire” as it were—to give up our life and labor to be exploited by the Wage Factory and our bodies and desires to the Baby Factory—many hesitate. Many, such as the queer theorists and fiction authors above, speculate alternatives (with mixed results). We, like Natsuki from *Earthlings*, crave a way out, while still clinging to our consumerist lifestyle, like A from *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine*. What Menuez describes above as the postmodern consciousness might be encapsulated by the diametric opposition represented by the endings of

Earthlings and *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine*—a desire for a way out of the violent systems of neoliberal patriarchal capitalism but a paralytic inability to accept the consequences of making the first step. It is for this reason that I find “The End of Fire” ending from *Dark Souls III* so analytically provocative. It gives its players a chance to act out a vision of a profoundly ambiguous apocalypse that nonetheless maintains a grasp on hope—José Muñoz’s methodology for speculating queer futurity.

Because of the particular media effect exerted by the interactive medium upon narrative storytelling, in order to do a close reading of the “End of Fire” ending of *Dark Souls III*, I will have to unpack how a player would “read” the phenomenological play space of the video game following a similar methodology to what I used to read the archaeological storytelling in *Bloodborne* in the previous chapter. In *Dark Souls III*, much of the story of the game has already happened by the time the player avatar arrives on the scene. Instead, like in *Bloodborne*, the player experiences the story like a detective or archaeologist picking through the clues left behind by the actors of the narrative. Because a videogame is inherently interactive, a game’s text is *always* made up of both the formal elements of the game’s design *and* the individual phenomenological experience of the player. As game studies scholar Daniel Vella argues in his work “No Mastery Without Mystery: *Dark Souls* and the Ludic Sublime,” the “formal structure of the game as a whole—of which the player and her play-movement are only one element—is... gradually developed and brought forth in the form of an ordered *cosmos*” (Vella 7).

Vella makes another key intervention in interpreting videogames that is useful for my analysis. The “ludic sublime” is a term used by Vella to describe “the player’s drive towards mastery of the game coming face-to-face with the impossibility of obtaining complete, direct knowledge of the underlying system” (Vella 1). Vella notes that the player is “driven onwards by

the *expectation* of the perfectly-ordered, rule-bound *cosmos*... ”; however, because of the inaccessibility of a complete text of the game (which would be like holding and interpreting the very code of the game), the player “is constantly drawn to confront the necessarily tentative nature... of the game object itself” (Vella 9). This ludic sublimity can be felt clearly in *Dark Souls III*, as a player masters challenging boss after boss in their search for both mastery of the game’s systems and also in their search for answers to the narrative archaeological question of “*what happened here?*” (Figure 34).



Figure 34 – The player’s first glimpse of the kingdom of Lothric in the game’s opening cinematic.

The opening cutscene of *Dark Souls III* informs our player that the land of Lothric, where “the transitory lands of the Lords of Cinder converge,” is in crisis (Miyazaki, *Dark Souls III*). The voiceover reads that when “the link of fire is threatened” (*tsugi-hi ga taeru toki*) a bell tolls and summons the old Lords of Cinder (*takigi no ou*) from their graves in order to link the fire once more. Menuetz compares this phenomenon to how after “fires burn out, wood cinders remain smoldering beneath the white ash [that] ... can be used to rekindle a fire by unearthing

them and placing fresh kindling atop them” (Menuez 123). However, even after being summoned, the Lords abandon their posts. As the fire starts to fade, more and more undead are brought up from their graves. With all the lords gone, “the Unkindled will rise. Nameless, accursed Undead, unfit even to be cinder.”

The player avatar finds themselves awakening as one such nameless, accursed undead in a graveyard of ash—the place where the remnants of those who attempted, successfully or not, to link the flame have been cast away. The player fights through the graveyard of ash, reaching beyond it a massive temple—Firelink Shrine. Firelink Shrine is a tremendously significant location in the *Dark Souls* universe. It is where the Fire Keeper resides. When the player approaches the eyeless and blindfold-wearing Fire Keeper, she says to the player, “Welcome to the bonfire, Unkindled One. I am a Fire Keeper. I tend to the flame, and tend to thee.” The Fire Keeper tasks the player with retrieving the Lords (dead or alive) to serve their role. The Fire Keeper can imbue the player with strength by providing nourishment from the “sovereignless souls” of the adversaries the player defeats. In this way, the Fire Keeper can aid the player in becoming strong enough to defeat the past Lords. When performing the ritual to imbue the player with strength, the Fire Keeper says the following prayer:

Let these souls, withdrawn from their vessels, manifestations of disparity elucidated by fire, burrow deep within me, retreating to a darkness beyond the reach of flame. Let them assume a new master, inhabiting ash, casting themselves upon new forms

This prayer might be suggestive to the player, particularly the line “Retreating to a darkness beyond the reach of flame.” This is the first moment that a player might become aware of anything outside the reign of fire. It anticipates the decisions to come that the player must make to decide the fate of both the Fire Keeper and the Age of Fire as a whole.

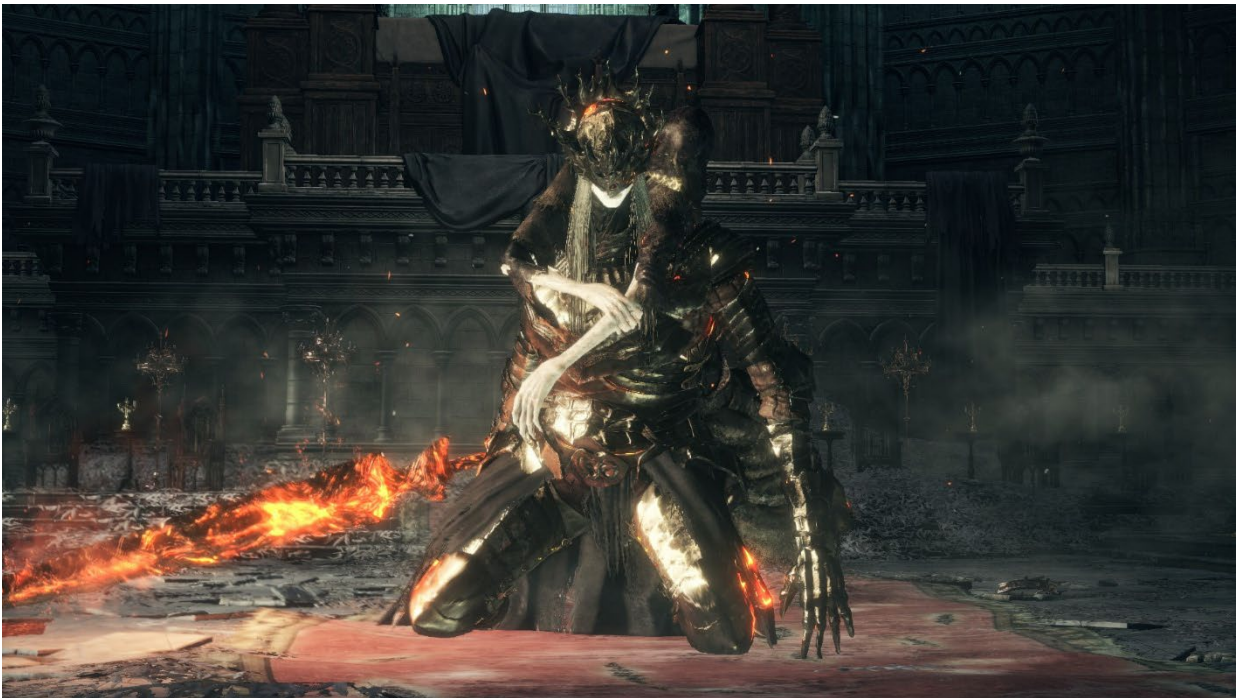
The player from here begins their quest as ordained by the Fire Keeper, to retrieve the ashes of the old Lords of Cinder. They collect the ashes of all the Lords of Cinder. Once the player collects all of their ashes, the player has filled all but one of the thrones where the Lords of Cinder are to sit in Firelink Shrine. One massive throne remains—larger than the rest, standing at the top of the shrine—unfilled. The player has hardly even heard whispers of who is to sit on that throne, only that they were the ones whose duty it was to link the fire most recently, and that they have shirked their duty, causing the crisis that begins the game. Finally, once the player collects all the other Lords' ashes, the high priestess of Lothric Castle makes an entreaty to the player: "Ahh, Unkindled One. Fire fades and awaits its one last lord. Prince Lothric is in your hands... Please, save his soul."

And so, here it becomes clear to the player who the final Lord is, Prince Lothric, the reclusive ruler of this land, who has hidden himself in his chamber at the top of Lothric Castle, defended by his older brother, Prince Lorian. Similar to Natsuki and Yuu in *Earthlings*, the brothers share a deep and intimate bond that goes beyond what is acceptable, and this bond becomes a larger symbol of transgression against the (re)productive system of the story's world.

Prince Lothric was chosen at birth by his father King Oceiros to become the next champion to link the flame. Oceiros and the royal family saw Lothric as the culmination of generations of obsession with producing a royal heir worthy enough to link the flame. Statues were built in Lothric's honor and a massive throne was erected at Firelink Shrine to his inevitable sacrifice even before the infant could walk, and as it turned out, walk he never would be able to do. Lothric was born cursed with an illness that rendered him frail—so frail as to never grow out of his swaddling robes which he wears even to this day. In a desperate attempt to make the prince worthy of becoming a lord, a taboo and repugnant ritual was carried out in order to

bind the soul of the sickly prince with that of his older brother—Lorien, a great champion and faultless warrior. Lorien possessed an undying loyalty to his sickly younger brother. The souls of the brothers merged, and Lothric was granted Lorien’s strength. However, Lorien was rendered crippled and mute by the ritual. The brothers became inseparable by the ritual, with Lothric as the mind and Lorien as the body—though each existed as separate entities.

Figure 35 – The princes Lothric and Lorien. The hooded Lothric clings intimately to his brother’s back with his slender arms.



It becomes clear from Lothric’s dialogue with the player that he has no intention of doing his duty to maintain the practice of linking the fire. Instead, it is his desire to “let it all fade into nothing.” After all, Lothric views the practice of Fire Linking as outright disturbing—sacrosanct self-immolation—and sees the corruption of the world that it maintains, with each successive link seeming weaker than the last. He says to the player upon their first meeting, “The mantle of

Lord interests me none. The Firelinking curse, the legacy of Lords—let it all fade into nothing.”

Lothric and Lorian have sequestered themselves at the top of Lothric Castle and have refused to do their duty to Link the Flame. The significance of two brothers who share a queer-coded bond of transgression making a literal queer refusal to make good on their inherited promise to (re)produce the cycle of Firelinking *should not go unnoticed* by the reader of this chapter, though it is unlikely that a player who has yet to complete “The End of Fire” ending would notice such a connection. At this point in the game (depending on how much optional exploration the player has done), it isn’t guaranteed that a player would even realize that they have a choice of whether or not to link the flame. For an uninformed player, all they see before them is two recalcitrant princes whose inability to do their apportioned duty to society has thrown the world into chaos. And so, the player slays the brothers and carries their remains back to Firelink Shrine, placing them ironically atop the very throne built to honor Lothric’s unwilling sacrifice. However, a player might be disturbed by Lothric’s adamant refusal of the practice of Firelinking. His vision of a future of “fading into nothing” might serve as a queer object towards which a player might orient towards. Although, I believe that it is more likely that another queer object might stand out more to the players—the Fire Keeper herself, who though blind can come to share this vision of a darkness without the flame.

The Firekeeper Is Imprisoned to maintain the flame. In *Dark Souls I*, this imprisonment was literal, with the Firekeeper being kept behind iron bars underneath Firelink Shrine. In *Dark Souls III*, this imprisonment is perhaps less visible, but the Firekeeper and the many who have lived before her are all prisoners to the cycle of Fire Keeping. We can stumble upon a mountain of charred corpses of former Firekeepers locked away in a burned-out turret of Firelink Shrine. The Fire Keeper is chained to her duty to maintain the cycle of linking the fire, a process that

does more than sacrifice the Lord who is to link the flame, but her own body as well. Linking the fire grants her a freedom of a sort—the freedom of death. She suggests as much to the player once they have collected the ashes of all five of the Lords of Cinder at Firelink Shrine, “For the Lords of Cinder, for the ashen prisoners, for all those held to preserve the fire. Link the First Flame.” All of the world is, in the Firekeepers view, imprisoned by this cycle of linking the flame.

The Firelink Shrine that we experience in the game is its current form. However, in the metaphysics of the game’s world, if a place is devoid of light, it might become devoid of time as well (VaatiVidya). There exists deep beneath Castle Lothric, behind numerous hidden passageways, a shadowy version of Firelink Shrine. Here is the Firelink Shrine whose fire has burned out completely. At this shadow version of a Firelink Shrine unstuck from time, we might find a pair of eyes on the fresh corpse of a dead Fire Keeper. The item description of these eyes reads as follows:



Figure 36 - The "Eyes of a Firekeeper" item icon.

“A pair of dark eyes. Said to be the eyes of the first Fire Keeper, and the light that was lost by all Fire Keepers to come. It reveals to the sightless Fire Keepers things that they should never see.”

The only Lord of Cinder who willingly returns to his throne upon the ringing of the bell is Ludleth of Courland. A pygmy champion who has been rendered a “charred corse” by his

Linking of the Fire. Ludleth has this to say to the player should they talk to him while carrying the Eyes of a Fire Keeper item, “Mayhap I should appraise thee of what the thin light of these eyes might reveal to the eyeless Firekeeper. Scenes of betrayal,

things never intended for her ken, visions of... this age's end." He continues if pressed by the player, "The eyes show a world destitute of fire, a barren plane of endless darkness. A place born of betrayal. So I will'd myself Lord, to link the fire, to paint a new vision. What is thine intent?" This moment marks the first time a player can encounter the fateful question directed at them: will you link the fire as all Lords before you have done? Or will you commit what this Lord of Cinder views as the ultimate betrayal, and, like the princes Lothric and Lorian, decide to let the flame burn out?



Figure 37 – The player avatar sits in front of the throne holding the Lothric's half-cremated ashes.

Upon giving the eyes to the Fire Keeper, she says, "Ashen one, are these... Are these eyes? How gracious of thee, ashen one. The very things we Fire Keepers have been missing." She thanks the player but then continues, "Fire Keepers are not meant to have eyes. It is forbidden. These will reveal, through a sliver of light, frightful images of betrayal... Ashen one,

is this truly thy wish?" Upon which, the player will be given a choice: "Decline," or "Wish for a world without flame." Selecting "Wish for a world without flame" will begin the process of the "End of Fire" ending. The Fire Keeper will say simply that she is duty bound to follow your commands. However, if you talk to her again later, she has clearly been reflecting, or rather, speculating about the vision granted to her by the eyes:

"Ashen one, forgive me if this soundeth strange. The eyes show a world without fire, a vast stretch of darkness. But 'tis different to what is seen when stripped of vision. In the far distance, I sense the presence of tiny flames. Like precious embers, left to us by past Lords, linkers of the fire. Could this be what draws me to this strangely enticing darkness?"

Instead of fear, it is an ambiguous light that energizes the Fire Keeper. In describing the "precious embers" beyond the darkness, might we read a subtle glimpse of hope? A hope in a future outside of (re)producing the Link of Fire? A future born of this world, but perhaps free from its curses? Could these embers be the "warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality" that José Muñoz speculates to be the to-come of queer futurity? Regardless, when the player defeats the final boss as described earlier in the chapter, and summons the Fire Keeper to help put out the flame, the "End of Fire" ending cinematic plays, followed by the credits.



Figure 38 – The Firekeeper assists the player in the “End of Fire” ending by extinguishing the fire.

After the credits play, the player is returned to Firelink Shrine. From the options menu, the player can choose to begin New Game Plus (NG+). NG+ is a game mechanic that allows players to replay the game while keeping their character’s stats and items. Enemies become stronger and new items become available for discovery. In all “*Soulsborne*” games before this one (*Dark Souls I* and *II*, *Bloodborne*), the player automatically begins NG+ after the credits roll. However, for the first time, the player here is given the choice to start it, or not. It is conceivable, therefore, that a player might complete *Dark Souls III*, the last game of the *Dark Souls* trilogy, carry out the “End of Fire” ending, and then choose *not* to begin a NG+. This player might choose to turn off the game system, and let the world of Lothric go off into darkness without beginning a new cycle (Figure 39). I like to think of this as the true ending of the *Dark Souls* trilogy. In this way, the game systems of *Dark Souls III* work alongside the theme of a world without fire, giving the player both the narrativial and the mechanical choice of whether or not to (re)produce the cycle of

linking the fire. In this way, the trilogy's story concludes with the ambiguous apocalypse of the diegetic world system.



Figure 39 – The non-diegetic menu that appears whenever the player rests at a bonfire. Here the player can begin NG+ by selecting “Begin journey 2.” New Game Plus will not begin unless the player chooses to select this option.

What I find beautiful and hopeful in *Dark Souls III*'s vision of a queer futurity is the glimmering embers that the Fire Keeper sees through the eyes of her dead ken. In our own (re)productive futurist society, with all the violence and trappings of heteronormative neoliberal capitalism hemming us in on every side, it can be easy to sink into despair, or to see any alternative as hopeless, or perhaps even a betrayal, like Ludleth. We might “will” ourselves to submit to the subjugation of the Wage and Baby Factories. We might remain paralyzed, unable to imagine any alternative, like A at the end of *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine*. We might

struggle to escape but end up brought kicking and screaming back by the envoys of the factory, like what the Player Avatar does to the queer princes Lothric and Lorian in *Dark Souls III*. Or, like Natsuki in *Earthlings*, or the Fire Keeper in the “End of Fire” ending, we might see the glimmers of hope that scintillate beyond the darkness and take a step towards the horizon of queer futurity. We might utilize the greatest power that speculating can afford us—the power to imagine. The power to go beyond the harmful reality of the world around us and envisage hope in all its frailty.

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CONCLUSION

*Omokage: Towards a Reparative Speculation*³⁹

Like many my age, I first encountered the Japanese language as tight black lines printed across the face of various *Pokémon* cards I collected as a four-year-old child. Naively, I believed that if only I could understand the secret symbols on my cards, I would become a better, more successful *Pokémon* trainer. The allure of that speculative power floated tantalizingly within reach when I had to pick a language to study at the international immersion school that I attended from kindergarten through middle school. Of the options, only Japanese jumped out to me that way. My study of Japanese language, and eventually Japanese literature and media, began here as an indirect result of my place, entangled in the history of Japan's international speculative image.

So far, this single decision of "Japanese" might have been the most impactful decision I've made in my life. My personal development has been affected tremendously by my second language, unlocking access to worlds beyond the borders of the monolingual culture I emerged into through accident of birth. My social life and community expanded through my access to Japanese, from the friends I've made through language classes in school and casual language exchange outside of it, to the many friends I've made entirely in my second language during my time spent in Japan. I'll have to thank *Pokémon* in my wedding vows later this summer when my Japanese partner and I get married. This marriage would never have happened if we hadn't met in Japan eight years ago in a class at *Kansai Gaidai* on Japanese translation—a further tie

³⁹ *Omokage* (面影), trans. "trace," "vestige," or "the shadow of something in something else." The Japanese translation of Lafcadio Hearn's *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* uses this word in its title: *Shirarenu Nihon no omokage* or literally "Traces of an unknown Japan."

between my material life and my obsession with the speculative. My decision to learn Japanese as a child had massive ramifications for both my personal and professional future. Would I really have gone to graduate school for comparative literature if I hadn't started learning Japanese all these years ago? Certainly, I wouldn't have made plans to relocate to Japan after graduation if I hadn't spent most of my life studying the language. My encounter with Japanese as an imaginative child—hungry for speculative alternatives to the banal uncertainties of childhood—made me who I am.

I suspect that many of my Japanese-studying peers likely share similar stories—a fascination with Japanese animation, a love of Japanese videogames, a taste for Japanese comics, an adoration for what they believe to be Japan's speculative image. I could never be a *Pokémon* master, but if I could just learn how to read those tight black lines, then maybe I'd be a little closer. We were born at the height of Japan's soft power boom in the late 80s and 90s, grew up on the *Pokémon* and anime craze, spent our childhood watching Studio Ghibli movies and playing *The Legend of Zelda* and imagining ourselves stepping into those magical worlds. This might be part of why I've invested all these pages into writing about the speculative. Accounting for it, accommodating it, and addressing its effects and possibilities, both good and bad.

In this dissertation I've made a case for the reparative value of speculation. In speculative thought and speculative media, there is a possibility for radical structural upheaval that is at the heart of a queer politics of the imagination. When a specular encounter enables one to step outside of one's everyday norms and experience alternatives, it can be earthshaking, like a Hegelian revel that can reside in us even after we awaken. An encounter with the speculative in this way can act as a queer object, reorienting the self off of the naturalized desire lines of

hegemonic life. A reader attuned to these possibilities might find such encounters in translation, in adaptation, and in speculative works that match our world with its multiplex alternatives.

However, reparative speculation exists as a counterpoint to paranoid speculation. The violent linear speculative gaze that has long been the normal terms of engagement for speculating about Japan. In the context of Japan, we've long seen the consequences of this linear speculative gaze that sees in the speculated object only its alienation. This speculative gaze commodified Japan and its real suicide victims in Logan Paul's video. It has become an accessible and exploitable source of global soft power for the Japanese government. It paints Japanese economic recovery and success in the wake of World War II as a threat to a good "Western" future. It collects, catalogues, and quantifies data about Japan as the enemy to be studied as in Benedict's orientalist anthropology. And yet, it also fascinated Lafcadio Hearn, and it fascinates many of us who have followed Hearn's love of the weird. I feel I owe it to Hearn, and his uncritical love for Japan, to work towards a distinct alternative to this linear gaze. This is why Japanese speculative media appeared to me to be the obvious choice for an object of study for this project. As is the case with Hearn and Paul, such speculative media is caught up in the same history, the same sets of normalized relationships between subject and object, reader and text. By disentangling these sets of relationships and speculating alternatives to these normalized lines, we can begin to see the tremendous value in reparative speculation.

In Chapter One, this reparative speculation enables a reader of translation to reconsider their relationship to the text, their language, and the language of their other. The specular encounter between languages inherent in the act of translation becomes a site for a reparative specular encounter that goes against the paranoid reading of translation as betrayal. Through the reparative readings of the figures of translation in *Hako otoko* and "Kagami," this chapter shows

how translation acts like a mirror, revealing the parts of our language that we cannot see ourselves. The translation mirror holds our language as an object outside of ourselves and enables us to come to terms with our own alterity and the subjectivity of our other. In the comparative translation study that concludes the chapter, this translation mirror can be read in spite of the homogenizing practices of the global translation market.

Reparative speculation also allows for reconciliation of the incoherence between a source and its adaptation. Adaptations ricochet off of their original on their own trajectory, which affords them tremendous capacity for reorientation. Although the animated film adaptation of *Hanamonogatari* distorted the queer I-novel of its original source, the two can be brought to reconcile with careful reparative reading, demonstrating both the persistence of queer resistance against heteronormalizing violence and the capacity for reparative speculation to aid in this resistance. Through a reparative reading of *Bloodborne*'s reimagining of the Japanese Gothic, the videogame reveals the powerful force that the interactive medium can exert on the phenomenological experience of themes such as self-abjection and the uncanny—themes long associated with the genre of the classical Gothic but unable to be realized to their full potential before interactivity.

The third chapter articulates the importance of reparative speculation for the explicitly political encounter between our present moment and its various possible futures. The violence of (re)productive futurity cannot be taken as the only option for our future. Queer futurity offers us a possible speculative alternative that, while still inchoate, can inspire hope and incite positive action against the violence of our present. A politics of queer futurity is still in the making, but feminist and queer authors of speculative fiction in Japan and the United States like Murata Sayaka and Alexandra Kleeman are already actively engaged in its imagining. Reparative

reading of these speculative works enables us to do justice to José Muñoz's vision of a queer politics of hope. Queer speculative fiction challenges the centrality of the category of the "human" to projects of (re)productive futurism. Instead, new models of the family, the human's place in the natural world, and the relationship between gender and reproduction must be considered. Interactive media might be one effective method to engage audiences to begin thinking through these questions and imagining just alternatives. Such is the case in the *Dark Souls* trilogy, where the player is tasked with authoring an alternative future for the game's crumbling narrative world. No matter how dark our future might loom, we must strain our eyes to find the scattered embers of hope on the horizon.

Part of writing this dissertation has required me to address and come to terms with my own place in this history of the West's fascination with the speculative Japan. This internal struggle over my place in relation to the subject matter of my research reached a climax in Japan in the summer of 2023. I spend most summers staying with my in-laws to be at their home in Akashi. The Miuras have been incredibly generous in offering me a space to research and write for the past several years as I produced this dissertation, and they have been remarkably welcoming to this tattooed US American stranger who can only communicate with them inelegantly in his second language.

Several years before I met my partner's family, the grandmother who was living with them passed away. I only know Etsuko from the portrait of her that hangs over the family shrine. Hers is a bright, round, smiling face that is present (absently) at each meal I eat with the Miuras. I've heard many stories about Etsuko, from the way she and my partner would clash over their mutually headstrong personalities to how when she laughed the whole house would shake with it. My father-in-law told me once that when I laugh, I reminded him of Estuko, his late mother.

Apparently, I am in possession of a similar *omokage* of her big appetite and easy humor. I wonder if this is why, when my father-in-law met my mother for the first time, he told her that he already sees me as a part of his family.

For *Obon* that summer, the Miuras and I went on a *haka-mairi* ⁴⁰ at the Miura family grave. We brought flowers, incense, and other offerings, and hopped in the car to drive about an hour to a compact graveyard just on the outskirts of West Akashi. The grinning face of a statue of the god *Ebisu* met us at the entrance to the graveyard. I remember feeling uncomfortable, like I was intruding into an uninvited space. The sky was overcast—fairly unusual for this late into the summer in Southwest Japan. The heat struck against everything. My button-up shirt was pasted to my slick skin. My eyes stung at the corners. Each footfall up the stone steps through the graveyard shook beads of sweat free from my hair, scattering them onto my face, my shoulders, again into my eye. The heat in Kansai in August is stupendous.

My partner hadn't said much to me all morning, but when we reached the grave—gray and black smooth carved stone with the family's names etched thick and deep into the rock—she asked me if I'd like to help wash it. We went together then with a bucket to a nearby shed and filled it from a spicket. When we returned, we found my father-in-law beginning to chant sutras from memory. My partner and her sister led me as we washed the grave, pouring water down the face, into the grooves, and scrubbing it clean until the stone shone in the scattered cloudlight. The smell of incense and of wet rock reached me. I didn't know the sutras, but I followed my partner's lead and bowed my head.

⁴⁰ Lit. "to visit a grave," a formal visit to the family grave.

In my head, I tried to say something, then, to Etsuko. Her face from the portrait over the family shrine broke free from the cloud cover in my mind and shone, round and smiling. Anyone familiar with Japanese as a second language will tell you how difficult it can be to decide on the correct politeness register for a given situation. How exactly should I address this grandmother-in-law, whom I've never met, who's never met me, in a not-quite-prayer on *Obon*? I couldn't decide, so I just spoke plainly. I said the same sorts of things I always said in my head whenever I'm kneeling in front of a family shrine—thanking her for the life she lived and the family she raised, thanking her for giving me a space in it, however small and short-lived that space might be.

Then I saw *your* face again—a person who is dead and somehow like me. We grew up decades apart, on different sides of the planet, speaking different languages, in entirely different cultural contexts and historical moments, and yet here I am standing in front of your freshly washed grave speaking to *you*. When I opened my eyes and looked at my future in-laws, my father-in-law squinted his eyes and nodded once. Wordlessly, we left the flowers and the grave slick from the washing and returned to the car.

For most of my childhood, “Japan” had been that speculative terrain on which my imagination could run wild. And yet, that day “Japan” was soil. A gravestone. The covered-up sun that still struck against everything. Heat and the comfort of water against my hand and against cool stone. A silent set of words said to a dead woman who might have once been quite like me. In short, memory and life—shimmering and speculative in itself. My encounter with Etsuko's grave that day placed my life of speculation in clear relief. I encountered myself, my other, and the non-totalizing unity that exists between us—a smiling portrait, a washed grave, a living body, a shared language, a shared history, an encounter, an *omokage*.