Table of Contents

1. Notes and Acknowledgements 3
2. Introduction 4
3. Chapter 1: Skulls, Paperclips, and the Inner Consciousness 14
4. Chapter 2: Disappearing Mementos 49
5. Conclusion 77
6. Bibliography 84
Notes and Acknowledgements

The ideas for this thesis began to percolate in my head after reading Ruth Ozeki’s *Tale for the Time Being* and Ogawa Yōko’s *The Memory Police* in quick succession in February 2020. I developed a fascination with the concepts of time and impermanence, particularly as they relate to objects. Since reading those books, I have increasingly become aware of the strange and precarious position objects play in all of our lives. Although the ideas for my thesis have changed over my research and writing, I am grateful for all the support I have received from professors, family, and friends along the way.

To begin with, I would like to thank my amazing thesis advisor, Eve Zimmerman, who has been incredibly encouraging and patient all throughout my thesis writing process. Our conversations have brought me great joy this year as we explored many different books and stories, looking with a very close eye at the things inside them. I am grateful for how she always pushed me to go one step further with my analysis, which has improved my writing significantly.

Additionally, I would like to thank my major advisor, Robert Goree, who has always been willing to listen to my ideas and has given me excellent writing and research advice over the past few years. Professor Goree always seems to suggest exactly the right book or article I need, and many of the sources he introduced me to helped shape this thesis. I would also like to express my gratitude towards Yoshimi Maeno, who has really helped me develop my Japanese reading skills. Learning how to understand written Japanese better allowed me to read a wider variety of articles and develop my ideas further.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family for being incredibly supportive of me over the past year (and for all reading the two novels discussed in this thesis). I am particularly grateful to my mother who listened to many brainstorming sessions and provided very thoughtful feedback on my writing. They are all much more well versed in contemporary Japanese literature than I think any of them expected to be.

Note: Japanese names are written in the traditional format of Last Name First Name instead of the Western method of First Name Last Name.
Introduction

In the 1980s and 1990s, two authors stand out for the unique and revelatory use of objects in their writing. Murakami Haruki and Ogawa Yōko imbue objects with a life of their own and provide them a sense of deep interiority. In his seminal work on objects and things, *A Sense of Things*, theorist Bill Brown notes that in modernity we live in an “age of things.”¹ He posits, 

The tale of that possession — of being possessed by possessions — is something stranger than the history of a culture of consumption. It is a tale not just of accumulating bric-a-brac, but also of fashioning an object-based historiography and anthropology, and a tale not just of thinking with things, but also of trying to render thought thing-like.²

Brown’s notion of “fashioning an object-based historiography” and looking at history through the objects we possess allows for powerful new readings of Japanese literature. With Japan’s long history of animating objects and spirit possession of objects, room exists to more thoroughly explore the role of objects in literature. Objects not only mark their historical period but are alive themselves and can play pivotal roles in stories. Through both objects of contemporary consumer culture and of the buried past, authors illuminate the historical dynamics of the bubble period in the 1980s and 1990s. In Murakami’s *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* and in Ogawa’s *The Memory Police*, these authors simultaneously show what late capitalism has contributed to people’s lives and what it is costing them. The strangeness of possession in the bubble period is particularly pronounced in Murakami and Ogawa’s works with their construction of dystopian worlds. Through magically distorting and vanishing objects, imbuing them with great meaning or reducing them to nothing, they explore the numerous dynamic roles objects can inhabit.

Objects in Japan

The ritualistic use of objects and the dynamics of possessing and possession have played a central role in Japanese art and literature from pre-modern times. The idea of possession and being possessed often takes the form of animism in Japan; people could not only possess or own physical objects but also have their spirits possess objects. Even from the Tale of Genji in the Heian Period (794 to 1185 CE), mementos from those who have died, katami (形見), were thought to hold their spirits. Rajyashree Pandey describes how the spirit (tama/tamashii) was thought to reside in the robes a person wore and appeared as a recurring trope in waka poetry. Pandey notes that keepsake robes (katami no koromo) “functioned as profoundly erotic and affective tropes in classical and medieval texts, bridging the gap between the living and the dead and serving as living repositories of the essence of absent loved ones.”

As an object containing essences of a person’s spirit, keepsake robes could eclipse temporal and spatial boundaries.

Moreover, Japan’s rich tradition of animism often includes imbuing everyday objects with a sense of spirit. One popular example is tsukumogami (付喪神), sometimes translated as “tool specters.” Popularized in the medieval period in emaki scrolls, tsukumogami are household objects—containers, tools, and instruments—that receive a soul after one hundred years and become independent spirits. However, the combination of spirits and objects did not only pertain to tsukumogami. A broken lantern imbued with the demonic spirit of a woman from the Yotsuya Kaidan is famously depicted in “Oiwa-san” in Katsushika Hokusai’s Hyakumonogatari series from the Edo period (1603-1868 CE). An everyday object like a lantern can become a

---

5 A print of “Oiwa-san” is held at the MFA in Boston: https://collections.mfa.org/objects/212849.
powerful image when it acts as a vessel for the soul or spirit of a person.

In the modern era, writers continued to focus on how objects can contain the spirits of the past, and a culture of preserving objects of the past grew in the wake of WWII. John Whittier Treat looks at how the Japanese often view history through an object-focused approach in an essay entitled “Ibuse Masuji and the Material of History.” Treat writes about how Ibuse—a writer famous for his account of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, *Black Rain*—held an obsession with the Edo period tea diaries. He uses Ibuse’s work on these esoteric objects to look further at an object-based study of history. Treat asserts, “Perhaps history is not ‘the past’ organized teleologically along the trajectory of time, but instead a ‘landscape’ scattered with the tokens of lives which preceded our own… proof of a time which, through its clay pots and diaries, overlaps with our own or is our own.” Authors and artists are often particularly effective at examining this “landscape” of history, picking up objects to examine as a way of connecting past and present. Despite how many cities in Japan have been destroyed by natural disaster and war, small tokens from the past can hold significant weight in understanding both personal history and the history of Japan as a whole.

Additionally, a culture of preservationism grew in Tokyo with the advent of Edo-Tokyo studies in the 1980s as a way to cultivate a new sense of local heritage and memory. More than just shared spaces, objects played an important role in the historicization of the recent past given how the American firebombing obliterated Tokyo during WWII. In *Tokyo Vernacular*, Jordan Sand argues,

> The pursuit of a standardized, modern material life (*seikatsu*) embodied in new consumer durables—together with the suspicion of materialism that had always shadowed this pursuit—found sublimation in the revival of vestiges from the everyday past. Eventually,

---

postindustrial mass society’s insatiable mining for auratic artifacts and sites of memory led the culture of preservationism to the very same houses and consumer durables that barely a generation earlier had embodied a bright future—now conceived instead as evocations of a fond past.\textsuperscript{7}

Sand’s idea of preserving the recent past is embodied in the massive Edo-Tokyo museum (completed in 1993), which catalogues the city of Tokyo from the Edo period to today and includes a huge collection of objects from postwar Tokyo. One exhibit shows a full-scale replica of a 1959 Tokyo apartment, replete with modern household appliances including a refrigerator and a television.\textsuperscript{8}

\textbf{The Post-Postwar Period and the Bubble}

During the postwar period in Japan, significant economic, political, and social change took place alongside urbanization and the renewal following the destruction of most of the major cities during WWII. However, the final edge of the postwar period is somewhat unclear. Some, including Shunya Yoshimi, mark the 1980s as the start of the “post-postwar” period in which Japan began to play a major role in the global economic sphere through the export of both manufactured goods as well as software.\textsuperscript{9} Beginning with the “economic miracle” in the 1960s, the trade balance between the United States and Japan shifted. By the mid-1980s, the value of Japanese exports to the United States was more than double the value of American exports to Japan.\textsuperscript{10} As a result, many began to fear Japan would dominate the global economy, and sensationalized news stories about Japanese productivity featured in the American news.\textsuperscript{11,12}

\textsuperscript{10} Gordon, \textit{Modern History}, 302.
\textsuperscript{11} Gordon, \textit{Modern History}, 304.
In Japan, the 1980s marked a period of affluence and an increase in consumer culture. While the economic miracle of the 1960s allowed for a rapid increase in consumer spending, consumers tended to purchase more practical items in that era including household appliances like refrigerators, rice cookers, and sewing machines. However, the consumer culture that flourished in the 1980s focused more on shopping for pleasure. Andrew Gordon describes the shift in the 1980s:

In the era of postwar growth and recovery, millions of Japanese people understood their efforts as part of a purposeful drive for national economic power and a better life for themselves and their families. By the affluent 1980s, a rather different spirit reigned. Young people and city-dwellers in particular launched into a frenzy of getting and spending. Scholars have noted how young single women, in particular, dominated the consumer economy, purchasing the latest fashions and consumer electronics like Walkmans. Some intellectuals and politicians began to fear the Japanese were turning to hollow materialism with the shifting consumer habits.

While the 1980s was an era of unparalleled affluence, the 1990s is known as a period of economic stagnation, political instability and growing social divisions following the economic bubble bursting. Coined “the lost decade,” the 1990s came at a time of significant change in Japan with the 1989 death of the Shōwa emperor who had reigned through WWII and the postwar period. The crash of the stock market followed shortly afterwards in 1990, and the crash spilled over into other areas of the economy spurring a recession. The fallout from bad loan practices and overinflated land prices in the 1990s only added to the severity. With all

---

areas of the economy stagnating, business and consumer confidence fell. However, the growing unease in Japanese society did not just exist in the economic sphere. Social divisions began to grow in Japan and smashed the widely shared image of an attainable middle-class lifestyle.\textsuperscript{19} As Gordon illustrates, “The equality of the recent past, and the divisiveness of a fearfully viewed present and future, were often exaggerated. But a sense that the nation faced new and profound social problems was omnipresent.”\textsuperscript{20}

As Japan increasingly became a late capitalist society in the 1980s and 1990s, new developments in consumer culture focused on objects with a nostalgic connection to the past. In spaces devoid of local culture and memory, popular culture—and in particular the material objects that played a large role in fostering that popular culture—became imbued with the sense of culture and memory in the 1980s and 1990s that other places and concepts formerly held. Many scholars talk about the shopping habits of the \textit{shinjinrui}, or “new breed,” a term used to describe the generation born after the war who came of age in the 1980s and 1990s. As a result of growing up in prosperous cities and suburbs with little local culture or memory, the \textit{shinjinrui} became enthusiastic consumers of products meant to simulate nostalgia, albeit a free-floating nostalgia to eras they themselves had not experienced.\textsuperscript{21} Sand describes how these consumers faced the increasingly dominant late capitalist system,

Yet although the objects of late twentieth-century Japanese nostalgia were various, they reflected a certain consistent sensibility that valued notions of rootedness and community; preferred low-tech, small, and intimate spaces; and sought to mark out territory outside the dominance of the state, capitalism, or global culture centered in the west… their nostalgia was part of a more generalized condition of ambivalence about capitalist modernity in Japan.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{flushright}  
\textsuperscript{19} Gordon, \textit{Modern History}, 330-331. \\
\textsuperscript{20} Gordon, \textit{Modern History}, 330-331. \\
\textsuperscript{22} Sand, “Nostalgic Consumerism,” 87. 
\end{flushright}
As tangible things, objects allowed for a simple connection to the past that fell outside the capitalist systems Sand depicts above. Ivy furthers Sand’s argument in *Discourses of the Vanishing* when she posits that everyday objects readily became sites for “reproductive nostalgia” because they “offer themselves as easily appropriated repositories of discrete style elements; their status as already circulated and advertised forms provides the requisite distance from the present while allowing ready recirculation.”23 Thus the same capitalist systems that created a desire for nostalgic objects also took advantage of consumers’ desire for objects that formed a sense of community and rootedness in their lives. Some companies initiated travel campaigns and retro products in the 1990s to capitalize on these consumer desires.24

**Dystopian Literature of the Bubble Period**

The bubble period revealed the ways in which advanced capitalism had influenced Japanese society. Both the Japanese people and the world at large began to see how dramatically Japan had changed during the postwar period. Susan Napier depicts this evolution,

> In the postwar period Japan (and Western observers) have seen the dawning and eventual triumph of a careerist, materialist consumer culture so widespread as to seem almost a parody of capitalism’s ultimate goals. Finally, in the 1990s with the rise of marginalized and subversive elements in Japanese society, the consumer dream seems now to contain elements of the dystopian nightmare.25

Yet the fragility of cultural memory in a late capitalist society creates a fertile space for literature to explore the dynamics of creation and loss. Marilyn Ivy argues, “Japan’s national successes have produced—along with Corollas and Walkmans— a certain crucial nexus of unease about

---

24 Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing*, 42.
culture itself and its transmission and stability.” Ivy and Napier effectively demonstrate the idea that literature—and particularly science fiction and fantasy according to Napier—can elucidate how the materialism and the consumer culture of late capitalism influenced Japan.

As the number of possessions people owned grew rapidly and as people came to identify themselves by their possessions during the postwar period, tales in which objects play a key role allow for a close examination of social and historical dynamics. For writers in the 1980s like Murakami, objects often symbolize hopefulness in the time of affluence, but they can also be distorted in dystopias to illustrate the anxieties that accompany growing materialism. For writers in the 1990s including Ogawa, the physical things the Japanese gathered during the 1980s became a reminder in the 1990s of the wealthy past and took on more eerie—and occasionally sinister—qualities.

Additionally, although often considered less “pure” literature than the modernist “I-novel” genre, magical realism and dystopia present a perfect discursive space to examine the consumerism, materialism, and anxieties of everyday life that peaked around the bubble period in Japan. In her examination of Japanese fantasy and science fiction, Susan Napier cites the influential Rosemary Jackson:

Rosemary Jackson has pointed out concerning modern Western fantasy that, “from about 1800 onwards, those fantasies produced within a capitalist economy express some of the debilitating psychological effects of inhabiting a materialist culture. They are peculiarly violent and horrific.” If anything, this statement is even truer of twentieth-century Japanese fantasy.27,28

As Napier argues, Japanese writers increasingly turned to fantasy, science fiction and magical realism in the postwar period in order to “highlight the fundamental absurdities and

---

impossibilities of living in the modern world” that underlie the psychological effects Jackson mentions. These absurdities are often embodied in the object-based world around us, which becomes increasingly filled with junk as Murakami mentions at the end of *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. Moreover, both Brown notes that fantasy—and particularly disappearing objects and things—can facilitate complex discussions of the dynamics of loss. Through the consistent loss of objects in Ogawa’s *The Memory Police*, we begin to see the way we shape meaning in our lives around objects and the memories they possess.

First examining Murakami’s *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* in Chapter 1 and then looking at Ogawa’s *The Memory Police* in Chapter 2, I will analyze the role objects play in their stories following the methods of Bill Brown. In particular, I will focus on what Brown terms the “slippage between having (possessing a particular object) and being (the identification of one’s self with that object).” The new ways Murakami and Ogawa treat objects and their meaning around the bubble period reveals new notions of society and the search for meaning and individual expression. While Ogawa and Murakami are considered popular fiction writers, their tales are rich and full of curious tropes to analyze. Both writer’s works challenge the distinction between “pure” literature (純文學 junbungaku) and “popular” literature as they sell to a wide audience and their works are translated worldwide.

In late capitalist societies where people have increasingly come to define themselves by the objects surrounding them, the idea of individuality feels fragile. And with advanced technology and greater scientific understanding of the material workings of the world around us and our own bodies, the very notion of who we are and what animates the mind and the body

---

29 Napier, *Fantastic*, 53.
comes into question. Writing before the bubble period, Murakami allows for some sense of hope to shine through in his work with his use of spirit-filled objects. On the other hand, Ogawa’s writing after the bubble burst expresses a deep sense of fear and cynicism as all vestiges of culture and memory disappear alongside objects.
Chapter 1: Skulls, Paperclips, and the Inner Consciousness

Spirit-filled objects in Murakami’s *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*

Born in 1949 during the occupation after World War II, Murakami Haruki grew up in the Kansai region of Japan, primarily in Kōbe, in a literary-minded household. He voraciously read world literature and developed a love of American hard-boiled detective novels, jazz, and world history in his youth.³² Murakami moved to Tokyo for college and attended Waseda University during a time marked by the violent student strikes that shut down the school for nearly half a year in 1969.³³ The failure of these student protests features heavily in Murakami’s works, particularly the apathy that followed in the 1970s. Despite having never written seriously in his life beforehand, Murakami claims that while sitting in the stands of a baseball game in 1978, he was suddenly struck by the desire to write a novel. He published his first novel, *Hear the Wind Sing*, in 1979 after struggling through a grueling writing process while still juggling work at his jazz bar, the “Peter Cat.”³⁴ Although he thought he would not write another book, after receiving the 1979 Gunzō Magazine New Novelist’s Prize for *Hear the Wind Sing*, he persevered and eventually sold his Jazz bar in 1981 to focus on writing and translating.³⁵ Over the course of his career as a writer, he has often focused on a few key themes, including individuality, dreams, the power of music, and Japan’s invasion of China.

Published in 1984 and written over the course of only five months, 「世界の終りとハードボイルド・ワンダーランド」, translated as *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (HBW&EW) by Alfred Birnbaum, marked a big leap in Murakami Haruki’s growth as a

writer over his first three novels. In HBW&EW, Murakami further developed his writing style and amplified many of the central themes that interest him. With an intricate structure comprised of two parallel, intertwining narratives, the novel won Murakami the prestigious Tanizaki Prize. Murakami initially faced criticism for rejecting the literary establishment, writing fiction appreciated by everyday readers, and embracing modern tropes concerning individualism and materialism, but scholars increasingly began to embrace his work starting with HBW&EW. It differs significantly from his previous works in multiple ways. First, told in the tradition of a hard-boiled detective novel, HBW&EW follows a more structured plot that progresses at a constant, fast pace. Second, Murakami delves further into the world of magical realism and fantasy, creating both dystopian and utopian worlds within a single narrative.

In HBW&EW, objects play a formal role in the development of the narrative—one could even say that Murakami stitches the two narratives together with the paperclips that play an important role in both stories. Whether making serious critique of the excesses of late capitalism or offhand comments about sofas, Murakami represents the postmodern movement in Japan by bringing contemporary consumer culture’s obsession with objects and things into the foreground. He examines objects thoroughly in both serious passages and also in jazz-like riffs interspersed throughout the text. Murakami grants some objects—particularly skulls—supernatural powers and connects them across the two narratives. Moreover, he carefully surveys the objects in each location, providing the reader with a consistent sense of the materiality of his worlds. Towards the end of the novel, objects play an important role in the narrator’s discovery of his own inner

---

consciousness as he goes from being a cog in the machine to a person who recognizes his individuality beyond the world of objects.

The title of the novel corresponds directly to the names for the two narratives that compose HBW&EW; the first narrative takes place in the “Hard-boiled Wonderland” (HBW) while the second narrative takes place in the “End of the World” (ETW). Murakami alternates between perspectives in each chapter. However, the stories take place on different time scales. The tale in HBW takes place over only five days in autumn while the tale in ETW takes place over a longer stretch of time, marking the shift from autumn into a deep, piercingly cold winter. Both narratives are told from a first-person perspective, with the narrators distinguished by which version of the pronoun for “I” they use: Watashi for HBW and the less formal Boku for ETW. As the tale progresses, the use of pronouns begins to blur, signifying the merging of the two stories.39

39 Rubin, Music, 117.


The first of the two narratives in the novel, the so-called, “Hard-boiled Wonderland” exists as an alternate version of mid-1980s Tokyo in which information secrecy is prized above all else. Matthew Stretcher argues that the conflict in the HBW narrative is “centered on information wars, the objectification and commodification of knowledge, the concretization of thoughts and memories… all part of an ongoing trend observable in the real world.”40 The narrator of this half of the book, Watashi, bears some similarity to other Boku characters from earlier Murakami novels. Watashi is a dissatisfied, divorced man in his 30s living alone in Tokyo with a penchant for Western novels and music. Most elements of the Tokyo in HBW exactly match the historical 1980s: Bob Dylan plays on the radio and the subway lines run on schedule.
The main difference lies in Watashi’s employer, the “System.” Watashi works as a “Calcutec” for the System, a quasi-governmental organization that controls the flow of information. As a Calcutec, Watashi manipulates data using his altered brain to evade the enemy of the System, the “Factory,” from capturing and interpreting the information for sinister purposes. At the beginning of the novel, Watashi takes a job processing data for the Professor, which involves a technique called “shuffling” that harnesses the inner depths of his consciousness. Yet after encounters with suspicious figures from both the System and the Factory and a whirlwind tour in the sewers of Tokyo, Watashi learns that the Professor used special data cues to flip a switch in Watashi’s augmented brain, destining him to be stuck within his inner consciousness. Along his winding journey through Tokyo—both above and underground—Watashi meets a wild cast of characters including the ethically ambiguous Professor, his rather forward granddaughter, and a helpful librarian with an endless appetite, each of whom provides him with new perspectives in his last days in HBW.

The second narrative, the “End of the World,” is a unicorn-filled world buried in Watashi’s deep, altered subconscious. A stark landscape surrounded by insurmountable walls, ETW resembles a utopian world although it does not have the true perfection of one. The narrator, Boku, enters ETW at the beginning of the novel and is swiftly separated from his Shadow—or the conscious version of himself—by the Town’s gatekeeper. Boku assumes the job of the Town’s dreamreader after his eyes are branded by the gatekeeper’s sharp knife, but he remains unsure of his identity and is torn by his Shadow’s desire for them to escape. Boku traverses this strange world seeking out every detail he can find and interpret to make sense of his existence. He forms close connections to the librarian and his protector, the “Colonel,” as he struggles to navigate his relationship with his dying Shadow. Time moves more slowly in this
narrative, and *Boku* is constantly faced by the growing threat of a bitterly cold winter. Additionally, *Boku* quickly finds himself torn between his growing love for the librarian and his desire to reunite with his shadow—who desperately wants to escape ETW. In the end, he rediscovers music and uses it to help him find the librarian’s lost mind. The two then go live together in the woods, a compromise that keeps him content with staying in ETW.

Many scholars have discussed how Murakami explores the powerful consumerism, materialism, and the quasi-national corporate culture driving Japan’s development in the 1980s in HBW&EW. For example, Strecher posits that the world Murakami creates in HBW&EW is “at once technologically far removed from the reader, yet frighteningly familiar in its portrayal of the dominant, mainstream culture.”

Marilyn Ivy wrote of the 1980s, “it is clear that a system of power now operates within Japan in an extraordinarily comprehensive, structured, and orderly way...Japanese capitalism recognizes no close in its global expansiveness.” Likewise, Susan Napier asserts that HBW&EW is an exploration of the systems governing Japan. She argues that Murakami’s vision of 1980s Tokyo in HBW even extends the corporate-government interactions beyond the street level and down into the sewers and subway systems that comprise the underbelly of Tokyo.

Additionally, scholars have noted how Murakami’s works—especially HBW&EW—focus on the question of the individual in a late capitalist and high-tech information society. Napier notes that HBW&EW “can be read as both an apolitical dystopia and a brilliant satire on technology, at the same time as it can be analyzed as a meditation on the self in contemporary culture.”

---

41 Strecher, *Dances with Sheep*, 43.
44 Napier, *Fantastic*, 127.
nostalgic images (projections of his narrator’s inner consciousness) as a way of fighting the
dehumanizing societal systems. He suggests Murakami uses this strategy in order to explore how
the Japanese state—as a consumerist entity proffering artificially constructed narratives—
prevents the formation of individual identity.⁴⁵ Strecher takes a decidedly negative stance,
writing that Murakami’s work suggests that late capitalism “has indeed destroyed the soul of the
Japanese preventing them from interacting with one another beyond (or outside of) that
system.”⁴⁶ Yet Strecher is not alone in his negative conclusions, Ian Buruma has also suggested
that Murakami’s work around materialism is almost Anti-Japanese in how it brazenly accepts
and utilizes elements of Western capitalist culture.⁴⁷

However, I would argue the elements of material culture in HBW&EW are not just a sign
of the consumerism and capitalism in Japan in the 1980s during the postwar economic boom. An
attempt to only look at the larger ways Murakami explores societal structures skims over the
surface of the novel and misses some of the bigger dilemmas the novel poses. Taking a deeper
look at the objects can tell us about the important philosophical questions Murakami asks in the
novel. These questions transcend the theme of the challenges posed by the late capitalist society
his characters inhabit, but are also about what it means to be human in the modern world. When
people are surrounded by a growing sea of objects produced in the name of capitalist
advancement, how do they define themselves as individuals? Ironically, it is through the objects
of consumer culture and the ways he uses them at literary devices that Murakami explores these
ideas. Rubin writes that Murakami “has said that a tendency to contrast ‘existence’ with non-

---

⁴⁶ Strecher, Dances with Sheep, 18.
existence’ or ‘being’ with ‘non-being’ is fundamental to his work.” Numerous objects and people in the novel inhabit the liminal space between an object and a living being, and Murakami blurs the lines of what existence means. In the following pages, I explore objects both real and imaginary—including skulls, musical instruments, and paperclips—and discuss how these objects connect the two narratives.

**Hard-boiled Wonderland**

**Skulls**

Murakami’s use of objects is reminiscent of Bill Brown’s concept that ideas exist within things. In *A Sense of Things*, Bill Brown posits, “Taken literally, the belief that there are ideas in things amounts to granting them an interiority and, thus, something like the structure of subjectivity.” I use Brown’s concept of “interiority” to refer to the way Murakami fills certain objects with a spirit: an amorphous, smoke-like existence that pulls the narrator towards them. In particular, Murakami assigns skulls a special ontological status and grants them a sense of interiority. Skulls take on supernatural characteristics in the HBW narrative, starting with curious sounds and moving to dazzling light from the first time *Watashi* discovers skulls in the Professor’s office. As Brown writes in the introduction to his book,

> It is not the worn, hard surface of the jug, after all, but the void constituted by the jug where Heidegger discovers the thingness of the thing and its gathering of earth and sky, divinities and mortals. It is not the elegant form of the vase but the void created by the vase where Lacan discovers the Thing that names the emptiness at the center of the Real. And it is all those spaces within…. [that] enable us to image and imagine human interiority.

Murakami’s narrators are not just drawn to the skulls themselves, but the discovery of the mystery of what lies inside a seemingly sterile object. The skulls exist in the liminal space

---

between living beings and insensate objects which allows Murakami to use skulls to reimagine
the workings of the human mind. The skulls eventually move from the scientific to the spiritual,
and in their capacity as vessels that can be filled, edited, or emptied, they prove Watashi can live
on beyond HBW.

When he enters the Professor’s laboratory, the skulls impress Watashi and introduce him
to the scientific mysteries that the Professor investigates. The narrator remarks that skulls fill the
room, “Giraffe, horse, panda, mouse, every species of mammal imaginable. There must have
been three or four hundred skulls. Naturally, there were human skulls, too.”51 The Professor
proudly describes his fondness for skulls, “Some folks collect stamps, some folks collect records.
Me, I collect skulls.”52 His portrayal of the collection has a strange tone to it, given skulls that
were once a part of living, breathing mammals have become mere objects: “Unscramblin’ the
skulls has taken me longer than I ever thought possible...it’s taken thirty years t’get t’where I can
hear the sounds bones make.”53 Although the Professor knows the skulls must contain some
complex interiority, he cannot access it from just the surface of the objects.

The Professor grants the skulls a sense of greater interiority as objects filled with history
and meaning through the sounds they produce. He notes that each skull possesses a unique tune,
creating a “the hidden language of bones.”54 Yet the Professor’s scientific objective to unravel
that “hidden language” creates ethical dilemmas since the Professor fears his research may be
used for sinister purposes. He hypothesizes “suppose you could draw out the memories stored in
bones; there’d be no need for torture. All you’d have t’do is kill your victim, strip the meat clean

off the skull, and the information would be in your hands.” The Professor believes the human experience can be contained within an object and be accessible through scientific measurement of that object. Strecher argues that the Professor’s language presents an objectification of knowledge and memory, similar to how technological advances in the 1980s allowed for storing “memories” onto computers, floppy disks, or CDs. In his scientific pursuits, the Professor doesn’t shy away from getting data through violent means. Rather than being concerned by the complex humanity which skulls represent, he seeks to exploit the skulls as vessels that can be emptied for scientific data. For him, using the data inside skulls to advance evolution is the primary goal.

Moreover, the way the Professor demonstrates the noises the skulls produce encourages the narrator to question the nature of his own body as a physical object. While Watashi analyzes data, the Professor experiments with the sounds his skulls produce by prodding them with steel tongs. The narrator finds himself disturbed by the sounds, remembering that “each skull once had skin and flesh and was stuffed with gray matter—in varying quantities—teeming with thoughts of food and sex and dominance.” Even at the beginning of the novel, the narrator begins to recognize the two-fold nature of people as both a physical body and an inner consciousness. He even imagines disconnecting his consciousness from his body as he contemplates,

I tried to picture my own head stripped of skin and flesh, brains removed and lined up on a shelf, only to have the old guy come around and give me a rap with a stainless-steel fire tong. Wonderful. What could he possibly learn from the sound of my skull? Would he be able to read my memories? Or would he be tapping into something beyond memory?

---

56 Strecher, *Dances with Sheep*, 43.
The narrator’s questions reveal Murakami’s interest in the interiority of objects. Murakami creates a possible interiority for the Professor’s skull collection that matches our preconception of interiority of a skull: memories encoded in a brain. Yet he extends beyond that, suggesting that the skull may have something extra encoded in it, the version of ourselves we cannot access: our inner conscious.

After he completes his first round of data processing, the Professor gives Watashi a skull of his own which leads Watashi down a path of intrigue and discovery. Watashi prods the skull to see what sounds it can produce, and he makes an important discovery: the skull is a unicorn skull with the horn broken off. Unicorns, imbued with their own mythology, enhance the magical characteristics of the skulls. Not only is the skull seen to be filled with some deeper, amorphous character but the animal it came from is also fantastical in its own right. Following his desire to understand more about the skull, Watashi works with the voracious librarian. They come to believe his skull might have been a relic from a Russian scientist who believed the unicorn skulls came from “a crater, the cradle for untold flora and fauna. In other words, a lost world.”59 The lost world he describes here bears remarkable similarity to ETW.

Contrary to his belief that the skull might be from the Russian scientist, Watashi discovers the true nature of the unicorn skull after his long and arduous underground journey to find the Professor. The Professor explains Watashi’s inner world and the way in which shuffling changed his brain permanently, eventually landing on the subjects of the unicorns inside ETW in Watashi’s core consciousness. He describes how in ETW, “Everythin’ that’s in this world here and now is missin’... In that world of yours, people’s selves are externalized into beasts.”60 He elaborates that the beasts are unicorns, noting “You’ve got unicorns herded in a town,

59 Murakami, HBW&EW, 103.
60 Murakami, HBW&EW, 270.
surrounded by a wall.”¹ Watashi asks the Professor if the skull he received is connected to the inner world, quickly noticing the connection. But the Professor replies that the skull is just a replica that he made himself. He prides himself on the creation, replying “Pretty realistic, eh? Modelled it after a visualized image of yours.”² As a model of an object, one would not expect Watashi’s skull to contain the same complex interiority as the original, but Murakami reveals later that the skull has more power than one might expect.

At the very end of the novel, the skull makes an important reappearance in Watashi’s last days and one that proves to him that a complete world really exists inside his own skull. When spending the night at the librarian’s house, Watashi brings the skull with him to her house, and shows her the skull after their dinner, explaining how it is a replica made by a skull specialist. But in the middle of the night, the librarian wakes up Watashi, pointing his attention to a glowing object on her table. Taking a closer look, he describes that he sees “a small Christmas tree-like object,” although he soon realizes it is the skull glowing.³ He depicts the skull’s miraculous transformation, “Lights were playing over the skull. Perishing points of microscopic brilliance. Like a glimmering sky, soft and white. Hazy, as if each glowing dot were layered in a fluid electric film, which made the lights seem to hover above the surface.”⁴ Both Watashi and the librarian are transfixed by the “miniscule constellations” drifting and swirling across the skull. The spirit contained within the skull is cast out onto the surface of the skull, making it more visible and tangible than in other scenes in the story.

---

¹ Murakami, *HBW&EW*, 270.
² Murakami, *HBW&EW*, 270.
At first, the librarian feels disbelief at the skull’s lights. She asks Watashi, “Is this your idea of a joke?” Unable to determine the cause of the light, Watashi suggests that the glow must be magical, coming from his deep, core consciousness. Yet rather than being fearful, he takes the skull in his lap and holds his hands above it, assuming a similar position to Boku dreamreading. In fact, he almost becomes a dreamreader himself as he connects to the skull. Like Boku, he runs his hands across the skull, sensing “slightest ember of heat, as my fingers were enveloped in that pale membrane of light. I closed my eyes, letting the warmth penetrate my fingers, and images drifted into view like clouds on a distant horizon.” Here the gap between the two narratives shrinks when Watashi explores the skull. For the first time, the spirit contained within the skull is fully apparent to him.

As the Librarian watches Watashi in disbelief, she too realizes the truly magical nature of the skull. Rather than being a replica, she insists the skull “has to be the real thing.” Watashi agrees and notes that its light “seemed somehow purposeful, to bear meaning. An attempt to convey a signal, to offer a touchstone between the world I would enter and the world I was leaving.” As he recognizes the true nature of the skull, Watashi is able to connect the object to his future. He knows that the skull acts as a connection between his inner consciousness and the real world, and that the light playing on the surface of the skull is conveying a “signal”: the depths held within it. The skull also reassures him that “there was nothing to fear.” A replica could never contain the intense internal complexity of the original, so the skull must be a direct line to ETW. When the librarian herself feels the warmth and humanity of the skull and “feel[s]
something” herself, we learn that the world inside *Watashi’s* head belongs not only to his solipsistic existence but is a part of the greater world of HBW.\(^70\)

Although not included in Birnbaum’s translation of the text, a few lines from this scene in the Japanese mark the direct connection *Watashi* feels between himself and the skull. Beyond his reply of “there was nothing to fear” in the English translation, in the Japanese *Watashi* also adds internally, “I’m not scared. It’s probably something tied to myself somewhere. No one is afraid of himself.”\(^71\) Here *Watashi* demonstrates how he sees the object as a part of himself since his innermost mind created it. Additionally, the librarian’s response is also cut short in the English translation. Rather than just saying it can’t be a replica, she notes, “Surely it’s a real skull, isn’t it? It brought a distant memory from a long time ago.”\(^72\) In her commentary, the skull has the power to travel both in time and space. The skull is transported between the two worlds *Watashi* face: his inner self and his outer self.

At the end of his stay at the librarian’s house, *Watashi* gifts the unicorn skull to her. In doing so, he leaves a part of his soul with her, knowing that the object contains vestiges of his consciousness. She asks him whether he thinks it will glow again, and he replies, “I’m sure it will.”\(^73\) In this casual parting scene, *Watashi* confirms his belief that his mind will live on in ETW. He has gained confidence in the way objects can contain greater meaning, whether it be a spirit or an entire world. The way the lights played over the skull confirm to him that his core consciousness can be accessed through looking inside its vessel: his body. In giving the lifeless skulls a soul, Murakami draws a parallel between the “thingness” of the physical body and the

\(^{70}\) Murakami, *HBW&EW*, 373.

\(^{71}\) 村上春樹, 「世界の終わりとハードボイルド・ワンダーランド」(Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2005), 572.

\(^{72}\) 村上春樹, 「世界の終わりとハードボイルド・ワンダーランド」, 572.

\(^{73}\) Murakami, *HBW&EW*, 378
interiority of the mind. More than just being a scientific object, the skull has become a spiritual object for Watashi, a known vessel for the complexity of his individual identity.

**Junk**

The excessiveness of late capitalist material culture also fascinates the narrator of HBW. Watashi purchased a car solely for shopping and talks endlessly about his clothing, books, and music. Yet after his run-in with the two men from the Factory, Watashi begins to realize the meaninglessness of the objects by which he defines himself. The objects begin to resemble garbage to him, and he sees sinking into ETW as a way to escape the consumerism of HBW. In particular, Murakami uses the growing number of broken and ineffective objects in Watashi’s world to illuminate the thingness of the objects, allowing the narrator of HBW to question the role of consumer culture in contemporary life. Watashi transitions from defining himself by his materialistic lifestyle and material tastes at the beginning of the narrative to rejecting late capitalism in favor of the complexity of his individual, inner consciousness.

Examining the wreckage of his apartment after the Factory’s men visit, Watashi struggles to take action. His directionless ponderings turn towards analyzing the material qualities of his life through the garbage around him. He contemplates,

Looking at the assortment of debris around me, I was reminded of a near-future world turned wasteland buried deep in its own garbage. A science fiction novel I’d read. Well, my apartment looked like that. Shredded suit, broken videodeck and TV, pieces of a flower pot, a floor lamp bent out of shape, trampled records, tomato sauce, ripped-out speaker wires… Joseph Conrad and Thomas Hardy novels spattered with dirty vase water, cut gladioli lying in memorium on a fallen cashmere sweater with a blob of Pelikan ink on the sleeve,... All of it, useless garbage.74

The seemingly random assortment of items he lists include items essential to his personality, and he seems somewhat lost by the way in which they have been thingified. His technologic devices

---

74 Murakami, *HBW&EW*, 165.
and novels have simply become things when broken: intertwining wires and pieces of metal, sheets of paper with carefully laid ink on the surface. The last item in his list, “cut gladioli lying in memorium on a fallen cashmere sweater” casts an almost funeral-like tone for the scene. Looking around his apartment, Murakami gives the sense that Watashi is mourning. His mourning seems to be less for the objects themselves and more for his realization, “All of it, useless garbage.” Through the debris, Murakami grants his narrator a more acute awareness of the strangeness of late capitalism, in which many define themselves in accordance with the physical objects around them. Moreover, he notably focuses on Western items. The imported pieces of Western culture Watashi once valued highly have become useless and thus he begins to question their value in his life.

Murakami also seems fascinated by the way in which our materialism is notably non-productive. After his tally of broken, useless items, Watashi considers his own humanity. He compares his own existence to the smallest level of life, pondering, “When microorganisms die, they make oil; when huge timbers fall, they make coal. But everything here was pure, unadulterated rubbish that didn’t make anything. Where does a busted videodeck get you?” As Watashi looks around his apartment, he sees the products of his life’s work before him and views them as only relics of a broken consumer culture. He comes to the conclusion that his life is thoroughly non-productive; microorganisms can make the oil our technology utilizes, but the material contents of his own life cannot produce anything. This passage surveying the destruction of Watashi’s apartment is one of Murakami’s more explicit critiques of late capitalism in HBW&EW. Through his narrator’s growing enlightenment, Murakami asks one of

---

75 Murakami, *HBW&EW*, 165.
76 Murakami, *HBW&EW*, 165.
the most basic questions: what is human existence even for? According to Murakami, our current obsession with buying goods and defining ourselves by them is not humanity’s purpose.

Towards the very end of the novel, Murakami revisits this idea of the excess accumulation of modern humanity through a conversation between the narrator and the librarian the morning after they spend the night together. As Brown notes, literature is particularly effective at illuminating the dynamics of gain and loss, and \textit{Watashi} has rapidly lost the things he once defined himself by.\textsuperscript{77} When the librarian tells \textit{Watashi} she would like to know a bit more about him, he answers in a rather nonsensical way. Rather than tell her more about his hometown, his occupation, or his family, he tells her a story about the “junk” in his life. He describes how he grew up near the sea and loved combing the beach for objects that the waves tossed up after a storm. He recollects, “The strangest thing is, everything washed up from the sea was purified. Useless junk, but absolutely clean. There wasn’t a dirty thing. The sea is special in that way.”\textsuperscript{78} After this brief introduction to his childhood tale, \textit{Watashi} takes a shift to the nostalgic and begins to think about his own life in the context of the garbage. He laments, “When I look back over my life so far, I see all that junk on the beach. It’s how my life has been. Gathering up the junk, sorting through it, and then casting it off somewhere else. All for no purpose, leaving it to wash away.”\textsuperscript{79} Here he focuses on the materialism of his life, realizing how everything he did was in pursuit of gathering, sorting, or using physical items. Moreover, when the librarian asks if this just pertains to his hometown, he responds, “This is all my life.”\textsuperscript{80} The way he talks about the junk on the beach mirrors his profession as a Calcutec in the way he deals with information. He “launders” data to purify it for companies, “sorting through it, and then

\textsuperscript{77} Brown, \textit{Other Things}, 7-9.
\textsuperscript{78} Murakami, \textit{HBW&EW}, 375.
\textsuperscript{79} Murakami, \textit{HBW&EW}, 375.
\textsuperscript{80} Murakami, \textit{HBW&EW}, 375.
casting it off somewhere else.” But he recognizes here that the data, like the objects on the beach, are unimportant in the end. He realizes he will leave no legacy behind when he goes into ETW, only trash and information that will be washed out into the sea and be purified into cleaner trash. Without a sense of responsibility towards the larger world around him, the narrator can sink into his inner, solipsistic universe in which there are meaningful objects and people he cares about.

**End of the World**

*Skulls*

Similar to HBW, skulls appear from the very first pages of ETW narrative. When the Gatekeeper designates *Boku* to the role of dreamreader, he cuts *Boku’s eyes* to mark his position and destines him to read the skulls kept at the library in the town. Murakami eventually reveals that the skulls *Boku* reads contain the “mind,” of the townspeople who have lost their shadows. Their minds are slowly absorbed by the unicorns and then the unicorn’s skulls are harvested they die. Dreams reside within the skulls and are brought onto the surface in swirling light. Murakami plays with the concept of memories and minds having shape through the skulls at the library in ETW. Over the course of the narrative, he transitions from focusing on the vessel to what lies inside. In releasing the vestiges of a self or “mind” kept inside the skulls as he reads dreams, *Boku* reveals how these objects are vessels for individuality in the same way the bodies of the characters are vessels for their mind.

*Boku* focuses on the deeply magical quality of the skulls in ETW as he reads the dreams which reside within skulls. Initially, the dreams befuddle him. Looking at a skull, he contemplates, “How is this an ‘old dream’? The sound of the words ‘old dream’ led me to expect something else—old writings perhaps, something hazy, amorphous.”  

---

vestiges of his past self, Boku expects a dream to be free-floating and amorphous rather than a cold, self-contained object. Boku describes how as he touches the skull to read the dream, threads of light dance over the surfaces. He describes, “The threads of light are so fine that despite how I concentrate the energies in my fingertips, I am incapable of unravelling the chaos of vision.”

The “chaos of vision” is the dream itself, transmitting through his fingertips and into his brains as “a busy current, an endless stream of images.” But rather than a message he finds an “intensity,” a knowledge of the life force held within the skulls. Through exposing the complex images and light held inside, Murakami seems to be getting at the complexity of the human mind. Both incomprehensible and beautifully complex, Boku cannot completely understand any of the dreams, or as we later learn, the individual minds of the citizens of the town.

Boku initially fixates on the disconnect between the external and the internal elements of the skull. He finds the light skull devoid of a sense of the life it once held. Similar to how Watashi describes the skulls in the Professor’s laboratory, Boku notes that the skull has been “stripped of flesh, warmth, memory.” His description of the skull also embodies the same sense of emptiness that pervades ETW. He describes it as being “enveloped in a profound silence that seems nothingness itself.” Notably, he suggests the silence does not live on the skull’s surface but rather resides within and is “held like smoke...it is unfathomable, eternal, a disembodied vision cast upon a point in the void.” Unlike the tangible skulls, the old dreams inside are currently incomprehensible. However, through the smoky interior and the sense of sadness that image provides, Boku allows skulls to move beyond the material boundaries of the world he

---

inhabits. The empty, “unnaturally light” vessels can contain something deeper and more complexly human than otherwise found in ETW.

Additionally, Murakami focuses on the process by which dreams become internalized within the skulls towards the middle of the narrative. Boku’s awareness of the dream’s origins grows through conversations he has with Town residents, particularly the Colonel and his own shadow. When Boku asks the Colonel about the unicorns freezing to death from the bitterly cold winter, the Colonel tells him about how the bodies are processed into the skulls Boku reads. His procedural description matches the Professor’s description of preparing the skulls in his laboratory. The Colonel depicts how the Gatekeeper “cuts of their heads, scrapes out their brains and eyes, then boils them until the skulls are clean.” When Boku asks the Colonel how the dreams are put into the skulls for the Library, he refuses to answer. He only replies, “You will learn that when you see what old dreams are...You must find out for yourself.”

On the other hand, Boku’s shadow happily tells him directly about the dream’s origins, hoping to use the information to convince Boku to reunite with his shadow and leave ETW. His description focuses on the concept of “mind” (⼼, kokoro) that Murakami develops over the course of the narrative. Rubin suggests the best translation of kokoro, would be “hearts and minds” rather than “mind” as Birnbaum translates it as. Yet I think it may be something even deeper, a soul or a sense of self. The Professor in HBW narrative describes mind as “the cognitive systems arisn’ from the aggregate memories of that individual’s past experiences.” In other words, the “mind” is an individual’s unique identity. Describing the perfection of ETW,

---

89 Murakami, HBW&EW, 203.
90 Rubin, Music, 125.
91 Murakami, HBW&EW, 255.
Boku’s shadow notes that through losing their minds the town residents gain immortality.\textsuperscript{92} Once their shadow dies, they lose their connection to their “self.” Eventually, the shadow reveals to Boku that the minds of the people are externalized into the unicorns bit by bit each day. He illustrates, “the beasts wander around absorbing traces of mind, then ferry them to the outside world. When winter comes, they die with a residue of self inside them.”\textsuperscript{93} Thus the dreams Boku reads are the latent humanity of the town: their desires, hopes, wishes, joys, and frustrations. Moreover, the shadow also elucidates Boku’s role as a dreamreader. When the dreamreader reads a skull, their “hands release the last glimmers of the mind into the air.”\textsuperscript{94} The shadow compares the dreamreader to a lightning rod, “Dreamreader reads each spark of self into the air, where it diffuses and dissipates. You are a lightning rod; your task is to ground.”\textsuperscript{95} The shadow’s attitude is pessimistic, as if Boku’s job is unimportant since the mind he releases is a weak imitation of a true self. But Murakami does not fully clarify where the mind goes when it diffuses and dissipates from the dreams Boku reads. Perhaps the sparks of self form the thoughts or dreams of Watashi.

Towards the end of the novel, Boku goes to the library on the pretense of reading dreams, but instead draws the librarian into a conversation about her mind. The librarian feels she cannot reciprocate Boku’s love for her given her lack of a shadow or a mind. But Boku believes that some vestiges of her mind must remain within her, especially since the librarian’s mother kept her mind. Boku suggests, “perhaps there are echoes of mind inside the memories of your mother, if you could only retrace them.”\textsuperscript{96} Remembering that the unicorn skulls contain the minds of the

\textsuperscript{92} Murakami, \textit{HBW&EW}, 334.
\textsuperscript{93} Murakami, \textit{HBW&EW}, 335.
\textsuperscript{94} Murakami, \textit{HBW&EW}, 336.
\textsuperscript{95} Murakami, \textit{HBW&EW}, 336.
\textsuperscript{96} Murakami, \textit{HBW&EW}, 351.
town people, *Boku* realizes that he should be able to read the librarian’s mind out of a skull if he can find the right dream. Her mind has been transported into another object, and through engaging with that object *Boku* can discover the spirit inside and give it back to the librarian. When *Boku* shares his proposal with the librarian, she hesitates. Rather than being a cohesive object, she worries her mind is “scattered, in different pieces among different beasts, all mixed with pieces from others.”

She views her mind like the junk on the beach or the objects in the collection room: disparate, mixed up, and indistinguishable from the other things around them. She describes *Boku*’s plan as “like looking for lost drops of rain in a river,” but she agrees to let him read dreams and together they enter the room containing “shelves of countless skulls.”

Through the act of reading the vestiges of the librarian’s mind hidden in the dreams, *Boku* can resuscitate her essence from the skulls.

**Musical Instruments**

Beyond skulls, the discovery of music through broken objects plays a critical role in *ETW*. Like the dreams inside in the skulls, music exists latent, hidden in broken instruments scattered throughout the small world. In a critical scene near the middle of the book, the librarian asks *Boku* about singing when they talk about her mother, who left for the woods in order to retain her shadow. Having lost her shadow and thus her “mind,” the librarian has trouble finding the word for singing, describing it in awkward terms. *Boku* quickly identifies the librarian’s description as singing but can “find no music in [his] memory.”

Hoping to find a song again, he goes on a journey looking for a musical instrument he can play to the librarian.

---

Boku and the librarian venture to the Power Station in the woods where they hear the Caretaker collects musical instruments. When Boku talks with the Caretaker about why the Caretaker has collected the instruments, the Caretaker notes that unlike those who live in the town, he relishes some objects for their innate beauty rather than their usefulness. He portrays his idea of the town residents, “Everyone has the things they need for living. Pots and pans, shirts and coats, yes...It is enough that their needs are met. No one wants for anything more.”¹⁰⁰ For those in the town in their “perfect” world, objects are important for their use and not for the extra qualities they impart such as aesthetics or signifiers of status. On the other hand, the Caretaker—who retains part of his shadow and thus his “mind”—sees the value of the aesthetic beauty of musical instruments and other objects. His belief in aesthetic appreciation distinguishes him from those in the town, “I am very interested in these things…I feel drawn to them. Their forms, their beauty.”¹⁰¹

After Boku and the Librarian leave the Power Station, his memories slowly return through learning to use the instrument the Caretaker gave him. Boku’s descriptions of the instrument still foreign to him highlight his perception of the mystery hidden inside: “When was the last time anyone touched it? By what route had the heirloom traveled, through how many hands? It is a mystery to me.”¹⁰² He focuses on the material qualities of the instrument, noting “the leather folds are stiff...the keys are discolored...the shellac on the wooden boards at either end has not flaked.”¹⁰³ The answers to his questions about the instrument’s identity are spelled out for him, with the word “accordion” inscribed on the instrument’s body.¹⁰⁴ Boku experiences a

¹⁰⁰ Murakami, HBW&EW, 293.
¹⁰¹ Murakami, HBW&EW, 293.
¹⁰² Murakami, HBW&EW, 315.
¹⁰³ Murakami, HBW&EW, 315.
¹⁰⁴ Murakami, HBW&EW, 313.
joyful moment of discovery when he sounds out the word. Rubin argues that in Murakami’s novels, “music is the best means of entry into the deep recesses of the unconscious, that timeless other world within our psyche.” Following Murakami’s idea that music acts as an entry into the psyche, Boku and the librarian decide to use the accordion to locate the librarian’s mind. While reflecting on his place in the town and realizing he doesn’t want to leave, Boku locates a song inside himself: Danny Boy—the song Watashi hummed in the elevator during the first pages of the story. Through rediscovering music, he begins to understand how the town exists within him, and he is moved by his self-understanding. The librarian too is moved by the song, and she cries, a symbol of the way her mind has been touched by the music.

When Boku awakens the librarian’s mind through his music, the skulls in the library emanate a powerful glow across the room. Boku describes it as “an ancient fire that has lain dormant in them...the phosphorescence yields pure to the eye; it soothes with memories that warm and fill my heart.” The way the music makes the skulls emit the mind formerly hidden within them demonstrates how Murakami thinks individuality is connected to art. With art, the sense of self buried inside of the skulls can be cast out. Through accessing the mind hidden within each object, he can fulfill his wish to fully be with the librarian. His discovery that the true humanity contained within the skulls can be released gives him a reason to stay and explore ETW further.

Both worlds

Paperclips

Throughout HBW&EW, the narrative repeatedly returns to one seemingly insignificant object: paperclips. These small objects tie the worlds together, and they draw a path through the

---

105 Rubin, Music, 2.
106 Murakami, HBW&EW, 369.
narrative for the reader to follow. Murakami’s choice of such a small object also seems poignant. With the paperclips, he finds an everyday object to captivate the reader’s attention and illuminate the ways the two worlds are connected. These simple objects act as both a question and an anchor to what is “real.”

In HBW, Watashi encounters paperclips first on the desk of the Professor’s pseudo-office in a Tokyo skyscraper. While waiting in the Professor’s big office, he notes all the minute objects present within each portion of the office. He inspects the objects covering the desk: “a lamp, three ballpoint pens, and an appointment book, besides which lay scattered a handful of paperclips.” While he doesn’t think much of the scene at first, he recoils when entering an identical office in the Professor’s laboratory. Wondering whether he’s been led in a circle, Watashi fixates on the paperclips knowing he could never remember the exact position of the paperclips in the first room he visited. While the pile of paperclips could help elucidate his current location, their insignificance prevented him from noticing their patterns.

In ETW chapters, Boku encounters paperclips for the first time when he goes to the library to learn about dream reading and to meet the librarian. While waiting for the librarian, Boku makes a detailed assessment of the library and its objects in a way characteristic of both narrators. Coming to the front counter, he finds it “scattered with paperclips.” Looking for something to pass the time, Boku picks up a handful of paperclips. When the librarian finally comes, he finds her face strangely familiar, asking himself “What about her touches me? I can feel some deep layer of my consciousness lifting towards the surface.” Here, Murakami begins to hint at the significance of the librarians in each world, and paperclips are one of the first

---

features that connect the two. As their conversation proceeds, Murakami repeatedly mentions the paperclips with how the librarian’s binder displaces some of the paperclips on the desk and how Boku never lets go of his handful. Drawing the paperclips through the scene, he signals to the reader how they will reappear, perhaps even in a similar scenario only a few chapters later.

Watashi also runs into paperclips in connection to the librarian in HBW when looking for identifying information on skulls at the library. He describes how next to the librarian’s book sat some paperclips and a few pencils. Watashi expresses shock at finding the paperclips, feeling as though the objects follow him. He laments, “Paperclips! Everywhere I went, paperclips! What was this? Perhaps some fluctuation in the gravitational field had suddenly inundated the world with paperclips.”¹¹⁰ He struggles to accept the paperclips as a coincidence, noting “I couldn’t shake the feeling that things weren’t normal. Was I being staked out by paperclips? They were everywhere I went, always just a glance away.”¹¹¹ The way in which Watashi describes the paperclips begins to venture away from usual his sarcastic tone and towards genuine concern. The paperclip’s new ubiquity in his life allows Watashi to grant the object undue value. He anthropomorphizes the paperclips, perhaps one of the first indications of him noticing something different about his mind.

Later in the story, Murakami uses paperclips to draw a literal map through the underbelly of Tokyo as the Professor’s granddaughter traces her grandfather’s path. When Watashi questions if they are on the right path as they wander through the sewers of Tokyo, the professor’s granddaughter asserts she knows they are travelling in the correct direction and shines her flashlight at the ground illuminating a Hansel-and-Gretel-like path of paperclips. She chides Watashi for forgetting the Professor’s genius, “Grandfather passed this way. He knew

¹¹⁰ Murakami, HBW&EW, 75.
¹¹¹ Murakami, HBW&EW, 75-76.
we’d be following so he left those as trail markers.” These trail markers come in handy; at each fork in the road paperclips point them in the right direction. The paperclips drive the plot forward and lay a literal trail to follow, guiding the characters towards the Professor whose knowledge will explain the challenges they have been facing.

When they finally meet the Professor, they learn that the paperclips they picked up along the way have another important purpose: scaring away INKlings—the kappa-like creatures living below HBW’s Tokyo. The Professor sees paperclips only in their most basic form: as bits of metal. When trying to make a new INKling repellent device, he asks the two if they noticed “Those bits of metal [he] scattered” since their purpose was to temporarily deter the INKlings. The Professor enthusiastically lectures them, “paperclips are ideal. Cheap, don’t rust, magnetize in a jiff, loop them t’hang ‘round your neck. All things said, I’ll take paperclips.” Here the Professor takes a special interest in the odd usefulness of paperclips. For him, the paperclip as an object has no value except for it’s true nature as a metal. As such, he focuses on their material qualities, that they “don’t rust” and “magnetize,” but also that they can be manipulated into different shapes. The way he treated paperclips emulates the ways he continually treats brains, skulls, and people as useful things rather than human-related entities. For the Professor, everything can be a scientific tool. Murakami uses the paperclips in the same way as the Professor, extending their purpose beyond holding paper together and instead as a thread to hold the narrative together and push the plot forward.

112 Murakami, HBW&EW, 211.
113 Murakami, HBW&EW, 289.
114 Murakami, HBW&EW, 289.
Librarians

In both narratives, Librarians act as masters of information, particularly information contained within objects. Through the two narrator’s relationships with librarians, Murakami examines the complexities of larger societal structures that deal with information through his critical exploration of objects and through the construction of a multi-layered world. From the outset, the libraries also directly connect to one of the objects Murakami investigates: skulls. By connecting the skulls, librarians, and information, Murakami demonstrates how libraries—as places filled with information stored in objects—can connect the inner and outer mind.

In both HBW and ETW, Murakami’s ties librarians to the skull and in some ways treats the skulls like books on a shelf. The skulls act as reservoirs of information, and the librarians hold special knowledge about them. In HBW, the librarian helps Watashi discover that the skull the Professor gave him is a unicorn skull. Through telling him the story of the Russian unicorn, she plants the idea in his brain that the skull comes from a world separate from our own, a “lost world.” Her idea comes to fruition; we learn later that the skull is a replica of the unicorn skulls from ETW, a world “lost” within Watashi. On the other hand, ETW’s librarian herself is a mystery to Boku as he discovers the true nature of the skulls she helps him dreamread. As Boku seeks to find the true meaning of the old dreams hidden in the skulls, he is also trying to recover her mind, which we learn is hidden within the old dreams. The librarian in ETW feels almost repressed. Unlike the librarian with an endless appetite in HBW, the librarian in ETW is always leaving out bits of information, encouraging Boku to discover things on his own.

Moreover, Murakami questions who controls information and the value of information through the way the librarians openly share their collections. In ETW, information is widely available but not highly valued. However, in HBW information is kept secret and is highly
valued. For example, in ETW, the librarian encourages *Boku* to read dreams without interpreting them.\textsuperscript{115} The librarian in ETW has access to a vast amount of information but she has neither the ability nor desire to use the data herself. Conversely, the librarian in HBW is eager to share information on unicorns with *Watashi*, and he highly values her contributions. The chapter where she brings books to his home consists almost entirely of her reciting information to him as she tries to help unravel the mystery of the skull. Unlike how *Boku* avidly shares his ideas with the librarian in ETW, *Watashi* holds back from telling the librarian more about his own skull. *Watashi* cannot share his ideas with her because of how his profession values secrecy, even though the skull brought them together. It is only at the end of the novel that he finally reveals pieces of the story of the skull, but he does so circuitously and without telling her the complete truth since he hides important details about his future.

The librarian in HBW reveals the emptiness of the obsession with data in HBW in how she subverts *Watashi*’s ideas of intellectual property. Since *Watashi*’s profession is focused on the processing of data for security, his mindset is to see data as profitable and worth keeping secret. However, throughout the novel—and particularly through his encounters with objects like the skulls—*Watashi* begins to see that his ideas of who controls information are misguided. When they dine together at an Italian restaurant after *Watashi* returns from his underground adventure, the librarian asks him about the way his apartment was destroyed and whether it had to do with the unicorns. He confirms the skulls relate not only to his destroyed apartment, but also to him leaving the next day. The librarian probes, “you must have gotten yourself caught in a terrible mess,” and *Watashi* replies that “It’s so complicated...the simplest explanation is that I’m up to here in information warfare.”\textsuperscript{116} But instead of nodding along, the librarian counters, “I

\textsuperscript{115} Murakami, *HBW&EW*, 59.
\textsuperscript{116} Murakami, *HBW&EW*, 360.
can’t follow all this...Our library is full of books and everyone just comes to read. Information is free to everyone and nobody fights over it.”\textsuperscript{117} Here she draws a contrast between Watashi’s world of capitalism and the more free, equitable world she lives in. Watashi replies jokingly, “I wish I’d worked in a library myself.”\textsuperscript{118} But in reality, each time he interacts with the librarian, Watashi gains access to valuable information at no cost to himself or to society. In some ways, his job is similar to that of a librarian: processing and accessing information for others to use. Yet the way his work has been marred by bodily modification and shrouded in secrecy makes him yearn for a simpler interaction with information.

On the other hand, the librarian in ETW feels almost empty at the start of the book. Rather than being a purveyor of information, she seems like a vessel for Boku to fill with the information he gathers along his own journey. Boku feels he must find the “mind” or spirit to put back inside the librarian so that they live together happily. When he finds the librarian’s mind hidden among the stacks at the end of the novel, he takes on the role of a librarian himself in how he finds information— in the form of old dreams—and shares it with the librarian. The information about the librarian’s mind was near them the whole time, but Boku needed to go on a journey to discover the value of the mind—and of individuality—before he could gain access.

Through the ways the librarians interact with the narrators, Murakami seems to be saying that one comes to knowledge of one's self and of society through objects and books one reads on their individual journey. With each interaction they have with the librarians, the narrators understanding of the world expands and changes through the information they gain, whether it be tales about real unicorns or old dreams. As their relationships with the librarians deepen, both

\textsuperscript{117} Murakami, \textit{HBW\&EW}, 360-361.
\textsuperscript{118} Murakami, \textit{HBW\&EW}, 361.
narrators come to an understanding of themselves as individuals who can use information and objects but also exist apart from them.

**Skulls (connections)**

Skulls play a central role in both narratives and Murakami uses them in magical ways to connect the two worlds through memory, light, and the concept of “mind” (心). By the end of the novel, he seems to be drawing a parallel between the way the skulls are vessels for dreams or spirits and the body is a vessel for an individual’s soul. Murakami’s objectification of the body feels at once almost scientific and also freeing; one’s mind can live on without a direct connection to the body.

Towards the beginning of the novel, both Boku and Watashi express feelings of déjà vu about the skulls, leading the reader to tie the narrators together through this object. After receiving the skull as a gift, Watashi decides to use it as a decoration on top of his television. He tries to go about his normal business, but he feels a strange magnetism from the skull, and it steals his usual focus. He meditates on his feelings, “I got the sneaking suspicion that I’d seen the skull before. But where? And how?” The sense of déjà vu Watashi feels here is echoed in ETW when Boku is struck by a similar sense of familiarity through dreamreading. When he is about to begin reading the dream, he contemplates, “I am overcome with a strong sense of déjà vu. Have I seen this skull before? The leached colorlessness, the depression in the forehead. I feel a humming, just as when I first saw her face. Is this a fragment of a real memory or has time folded back on itself? I cannot tell.” He feels vestiges of his outer self, Watashi, in this moment, perhaps recalling the replica skull given to him by the Professor.

---

119 Murakami, *HBW&EW*, 70.
120 Murakami, *HBW&EW*, 60.
Moreover, Boku’s two hypotheses on where the déjà vu could come from—a memory or a folding of time—hint at the challenge of the structure of the novel. Like the dreams housed inside the skulls, Boku lives with Watashi’s brain and thus within his skull. This multi-layered approach mixes both dreams and time as we find the time scale of ETW is incongruous with HBW; one cannot be sure which parts of each narrative line up. For example, the passage where they find the librarian’s mind in ETW takes place just before the scene where the skull becomes like a Christmas tree in HBW. The connection between the two chapters is explicit; both deal with narrators falling in love with librarians and absorbed by crises about the path forward in relation to their complex identities. The glowing skulls connect the narratives in both cases and remind the reader that the skulls contain something deeper in the same way both narrators have growing internal complexity.

**Vessels (Bodies)**

At a larger level, Murakami’s fascination with skulls demonstrates his interest in the idea of the body as a vessel for the mind. We see this concept in the Professor’s lengthy explanation of how ETW came to be inside Watashi’s brain. He first describes the mind as a “great unexplored ‘elephant graveyard’ inside us”, or “humanity’s last terra incognita.”\(^{121}\) He then corrects himself to say that the brain is more like an “elephant factory” than an “elephant graveyard.”\(^{122}\) Using machine-like terminology, he describes it as a factory, “where you sort through countless memories and bits of knowledge, arrange the sorted chips into complex lines, combine these lines into even more complex bundles, and finally make up a cognitive system.”\(^{123}\) Yet he notes that “the factory floor is off-limits,” such that without augmentation one

---

\(^{121}\) Murakami, *HBW&EW*, 256.  
\(^{122}\) Murakami, *HBW&EW*, 256.  
\(^{123}\) Murakami, *HBW&EW*, 256.
could never know the true workings inside one’s brain. Through the Professor’s pseudo-scientific explanations, Murakami casts humans as complex factories, but ones where insides are kept secret. Rubin suggests the rationale for keeping the two worlds completely separate is that one can never fully understand their inner mind, or the “factory floor.” In doing so, the reader is given the unique opportunity to visit the inner mind through reading the dual narratives. We can see both the vessel and the interior.

Additionally, Watashi signals that he sees himself as more connected to his own brain than the physical world. Yet his own mind begins to feel disconcertingly unstable as the novel progresses which stresses him. Watashi becomes increasingly aware of the disconnect between his mind and his body underground. Travelling in total darkness, he describes how he started “to think the body is nothing but a hypothetical construct.” He feels detached from his body, only a floating consciousness. He wonders why he has never subscribed to a newspaper and concludes that he was completely disconnected from the world as a person, “converting numbers in my brain was my only connection to the world.” Yet in the dark, confusing underbelly of Tokyo, an old memory from when he was ten years old about his shadow comes back to him, and he becomes very angry about his brain modifications. He realizes that the shuffling operation must have adjusted some of his memories and internally screams, “They had stolen my memories from me! Nobody has that right...Forget the end of the world, I was ready to reclaim my whole self.” For Watashi, getting his “whole self” does not entail anything about his body but only his mind and the memories hidden inside its corners.

124 Murakami, HBW&EW, 256.
125 Rubin, Music, 118.
126 Murakami, HBW&EW, 211.
127 Murakami, HBW&EW, 235.
128 Murakami, HBW&EW, 239.
In the other narrative, the insurmountable walls surrounding ETW that keep Boku and his shadow stuck in the town seem like the edges of Watashi’s consciousness. When Boku explores his confined world while making a map for his shadow, the walls inspire awe in him, and he begins to ask philosophical questions. He notes that as he stares at the sky above him, he feels “them” peering at him. They ask him “What are you doing here?” and “What are you looking for?” The “them” is hard to designate here, but it almost feels as though it could be Watashi looking inside himself as he begins to realize his depths. Boku is put off by these questions he knows he can’t answer and finally asks himself, “Do I occupy the body of another?” Boku’s questions illustrate that he has some awareness that he lives within Watashi. His own feelings of awe and sadness are incongruous with the perfection of the town. While the traces of mind in the unicorns can enter and exit the small world of Watashi’s inner consciousness, Boku is destined to be trapped within the small section of Watashi’s brain with only a partial understanding of his existence.

**Conclusion**

The solution to Boku’s existential dilemma comes through an unexpected source: music. Through music Boku discovers that the town is a part of himself and his individual identity as a human, a part he deems worth exploring further. When playing the song Danny Boy—a tune he barely recollects—on the accordion while trying to find the librarian’s mind, Boku feels how his music moves the town. He describes,

> The whole Town lives and breathes in the music I play. The streets shift their weight with my every move. The Wall stretches and flexes as if my own flesh and skin. I repeat the song several times, then set the accordion down on the floor, lean back, and close my eyes. Everything here is a part of me—the Wall and Gate and Wood and River and Pool. It is all my self.

---

Yet Birnbaum’s translation does not fully capture how deeply embedded within himself Boku sees the town being. In the Japanese, Murakami writes 「彼らはみんな僕の体の中にいた」 which translates to “they are inside my body” with “they” referring to the people of the town. Boku realizes through art that he literally holds ETW within him. By seeing how music moves him and thus physically changes the shape of the town, Boku begins to see himself as a vessel for the town. The humanity of Watashi’s core consciousness is expressed through his music. In some ways, Murakami frees Boku from the strange condition in which humans are both sacks of flesh and bones and also incredibly individual, complex spirits that have some strange sense of extensive interiority. He is both the mind and the vessel at once.

In the very last pages of the novel, Boku affirms his decision to stay, wanting to satiate his inner curiosity and uncover his individual identity in ETW. He tells his shadow as they stand at the edge of the whirlpool, “I have responsibilities… I cannot forsake the people and places and things I have created…. I must see out the consequences of my own doing.” Although the shadow might say his inner world lacks complexity, Boku certainly believes that complexity exists within him. He insists to his shadow, “This is my world. The Wall is here to hold me in, the River flows through me, the smoke is me burning. I must know why.” In his solipsistic statement, we see that Boku prizes his individuality above all else.

The way Murakami distinguishes objects with greater interiority and ties them to the narrators suggests that the true objective of each narrator’s quest is the search for his own

---

132 村上春樹, 「世界の終りとハードボイルド・ワンダーランド」, 567.
133 One line from the original that does not fully make it into Birnbaum’s translation of this passage that connects to this concept is on page 567 of the text in Japanese: 「僕はその街の中にあり、その町は僕の中にあった。」 This line translates to “I was inside that town, and that town was inside of me.”
134 Murakami, HBW&EW, 399.
135 Murakami, HBW&EW, 399.
individual identity, hidden below the many-layered structures that form a late capitalist society. *Watashi* must even go underground to discover the true workings of his modified brain. As late capitalism and an obsession with the material made up an increasing part of life in the 1980s, Murakami appears to push against the trend of the time. Despite many scholars talking about Murakami wanting to move away from late capitalism, the literary devices he uses to discuss late capitalism are physical things, the objects that make up his narrator’s lives and push them to action. While Strecher argues that the ending “tells us only that there is no true escape, even temporarily, from the power of state ideology,” I’d agree with Napier and say the novel provides a bit of optimism about the possibility of finding an individual self, even if it must be discovered by searching through the sea of junk that is contemporary consumerism.\(^{136}\) Through understanding objects that contain a sense of humanity like the skulls, the narrators can more easily identify the complexity of their own identities, especially when society has meddled with their memories and experiences. And in a scientific world in which ideas of what constitutes humanity and human experiences are constantly changing, Murakami reminds us that even if we can think of the human body as a known object, there is something deeper below the surface of the object that defines our humanity: a unique inner consciousness.

\(^{136}\) Strecher, *Dances with Sheep*, 46.
Chapter 2: Disappearing Mementos

The dynamics of loss and nostalgia in Ogawa’s *The Memory Police*

Born in Okayama Prefecture in 1962, Ogawa Yōko attended Waseda University and began her writing career soon after graduating.\(^{137}\) She famously became the first woman in her twenties to receive the Akutagawa prize, which she won in 1991 for her novella 「妊娠カレンダー」 (*Pregnancy Diary*).\(^{138}\) Her inversion of tropes from the *shōjo* genre brought her much attention, and she continues to play with ideas about girlhood in many of her works.\(^{139}\) Since her debut, she has written prolifically, and has published more than 40 novels and short story collections, winning nearly every major literary award in Japan.\(^{140}\) Yet few of her books have been translated into English, and as such, the dates of the English publications do not generally closely follow her novels' publications in Japan. English language academic scholarship on Ogawa is minimal as well, but the articles and books available attest to the richness of her work.

Ogawa’s 1994 novel 「密やかな結晶」, translated as *The Memory Police* (TMP) by Stephen Snyder, is a striking dystopian novel about an island where objects, concepts, and ideas disappear at a slow but increasing pace. The disappearing items vary widely; Ogawa makes everything from wind-up music boxes to birds to hats vanish. With the disappearances, Ogawa seems to engage with the traditional Japanese aesthetic of *mono no aware*, often translated as “the pathos of things,” in which the impermanent things become beautiful and sad all at once. An


\(^{138}\) 高根沢紀子, 「小川洋子」 (東京: 鼎書房, 2005), 9.


omnipresent authoritarian group called “the memory police” enforces the disappearances. However, not all citizens of the island forget, and those who don’t forget are persecuted and researched by the memory police. To protect those who remember, kind citizens create safe houses and hide them in attics and secret rooms. Ogawa’s dystopia is simple but effective; the anxiety created by the disappearances permeates every chapter of the text. Residents constantly wonder what they will lose next, which neighbor will be captured and taken by the memory police, and how they will make it through.

An unnamed woman acts as the narrator and tells the story of decline and decay on the island. She works as a novelist and lives alone in her family home, forming strong friendships despite the crumbling world around her. Her mother, a sculptor, was taken by the memory police when the narrator was a girl. Before being kidnapped, the narrator’s mother hid disappeared objects in a cabinet in her studio and shared their stories with the narrator. These hidden objects eventually return, concealed in her mother’s sculptures stored in a cabin in the woods and given to family friends. Small vignettes from the narrator’s current novel are interspersed throughout the story. Her writing—about a young woman whose voice becomes locked inside a typewriter by a cruel typing teacher—mirrors the loss and decay of the island. As the young woman in the story loses her voice while trapped inside a church tower, the narrator struggles to maintain her own voice as an author. Overall, Ogawa keeps the main cast of characters small; there are only three main characters and a handful of neighbors, mostly unnamed. The reader gets to know an old man whose gentle disposition and ongoing willingness to help the narrator provides a note of positivity in the tale. Additionally, we meet the narrator’s editor—who is only known by the letter R—a man who remembers everything. With the help of the old man, the narrator then hides R in a secret room under her father’s office. R helps the narrator work on her novel and
tries to bring back her memories of disappeared items, though both feel helpless about their increasingly dire situation.

Published in the early 1990s, TMP came in the wake of the economic bubble bursting in Japan in 1990. The sense of economic anxiety that permeates the narrative feels pertinent to the post-bubble era and “the lost decade” of the 1990s. The island Ogawa’s characters live on exists in a state of unmitigable decline. Characters constantly worry about the scarcity of food and resources. Yet Ogawa takes the island’s decline beyond the economic with the objects of consumerism on the island rapidly disappearing. Describing the morning of a disappearance, the narrator recollects,

When I opened my eyes, I could sense something strange, almost rough, about the quality of the air. The sign of a disappearance. Still wrapped in my blanket, I looked carefully around the room. The cosmetics on my dressing table, the paperclips and notes scattered on my desk, the lace of the curtains, the record shelf—it could be anything. The narrator first looks to the world on consumer objects around her when she wonders what is gone. The objects she mentions—cosmetics, paperclips, lace, records—are those anyone might see in the room around them without thinking about the important role those objects have come to play in contemporary life. Ogawa’s use of magical realism techniques heightens the feeling that the world her characters live in is not far from our own—we would see the same objects around our own bedrooms or offices.

Unlike Murakami’s HBW&EW, where quasi-national systems are growing prosperously if unsustainably, the memory police act as a completely authoritarian force that only inflict harm in how they erase memories. Standard citizens like the narrator feel as though they are losing

---

themselves, aware of the larger societal forces acting against them. Since TMP came at a time of growing historical revisionism about World War II, some scholars see the novel as fighting against erasing memories of war and trauma in Japan’s past. Additionally, the novel decidedly fits into the growing trend of postmodernism in the 1990s as well. In *Postmodernism and Japan*, Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian note, “As postmodernism empties itself of historicity, it is haunted by the memory of the erased past and anxious about the unarrived future.” The sense of haunting by past disappearances and anxiety for future losses pervades Ogawa’s tale, creating a dynamic but slow sense of total destruction. Readers cannot help but feel increasingly helpless as they get towards the end of the novel. Moreover, Ogawa imagines a series of complex power dynamics between the characters especially through the duality of captor and captive. The power dynamics become increasingly complicated as the narrative progresses, and who holds power changes rapidly at the ending.

In 2018, Stephen Snyder published a translation of TMP and brought renewed popularity to the novel. Although far less successful than some of Ogawa’s other works, many reviewers found the novel particularly profound in the wake of growing fears of authoritarianism in the 2010s. Snyder’s translation of TMP was nominated for a number of prizes, including as a finalist for the American National Book Award for Translated Literature in 2019 and being shortlisted for the International Booker Prize in 2020. Even nearly thirty years after its initial publication, the questions Ogawa brings forth in TMP remain worthy of discussion. The way she portrays the decline of the society through the loss of both consumer objects and objects that contain a sense of historicity invites questions about the structures of society in the postwar period. Ogawa gives

---

146 Rich, “Yōko Ogawa Spirits”.
objects an almost ineffable sense of value and animates them through the lives of the people who interact with them by equating memories and objects. She suggests that our world should revolve around creative expression, and that objects should tell stories rather than just serve as meaningless commodities.

The story of Anne Frank in The Memory Police and feminine objects

Ogawa’s work engages heavily with the legacy of World War II, particularly through the issue of historical revisionism and authoritarianism. The power dynamic between the civilians and the authoritarian memory police mirror the conditions of both Japan and Germany in WWII. In a recent series in the New York Times called “Beyond the World War II We Know” recognizing the 75th anniversary of the end of WWII, Ogawa wrote a short piece entitled “Small Boats that Carry the Voices of the Dead.”147 In the article, she discusses how literature can act as a vehicle for retaining memories of the past and cultivate empathy across tragedies. She states:

Through the language of literature, we can finally come to empathize with the suffering of nameless and unknown others. Or, at very least, we can force ourselves to stare without flinching at the stupidity of those who have committed unforgivable errors and ask ourselves whether the shadow of this same folly lurks within us as well.148

She highlights a number of tales of the Holocaust that capture the memory of victims including the story of Anne Frank. She connects firsthand accounts of the Holocaust and of the Atomic Bombs in Japan, particularly the way vivid images of the death, destruction, and injury in Hiroshima and in Nazi concentration camps continue to horrify people today. As an author focused on the preservation of memory, Ogawa’s play with memory in TMP continues her effort to find new ways to highlight the horrors of authoritarianism and of forgetting one’s history. In

147 This translation of the title of Ogawa’s article is my own since I did not like that in Stephen Snyder’s translation of the piece, he entitled the article “How we Retain the Memory of Japan’s Atomic Bombings: Books.”
an article for the New York Times on TMP, Motoko Rich argues that the loss of memories in TMP might be a critique of Japan’s tendency for historical revisionism because many of the wartime atrocities Japan committed are regularly censored or denounced by members of government.149,150

Beyond focusing on memory’s preservation through literature, Ogawa also highlights a collection of photographs of artifacts from the Atomic Bombings. She notes how objects themselves can also carry the voices of the dead into the present. One small object in particular catches her attention: a lunch box and canteen that belonged to a middle schooler named Shigeru Orimen who perished in the bombing of Hiroshima. Twisted out of shape and terribly burnt, Ogawa finds the lunch box barely recognizable. But she notes the power of the simple object,

This tiny box contained something more important: the innocence of a young boy who had been full of anticipation for his simple lunch, and his mother’s love. Even when the last victim of the atomic bomb has passed away and this lunchbox is no more than a petrified relic, as long as there is still someone to hear the voice concealed within it, this memory will survive.151

Ogawa seems to believe that the object carries Orimen’s spirit within it like a katami. Through interacting with the object, Ogawa constructs a story that resonates with the reader—a simple lunch and the warmth of a mother’s love—and then demonstrates the immeasurable loss of that story through the objects. She gives life to the object in how she describes a “voice concealed within.” The object takes on a human quality in the way it conveys memories into the future. Orimen’s lunchbox is reminiscent of the mother’s objects in TMP. While polishing the narrator’s mother’s silver to pass the time, R remarks, “When you hold them in your hands, it seems as though you’re holding light itself. I feel they’re telling me a story.” The story or the voice

---

149 Rich, “Yōko Ogawa Spirits”.
150 Gordon, A Modern History of Japan, 308.
151 Ogawa, “死者の声を運ぶ小舟”.

54
concealed within objects becomes an essential part of TMP since important stories are often lost when objects disappear.

Moreover, Ogawa tells interviewers how Anne Frank’s story acted as a source of inspiration for TMP. Rich writes that Ogawa was obsessed with *Diary of a Young Girl* as a child to the point she even tried to recreate Frank’s captivity by crawling “notebook in hand, into a drawer or under a table draped with a blanket.”¹⁵² For her article on WWII in the New York Times, Ogawa writes that from Frank, she “learned the invaluable truth that a human being can still grow and develop even when living in hiding.”¹⁵³ As an adult, Ogawa wanted to recreate Frank’s story with her own writing in TMP. The question of growth and development in hiding become particularly important for her retelling. Many elements of the tale remind the reader of the experience of Jews in World War II, in which Jews were often hidden in attics and secret rooms by kind friends and neighbors to help them escape the wrath of the Nazis. Like how the Franks were kept hidden by Otto Frank’s business partners, the narrator hides R in her home to protect him from the memory police.¹⁵⁴ Ogawa fully reconstructs the Frank’s Dutch annex in her narrator’s home with the hidden space below her father’s office within which she hides R. Additionally, Ogawa recreates historical elements of the authoritarian regime of the Nazis. The actions of the memory police mirror the Nazis with police surveillance, book burnings, neighbors disappearing in the middle of the night.

Yet Ogawa’s interest in Anne Frank is not confined only to TMP; she has written multiple non-fiction books on Frank that involved extensive research and trips to Amsterdam,

---

¹⁵² Rich, “Yōko Ogawa Spirits”.
¹⁵³ Ogawa, “死者の声を運ぶ小舟”.
Germany, and Poland. In her article, “Angels and Elephants: Historical Allegories in Ogawa Yōko's 2006 "Mīna no kōshin,” Eve Zimmerman discusses how Anne Frank has influenced Ogawa’s work, especially with regard to the process of “self-estrangement.” Zimmerman also notes that Ogawa and other authors have identified a powerful association between Anne Frank and the shōjo (girl) in Japan, which is only possible given the lack of knowledge of anti-Semitism in the country. Ogawa’s vision of incorporating Frank into her literature opposes the trend of sentimentalizing Frank’s story. As we see with the dark overtones of TMP and the growing distress of the characters, the story of confinement Ogawa imagines moves away from fantasy of girlhood and into the realm of the war outside the attic. While R suffers hidden alone in his room, the narrator watches books burn in the town square surrounded by others who forget after the disappearance of novels.

The girlish objects Ogawa chooses to focus on in TMP seem connected to her obsession with Anne Frank, and her interactions with Frank’s objects are key to the connection between Frank’s diary and her novel. Some scholars, including Zimmerman, have noted how Anne Frank’s possessions have played a role in Ogawa’s fascination with her. In her writings on Frank, Ogawa engages with Frank’s objects in a way that emphasizes how they carry Frank’s voice into the present by preserving her memory. When Ogawa visited Miep—one of the people who aided the Frank family—she expressed her gratitude that Miep saved many of Anne’s personal belongings. Zimmerman posits, “Ogawa praises Miep for saving the diary, which she

---

156 Zimmerman, “Angels and Elephants,” 70.
equates with Miep saving Anne’s spirit (tamashii)."\(^{159}\) For Ogawa, objects act as a proxy for the soul of the person who possessed them. Ogawa also calls a bag of Anne’s mementos which Miep shows her “treasures.”\(^{160}\) The hidden objects in TMP, stored away like secrets in the basement studio of the narrator’s house bear similarity to the objects found in the Frank’s attic after they were discovered. The objects become treasures for both those who forget and those who remember with how they bring memories into the present, particularly of girlhood.

One memento of Anne Frank’s that fascinates Ogawa, Anne’s makeup cape—which she used to protect her clothing as she did her hair and makeup—demonstrates how Ogawa sees objects as being carrying the souls of the dead similar to *katami*. Zimmerman argues that Ogawa equates the cape to Anne’s own body, and that through touching the object she tangibly feels the history contained in the object.\(^{161}\) But beyond being a simple object, the cape becomes a treasure because it acts as a representation of the human spirit of the wearer. Ogawa wrote of touching the cape,

> I am touching something that Anne held. It seems mysterious to me, but it isn't. Anne doesn't exist in some history that is unrelated to me, but in a time that links up to today. Fifty years is not an infinite period of time. It is within arm's reach. Truly, at this moment I am touching Anne's makeup cape.\(^{162}\)

In the same way Anne’s makeup cape acts as a conduit through time and space for Ogawa, objects in TMP also convey history across generations. The attitude of objects containing memories and thus the souls of people echoes into TMP, particularly with how lost items are treated as treasures to those who retain memory, no matter how insignificant they are.

\(^{159}\) Zimmerman, “Angels and Elephants,” 77.
\(^{160}\) Zimmerman, “Angels and Elephants,” 77.
\(^{161}\) Zimmerman, “Angels and Elephants,” 77-78.
\(^{162}\) Ogawa in Zimmerman, “Angels and Elephants,” 77-78.
Similar to Anne’s items, Ogawa’s feminine objects demonstrate the way she sees a woman’s individuality tied up with objects connected to women, girls, and motherhood. Many of the objects the narrator’s mother hid in TMP relate to her femininity, and the recovered objects transmit this sense of femininity to the narrator even after her mother’s death. From the first pages of the text, the narrator reminisces about how her mother used to show her hidden objects while she worked in her basement studio as a sculptor. The mother kept objects in an old cabinet that feels as if it comes from a fairy tale. The narrator recollects, “I always hesitated because I knew what sorts of strange and fascinating things were inside. Here in this secret place, my mother kept hidden many of the things that had disappeared from the island in the past.” She shrouds the objects with a mysterious aura as if keeping her mother’s secrets even though the objects were once commonplace because the narrator has no concept of their true value. The items her mother keeps feel decidedly feminine and domestic. Some of the first pieces she mentions—a ribbon, stamp, emerald, and bell—seem like objects her mother has held onto since childhood. These objects provide the narrator endless fascination because her memories of her mother reside within the foreign objects. The mother’s treasured possessions may provide such a sense of excitement because she sees them as a conduit to her soul. In the absence of a connection to the objects herself, the narrator can only associate the objects with the memory of her mother and feelings of maternal care and love.

**Nostalgic objects**

The objects the narrator’s mother chose to keep tend to be ahistorical, but the small pieces of girlhood evoke a strong sense of nostalgia for both the narrator and her mother. The objects remind them of the simplicity of girlhood joy, and they harken back to an era that is

---

largely undefined but exists before the technological revolution that followed WWII. Beyond the mother’s collection, many elements of the narrator’s life feel antiquated for a novel published in the 1990s. Cars and other technologies exist in TMP but the narrator writes her novels by hand with a pencil, and the tale she writes centers around typewriters.

Through a pervasive sense of nostalgia for objects from a broad set of eras the characters could not have possibly known themselves, Ogawa engages in the Japanese culture of the 1990s that attempted to cultivate nostalgia as a cultural product. Scholars including Marilyn Ivy and Jordan Sand have noted how a focus on the nostalgic grew in the 1980s and 1990s. In “The Ambivalence of the New Breed: Nostalgic Consumerism in 1980s and 1990s Japan,” Sand portrays the young generation born after WWII who often have a sense of nostalgia for an older version of Japan beyond their own experience. The nostalgia the so-called “new breed” (shinjinrui) feels is often rootless and has been fashioned for them as a commodity good. Many of the objects that Ogawa crafts nostalgia around fit into Sands framework of low-tech and small spaces outside of the dominant globalist and late capitalist culture.

Items like the mother’s hidden ramune candy cast a gaze on small elements of childhood before one would have awareness of the growing capitalist structures around them. With more and more objects vanishing, the disappearances force characters to look for smaller, recognizable ways to connect that exist outside of the dominating control of the memory police.

---

164 Jordan Sand argues in “The Ambivalence of the New Breed: Nostalgic Consumerism in 1980s and 1990s Japan” (105-106) that the nostalgia of this period turned primarily to the Shōwa 30s (approximately 1955 to 1965). This decade marked a time during the postwar period which has been remembered and inscribed as a time of uncomplicated optimism.

Moreover, scholars note how the melancholy sense created by free-floating nostalgia influenced mass culture in the 1990s, including books like TMP. In her seminal work *Discourses of the Vanishing*, Marilyn Ivy describes the “new breed” in the 1990s,

They are fascinated by the minutiae of lives now gone, and copywriters have echoed this quotidian fascination in their citations, reproductions of advertisements from different historical periods, particularly the 1920s and early 1930s. The object of nostalgia subsists, in short, in the emergent forms of Japanese modernity and its mass culture.\(^{166}\)

Novels act as one form of modern media that incorporates the sense of nostalgia for former eras as stories allow readers to explore both historical worlds and fantasy worlds in intricate detail. With Ogawa, we see an almost twisted sense of nostalgia for the experiences of those hiding in attics during WW2, and the small experiences they had to craft to maintain their spirits. Additionally, the disappearances act as a reverse globalization in some ways. Products that expanded Japan’s horizon as a consumer state and member of the global marketplace disappear, and residents cannot leave the island. Ogawa moves the entire society back in time to the landscape of authoritarian rule in the 1930s and 1940s.

Sand also identifies that some authors imbued fantasy tales in the 1980s and 1990s with a sense of melancholy nostalgia through characters who lack traditional connections and instead form somewhat unconventional relationships.\(^{167}\) Ogawa follows the trend Sands describes, particularly in the narrator’s relationships with the old man and R. The three form a close friendship through R’s sense of nostalgia for the mother’s objects. As the only one of the three with “roots” through his memories, R experiences a true nostalgia rather than cultivated nostalgia. When he goes through the narrator’s mother’s objects and explains them, the narrator remarks, “It was wonderful to hear him, as though he were reading me a thrilling fairy tale or

\(^{166}\) Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing*, 55.
playing delightful music. From time to time I would raise my head to glance over at the three objects lined up on the bookshelf, but they seemed to be dozing—so very peacefully that it was almost impossible to believe that they were the source of all these stories.”

R plays the role almost of an antiquarian in how he tries to jog the narrator and the old man’s memories of lost objects. He becomes a purveyor of nostalgia as he both reminisces about hidden objects and reveals the scale of what is lost to those who cannot comprehend the disappeared objects.

Ogawa seems most troubled by the loss of what the object can raise within one’s soul rather than the loss of the object itself. In *Discourses of the Vanishing*, Ivy argues, “the loss of nostalgia—that is, the loss of the desire to long for what is lost because one has found the lost object—can be more unwelcome than the original loss.” Even though the narrator rediscovers her mother’s collection of disappeared objects in the tapir sculptures hidden by friends, she suffers a great loss when the objects evoke no memories for her, particularly of her mysterious mother. While she could think of the objects fondly in memories of her mother, seeing them again makes her realize the vastness of her loss. When she and R examine the ferry ticket, she struggles to remember anything other than how her mother treated the old ticket with care. Exhausted from trying to remember, R encourages her that more than trying to remember for him, retrieving memories of the ferry may wake up her “sleeping soul.” But the narrator responds, “My sleeping soul. I wish it were just sleeping instead of completely gone.”

Through her inability to feel specific nostalgia and her loss of connection to her mother’s stories, Ogawa worries that she loses her soul as the objects and concepts around her steadily disappear.

---

R’s unsuccessful attempts to evoke a sense of nostalgic joy in the narrator and the old man bring forth the narrator’s demise; without true memories she begins to lose her sense of self. Ogawa makes the loss of self explicitly part of the tale as the people on the island begin to experience the loss of their own limbs. Towards the very end of the novel, the narrator sees R’s retelling of object tales as sparks that cannot create flames. She tells him as he cares for her,

I know you can summon up memories of the music box and the ferry ticket, the harmonica or the ramune. But that doesn’t mean that the things themselves come back. It’s no more than a momentary flash, like the tip of a sparkler when you light it in the dark. When the light’s gone, it’s instantly forgotten, and you can scarcely believe what you saw just a moment ago. They’re all illusions—my leg and arm and all the rest of the things lined up on the shelves.¹⁷²

The lack of nostalgia overwhelms the narrator, and she eventually becomes more and more consumed by her sense of loss. The sparks cannot create any light, leaving the narrator to live in darkness. The final phrase, “they’re all illusions,” is particularly evocative. The word for illusion Ogawa uses in Japanese, 「幻」 (maboroshi), could also be translated as “phantom,” giving the items a ghostly appearance.¹⁷³ Ogawa’s depictions of the objects here—pieces of her childhood passed on by her mother and ghostly limbs on her own body—fits into Freud’s definition of the uncanny, in which the homely (heimlich) becomes unhomely (unheimlich) and creates a frightening sense of cognitive dissonance.¹⁷⁴ The visualization of her loss of her own body as the same as the loss of the objects gives a discomfiting tone to the passage. Despite knowing that the objects before her were once deeply familiar, she has no capability of returning them from the uncanny.

**Thingification of Disappeared Objects**

¹⁷³ 小川洋子, 「密やかな結晶」 (東京: 講談社, 1994), 374.
Ogawa’s depiction of object disappearances in TMP strangely focuses on how the objects still exist in the dystopia but lose their sense of meaning and connection to cultural memory. The objects that disappear do not fully vanish. Rather, for most of the residents of the island, the objects become disconnected from their cultural memory, use, and significance. The burning or disposal of the items aids in the disappearance but does not totally obliterate the existence of a disappeared object.

The process by which parts of the island disappear is reminiscent of Bill Brown’s distinction between objects and things as based on Heidegger, Kant, Lacan, and other 20th century philosophers. Brown looks at the concept of a thing as designating “something as opposed to nothing”; a thing can be an action, condition, or—most importantly—“any quotidian object.”175 He draws on Lacan and Heidegger’s identification of the thing as that which is primordial.176 Notably, in a diagram of the relationship between subjects, things, and objects, Brown characterizes things as “amorphous matter, primal stuff, sensations, pure experiences, il y a, gubbish, &c.”177 Thingness can either be a higher level beyond objects—that which is metaphysical or transcendent—or on a lower, primal level—that which is physical and immanent.178 Moreover, Brown notes how Heidegger sees the thingness of an object becoming most apparent when it is broken, missing, or unusable for its purpose.179 On the other hand, Brown defines an object in the relationship between perceiving subjects and things.180 He suggests an object is a thing with some excess; as a commodity it has a use value, historicity, and

175 Brown, Other Things, 18.
176 Brown, Other Things, 35-36.
177 Brown, Other Things, 18.
180 Brown, Other Things, 22.
cultural significance.\textsuperscript{181,182} In particular, Lacan uses the example of a vase to demonstrate how the creation of an object casts a void that can be filled by the thoughts and ideas of humanity.\textsuperscript{183,184} Thus the important distinction between a thing and an object comes from how a thing notably lacks the spirit of an object. It does not have some empty space that can be filled with cultural significance, capitalist ideals, or family history.

Noting Brown’s definitions of things and objects, I argue Ogawa’s disappearances take objects and turn them into things by stripping them of their cultural significance and the sensations they provide to users. In losing the void created by the object, the disappeared objects cannot have memories associated with them and become primordial things. For example, the narrator describes perfume from the mother’s collection as only a “clear liquid” with no fragrance or attraction, and a harmonica becomes a strip of metal with holes in it.\textsuperscript{185} When the narrator unearths her mother’s collection of objects from inside the sculptures, the adjectives she uses to portray them depend completely on their existence as things and not as objects. She lists her discoveries, “One was so tiny we almost failed to notice it, another was wrapped in oiled paper, a third had a complicated shape. There was a black one, a sharp one, a fuzzy one, a thin one, a sparkly one, a soft one…”\textsuperscript{186} Since she forgets the use of the objects and their meaning to society, she can only use the most simple adjectives to describe the pieces of her mother’s collection. Her description starkly contrasts R’s reaction as well. As someone who remembers, he quickly identifies each object and nostalgically recollects the place they once held in his life.

Those who forget transition from having a subject-object relationship to a subject-thing

\textsuperscript{181} Brown, \textit{Other Things}, 12.
\textsuperscript{182} Brown, \textit{A Sense of Things}, 13-14.
\textsuperscript{183} Brown, \textit{Other Things}, 36.
\textsuperscript{184} The example of the vase is discussed in Chapter 1.
\textsuperscript{185} Ogawa, \textit{The Memory Police}, 5.
\textsuperscript{186} Ogawa, \textit{The Memory Police}, 229.
relationship with the disappeared objects. They can only perceive the thingness of the object and not the excessiveness that makes the object significant to their lives.

In particular, the thingification of novels in TMP is key because novels hold great significance for the narrator given her profession as a novelist. When talking about novels after they disappear, the narrator argues against R’s attempts to make her keep writing. She states, “But that’s impossible. Novels have disappeared. Even if we keep the manuscripts and the books, they’re nothing more than empty boxes. Boxes with nothing inside. You can peer into them, listen carefully, sniff the contents, but they signify nothing. So what could I possibly write?”\footnote{Ogawa, \textit{The Memory Police}, 176.} A book becomes simply paper and ink without a story hidden in the pages when thingified, and the shared memories around the experience of reading the story in novels vanishes. As a result, the thingification of novels dramatically changes the narrator’s relationship to R since many of her memories of him connect to their work editing her novels together. The objects that once held proof of their relationship must be burned or carefully hidden to prevent the interference of the memory police.

Moreover, in thingifying objects, Ogawa makes them foreign to those who experience the disappearances. Without any sense of cultural memory or value, the narrator feels the same sense of awe from every object, whether it be an old, used stamp or an heirloom emerald. She describes her emotions at encountering the objects with her mother,

\begin{quote}
The words that came from my mother’s mouth thrilled me, like the names of little girls from distant countries or new species of plants. As I listened to her talk, it made me happy to imagine a time when all these things had a place here on the island. Yet that was also rather difficult to do. The objects in my palm seemed to cower there, absolutely still, like little animals in hibernation, sending me no signal at all.\footnote{Ogawa, \textit{The Memory Police}, 5.}
\end{quote}
For the narrator, the objects act as things. The language Ogawa uses—“distant countries,” “new species,” “hibernation”—emphasizes the foreign nature of the objects for the narrator. As a result, they all give her the same feeling, no matter how valuable they are. An emerald is indistinguishable from a stamp except in shape, size, and composition. Only through those who remember and can tell stories about disappeared objects does their legacy survive and they are prevented from being completely thingified.

Objectification of the Body and Memories

Moving beyond just the objects themselves, the body and the soul become objectified and eventually thingified as the narrative progresses on its slow decline. The objectification of the body comes in multiple paths throughout the novel. First, Ogawa objectifies memories through her discussion of their existence within the heart. The narrator feels as though her heart has a hole cut out of it with each disappearance. When photographs disappear, she exclaims frustratedly, “Nothing comes back now when I see a photograph. No memories, no response. They’re no more than pieces of paper. A new hole has opened in my heart, and there’s no way to fill it up again.”¹⁸⁹ The loss of photographs challenges the narrator because the memories captured inside the photographs fade as well. The loss of the memories creates a “hole” in her heart. She treats the heart as something with bounds; eventually there will be enough holes that the heart itself ceases to exist.

One conversation early in the novel between the narrator and R highlights how Ogawa objectifies memories and allows for the creation of an empty void in the heart where lost memories once resided for those who forget. R and the narrator begin with incongruent views of how memories work. The narrator tells R, “I’d imagine you’d be uncomfortable, with your heart

¹⁸⁹ Ogawa, The Memory Police, 95.
For the narrator, the heart has boundaries; it can only comfortably hold so many memories. Since the disappearances have caused her heart to continually become emptier, she cannot understand what it feels like for the heart to grow fuller. The phrases she uses to ask R about his memories literally translates to “the things inside your heart” and “inside you” as if the heart can have a physical interior. However, R response dissuades her and emphasizes that the heart is amorphous, “No, that’s not really a problem. A heart has no shape, no limits. That’s why you can put almost any kind of thing in it, why it can hold so much.” The way the narrator discusses the heart makes it seem like a vessel with both empty and filled spaces, but R disagrees with her because he understands the way memories move and change with time.

In trying to explain his understanding of memories to the narrator, R compares them to small seeds and gives a material quality to memories while also animating them. For R, memories are alive, and the disappearances do not make them die; they only become dormant. He animates memories, “My memories don’t feel as though they’ve been pulled up by the root. Even if they fade, something remains. Like tiny seeds that might germinate again if the rain falls. And even if a memory disappears completely, the heart retains something. A slight tremor or pain, some bit of joy, a tear.” His analogy highlights the way the disappearances affect him differently. The memories do not leave him, and through his interaction with hidden objects like the mother’s, a memory can surface and flourish. Yet since R views his memories so positively, he asks the narrator if she too would like to remember. She struggles to answer as she holds onto her idea of the heart as a physical object with boundaries. She replies to R, “I don’t know.

---

190 Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 81.
191 小川洋子, 「密やかな結晶」, 116.
193 Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 81-82.
Because I don’t even know what it is I should be remembering. What’s gone is gone completely. I have no seeds inside me, waiting to sprout again. I have to make do with a hollow heart full of holes.”194 While R protests that her heart could never be hollow, the narrator struggles to see an alternative viewpoint. She cannot imagine memories as lively seedlings, and her heart seems to empty at an increasingly worrying rate.

The old man appears to have a similar point of view to the narrator as another person who forgets. In a conversation later in the novel soon after they discover the mother’s hidden collection, he visualizes memories as residing within the body despite their invisibility. Ogawa illustrates, “‘I suppose memories live here and there in the body,’ the old man said, moving his hands from his chest to the top of his head. ‘But they’re invisible, aren’t they? And no matter how wonderful the memory, it vanishes if you leave it alone, if no one pays attention to it.’”195

The way Ogawa depicts the body as a vessel for memories is reminiscent of Murakami’s treatment of the body in HBW&EW. Similar to how the narrator of HBW&EW’s body acts as a vessel for his inner consciousness, Ogawa focuses on how the old man sees his body as a vessel for memories. The old man sees his body as capable of relinquishing memories the same way the characters in ETW can lose their shadows.

However, R fights against the old man’s view and tries to persuade him that the memories must be retrievable. He uses objects as his examples of retrievable memories despite how the objects trigger no nostalgia or memories for those who forget. When the narrator worries that eventually everything on the island will disappear, R tries to comfort her with the idea that the objects within their hidden room will remain. He calmly tells her, “Don’t we have all the memories preserved here in this room? The emerald, the map, the photograph, the harmonica, the

194 Ogawa, The Memory Police, 82.
195 Ogawa, The Memory Police, 231.
novel—everything.” Interestingly, R uses the mother’s objects as proof of memories. He suggests that memories exist in the world through their interaction with objects, and he may even see the objects as memories themselves. Yet his view is also somewhat self-centered because the objects only act as memories for him because he remembers. The island will continue to become more and more hollow for the narrator and the old man, even if the room itself remains full of objectified but irretrievable memories.

Moreover, at the very end of the novel, the body itself disappears and becomes thingified and leaves the characters immobile. The citizens of the island begin by losing their left legs, and the limb becomes foreign despite being a part of their bodies. Upon waking up after the disappearance, the narrator notes, “Something was stuck fast to my hip. And no matter how much I pulled or pushed or twisted, it would not come off, just as though it had been welded to me.” Concepts that formerly were obvious, such as pants having two openings, no longer make sense to the narrator. The limb becomes thingified since she can recognize the limb’s presence, but it no longer has meaning or connection to her life. It only creates a struggle for her as she goes about her days. Ogawa even suggests that the loss of a body can be beneficial in a twisted sense because the citizen’s thingified bodies match the thingified world around them. The narrator, who feels full of holes herself, is not particularly bothered by the loss. She illustrates, “When our left legs first disappeared, we were thrown off balance... But once our entire bodies were gone, no one seemed particularly upset. They seemed more coherent now that they had fewer parts, and they adapted easily to the atmosphere of the island, which was itself

---

196 Ogawa, The Memory Police, 231.
197 Ogawa, The Memory Police, 246.
full of holes.”

She feels as though she matches the world around her when the disappearances directly match the transformation of her body.

Through playing with the body’s disappearance, Ogawa asks the question of where the soul resides. Unlike Murakami who sees the soul as residing within one’s inner consciousness, Ogawa seems to believe that the soul comes from having a voice with which one can express oneself and tell stories. Even when body parts begin to disappear, the citizens carry on with their strange existence because they still have a voice: a way to keep their souls visible in the world. The narrator even exclaims, “The disappearances of body parts were, in fact, easier and more peaceful than earlier ones, as no one had to gather in the square to burn the objects or send them floating down the river. There was no uproar, no confusion. We merely went about our usual morning routines, accepting that a new cavity had opened in our lives.”

Even after the loss of a body part, neighbors gather and talk, giving some meaning to life. Each individual can speak and share their voice despite having a thingified body.

But the total loss of bodies comes at a cost, and the darker edge to the novel comes through the loss of the voice—or the soul—as it becomes disconnected from the objectified body. At the end of the novel, Ogawa leaves only the voices of the citizens, perpetually growing weaker as decay outpaces creation. She narrates, “in the end, all that was left was a voice. The citizens of the island had lost everything that had a form, and our voices alone drifted aimlessly.”

The narrator still manages to find some positivity in the situation; she can slip in through the narrow crack around the trapdoor when she wants to visit R. While she views the loss of her body a “form of liberation” she also says she must be watchful since her “unreliable

---

198 Ogawa, The Memory Police, 270.
199 Ogawa, The Memory Police, 256.
200 Ogawa, The Memory Police, 272.
and invisible voice might be swept away with the wind.”\textsuperscript{201} She must take care to keep her voice in the world as the instability around her grows.

After finally finishing her story with great effort, the narrator cries about the loss of her body, how her hands, her eyes, her cheeks, every part of her body that helped create her novel has disappeared. While she sees some hope for R and the others in hiding who will be able to go outside and “melt the frozen world bit by bit,” her tone does not feel optimistic. She sees her own objectification clearly in the last few pages as she surveys her situation in the hidden room,

\begin{quote}
My body was now included among the objects arranged on the floor. I lay there between the music box and the harmonica, my two legs protruding at odd angles, my hands crossed on my chest, my eyes lowered. In the same way he had wound the spring on the music box or blown into the harmonica, I imagined R would now caress my body in order to call forth memories.\textsuperscript{202}
\end{quote}

Here we see the dynamics of captor and captive shift when the narrator begins to lose her body; she becomes an object in a collection rather than a true person. As her voice leaves at the end of the novel, there is no hope that her soul will remain. She becomes only a thing unless someone who remembers her can access memories through her objectified body.

**The prophecy of the inner story**

Ogawa’s exploration of the soul begins in the inner narrative of the novel the narrator writes. The inner story highlights the narrator’s obsession with loss, particularly of one’s ability to create new work and ideas. The narrator’s fiction feels almost gothic with its eerie tone. The inner story takes place in the attic of a church, where a sinister male typing instructor traps his female typing student’s voices in old typewriters. Ogawa uses the typewriter as a device that can trap the voice and separate it from the body. She makes a subtle feminist statement by having the

\textsuperscript{201} Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 273.

\textsuperscript{202} Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 273-274.
narrator try to bring light to the nature of the exploitative and silencing man and how he makes the woman in the story powerless.

In a scene towards the middle of the narrative, the typing student’s typewriter—which contains her voice—breaks, and the typing instructor draws her into his workshop in the steeple of a church where a mound of broken typewriters lay. Rather than fix her typewriter, he casts it into the pile of typewriters despite the woman’s protestation. He derides her,

“Their voice is trapped inside the machine. It’s not broken, it’s just been sealed off now that it no longer has a purpose...It’s an extraordinary sight, don’t you think?” he said. “Every one of these is a voice. A mountain of voices wasting away here, never again able to make the air tremble. And today yours joins them.” He picked up my typewriter with one hand and tossed it back where it had been resting. It sounded like a heavy door slamming shut—closing off my voice.

His language focuses on how the typewriter becomes an enclosure for the voice. The voice is transferred from one object, the body, to another, the typewriter. But in doing so, the typing instructor rips away the woman’s soul. By taking away her voice—and thus her soul—he fully possesses the woman as just an object. In her mind, the woman argues against him because she believes she still has a voice if she can only type the words she thinks. In a way that follows Descartes’s “I think therefore I am,” the woman knows that because she exists as a human because of her voice, even if the voice only exists inside her head. However, when she loses her internal voice as well, she just becomes one more sealed object in the typing instructor’s twisted collection.

From the woman’s decline within the small steeple room, Ogawa portrays the soul as decaying alongside with the body. As she spends her days alone and loses track of time, the woman even forgets the sound of her own voice. She comes to believe the other typewriters must be the trapped voices of other women the typing instructor abducted which increases her

---

203 Ogawa, The Memory Police, 130.
discomfort. Looking at the collection of typewriters around her, she contemplates, “If voices, like bodies, decline and decay, then most of these, crushed under this mountain, have been choked off and are hardened and useless.”204 The pile of souls in the form of objects before her leads her to think about the body as a physical object as well. She comes to a dark realization, “If my body were cut up into pieces and those pieces mixed with those of other bodies, and then if someone told me, ‘Find your left eye,’ I suppose it would be difficult to do so.”205 In many ways the woman’s decline marks the loss of her image of herself as a unique individual with a body and a voice all her own. As the typing instructor controls the actions of her body and traps her voice, she struggles to maintain her individual identity. Her lack of autonomy presents a world almost worse than the dystopia itself; characters on the island can cry out against the injustices they face but the woman in the narrator’s novel is too objectified to even raise her voice.

Yet Ogawa also writes the inner story as a prophecy; the narrator becomes the woman in the inner story at the end of the novel when she becomes trapped in the hidden room with no way to share her voice. The hidden woman begins to lose herself in the main chapter of the inner story, and she experiences the same distancing of body and soul that the citizens experience when their bodies become objectified. She laments, “In the past few days I’ve begun to feel my body growing more distant from my soul. It’s as though my head and arms, my breasts and torso and legs are all floating somewhere just out of reach, and I can only watch as he plays with them.”206 Her description matches the narrator’s description in the outer tale of her own lost limbs. She tells R, “The arm and leg you see aren’t really mine. No matter how much you care for them, they’re just shells, empty skin. The real me is disappearing as we speak. Slowly but

---

204 Ogawa, The Memory Police, 163.
205 Ogawa, The Memory Police, 163.
206 Ogawa, The Memory Police, 163.
surely being sucked into thin air.”\textsuperscript{207} Like the woman in her story, R tries rubbing her lost limbs to bring them back, but she feels no sensations from his touch.

Moreover, both the narrator and the woman in her story lose their voice by the end of the novel. Ogawa seems to meditate on the magnitude of losing one’s voice through the inner tale. The woman says the disconnect between her soul and body comes from losing her voice. She illustrates, “When the voice that links the body to the soul vanishes, there is no way to put into words one’s feelings or will. I am reduced to pieces in no time at all”\textsuperscript{208} The loss of voice signals a particularly dangerous loss of agency. When the narrator herself loses her voice, she seems to just float away in the wind and is unable to make an impact on the world anymore. Just before the narrator ceases her tale in the last pages of the novel when the inner story comes to a close, the woman cannot cry out to a nearby woman to help get her out of the attic. In being fully objectified by the typing instructor, she is also incapable of sounding a warning cry for others. This warning cry appears significant to Ogawa. By writing the inner tale with a sense of doom and demise, Ogawa lets her own story be the warning cry against losing oneself and the importance of keeping one’s individual voice.

**Conclusion**

Ogawa’s emphasis on the larger decay of the island seems to warn against a consumerism that makes the world revolve only around objects. In TMP, even the seasons and time depend not on the rotation of the Earth, but rather the existence of calendars. The narrator hears a woman say when calendars disappear, “no matter how long we wait, we’ll never get to a new month... so spring will never come.”\textsuperscript{209} While some neighbors try to dissuade her, Ogawa concludes that the

\textsuperscript{207} Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 258.
\textsuperscript{208} Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 166.
\textsuperscript{209} Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 135.
old woman holds the correct opinion. The narrator soon laments, “No matter how long we waited, spring never came, and we lay buried under the snow along with the ashes of the calendars.”210 The perpetual continuation of winter plunges the characters further into darkness as snow falls endlessly. Without the anchor of calendars to give them a sense of time, characters lose precious memory-making moments like birthdays and holidays.

In contrast to Murakami’s work, Ogawa suggests even art cannot save her characters from the cycle of disappearances. As a novelist who constantly must creatively think of new ideas, the disappearances trouble the narrator more than most. Her fear comes from one essential question, “things are disappearing more quickly than they are being created, right?”211 As an artist she is stressed by the lack of cultural output. She fears the island will become so full of holes that it might disappear itself, “If it goes on like this and we can’t compensate for the things that get lost, the island will soon be nothing but absences and holes, and when it’s completely hollowed out, we’ll all disappear with a trace.”212 The residents do not form many new memories because people just continue living without the disappeared item and don’t actively engage in creative acts. The narrator’s mother’s sculptures serve as a reminder of the power of art, and through engaging with the objects inside the sculptures and the sculptures themselves, the narrator forms precious memories with R and the old man. Yet even the sculptures are not enough to remove the effect of the disappearances. As the narrative progresses and even books disappear, the narrator struggles to find ways to continue her artistic efforts and stops writing because it requires too much effort. When her ability to create disappears through book burning, she realizes she cannot have the same effect on the world as her mother. Rather than art being a

---

211 Ogawa, *The Memory Police*, 52.
savior, the loss of art and creative pursuits demonstrates how forsaken the dystopian island has become.

At the metafictional level, Ogawa speaks to the power of the novel in carrying the voices of the hidden into the future. As Susan Napier notes, “dystopian literature is ‘message fiction,’ and the message is one of alarm and warning.”213 As such, Ogawa’s novel itself becomes a testimony. Her story of authoritarianism, captors and captives, and significant objects demonstrates to the reader what might be lost forever if not captured in art or words. Ogawa seems to warn readers through her work to hold our objects dearly, and to see the power of the memories stored within them. The book, as an object containing a story, can itself act as a voice that projects outwards.

By writing this book, Ogawa harkens back to the loss of Anne Frank and the way the diary she left behind has continued to influence generations of young women. Both the inner and outer story mirror Frank’s life in how they portray the dangers of entrapping women, giving the story a subtle feminist lens. Through TMP, Ogawa demonstrates her belief in the power of storytelling to save humanity. The continued interest in the novel more than 25 years after it was first published demonstrates the power of books in creating public dialogue around the issue of silencing voices, particularly the voices of entrapped women. Ogawa’s work succeeds despite the pessimistic ending; you cannot help but leave it feeling as if you must tell others to read it as well. By using the power of objects to be passed around and shared in book form, Ogawa finds a way to preserve the voices of her doomed characters by transmitting them to the larger world.

213 Napier, Fantastic, 183.
Conclusion

Comparing HBW&EW and TMP

As shown in chapters 1 and 2, objects play an essential role in Murakami and Ogawa’s works and further their stories in multiple ways. Their use of objects shares many features, including the concept of the body as a vessel and spirit-filled objects. However, their works also differ greatly with regard to the importance of objects for humanity in a late capitalist society of Japan during the bubble period.

Ogawa and Murakami focus heavily on the concept of the body as a physical object that contains what we might call the spirit or kokoro—which people often translate as “heart” or “mind,” although no exact translation exists. Both authors twist the traditional notion of spirit possession and suggest the physical body is an object that can be possessed by a free-floating spirit. However, their vision of the body as a vessel also implies a sense of alienation, particularly from the material world constructed by society. The characters in Murakami and Ogawa’s books come to a critical understanding of the condition of their bodies within the world of post-postwar consumerism. Their dystopian worlds emphasize the importance of objects for developing a sense of self. For example, Watashi, in the affluent 1980s, can continually increase his material wealth and initially shops excessively. But through the dystopian aspects of HBW, he discovers his sense of individuality apart from the physical world through his interactions with the skull and the librarian. On the other hand, the narrator of TMP increasingly fears losing herself as the objects on her island disappear. She sees her memories as encompassed within objects; the objects are tied to the fullness of the soul within her body. In a time of stagnation like the “lost decade” of the 1990s, the decline in production may have made authors like Ogawa more cognizant about what objects were being lost and what memories were lost with them.
Beyond existing separately from the soul, these authors see the body as impermanent and fleeting like the physical objects in their stories. Both the narrator of TMP and the narrator of HBW end their stories with their souls disconnected from their bodies. In some ways the body mirrors the other objects in the stories, which can have meaning imbued or removed almost on a whim. However, if the mind can go on without the body in perpetuity, what happens to humanity? Murakami sees freedom in disconnecting from the globalized, late capitalist country Japan increasingly became in the postwar period. For Watashi, his inner world is more appealing than the material world of the 1980s. But Ogawa seems to disagree. TMP leaves the reader asking if objects and concepts can be so easily lost, how permanent are we really? Her vision of the very weak remaining voice of the narrator in the final pages insinuates that our connection to the material world is important for how it allows us to influence and connect with others. Ogawa cultivates a sense of fear that corporations and authoritarian governments could influence people’s memory and sense of self through manipulating objects and consumerism.

Additionally, Ogawa and Murakami both lean into the idea that in consumer culture we are defined by our things and we define our history through our things. They engage with John Treat’s idea of history as “‘landscape’ scattered with the tokens of lives which preceded our own” rather than a time-based trajectory. Both novels change our sense of which objects should be valued in how they treat spirit-filled objects as important for defining the landscape of history. For example, objects carry precious memories in Ogawa’s novel. TMP demonstrates the importance of preserving the minutiae of daily life. Ogawa constructs the history of her narrator’s family through the mother’s hidden objects: the ribbon, stamp, emerald, and bell. The mother’s small objects allow the narrator and R to cultivate joy in a world of destruction. For

---

214 Treat, “Ibuse Masuji and the Material of History,” 274.
Ogawa, anything and everything can have a sense of spirit and importance. Conversely, personal possessions only remind Watashi of how alone he is in the world. Murakami constructs Watashi’s apartment and life as an image of 1980s materialism through his clothing, books, and food. When Watashi realizes how few objects in his life contain a sense of spirit, nearly everything becomes meaningless. And those objects that do contain a sense of spirit, such as the skulls, are connected to his individual inner consciousness. As the narrator eventually sees all of his possessions as part of the “junk on the beach” that makes up his life at the end of the novel, Murakami signals that there must be something greater than being defined by our things.

Although both authors deal with objects carrying deep meaning and souls being able to continue on without the body, the final implication of spirit-filled objects varies greatly between the two novels. Murakami sees a positive path forward in embracing the impermanence of the object world and the permanence of the individual soul. His view of personhood is deeply individual and solipsistic, but nonetheless freeing for his characters. On the other hand, Ogawa sees only destruction with the loss of objects and concepts that carry memories, beginning with physical things and ending with the loss of our own identities. In particular, the inner narrative carries this fear of destruction strongly. When the mind is free of the body, Ogawa sees the world in a state of destruction because people cannot engage in the creative acts she deems essential for the continuation of humanity. Thus she takes a more community-focused approach. The narrator’s objects and her mother’s treasures bear connections to friends and family making them important to preserve. Unlike Murakami, she does think her characters have a sense of responsibility to the world and perhaps need to take on preservationist attitudes similar to the ones Sand notes grew in the 1980s and 1990s in Japan.
Writing Novels in the Consumer Era

When considering the way authors treat objects, it also is important to discuss the fact that books exist as physical objects within the consumer world. In a late capitalist society, books are meant to be sold and purchased as physical objects. For example, Murakami’s novels can be considered a commodity in high demand since his books routinely sell at least one million copies. Through writing books on the complex dynamics surrounding objects in Japanese society, Murakami and Ogawa have both created physical objects that in turn express their thoughts on physical objects as being imbued with stories, culture, and meaning.

However, novels as physical objects can also serve a deeper purpose. As discussed in Chapter 2, Ogawa believes strongly in the concept of physical objects carrying history and stories. Based on her fascination with Anne Frank, Ogawa deeply understands how written narratives preserved in object form can be important for fighting authoritarianism and acting as a voice of testimony. Ogawa too creates a testimony against silencing people with her own novel. The way her novel has created many conversations on the concept of preserving history through objects attests to the success of her work mission. Indeed, one could say that both TMP and HBW&EW have an element of circularity; ironically while these books attempt create meaning by resisting materialism and consumerism, they are also objects to be sold and bought.

Dystopian Worlds

The dystopian worlds Murakami and Ogawa create are not too far removed from our own, and this fact heightens the messages hidden within their tales. Creating a distorted version of reality by using images from the real world of 1980s and 1990s Japan gives the writers a level of soft power to change their reader’s perspectives. By constructing a new object-based history of their worlds, Ogawa and Murakami can question the world of late capitalism through objects.
like skulls, paperclips, and everyday mementos. Often the world they question has to do with influence of Westernization, as discussed with Murakami and his prolific use of Western objects in his text.

The destruction of consumer objects and the return to spirit-filled objects feels typical of Japanese dystopia. Susan Napier discusses trends around Westernization and modernization in Japanese fantasy literature:

What the fantastic is subverting in modern Japanese literature, then, is not so much ‘Westernization’ as modernity itself, a modernity in which Japan has participated at least as fully and wholeheartedly as any Western country. To study the fantastic in modern Japanese literature is, therefore, to find a kind of mirror image of modern Japanese history, the reverse side of the myths of constant progress, economic miracle, and social harmony; stereotypes which have dominated the thinking not only of those outside Japan but among the Japanese themselves.215

Napier’s concept of “the reserve side of the myths” that drove Japan in the postwar era resonates strongly in Murakami and Ogawa’s works. With HBW&EW, we see the dark underside that comes with a technological society and quasi-governmental organizations through the changing ideas of information in society. Murakami subverts the continued growth of an information society by contrasting technology organizations that value information above human life with meaningful objects stored in the libraries. Similarly, Ogawa shows us the reverse side of historical revisionism, creating a world in which the very real censoring of objects and concepts thoroughly destroys a society. Moreover, both these authors write with dual worlds or stories to illuminate both the surface and “reverse side” of myths about contemporary Japan in their dystopias. The objects and ideas that connect across both worlds feel both unstable and certain at once. They remind the reader of the deeply interconnected nature of the world.

215 Napier, Fantastic, 12.
Additionally, Murakami and Ogawa fit into an important group of science fiction/fantasy/magical realism writers who use literature to chart the role of objects in society. When discussing the work of science fiction writer Philip K. Dick, Brown argues,

But while historians have charted this shift in how objects were meant to mediate individual and group identity (the citizen, the housewife, the community), they have been less attentive to those high-cultural and mass-cultural efforts to represent or register a quotidian object culture that’s run amuck.\textsuperscript{216}

Brown brings up a key idea here. Murakami and Ogawa’s views of an object-based history complement the factual ones which historians create by heightening the dynamic role that objects can play in society through their stories. While they focus on consumerism and how it impacts individuality and cultural memory in HBW&EW and TMP respectively, these are not the only elements of society these authors illuminate using objects. Beyond late capitalism, Murakami and Ogawa notably explore the changes in the Japanese \textit{ie} (family) system through household appliances in other works. For instance, both authors wrote short stories around the late 1990s that explore men and women’s relationships to the \textit{ie} system through sinister depictions of refrigerators. As they are very familiar to readers, everyday objects can help authors explore the social dynamics of different eras, and these authors evolve their use of objects to fit their time.

In spite of their differences, what Ogawa and Murakami seem to fear the most is the loss of a sense of what it means to be truly human. The increasing dominance of technology and the historical revisionism in politics during the 1980s and 1990s exacerbated the growing sense of depersonalization in postmodernism. Given the complexities of living in the age of consumerism, Murakami and Ogawa describe a desire for anchors in the material world. These anchors can be physical objects like the spirit-filled skulls, but human beings and our connections to others also act as anchors. The idea of both bodies and objects as physical repositories of memory is

\textsuperscript{216} Brown, \textit{Other Things}, 134.
essential to both Murakami and Ogawa’s stories. When these authors imagine the body as a vessel, they ask: what stories do we literally hold inside ourselves? Nonetheless the fear of losing memory-filled objects comes with a fear that we are indeed just empty ourselves.
Bibliography


