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## Literary Shots –

An Analysis of *Afterdark* by Haruki Murakami



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## 1. Introduction

Maybe it might not appear to make sense that someone would write a research paper on a Japanese novel in English. But Haruki Murakami is not only some random Japanese author, the *Japan Times* states that he is “Japan’s most important and internationally acclaimed living writer”.<sup>1</sup> He has been on the list of possible recipients of the Nobel Prize for Literature for several years and in 2006 was even accidentally congratulated on winning it.<sup>2</sup> But instead of the Nobel Prize he was awarded others, amongst them the prestigious Franz-Kafka-Award for his novel “Kafka on the Shore”.<sup>3</sup>

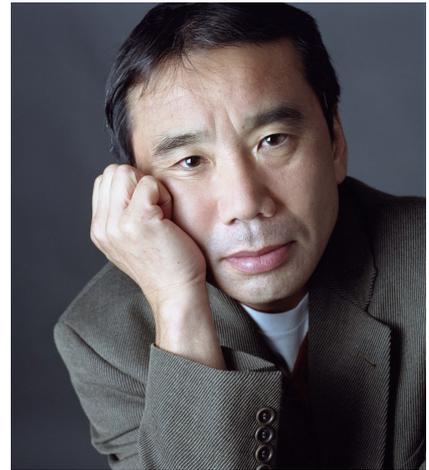


Illustration 2: Haruki Murakami

Haruki Murakami, who was born in Kyoto on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January in 1949, could not imagine to be a writer for a long time. In fact, he had started writing at the late age of 29, allegedly after watching a baseball game. But once he had finished his first novel, more short-stories and novels followed, making him a national superstar. Because of his major success and popularity in Japan, he had decided to live in Europe and the United States for a couple of years and has only recently moved back to his home country.<sup>4</sup> His style of writing is inevitably influenced by his long stay in America and his work as a translator of American authors, amongst them F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Irving, and J. D. Salinger, which explains why, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, he “remains one of the most accessible Japanese writers for Western readers”.<sup>5</sup> This, in return, does not make him popular with all literary critics who “have expressed skepticism about his “American” language”.<sup>6</sup>

In his latest novel, *Afterdark*, which came out in Japan in 2004, Haruki Murakami features some unique and very experimental narrative techniques that I am going to analyse in this paper. But before I go into detail, I will introduce his style of writing in general.

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1 <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/fl20021201a4.html>

2 [http://www.japannewsreview.com/society/kansai/20070705page\\_id=344](http://www.japannewsreview.com/society/kansai/20070705page_id=344)

3 <http://www.ikjeld.com/japannews/00000303.php>

4 [http://www.hanamiweb.com/murakami\\_haruki.html](http://www.hanamiweb.com/murakami_haruki.html)

5 <http://www.powells.com/cgi-bin/biblio?isbn=9781933330662&atch=h&yml=pp>

6 <http://www.enotes.com/contemporary-literary-criticism/murakami-haruki>

## 2. Murakami's Style in General

It is difficult to clarify if Haruki Murakami belongs to the modernist or the postmodernist authors, since he uses elements of both. Typical modernist techniques in his works are “his play with foreign language and with the Japanese writing system (particularly the *katakana* syllabary), his distrust of the ability of language to represent and communicate, his stress on the arbitrariness and deceptiveness of the linguistic sign, or his use of “fragments of Western culture” as a means to hold back chaos [...]”. But most of the time he is labeled a postmodernist, often in order to criticize the commercial touch of his novels and his many references to American capitalist companies. The subjectiveness in Murakami's metaphysical fiction and the negation of one distinct and true reality are probably the strongest arguments to say that he is a postmodern author. Rebecca Suter, however, thinks that Murakami's fiction is a mixture of both “modernist epistemological doubt, which interrogates the possibility of knowing the world, and postmodernist ontological doubt, which questions the world's very realness”.<sup>7</sup> The “realness” is indeed questioned in Murakami's works. He has written only one novel that is 100% realistic, *Norwegian Wood*, and has no intention of doing so again. He admires Kafka, but thinks that “his fictional world is already so complete that trying to follow in his footsteps is [...] pointless.” He rather tries to “dismantle the fictional world of Kafka that itself dismantled the existing novelistic system.”<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, Murakami's fiction is well-known for its Kafkaesque themes like alienation.

Besides Murakami's penchant for surrealistic elements, he is famous for his references to the West. The New York Times remarks that

“from reading the books of Haruki Murakami, one of the country's most celebrated novelists, you'd never know he was Japanese at all: his characters read Turgenev and Jack London, listen to Rossini and Bob Dylan, eat pate de foie gras and spaghetti, and know how to make a proper salty dog. In Murakami's early books, the references to Western pop culture were sometimes so obscure that they even flew over the heads of many Americans.”<sup>9</sup>

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7 Suter 5-6

8 <http://www.randomhouse.com/features/murakami/site.php?id=>

9 <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9800EED9133EF931A35752C1A961958260>

This “westernized” style can also be assessed visually. The Japanese language consists of two syllabaries plus some thousand Chinese ideograms. One syllabary, the so-called “katakana” is mainly used to transcribe foreign words, so that many Japanese words are replaced by English words written in katakana in order to sound modern, especially for advertising.<sup>10</sup> Even the Japanese title of *Afterdark* itself, *Afutādāku*,<sup>11</sup> where anyone can trace back its origin, is one of them. Murakami uses those “japanized” English words in katakana in such a great number that is “striking”<sup>12</sup> By doing so, he creates an alienating effect and a sense of estrangement that keeps the (Japanese) reader at a distance to the text. At the same time, it attracts a Western readership that does not feel intimidated by too many alien Asian elements. Murakami readers do not read Murakami because of the exotic Japanese touch. In *Afterdark*, there is a Starbucks<sup>13</sup>, a Denny’s<sup>14</sup>, a 7-Eleven<sup>15</sup>, the Boston Red Sox<sup>16</sup> and Blade Runner<sup>17</sup>, to name just a few. Murakami’s style can be summarized as realistic, mixed with some super-natural elements, flavored with a highly Westernized language that may be unnatural for a traditional Japanese reader because of the many words in katakana. Translated into English, however, Murakami’s dialogues sound just like a perfectly normal conversation. This is only logical, as his first attempts to create his own style were only successful when he tried writing in English, and then re-translated it into Japanese. “I didn’t know how to write fiction, so I tried writing in English because [there] my vocabulary was limited. I knew too many words in Japanese. It was too heavy”<sup>18</sup>, he admits in an interview. Besides this, it is the prose itself that makes him so popular:

“The plain style and deceptively on-the-nose dialogue of Murakami’s recent fiction can trick the imperceptive reader into thinking his work is simple. Instead, he’s drilling down to the essential mysteries of existence, jettisoning the sort of ornamental language that lesser writers use to gesture toward profundity; Murakami doesn’t need it.”<sup>19</sup>

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10 Maderdonner 50

11 Murakami The very first pages (without numbers) before the narration starts

12 Suter 69

13 Murakami 83

14 Murakami 4

15 Murakami 139

16 Murakami 5

17 Murakami 74

18 <http://www.smh.com.au/news/books/not-lost-in-translation/2006/06/22/1150845292121.html?page=2>

19 [http://www.salon.com/books/review/2007/05/30/after\\_dark/index.html](http://www.salon.com/books/review/2007/05/30/after_dark/index.html)

### 3. The Plot of *Afterdark*

The story of *Afterdark* has relatively little action. It takes place from 11:56 pm to 6:52 am the next morning; one night in a city in Japan, Tokyo. It begins with Mari, a 19-year-old girl who sits at a table in a Denny's. She's reading a big book whose title we never get to know and is soon joined by Tetsuya Takahashi, a student and trombone player. He starts a conversation and does most of the talking. Takahashi remembers that Mari and her beautiful sister Eri once had a date with him and a friend of his. After a while, he leaves to practice with his Jazz band in a basement, while Mari continues reading. Suddenly a "large woman"<sup>20</sup> – Kaoru, an ex-wrestler – walks in and asks Mari to come with her. Kaoru is the manager of the "Alphaville", a love hotel, where "anonymous partners rent rooms for anonymous sex".<sup>21</sup> The name "Alphaville" is an ironic allusion to Goddard's film which is explained in the novel itself by Mari. Again, a reference to Western culture. In the love hotel, a Chinese prostitute called Guo Dongli got robbed and beaten up by her costumer; Kaoru knows from Takahashi that Mari speaks Chinese and thus wants her to translate. It turns out that Guo Dongli is employed by a Chinese gang that organizes prostitution in Japan. When she calls her boss, they send a man to collect the money that Guo Dongli was supposed to earn, but Kaoru does not give it to him. After he is gone, Kaoru takes Mari to a bar and they talk for a while, until Mari goes to another restaurant and Kaoru returns to the *Alphaville*, where, with the help of her assistants, she manages to get a picture of the man's face from the surveillance cameras in the entrance hall. She calls Dongli's boss again and hands it to him. It is about 2:30 now and Takahashi, done with part one of his band practice, goes shopping before he visits Mari at the restaurant. They resume their conversation from before and go to the park where they feed cats while Mari gives a hint of Eri's problems, but doesn't want to talk about it there. In the meantime, Shirakawa, who beat up Dongli, is getting rid of the possessions and clothes of the prostitute by throwing them away. The taxi that takes him home from work, is right beside Dongli's boss for a few seconds, but the Chinese man doesn't look to the side and misses the chance. Shirakawa places Dongli's cell phone somewhere in a 7-Eleven on his way home. Takahashi has walked Mari back to the *Alphaville* and is practicing with his band again, while Mari is talking to Korogi, one of Kaoru's assistants and it becomes clear that the

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20 Murakami 32

21 <http://calitreview.com/229>

reason why Mari stays up all night is because she “*just can’t sleep*”<sup>22</sup>, ever since Eri has fallen asleep two months ago, without waking up.

Finally, after her conversation with Korogi, Mari manages to find some sleep. At the same time, Takahashi is doing some shopping at the 7-Eleven when Dongli’s cell phone rings and he picks it up. It is her boss, who expects Shirakawa to answer it and delivers a threat of revenge. Bewildered, Takahashi puts the phone where he found it and calls Mari to meet with her. When they depart, he promises to write her a “nice, long letter”<sup>23</sup>, as she will go to China soon. Mari goes home and enters her sister’s room, hugs her and sleeps next to her, her arms wrapped around Eri.

But this story is only one half of the book. The other half takes place in Eri’s room, mostly. The “Eri scenes” are six in total and occur parallel to the main plot. At first, she is sleeping in her bed, when the TV screen – although it is unplugged – comes to life and displays a man sitting on a chair. The second time the reader “visits” her in her room, Eri is still sleeping and the “Man with No Face”<sup>24</sup> stares at her through the screen. But when the action returns to Eri’s room the next time, her bed has been transported to the other side that is shown on the TV screen. Eri is still sleeping, and in her room there now stands a copy of her bed, perfectly made, to fill in the empty space perhaps. Finally, in the next scene, Eri wakes up, but the man is gone. This is the only time that the narrative perspective changes so that we can hear Eri’s thoughts directly. She does not know where she is or why, and neither can she get out of the room that “*resembles the office where Shirakawa was working late at night.*”<sup>25</sup> Another link to Shirakawa is that she finds the same VERITECH-pencil on the floor which he had on his desk. The next time, Eri is still behind the TV screen, staring at the other side into her room. She seems exhausted from screaming and starts running to the door when the “*meaning of her physical self is eroding*”<sup>26</sup> and she starts dissolving. The TV screen goes black. In the last scene, however, she is back in her room again, sleeping soundly.

The two story-lines are finally linked when Mari enters Eri’s room. The book ends with some positive future prospects: “*The night has begun to open up at last. There will be time until the next darkness arrives.*”

But what makes *Afterdark* up, why does the reader follow an action where “the conflict of wills that is typically the basis for suspenseful storytelling never quite

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22 Murakami 162

23 Murakami 188

24 Murakami 51

25 Murakami 112

26 Murakami 152

emerges”<sup>27</sup> Because Murakami asks questions. He asks questions about identity, about fate, about the deepest paths of our subconsciousness. And he creates tension by foreshadowing that something will happen to answer them: “*Something is about to happen in this room. Something of great significance.*”<sup>28</sup>

## 4. Analysis of the Film-like Elements in *Afterdark*

Since *Afterdark* came out in Japan in 2004 and has been translated into English only in 2007 by Jay Rubin, it is nearly impossible to find any books or other secondary literature about it. The internet provides only spare information about narrative techniques and such, instead one can find plenty of reviews dealing with the novel in general. Due to these circumstances, the analysis of and the results concerning Murakami’s style in *Afterdark*, are mostly based on my own work and opinion.

### 4.1. The Cinematic Structure of *Afterdark*

“Murakami’s novels have always had a close tie with cinema, but in *Afterdark* that linkage blossoms into its full potential.”<sup>29</sup>, says one critic. Indeed, the entire novel is built like a screenplay, which is evident in the way the scenes are arranged. In a common novel, and most films, too, there is one protagonist that is focused on over the course of the story. But in some films, there is **cross-cutting** to convey simultaneity, which means that the camera follows different characters and switches between the different story-lines until the characters meet. This is exactly what is done in *Afterdark*, a “constant cutting back and forth between scenes - again more a staple of cinema than of the novel.”<sup>30</sup> After each chapter, the location switches to one or more other characters, and sometimes even a chapter is divided into several locations. Just like in those films, the story-lines intertwine and are connected in a very clever way. For example, the VERITECH-pencil that Eri finds in the room “on the other side” is exactly the same as the one on Shirakawa’s desk, and even the room looks the same as his office. Or the fact that Shirakawa and the Chinese man, who is looking for him, wait

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27 <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/03/books/review/Kirn-t.html>

28 Murakami 30

29 <http://momus.wordpress.com/2007/06/10/the-dark-side/>

30 <http://momus.wordpress.com/2007/06/10/the-dark-side/>

next to each other at the same traffic lights without knowing. All the characters somehow have a connection with each other, or rather *become connected* in this one night. Even Eri in her room is included, when at the end of the night, Mari goes to her and sleeps in her bed, cuddled around her. So over the course of the novel, the reader gets to know different characters at the same story-time<sup>31</sup> by means of cross-cutting, who then later on get in touch with each other. Although not every movie has this extreme form of cross-cutting, it is definitely a cinematic technique that is executed to perfection here.

What every movie does have, more or less, is music to accompany the action – **soundtrack**. Murakami “is so scrupulous about telling us what music is playing in the background of each scene that you could compile a soundtrack.”<sup>32</sup>, one critic says. Indeed, it is very peculiar how detailed the music at public places is noted. At the Denny’s, for example, *Go Away Little Girl* by Percy Faith and his Orchestra<sup>33</sup> is playing while Mari is sitting at her table. Some time later, “*The April Fools* plays through the restaurant at low volume.”<sup>34</sup> In this case, Murakami gives not only the title, the interpreter, but also the loudness of the song. In a different scene, when Duke Ellington’s *Sophisticated Lady* is played on an old record player in a bar, he describes it as “*languorous, sensual music*”, music “*for the middle of the night*”.<sup>35</sup> (It is 1:18 am at that point.) Murakami clearly uses music to underline the mood of a certain situation or a location, which is exactly what soundtrack does. He also portrays characters by telling what music they are listening to at the moment or letting the reader know what their favorite music is. For instance, Shirakawa prefers classical music and listens to Bach in his office, *the Baroque* composer. This indicates that maybe like Louis XIV he is self-centered or wants to demonstrate his power, which fits to what he has done to the prostitute. The fact that the music is very old reflects the traditional distribution of roles in that Shirakawa goes to work and his wife stays at home and takes care of the children. In contrast, the open-minded and spontaneous Takahashi loves Jazz music, just like Murakami himself, who once run a Jazzbar with his wife.<sup>36</sup>

Even the title of the novel itself, comes from an old Jazz number by Curtis Fuller, *5 Spot After Dark*, that is known to both Takahashi and Mari.<sup>37</sup>

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31 vgl. Poppe 70

32 <http://januarmagazine.com/fiction/afterdark.html>

33 Murakami 6

34 Murakami 24

35 Murakami 64 f.

36 <http://www.enotes.com/contemporary-literary-criticism/murakami-haruki>

37 Murakami 21

Besides music, soundtrack also consists of dialogues and (background) noises, like constant muttering in a classroom or announcements and incoming trains at a station. One scene in *Afterdark* features a sequence of typical soundtrack noises to establish an authentic surrounding:

*“They step outside. The street is as busy as ever despite the time. Electronic sounds from the game center. Shouts of karaoke club barkers. Motorcycle engines roaring.”*<sup>38</sup>

Although describing sounds, this passage is very visual. Not in the sense that it uses many adjectives – actually none at all – but because basically everybody has seen a city at night and knows how it sounds like. In return, that evokes memories of the people there, the sound from bars, slot machines maybe, honking. It probably won't be the exact same images, but very much alike and the mood and the atmosphere they convey is the same.

All in all, if *Afterdark* ever gets made into a movie, the soundtrack is already written.

## 4.2. The Camera Point-of-View

From the very first sentences on, it is clear that the writing style of *Afterdark* is an exceptional one:

*“Eyes mark the shape of the city. Through the eyes of a high-flying night bird, we take in the scene from midair. In our broad sweep, the city looks like a single gigantic creature – or more like a single collective entity created by many intertwining organisms. Countless arteries stretch to the ends of its elusive body, circulating a continuous supply of fresh blood cells, sending out new data and collecting the old, sending out new consumables and collecting the old, sending out new contradictions and collecting the old.”*<sup>39</sup>

Besides the unusual simile of comparing a city to an organism, there are other things

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38 Murakami 34

39 Murakami 3

that stand out: It is not only the unusual narrative perspective – the first person plural “we” – that gives the impression of a film, as if we, the readers are watching through a camera. The picture that immediately comes to mind with “*Through the eyes of a high-flying night bird*” and “*our broad sweep*” is that of a film that starts with the image of a city at night taken from the **bird’s eye view**. It is an **aerial panoramic establishing shot**. Later on “*our line of sight chooses an area of concentrated brightness and, focusing there, silently descends to it – a sea of neon colours.*”<sup>40</sup> Now the camera **focuses** on a very bright area, an “*amusement district*”<sup>41</sup> and moves down in a **forward tracking shot**.

There are various other shots, camera angles, film terms and devices, some of which are paraphrased, while in other cases, they are mentioned explicitly. An example for the blatant use of a typical instrument of film is the following:

*“He passes the table of the girl with the book. A few steps beyond it, he comes to a halt as if a thought has struck him. He begins moving slowly backwards as in a rewinding film.”*<sup>42</sup>

Before Murakami even mentions the word “camera” for the first time, he is talking about a “**rewinding** film”. Surprisingly, this does not sound strange at all, because, at that point, the narrative style has established itself as a purely observing one, making the reader a mere voyeur.

In contrast, a scene where the camera is mentioned directly, is where Eri is sleeping and the reader’s vision is directed at the TV screen, that shows the Man with No Face:

*“Eventually the camera circles around the front and shows his face, but this does not help us to identify him.”*

And later: “*The camera angle is now fixed. It views the Man with No Face straight on, just below the centre.*”<sup>43</sup>

This is read kind of like a storyboard, where one scene is split into its different camera movements and/or positions. At first there’s a **mobile camera** that moves in a **circular traveling shot** around the head of the man until it is monitoring his face. Then it is a fixed camera angle, in a **low angle shot** which makes the Man with No Face appear

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40 Murakami 3

41 Murakami 3 f.

42 Murakami 7

43 Murakami 50 f.

bigger, even intimidating. That shows that in addition to soundtrack, Murakami also uses camera perspectives for implicit characterization.

In another scene, the second camera, the one that is responsible for the image on the TV screen, presents yet another cinematic angle:

*“As if sensing our will, the camera lens draws nearer to its subject. Eri’s mouth appears in close-up.”<sup>44</sup>*

Again, Murakami doesn’t shy away from using the film term. Instead of “**close-up**”, he could have written “in detail” as well, but consciously reminds the reader of the camera eye.

One passage is virtually contrary to the opening scene where the camera moves closer to the city from above:

*“We look down at her from above as she lies in bed. Gradually, as point of view, we begin to draw back. We break through the ceiling, moving steadily up and away from her. The higher we climb, the smaller grows our image of Eri Asai, until it is just a single point, and then it is gone. We increase our speed, moving backwards through the stratosphere. The earth shrinks until it, too, finally disappears. Our point of view draws back through the vacuum of nothingness. The movement is beyond our control.”<sup>45</sup>*

The camera movements, that are described here are a **reverse tracking shot** combined with a **tilting shot** moving upwards. Together, they achieve the maximum distance from Eri, “up *and* away”. In graphic images, like the shrinking earth that reminds of countless science fiction movies, Murakami connects film techniques with the poetic image of a “vacuum of nothingness”. This enables him to cull out the best out of both: From cinema, the vivid picture of a film progressing in one’s mind, and from literature the quiet poetry of the word. Later on, Murakami picks up a common artifice of editing:

*“The room grows darker by degrees until, in an instant, all light*

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44 Murakami 107

45 Murakami 115 f.

*is lost. The sandstorm also fades. Total darkness arrives.*<sup>46</sup>

What I am talking about is, of course, the classic **fade-out**, that Murakami has placed at the end of a chapter. In films, it is used to end a scene or even the movie itself. In the first case, it marks either a change of time or a change of location, in many cases both. Here, it is mainly a change of location, as the next chapter starts with “*Mari and Takahashi are sitting next to each other on a park bench.*”<sup>47</sup> Again, Murakami evokes a film running before our inner eye.

The camera perspective continues throughout the book, and is especially noticeable in the Eri scenes. Although the other part of the book is cinematic and passively observing, as well, these most of all consist of explicit camera movements or angles as analysed above. The reader is kept at a distance to the action through the frame of a camera, or as Murakami puts it:

*“We are invisible, anonymous intruders. We look. We listen. We note odours. But we are not physically present in the place, and we leave behind no traces. We follow the same rules, so to speak, as orthodox time travellers. We observe but we do not intervene.”*<sup>48</sup>

But that is not enough, and Murakami introduces yet a second camera which determines the object of attention. It is the one creating the picture on the TV screen (which realistically speaking actually can't turn on itself) and is another frame that separates the reader from the direct action. So now, “we”, the readers, are observing through a camera that is observing what another camera is observing. This multiple frame, in Rebecca Suter's eyes, is a “parody of the extradiegetic narrator of the traditional realist novel, the purely external observer that does not get involved with the story.”<sup>49</sup> By that, she means that Murakami deliberately exaggerates the observing part of the narrative perspective to question extradiegetic narration which means that the story is told at a “higher level” that is outside the story.<sup>50</sup> Thus, by creating multiple frames, Murakami is an extradiegetic narrator (the first camera) who is telling a story that is observed by another extradiegetic narrator (the second camera). The image on the TV screen that comes

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46 Murakami 116

47 Murakami 117

48 Murakami 27

49 Suter 126

50 <http://www.answers.com/topic/diegesis>

from the second camera, combined with the camera eye of the reader that is staring at the TV, is also an allusion to the voyeuristic reality TV.

After having established the two frames and their corresponding limited points of view, Murakami is going to break this structure by transporting Eri to the other side, and “we”, the readers are able to follow Eri.

*“All we have to do is separate from the flesh, leave all substance behind, and allow ourselves to become a conceptual point of view devoid of mass.”<sup>51</sup>*

Furthermore, the camera point-of-view makes place for Eri’s thoughts, so the extradiegetic structure is given up as a whole. Not for long though, and the perspective returns back to “normal”, the camera vision.

But why the camera point-of-view anyways? Why does Murakami choose such a strange way of telling a story? In an interview published by *The Guardian* in 2001, Murakami finds that “these days “it is a video-type world” that we live in.”<sup>52</sup> This might explain the cinematic approach in *Afterdark*, but it is certainly not the only reason.

### **4.3. Stage Directions**

Apart from the mere *perspective* of a camera, Murakami uses other film elements as well. Like in a normal screenplay, he uses stage directions. Each and every first sentence of any chapter could introduce a new scene in a movie as well. Even in between chapters, when the setting changes, a different location for example, there are those typical, elliptical sentences just like in a screenplay.

In chapter five is probably the best example:

*“The Skylark. Big neon sign. Bright seating area visible through the window. Equally bright laughter from the youthful group of men and women – college students, likely – seated at a large table. This place is far livelier than the Denny’s. The deepest darkness of the night-time streets is unable to penetrate here.”<sup>53</sup>*

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51 Murakami 108

52 <http://books.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4192909-99930,00.html>

53 Murakami 66

What effect does Murakami achieve here? While reading a book, a person translates the letters on a page into mental images that depict the action that is written down. In a well-written novel, when we read the description of e.g. a girl riding on a horse, we can *see* her in our heads. One difference between literature and film is, that in literature the action is *told* by a narrator, in most cases the first-person singular “I” or from a third-person point-of-view. Hence, “the fictional world is not directly represented to the reader”.<sup>54</sup> In film, however, there is no mediator between the spectator and the action, so that the action is something that is happening *right now* which can be seen with your own eyes without a narrator.<sup>55</sup> So by using a film-like style and by writing in the present tense, Murakami manages to convey the same kind of immediacy one experiences with a movie. The reader sees the action directly through his own eyes, or rather through the lens of a camera. In an essay from 1957, George Bluestone quotes Howard Mumford Jones, who lists problems modern novelists face, amongst them “the difficulty of catching the flux of time in static language.”<sup>56</sup> In order to avoid this problem, there is a time indication before each chapter, 24 altogether. They go over the course from 11:56 pm to 6:52 am the next morning and mark the progress of time. This way, it is possible to maintain the “flux of time”, although it is only “static language”.

The disadvantage of a writing-style like this is, that – just like in a film – the explicit description of inner action, thoughts and feelings, get lost. The only way the reader is able to know what happens inside a character is when Murakami gives a description of e. g. a character’s face, and, of course, he can’t do that all the time. (There are a few moments when the reader slips into the mind of a character, but only two or three times in the entire book.) “It’s the way Murakami consistently refuses the inwardness of his own characters, insistently remaining an observer of the action he creates, rather than entering into the thoughts of his protagonists.”<sup>57</sup> And this, in return, fits perfectly to the human being as a “*nameless part of the collective entity*”<sup>58</sup> as characterized in *Afterdark*. Thus, it is more immediate, but in certain aspects less intimate than common novels.

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54 Ross 5

55 Ross 5

56 Harrington 140

57 <http://momus.wordpress.com/2007/06/10/the-dark-side/>

58 Murakami 198

## 5. Decoding Metaphors: Eri Asai

As in almost every Murakami novel, there are certain unrealistic elements, that in real life, simply can't be: "Clearly designed to be metaphors, they are nonetheless presented as completely real and often leave physical traces on a character."<sup>59</sup> In *Afterdark*, the TV screen in Eri's room shows an image without even being plugged in. It is an image of a man who is looking at her through the screen. Strangely enough, the moment she wakes up, Eri and her bed are inside the room that is shown on the screen. The "physical trace" in this case is Shirakawa's VERITECH-pencil. This and the fact that she wakes up in Shirakawa's office (while he is actually still there in the real world), makes it clear that there is a significant relationship, or at least some connection between the two. But of what kind?

First of all, it is necessary to clarify why Eri has been sleeping for two months straight, or at least nobody has seen her awake in that time. The food disappears in her room mysteriously, because no-one ever sees her eat. It seems as if Eri doesn't want to deal with her family anymore, or her social life in general. The function of sleep as an escape of reality is very likely, since this "role" of sleep is being mentioned in the novel by Korogi, who is running away from someone or something herself: "[...] *I always think: let me not wake up. Let me just go sleeping.*"<sup>60</sup> And really, Eri's sleep was so deep that she "*left her normal reality behind*"<sup>61</sup> when she wakes up.

But not only her, both Eri and Mari have problems. Mari is very self-conscious and in her own words thinks that she doesn't "*stand a chance if you compare me to her [Eri]*."<sup>62</sup> Because the beautiful Eri is privileged by her parents, Mari wants to make up for her lack of prettiness by intelligence. She still longs for her parents' attention and approval, while Eri has the pressure of being perfect. The roles are definite: "*The elder sister, Snow White; the younger sister, a little genius.*"<sup>63</sup> This, however, does not make it easier, because the two of them grow away from each other and are not able to see the respective problem of the other. The difference between the sisters is also evident in the fact that Eri is sleeping all the time, while Mari stays up all night and desperately tries to find some sleep.

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<sup>59</sup> <http://quarterlyconversation.com/haruki-murakami-sputnik-sweetheart>

<sup>60</sup> Murakami 158

<sup>61</sup> Murakami 115

<sup>62</sup> Murakami 56

<sup>63</sup> Murakami 57

The assigned roles Mari and especially Eri have to fulfill, force them to find their own personal identity by other, more drastic means. This opinion is shared by a critic:

“In what is perhaps the novel’s most powerful metaphor, the blurring of the line between television and reality, becomes a code for a beautiful young woman’s struggle to break out of her own image, to establish a self independent of the perception of others.”<sup>64</sup>

It makes sense why Eri, suffering from social withdrawal, is expressing this in the extreme form of sleeping non-stop and Mari is wandering through the night. But maybe there is another reason behind Eri’s sleep that explains the Man with No Face and her transporting to the “other side”. The detailed description of her awakening might help:

*“In a twilight corner of her consciousness, one tiny fragment and another tiny fragment call out wordlessly to each other, their spreading ripples intermingling. The process takes place before our eyes. A unit of thought begins to form this way. Then it links with another unit [...]”*<sup>65</sup>

Here the emphasis is clearly on sleep as a state of sub-conscious operations. That means that Eri is processing sensations or generally any kind of thing that has happened to her. Takahashi, the mediator between Eri and Mari, offers a possible explanation:

*“I just had an idea. Why don’t you look at it this way? Say your sister is in some other Alphaville kind of place – I don’t know where – and somebody is subjecting her to meaningless violence. She’s raising wordless screams and bleeding invisible blood.”*

*“In a metaphorical sense?”*

*“Probably.”*<sup>66</sup>

Eri Asai is in an “Alphaville kind of place”? Now what is that supposed to mean? What

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64 <http://momus.wordpress.com/2007/06/10/the-dark-side/>

65 Murakami 109

66 Murakami 130

does Eri have to do with a love hotel? Is she a prostitute? When Murakami lets the reader get an insight into her thoughts at one point, Eri herself thinks: *“I’m a lump of flesh, a commercial asset”*<sup>67</sup>, which could mean that she indeed has something to do with prostitution, but it could also just be just a reference to her modeling, which she has done since middle school.<sup>68</sup> Very likely, the *“Alphaville kind of place”* refers to the movie of the same name. In the movie, *Alphaville* is the *“name of an imaginary city of the near future”*, Mari explains. She adds that in *Alphaville*, *“you’re not allowed to have deep feelings. So there’s nothing like love.”*<sup>69</sup> This association of the *city Alphaville* also fits to the *“place”* Takahashi is talking about. This could mean that Eri wants to escape a world in which she has to be perfect and cannot express herself freely.

The *“meaningless violence”*, however, is very vague, as it could mean either physical or psychological terror. So is the *“somebody”*. The only two people that come into consideration are Shirakawa and *“The Man with No Face”*. Shirakawa, because he is the only *“bad”* guy in the novel and has proven by beating up the Chinese prostitute that he is capable of acting very brutally. On the other side, the Man with No Face is the most mysterious character throughout the entire novel and is showing a direct interest in Eri – not just through words like Takahashi – but by staring at Eri continuously. Murakami, who allies himself with *“us readers”*, subtly guides the reader’s thoughts by asking questions. This example shows how he deliberately wants his readers to think about the connection between Eri and the Man with No Face:

*“Unfortunately (we should say), there is nothing we can do for Eri Asai. Redundant though it may sound, we are sheer point of view. We cannot influence things in any way. But – we wonder – who was that Man with No Face? What could he have done to Eri Asai? And where has he gone off now?”*<sup>70</sup>

This implies that the Man with No Face has hurt Eri in some kind of way. Whoever he is, that explanation would fit to all the bits and pieces the reader gets as information. It does not explain, however, why Eri wakes up in Shirakawa’s office and finds his pencil on the floor. It seems inevitable, that the Man with No Face – since he has been sitting in Shirakawa’s office – must be somehow related to him. It is even possible to draw an

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67 Murakami 114

68 Murakami 57

69 Murakami 59 f.

70 Murakami 152

analogy between them. In one scene, Shirakawa is watching *Creatures of the Deep*, a TV program about underwater life, while he is “*actually looking at something deep inside the screen – something miles beyond the screen.*”<sup>71</sup> Earlier in the book, Murakami says that Eri’s heart and mind are “*at the bottom of the sea*”<sup>72</sup>, which could mean that Shirakawa is staring at Eri’s soul somehow, through a TV screen, just like the Man with No Face is watching her through a TV screen as well.

But one must not forget, that the office and the pencil are not *real*. One cannot simply disappear into a TV-screen. I am convinced that what “we”, the readers, see through “our” camera-eye, is Eri’s dream and her subconscious mind. Murakami, whenever dealing with some metaphysical, “really-can’t-be” action, let’s it happen in an uncomfortable or mysterious state. In general, the “dark” is “corresponding to the unconscious realm.”<sup>73</sup> The title alone indicates such a situation. After dark, dream-like fantastic things happen. In fact, they take place in the deepest darkness of the mind, during sleep. When Eri has escaped Shirakawa’s office and is in the real world in her own room again, Murakami notes that “*the deepest darkness of the night has now passed. But is this actually true?*”<sup>74</sup> It is evident that the “darkness of the night” corresponds to the psychological process of Eri. In between the two scenes where Eri is on the “other side”, Takahashi remarks that now it is the “*darkest part of the night – and the hardest part.*”<sup>75</sup>

But what does that help to decode the metaphor? I see it this way: Eri is escaping a reality she can’t cope with any more. She has made a really bad, harmful experience with a man, symbolized by the Man with No Face. It is the same type of person as Shirakawa, or maybe even *is* Shirakawa, which is why there are so many connections to him. When sleeping, Eri’s subconsciousness (that is dealing with her experience) is projected to the TV screen, that comes to life with nightfall and goes off with breaking dawn, as the darkness stands for the unknown processes of the mind.

Mari is the counterpart to her sister and thus cannot sleep. She makes a step towards Eri with the help of Takahashi and in the end really tries to get closer to her which is exactly what Eri longs for.<sup>76</sup> Although it is an open ending, it seems as if Mari can help Eri wake up in the real world again.

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71 Murakami 154

72 Murakami 52

73 Strecher 83

74 Murakami 176

75 Murakami 91

76 vgl. Murakami 121

But maybe, all the connections between Shirakawa, the Man with No Face, and Eri, are not as important as they *can* be understood. Maybe it is just Murakami's "recurring theme", namely "that despite our loneliness we are all connected."<sup>77</sup> Even Murakami himself says as quoted in an interview: "I never plan. I never know what the next page is going to be."<sup>78</sup> Like his hero Kafka, Murakami can be interpreted in many ways.

## 6. Themes in *Afterdark*

As narrative techniques, the camera perspective and the cinematic frame itself, create their own atmosphere, prompt certain effects on the reader. These stylistic devices have been maintained consistently throughout the novel, thus making Murakami the author of the probably most cinematic novel so far. This, however, is only an achievement when it is done successfully, namely when it fits to its content. The themes and the way of narrating a story should support, not defy each other. The two main themes in *Afterdark* are both typical of Murakami: Alienation and a play with two sides that is also reflected in characters, which I have summarized with the generic term "dualism".

### 6.1. Alienation

Like I have mentioned before, the camera sight establishes a distance between the reader and the action. It *is* more immediate in the sense that it creates the illusion of direct action that is happening *right now* instead of using a narrator and the past tense, for example, but the relationship between the narrator and the characters is far less close. It is an outright observing perspective that doesn't take anybody's side, but unlike the omniscient narrator, it does have a limited point of view. Though it can follow people and visit Eri in her room, there are restrictions. The perfect example is the scene where the mask of the Man with No Face is described:

*"What makes the mask truly eerie is that even though it fits the face like a second skin, it prevents us from even imagining what (if anything) the person within is thinking, feeling or planning. Is the man's presence a good thing? A bad thing? Are his thoughts straight? Twisted? Is the mask meant to hide him? Protect him? We have no clue."*<sup>79</sup>

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77 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2001/may/26/fiction.harukimurakami>

78 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/may/17/fiction.harukimurakami>

79 Murakami 51

Obviously, the camera can only gather visual information, like a smile, that then maybe gets interpreted as “happy smile” or “polite smile” by the narrator who guides “our” thoughts. What Murakami created in *Afterdark*, is a narrator that stands outside the story *and* has a limited point of view.

Transferred to humans that means: People observe, but do not really know each other. There is always a distance that prevents a direct access to the other’s feelings, thoughts etc. Individuals form “the people”, but many individuals do not identify with “the people”, analogous to the camera that stands outside the story.

Alienation, especially in a big city, is a typical Murakami theme.<sup>80</sup> In *Afterdark*, it is evident in two ways. The most apparent one is the estrangement of Mari and Eri, which I have already explained.

Remarkably, whenever the camera jumps to Eri (or to a different location), the “cut” between the scenes is very harsh, it simply says “*Eri Asai’s room.*”<sup>81</sup> or “*Eri Asai is still sleeping.*”<sup>82</sup> to introduce the new location. A significant change occurs after Mari has walked into Eri’s room. The next time “we” enter her room, it is incorporated into its surroundings:

*“Our point of view departs from the sky over the city centre and shifts to an area above a quiet suburban residential neighbourhood. Below us stand two-storey houses with yards. [...] We choose one house from among all the similar houses and drop straight down to it. Passing through the glass and the lowered cream-coloured blind of a second-storey window, we soundlessly enter Eri Asai’s room.”*<sup>83</sup>

The fact that Eri’s room is now connected with the rest of the world is also a reflection of her mind, which in the end is – and probably stays – back on *this* side again.

Apart from Eri, most other characters have to cope with isolation as well:

Mari has a hard time talking about personal issues, but at one point admits that she was successful at creating her “own world”<sup>84</sup>, a relic from the time she got bullied at school.<sup>85</sup>

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80 vgl. <http://gbctrans.com/essay/essay.html>

81 Murakami 49

82 Murakami 106

83 Murakami 199 f.

84 Murakami 166

85 Murakami 165

Korogi is always running away from someone or something and thus can't form any deep friendships. Like Eri, she craves sleep because then she does not have to deal with reality.<sup>86</sup>

Kaoru, the ex-wrestler, has only little money left since she has retired from her professional career. From then on, nobody was interested in her anymore and she doesn't quite know what to do with her life.<sup>87</sup>

Shirakawa likes to be lonely. He works alone in his office at late hours in the night, so that when his family wakes up, he doesn't get to see them. The scene where Murakami describes him in his office for the first time, he uses a very graphic reference to one of America's best-known painters:

*“The room is dark. Only the area around the man's desk receives illumination from fluorescent lights on the ceiling. This could be an Edward Hopper painting titled Loneliness.”*<sup>88</sup>

Murakami, whose writing style is often compared to Edward Hopper's paintings, evokes the image of one of these nocturnal, lonely scenes, the most famous one being *Nighthawks*. Because it fits perfectly to the themes and atmosphere in *Afterdark* and also portrays people in a city at night, I chose a detail as the cover image, as if seen through an optic lens.

## 6.2. Dualism

While reading *Afterdark*, as well as other Murakami novels, it is striking how often Murakami is talking about “this side” and the “other side” throughout his writings. Be it Takahashi talking about hearings at court,<sup>89</sup> or Mari staring at her reflection in the mirror that remains after she is gone,<sup>90</sup> there's always a reference to the two sides.

Even “most characters have a two-side”<sup>91</sup>, according to one critic, a light and a dark notion. One example is Takahashi, who is apparently a very cheerful and spontaneous character, but nevertheless describes his experiences at court and the resulting ominous *Weltanschauung* as a feeling of “*deep terror*” and “*hopelessness*”.<sup>92</sup> Shirakawa, on the

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86 Murakami 158 f.

87 Murakami 61

88 Murakami 81

89 Murakami 96 f.

90 Murakami 67

91 <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/after-dark-by-haruki-murakami-trans-jay-rubin-455055.html>

92 Murakami 97

other side, who seems to be *the* bad, brutal and insensitive character per se, still has also some human, likable moments to him, for example when he banter with his wife.<sup>93</sup>

The theme is so evident in almost any aspect of the book, that one review bears the title: “A Dark Beauty of Novelette Filled With Dualism”<sup>94</sup>

The scenes where the dualistic character of *Afterdark* stands out most, are the Eri scenes, which are also the most cinematic scenes in the novel. Here, the TV screen separates **ko chiragawa**, *this* side, from **achiragawa**, *that* side.<sup>95</sup> Constantly, the room with the Man with No Face is referred to as the “other side”,<sup>96</sup> while Eri’s room belongs to “this side”.<sup>97</sup> Here, the two sides represent the realistic and the fantastic world, just like waking and dreaming, light and dark. This idea behind the two sides is also expressed in another Murakami novel, *Sputnik Sweetheart*, which was written in 1999.<sup>98</sup> In that passage, the narrator draws a comparison between building a gate and writing:

*“People believed the city’s soul resided in the gates. [...] People would take carts out to old battlefields and gather the bleached bones that were buried there or that lay scattered about. [...] At the entrance to the city they’d construct a huge gate and seal the bones inside. [...] When the gate was finished they’d bring several dogs over to it, slit their throats, and sprinkle their blood on the gate. Only by mixing fresh blood with the dried-out bones would the ancient souls of the dead magically revive. [...] Writing novels is much the same. You gather up bones and make your gate, but no matter how wonderful the gate might be, that alone doesn’t make it a living, breathing novel. A story is not something of this world. A real story requires a kind of magical baptism to link the world on this side with the world on the other side.”*<sup>99</sup>

Reading this, one gets the impression that the author reveals his own philosophy about writing in general. The two sides, once more, represent the realistic and the magical

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93 vgl. Murakami 84 f.

94 <http://www.wilfridwong.com/2008/08/07/after-dark-by-haruki-murakami-a-dark-beauty-of-novelette-filled-with-dualism/>

95 vgl. Suter 127

96 Murakami 52

97 Murakami 175

98 <http://www.randomhouse.com/features/murakami/site.php?id=>

99 Murakami 17 (*Sputnik Sweetheart*)

world, respectively. Although that is a recurrent Murakami theme, the dualism in other aspects is especially developed in *Afterdark*. Murakami himself makes use of the word “dualism” in the very end of the novel:

*“Commuter trains of many colours move in all directions, transporting people from place to place. Each of those under transport is a human being with a different face and mind, and at the same time each is a nameless part of the collective entity. Each is simultaneously a self-contained whole and a mere part. Handling this dualism of theirs skilfully and advantageously, they perform their morning rituals with deftness and precision”*<sup>100</sup>

However, the context and the meaning are utterly different. Here, the stress is on the human being as a creature that belongs to a “pack” so to speak, and yet is still on its own. This way, the two main themes of alienation and dualism are linked.

But what does the camera perspective have to do with all that? What the camera does, is nothing else than supporting the structure of the “two sides”: It separates the reader – or the “viewer” – from the characters. The camera lens functions as an unbreakable wall between “this side”, reality, and “the other side”, fiction.

## 7. Conclusion

In this paper, I tried to point out the extraordinary achievement of Haruki Murakami to write a truly cinematic novel, make clear the relation of narrative techniques and the resulting effects, and give an insight into Murakami’s fantastical surrealistic metaphors. Although the narrative style is very unique, Murakami has blended all the mentioned aspects into a master-piece. To my great surprise, (amongst others, of course) there were many critics who disliked the novel very much, or not even mentioned the cinematic approach. The website [goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com), lists a statistic with 4174 ratings, that give *Afterdark* an average of 3.53 out of 5, which is good, but not remarkable.<sup>101</sup> Maybe, *Afterdark* is a little bit inaccessible for some readers, or as one review by “Daniel” says, “Murakami is not a great author for passive readers. [...] To me, Murakami is a great

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100 Murakami 198

101 [http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2782082.After\\_Dark](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2782082.After_Dark)

author for teaching you how to read (forgive me) proactively.”<sup>102</sup>

Personally, I find *Afterdark* a sometimes challenging novel, but I still enjoyed it very much at the same time. It was my first Murakami novel, but definitely not my last.

## 8. Self-Written Story

After my analysis of *Afterdark*, I decided to write a story myself, that embraces Murakami’s cinematic approach. I also tried to take up common “Murakami themes” such as alienation, search for identity and growing up. It goes without saying that unrealistic elements are included, as well as Murakami’s affinity to cats, music and references to Western culture. Before I started writing, I read his “instructions”:

“Whether in music or in fiction, the most basic thing is rhythm. Your style needs to have good, natural, steady rhythm, or people won’t keep reading your work. I learned the importance of rhythm from music — and mainly from jazz. Next comes melody — which, in literature, means the appropriate arrangement of the words to match the rhythm. If the way the words fit the rhythm is smooth and beautiful, you can’t ask for anything more. Next is harmony — the internal mental sounds that support the words. Then comes the part I like best: free improvisation. Through some special channel, the story comes welling out freely from inside.”<sup>103</sup>

### Enter Cat

Red. Cars are slowing down, squealing tires, honking. The noise abates. A wall of machines and metal. Hip-hop at high volume. Green. The noise is rising and the wall begins to disperse, slowly, then faster, until we can see the other side of the street, interrupted by traffic. A girl of 15, maybe 16, is sitting at a bus stop. She’s wearing Jeans, a green shirt and a black coat. We can’t make out details, so we zoom in closer and concentrate our vision on her face only. To our surprise, there’s a scar on her left cheek, but we find that she still looks pretty. Then the bus approaches and she stands up. The doors slide open and people, young and old, rich and poor, are oozing out of the bus, going

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102 [http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/17803.After\\_Dark?rating=3](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/17803.After_Dark?rating=3)

103 [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/08/books/review/Murakami-t.html?\\_r=3&8bu&emc=bu&oref=slogi n&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/08/books/review/Murakami-t.html?_r=3&8bu&emc=bu&oref=slogi n&oref=slogin)

about their businesses. A woman kisses her husband on the cheek before they part. New people of all kinds surge into the bus. Someone is trying to dodge the ticket, but the bus driver, under constant yelling, makes him pay. Finally, the bus drives on. Surprisingly,, the girl is still standing at the same spot, looking somewhat irresolute. As she walks on hesitantly, we decide to follow her.

After a while we realize that she is walking to the beach. Slowly, she descends the stairs that lead to the water. The rows of folded parasols cast an army of shades that grows darker by the minute. Few people strolling around. A life guard is on duty; next to the *Rental & Shop* sits its owner.

“Hi Tami!” The man waves at her.

“Hi Jacob. Can I have your equipment for an hour, or maybe one and a half? Please.”

“What’s up with you? You know the beach is closing in 45 minutes. And everybody is already off to the festival downtown anyways. You should enjoy the party.”

“You’re not there, either.”

“That’s not the point. What I actually mean to say is, I can’t give it to you. In case something happens, there won’t be any qualified person to help you.”

He glances at the college life guard who is immersed into a fashion magazine.

“I know you’ve done that a zillion times and I know I can trust you, but still...it’s my responsibility.”

“Jake...I thought we were friends. Remember when we went to the Mac Donald’s and your ex-girlf--”

“I know, I owe you a favor. A big favor. But still...Are you *sure* you want to do this?”

“Yes. Absolutely 100 % sure. Trust me.”

“I guess I have to then. Here’s the keys”

“Thanks Jake, you’re the best.”

“Oh shut up!”

After Tami has disappeared into the store, we turn to look at the red sea. Seagulls call out into the wide. Concentrating our spirits, we free our minds, leave gravity behind and take to the skies. Our point of view is that of a wide angle camera traveling through the air. Soft winds wave around, above, and through us. We draw in circles with the seagulls and gradually move away from the coast. The flashing spotlight of a lighthouse in the distance. The ocean below us. The land behind us.

After a while, we hurtle back in one giant circular movement towards the beach, where we can see a slender silhouette against the light, gently gliding into the water. Whoever it is, wears a giant backpack of some sort, and eager to find out more, we zoom in further, but the person has already disappeared into the water. In a terrifying run, we aim for the sea until we land on the surface with a smack, and, instead of dwelling on there, sink deeper and deeper. Fish, yellow, white and red. Seaweed and garbage. Darkness.

Suddenly, a diver is approaching. We move backwards, constantly watching her. Again, we decide to keep track on Tami, who is diving deeper, fast. The ground grows slimier, but she seems to be very used to the sinister surroundings. After a while, we make out a green glow in the distance.

Tami begins to swim hastily towards it, as if pulled by a strong magnetic force. Our high-resolving camera eye makes out two distinct points of light now and after some further advance, we can tell that they belong to a giant cat's face. Horrified, we witness as Tami takes off her oxygen mask and kisses the black beast on the snout. Without warning, it opens up its tremendous mouth and, together with Tami, we are being sucked inside.

Our vision is blurred and the jerky picture transmitted to our eyes does nothing but continue being jerky. After a seemingly endless time – like watching a film in slow motion – it gets steady again. From a fixed – and hopefully safer – camera angle, we see Tami kneeling before an old man. Her head is resting on his lap. A close-up of his face reveals that he is indeed very old, 85 at least. We can't see Tami's face, but our little microphone is recording quiet sobs. We move closer until we are able to circle around her face so that we can take in every detail of her skin, every single tiny pore. Tears on her face.

“When are you coming back?” She is weeping heavily, her body rocking back and forth.

“I want you to come back now!” We note anger in her voice. She suddenly stops crying and looks at the old man

“Grandpa, you promised to come back! You can't just disappear and leave me!”

The old man shows no indication that he has either understood or even heard what his grandchild was saying.

“This is so unfair. I've been waiting for you every day since the day you left six weeks ago.”

No reaction. Sobbing. She stares at him with a weird glance. He looks like a scene in a movie that has been accidentally paused. 24 pictures per second that look exactly the same. There is not even the slightest twitch of his eyes. Ten minutes pass like this. Then Tami gets up and the giant mouth opens.

“I miss you. I'll be back. Good-Bye.”

She swims away without looking back, until we can't distinguish her from the water anymore. Slowly, the mouth is closing. It becomes darker until our camera records nothing but pitch-black.

At the bus stop. Tami is sitting on the same seat as the day before. Jeans, red shirt, black coat, blue umbrella. Raindrops gently tapping on windows, cars, footsteps. The bus arrives. Doors slide open and even more people than yesterday pour out. Tami watches carefully, but does not move. After a while, the bus leaves and Tami is staring into nothingness. She walks on slowly, but then turns around and goes back to the bus stop on the other side of the street. Ten minutes later she is on the bus, leaving the city behind. Through the windows we observe our surroundings. Cars, people, trees, dogs, streets, birds, trees, more trees, a horse, a few houses, the entrance to the forest. The bus comes to a halt. This is the last stop. Tami, a woman and we are the only ones left. Tami's shoes touch the ground. They rest for a split second, are being lifted up and set down again. She is walking towards the forest.

Our viewpoint rises until Tami is just a tiny black dot on a field of green. We hang in the air above the forest. A shot. A barking dog. Silence. Our camera notices a second black dot which is coming from the forest, hurrying towards Tami. Worried, we zoom in hastily and recognize the

black cat from last night. Should we be relieved? Should we be scared? We don't know, and whatever the case may be, we can't help Tami anyways. We are just a tool collecting data. We can't intervene.

Nevertheless, we still follow her as she walks into the forest. We get deeper and deeper, and the sunlight that shines through the trees covertly becomes less. After a while it is hard to make out the blue of the sky until it's impossible. To avoid stumbling, Tami rides on the cat and we follow soundlessly, ditching branches that cross our aerial paths.

"Ouch!" At first we don't realize that it is Tami who hit her forehead with a branch. We have to look up to her. We gain on her and stare into two giant green eyes from below. Tami is already on her feet again. She kisses the gigantic creature and is sucked inside in a swirl. This time we decide not to follow her. Instead we use the time to observe in the nature around us. Birds singing, wild flowers in all variations, knotty roots, soft moss. Slowly, we move upwards, fly over the forest to the way that leads into it and wait.

A girl is hopping out, carrying something in her arms. We know it is Tami with the cat, before we even recognize them. We move backwards, but she comes closer fast, until the upper half of her body fills in the screen. The black cat, which has to our relief shrunken to a normal size, is purring intriguingly. They pass us and walk back to the bus stop. The next bus takes them to the city. We remain where we are and watch them disappear.

As the the sun goes down, all is red again.

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## Illustrations

Illustration 1 (Cover): I took a detail from E. Hopper’s *Nighthawks* and photoshopped it.

Harden, Mark. “Hopper, Edward: Nighthawks”

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Illustration 2:

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