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Reproducing an *Outside* to Modernity at the Limit of the Law of Seriality: Reading Kawakami Mieko's *Breasts and Eggs*

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Abstract: This essay offers a close reading of the female protagonist Natsuko's account of childbirth in Kawakami Mieko's *Breasts and Eggs*. It proceeds from scrutinizing a particular scene featuring a contradiction between the setting of hallucination and the agential implication to unfolding a non-normative reproductive desire that objectifies and fantasizes an *outside* to modernity. In my analysis of the scene featuring hallucination, I will argue that the contradiction in the hallucination marks the coming-into-being of a subjective *I* that emerges at the limit of the efficacy of the Law of the Father and the Law of the West. In the subsequent analysis where I unfold what type of *I* is being reproduced, I argue that fantasizing an *outside* to modernity smoothes out contradiction inherent in modernity. As manifest in Natsuko's account of childbirth, the *outside-ness* she fantasizes and objectifies in the father she chooses for her child is reproduced in the child as extra-planetary in her imagination.

Keywords: *Breasts and Eggs*; outside-ness; modernity; law; seriality

1 Introduction

Breasts and Eggs (*Chichi to Ran*, 乳と卵) is a contemporary Japanese novel by Kawakami Mieko (川上 未映子) that explores, among other things, working class womanhood through the perspective of the first-person narrator, Natsuko, a female writer originally from Osaka but now living in Tokyo. The first part of the novel centers around a series of failures in communication between Natsuko's elder sister, Makiko, a barmaid in Osaka who has come to Tokyo to undergo breast-enhancement surgery, and her teenage daughter Midoriko, whom she is raising as a single mother. The second, longer part then tells how Natsuko carries out her project of becoming a (single) mother. She meditates on several options of conception, including a Danish Sperm bank (the first option that pops up in an online search engine), insemination

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by an anonymous donor, and conventional impregnation with a friend, Jun Aizawa, a freelance physician whose biological father is an anonymous donor. As she and Aizawa fall in love, Natsuko eventually chooses him to be the father of her child.

Since its publication in 2007, the novel has been widely discussed among critics. Positing that the novel "allows the reader to experience 'what it may feel like' to be a female member of the precariat in Japan," Reiko Abe Auestad, for example, offers an analysis of *Breasts and Eggs* in accordance with the affects aroused in her own readerly experience.[1] Juliana Buriticá Alzate argues that by positioning the novel in "cultural and economic mechanisms that enact violence on the female body, and fix gender roles in a male-dominated, neoliberal society," Kawakami problematizes the idea of agency through feminist reflections on fundamental ethical and political themes such as (single) motherhood, menstruation, beauty ideals, sex and reproduction.[2] In a different essay Alzate wrote with Hitomi Yoshio, the novel is seen as a valuable asset in the common project of claiming reproductive justice for "bad" mothers.[3] Pro-natal policies in Japan, Alzate and Hitomi argue, encourage heteronormative reproduction within the restraints of a (modern) bourgeois nuclear family, drawing legitimacy from an older convention like the Japanese *Koseki* system, which is programmed to maintain hereditary lineage and known to uphold "racial purity."[4] In this context, Alzate and Hitomi contend that *Breasts and Eggs*, in portraying a series of "bad mothers," "complicates the narrative of what it means to be a mother in a poor, working class neighborhood where father figures are either abusive or absent."[5]

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1 Reiko Abe Auestad, "Invoking Affect in Kawakami Mieko's Chihi to Ran (Breasts and Eggs, 2008): Higuchi Ichiyô, Playful Words and Ludic Gestures," *Japan Forum (Oxford, England)*, vol. 28, no. 4 (2016): 530–48, 531.

2 Juliana Buriticá Alzate, "Embodiment and Its Violence in Kawakami Mieko's Chichi to Ran: Menstruation, Beauty Ideals, and Mothering," *Japanese Language and Literature*, vol. 54, no. 2 (2020): 515–50, 516.

3 Juliana Buriticá Alzate, and Hitomi Yoshio, "Reimagining the Past, Present, and the Future of Reproductive Bodies in Contemporary Japanese Women's Fiction: Mieko Kawakami's *Breasts and Eggs* and Sayaka Murata's *Vanishing World*," In *The Palgrave Handbook of Reproductive Justice and Literature*, ed. Beth Widmaier Capo and Laura Lazzari (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022): 465–86, 465–6. Alzate and Hiroshi's term "bad mother" derives from Loretta J. Ross's and Rickie Solinger's activist work *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*. The "Bad Mother" refers to women who "do not reproduce within the confines of a middle-class white nuclear-family structure in conditions that are deemed 'safe' by the middle-class standards that are increasingly difficult for many people to achieve" (Ross and Solinger 2017, 171).

4 Harada, Kazue, *Sexuality, Maternity, and (Re)Productive Futures: Women's Speculative Fiction in Contemporary Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 5.

5 Juliana Buriticá Alzate, and Hitomi Yoshio, "Reimagining the Past, Present, and the Future of Reproductive Bodies in Contemporary Japanese Women's Fiction: Mieko Kawakami's *Breasts and Eggs* and Sayaka Murata's *Vanishing World*," In *The Palgrave Handbook of Reproductive Justice and*

This essay ties fantasies of non-normative motherhood to (Asian) modernity to which the Law of seriality is fundamental, as a strategy adopted to overcome the inherent contradiction between seriality and non-seriality in modernity. The Law of seriality has formed the foundation of modern nation-states. On the one hand, law, intimately bound up with genre, implies an "interdiction" that points to both a "counter-law" and "the production of *I*."[6] Law, thus, is a force of a subjective *I*. Through its effectuation upon an *other* and its attrition, the limit of the law is revealed. On the other, serialization, presupposes a homogenization of *real* space and time into quantifiable units of equal length.[7] Thus, there arises bound seriality – the homogenization of time and individual lives into statistics, – and unbound seriality – that of geographical locations as represented in printed media. In this essay, I will examine, first, how the Law of seriality takes form and what types of patriarchal or ethno-national *I* is generated in the embodiments of these laws in the novel. By focusing on a particular scene where in hallucination, the *I* of the female protagonist, sees ink oozing out of the interrogatory father's eyes and defacing him, I will, then, examine how the absent presence of the father and that of her silence generate a third *I* alternative to the *I*s produced through the law of seriality. This alternative female *I* is characterized precisely by a contradiction between the environment of hallucination where she does not have control over what she sees, and the agential implication in her seeing the father defaced. This contradiction constitutes her *I* – an *I* generated in the process of conforming to the Law of seriality. The formation of her *I* that marks the limit of how far the efficacy of the Law (of the Father and the West) goes and points at the desire for an *outside* – which is exchangeable to a desire for love as a modern possibility/impossibility – to the Law of seriality that is inherent in modernity.

2 Popping Balloons

In the second part of the novel, Natsuko was briefly captivated by the charm of one option – the Danish sperm bank – but before long this captivation is disrupted. After hearing an account of a king-of-the-hill type of father from her friend Rie, Natsuko

Literature, ed. Beth Widmaier Capo and Laura Lazzari (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2022): 465–86, 469–71.

6 Jacques Derrida, and Avital Ronell, "The Law of Genre," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1980): 55–81; Peter Hitchcock, "The Genre of Postcoloniality," *New Literary History*, vol. 34, no. 2 (2003): 299–330.

7 Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (London: Verso, 1998); Peter Hitchcock, "The Genre of Postcoloniality," *New Literary History*, vol. 34, no. 2 (2003): 299–330.

has a dream in which she is standing on a stool popping an infinite series of balloons that might contain a prize. In the middle of popping balloons, she hears Rie chanting "Merry Christmas!" and sees her waving to her and saying goodbye forever.[8] Before long she is overwhelmed by the sight of balloons that seem to pop up ceaselessly. She *almost* loses her balance and falls off the stool. At this time, Jun Aizawa appears, helps her "back onto" the stool and "points his finger toward" the next balloon.

Read in the context of insemination, the action of popping balloons signifies ovular penetration and thus Natsuko's desperation to be fertilized. The Danish bank initially eclipses the other two options she has considered before she settles down into the decision to have a child with Aizawa, the Sperm Bank Japan and direct donation.[9] She writes emails to the Sperm Bank Japan twice and honestly tells them her unmarried status, but receives no response from it. She also sends a message to an online blogger who offers his sperm to women who would like to be inseminated through direct donation – a decision she feels doubtful about.

At this time, the Danish Sperm Bank pops up as the third option she is considering. Even though it can be seen as a pragmatic choice (as the Japanese sperm bank prefers heteronormative married couple), the fantasy of the West is manifest in her captivation by the Danish option. Before seriously considering the Danish sperm bank, she already shows an astonishment at an unsubstantiated argument which she takes as a fact that "there really were women in the western world who used sperm banks like it was nothing."[10] She shows a belief in the Danish sperm bank's self-representation on the website:

> They had been in business for a number of decades and were known throughout the world. They had a proven track record, up-to-date facilities, and regularly screened collected sperm for disease. They even conducted chromosomal testing and genetic screening to identify any major genetic disorders. Not overlooking even the tiniest concern, they made every effort to ensure that only healthy, viable sperm was frozen and added to the bank. As a result, only one in ten donor applications were accepted. Their clients, on the other hand, were numerous. The bank had provided sperm to over seventy different countries, opening their doors to infertile couples, lesbian couples, and even single women like me-they had a system in place so that anyone could order sperm over the internet.[11]

Three qualities of this bank attract Natsuko here: first, the quality of the sperms is guaranteed; second, the bank has a good reputation for a long time; third, it is very popular. Natsuko shows a direct interest in it after seeing the bank's representation of these three qualities: "I wondered what had made me even bother with Sperm

8 Mieko Kawakami, *Breasts and Eggs*, (London: Picador, 2020): 255.
9 Mieko Kawakami, *Breasts and Eggs*, (London: Picador, 2020): 195.
10 Ibidem, 186.
11 Ibidem, 196.

Bank Japan or that sperm blogger."[12] However, she never actually checks the boxes on the website so that the frozen sperm would be shipped from Copenhagen in "as little as 4 days."[13] Thus, her brief captivation by importing the Danish option functions in her narration as a loose end which is never rationalized and certainly never realized. It hovers as an option on the Internet, analogous to a fantasy of the West floating in Japan's modern imagination. Natsuko's desire to merge her eggs with Danish sperms thus might be seen as literalizing the tendency on the part of East Asian societies to merge their "*own*" societies that "*appear*" not Western enough – often under the gaze of the West – with the fantasy of an imagined West. In Natsuko's imagination, there clearly exists "the western world" where women – not just married heterosexual women – enjoy *more* reproductive liberties, as if they were consumer choices.

The charm of the Danish Option, however, remains only a vague fantasy in the novel. It soon gives way to the figure of her father, whom Natsuko hallucinates after exiting a steamy public bathhouse. She has not seen him, a physically abusive alcoholic, since her mother escaped him, taking Natsuko and Makiko with her as children. The vision is triggered by her seeing a group of short grown men huddling together, smoking cigarettes, and wearing dirty clothes and shoes.[14] She watches them and starts being overcome by a hallucination of the one that turns around and meets her eyes to be her father. In her hallucination, she hears "her father" call her name. He asks her where her mother is, forcing out the word "dead."[15] He then starts interrogating her why she did not do anything to save her mother from dying. As she cannot speak a word, the fantasized father literally terrifies her. She then starts hallucinating moving images of dark substance oozing out of his eyes as well as lines of liquid trickling down his cheeks.[16] The result image is that of her father's face being covered "like a fatal stain."[17]

The virtual presence of the Japanese father follows Natsuko's desire for a virtual Western father for her child and serves thus as a harsh correction of the consumer's fantasy. However, the smallness of the Japanese father's statue disturbs her. The act of seeing the father here in her narration is represented as being not under her control. Seeing her father defaced and thus rendered incapable of speeches, however, contradicts the set-up of this scene as a hallucination. Thus the scene of hallucinating her father goes through the process of not being in control to regaining control. This contradiction, however, points to a shame implicitly suggested in her

12 Kawakami, *Breasts and Eggs,* 196.
13 Ibidem, 197.
14 Ibidem, 219.
15 Ibidem, 220.
16 Kawakami, *Breasts and Eggs,* 220–1.
17 Ibidem, 221.

hallucination – the shame of being the daughter of a shabby-clothed working class father. In relation to the previous captivation by the Danish option, it is a shame – triggered by her experience of lack of reproductive freedom as a non-Western single woman – felt under the gaze of an imagined ideal West that combines the shame of poverty and that of patriarchy.

As Natsuko regains control of herself, the figure of Aizawa returns. This time, he appears in the novel as a man looking for his biological father, handing out his information – "My mother is petite, but I'm on the tall side. Just about 5′10". My mother has clearly defined double eyelids. I don't. I've been a decent distance runner from the time I was little."[18] This leads me to Natsuko's dream after hearing her friend Rie's recount of her king-of-the-hill father. Rie is a friend Natsuko met when she was working as a teenager in a bookstore. Rie's father shows similarity with Natsuko's in beating his wife and daughters. Despite Rie's father's domestic violence, Rie's mother shows unconditional affection for the father, putting the father above everyone, including her two daughters. Once she says to Rie, "I could always have more kids–but there's no replacing your father."[19] After Rie's marriage she becomes a fulltime housewife, taking care of her husband who suffers from chronic depression, her mother-in-law and her daughter, namely the whole household.[20]

It is after this conversation with Rie that Natsuko has a dream where "a medley of colorful balloons crowded out the ceiling."[21] Descriptions like this capture the fast speed with which the balloons pop up and how this makes her feel overwhelmed, abound in Natsuko's narration: "Every time I popped a balloon, another one took its place; like they were coming out of a bubble machine"; "my chest hurt, I couldn't breathe, but the balloons were moving like a bank of clouds and growing. The sight was almost too much for me to bear. Standing on my toes, I reached as high as I could, trying to pop all the balloons"; and: "I stabbed again, popped another, watching it disappear without a sound, but they were multiplying so quickly that I almost lost my balance and fell off the stool."[22]

Seriality, in this dream, stands out, as a fundamental element that Natsuko faces. She conforms to it but also feels stressed about it. In relation to the figures of father and the national element inherent in them, it seems then plausible to invoke Benedict Anderson's concept of seriality to make sense not so much of the psychological but rather of the political dimension of the dream. In his discussion of nationalism in *Spectre of Comparison* (especially Asian nationalisms), Anderson has

18 Ibidem, 224.
19 Kawakami, *Breasts and Eggs,* 249.
20 Ibidem, 251–2.
21 Ibidem, 225.
22 Ibidem, 255.

termed the homogenization of time as bound seriality and that of space as unbound seriality.[23] The homogenization of time sees time as a homogenous continuum in which one can move up and down; that of space presupposes that spaces across the world are synchronized.[24] On the one hand, bound seriality can be seen in identitarian politics that has become the fundamental site where ethnical and racial dynamics within a nation are played out.[25] In this sense, identitarian politics, for example, assumes that an Asian can only identify with an Asian, because the method for achieving more representatives for a particular race or ethnicity is to grow a larger ethnical or racial population. Here, time is homogenized, because individual lives – which are always constituted by history extending through time, – are homogenized into a fixated identity.[26] On the other hand, unbound seriality can also be found in newspapers where different geographical locations are juxtaposed next to each other as if they were of equal value in the same topographical space.[27]

Natsuko's negotiation with the seriality in the balloons exemplifies the lived tension between the tendency to conform to the Law of seriality and that to resist it by individuals who cannot control the dominant conceptions of time or space. Her captivation by the Danish option which follows her imagination of a "free" Western world – a world she has in fact no access to – thus signifies her attraction to the Law of unbound seriality and the promising liberation from one geographical point to another. Her being overcome by the hallucination of the interrogatory father – signifying the force of the Law of the bound seriality – suggests a counterforce against this attraction; the fact that she is not in control of the interrogatory father suggests that both the Law of bound seriality and that of unbound seriality control her. Her regain of control, through the sheer force of the unspeakable site occupied by her mother, over her hallucination, read in relation to the figure of Aizawa that keeps coming into her consciousness, suggests a turn away both from the Father and the West.

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23 Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*, (Verso, 1998): 30–45.

24 Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*, (Verso, 1998): 30–45.

25 Ibidem, 43–4.

26 Partha Chatterjee, however, points out that empty homogeneous time does not exist anywhere in real space (1999, 131). Evidently, homogenous time exists nowhere in real space, but that does not mean that the conception of time and space and population as dividable into units does not exist either. A similar point is made by Peter Hitchcock that "it is never clear in Anderson's critique that the logic of seriality is the only or even a primary precondition of nation" (2016, 13). Individuals who accept the logic of seriality and "the premise of imaginary identification" can still "doubt the degree of its force and the shared nature of its categories" (Hitchcock 2016, 13).

27 Benedict Anderson. *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (Verso, 1998): 30–5.

The appearance of Aizawa who helps her in carrying on the process of balloon-popping after her *almost-fall* suggests that the way for her to work through the tension is a further serialization that seeks an (imagined) identity that differs from both the West and the Father. This means that the identity cannot be identified as an equivalent digit subsequent to either the West or the Father. Thus the turn towards Aizawa suggests that replacing the Japanese father with a Danish one is not a satisfying answer to her reproductive desire, thus negating the replacement of bound seriality by unbound seriality as the solution to the tension between conforming to the Law of seriality and resisting it.

Thus, the contradiction between not having control over what one sees in hallucination and regaining control over one's own vision, and that between conforming to the Law of seriality and resisting it, points at the formation of an *I* that marks the limit of how far the efficacy of the Law (of the Father and the West) goes. Drawing upon Derrida's essay "The Law of Genre," Peter Hitchcock posits that law, intimately bound up with genre, implies an "interdiction" that points to both a "counter-law" and "the production of *I*."[28] Law, thus, is a force of a subjective *I*. Through its effectuation upon an *other* and its attrition, the limit of the law is revealed.

Natsuko's *I* arises against the expansion of the two other *I*s – the enforcing Father and the enticing West. This alternative female *I* is characterized precisely by a contradiction between the environment of hallucination where she does not have control over what she sees, and the agential implication in her seeing the father defaced.

3 Reproducing a Fantasized *Outside-ness* to Modernity

The next question to be asked is then what kind of *I* is produced in countering the Father and the West – representing respectively the Law of bound seriality and that of unbound seriality in modernity? I will answer this question through three perspectives: first, the figure of Aizawa; second, the relation she and Aizawa imagine established between her and Aizawa; and third, the imagination of her child as extra-planetary.

The figure of Aizawa conforms neither fully to the Law of bound seriality nor to that of unbound seriality. He appears in Natsuko's narrative initially in the form of pieces of abstract information about the biological father he is seeking:

28 Jacques Derrida, and Avital Ronell, "The Law of Genre," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1980); Peter Hitchcock, "The Genre of Postcoloniality," *New Literary History*, vol. 34, no. 2 (2003): 299–330, 303.

"single eyelid," "tall," "a medical student."[29] The lack of information regarding the biological father's nationality points at Aizawa's potential foreign-ness, thus testifying to his non-conformity to the Law of bound seriality and his being contained within that of unbound seriality. However, Aizawa has also been adopted by and naturalized into a wealthy Japanese household.[30]

He is also a potential inheritor of a large amount of fortune his wealthy adopted father's family has bequeathed to his biological mother, – "about two hundred million yen after taxes."[31] His being adopted and naturalized into a Japanese household suggests that he is still contained within the Law of bound seriality and his acquired non-conformity to that of unbound seriality.

The contradictions that exist in Aizawa's relations to the Law of bound seriality and that of unbound seriality, nevertheless, disappear into Natsuko's fantasization of the relation established between her and Aizawa.[32] She "falls for him" the moment she reads the pieces of information Aizawa uses to look for his biological father.[33] In other words, she chooses Aizawa based on the information he provides and which suggests a potential non-conformity to the Law of seriality. In Natsuko's narrative, Aizawa, too, seems to choose her over someone else – a long-term partner with whom he has been living for years. He says to Natsuko: "I told her there was someone else. Someone I'd rather be with."[34]

In *Love as Passion*, Niklas Luhmann has stressed the systematic emergence of (modern) love as personal, non-functional social relation out of its milieu of impersonal functional social relations. Modernity marks the transformation of personal self-chosen love as a low-probability event to one of high probability.[35] In

29 Kawakami, *Breasts and Eggs,* 193.

30 Ibidem, 278–95. Aizawa grew up in a "giant home out in Tochigi, replete with its own orchard and ornamental garden".

31 Ibidem, 283.

32 Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, in turning to Freud, locates fantasies "exclusively within the domain of opposition between subjective and objective, between an inner world, where satisfaction is obtained through illusion, and an external world, which gradually, through the medium of perception, asserts the supremacy of the reality principle" (109). Laplanche, Jean, and J. B. Pontalis. "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality 1." *Unconscious Phantasy*, 1st ed., (Routledge, 2003), pp. 107–43, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429484469-5. Lauren Berlant, building upon Laplanche and Pontalis, strategizes fantasies as what allows you to bear your ambivalence, not by resolving and vanquishing it, but in the way it fills in the holes left by your incoherence toward yourself, those you love, what matters, your appetites, and the world, whose concept you carry around as a figure in your head and walk through responding in a range of moods – "numb, confirmed, and surprised" (26–27). Berlant, Lauren. *On The Inconvenience of Other People.* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2022), 26–27.

33 Kawakami, *Breasts and Eggs,* 363.

34 Ibidem, 403.

35 Niklas Luhmann, *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy* (Stanford University Press, 1998): 9.

late modernity, as Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim argues in *The Normal Chaos of Love*, love in intimate relationship has become a central goal for individuals to compensate for the sense of insecurity and instability deriving from everyday life, and an impossibility. To Japanese modernity, individual love is especially pertinent. The tension between devotion to kinship and feudalist collective on the one hand and to the concept of a radically atomized (modern) individual love on the other has been intensified since the Meiji Revolution in the late 19th century when modernization became a totalizing tendency all over Japan by which personal love too became a (modern) possibility and perhaps, in many ways, part of a new ideological constellation which promised to liberate an individual from the obligation to sacrifice oneself to patriarchal feudalist kinship.[36] Love persists into late modernity – both within the context of Asian modernization and without – as both a possibility in reference to obligation decreed by patriarchal kinship and an impossibility in reference to the individualization process symbiotic with collectivization process inherent in the modern quest for love.

Thus, in fantasizing the relation established between them as love, Natsuko sublimates love into a thing-in-itself, as the contradiction between love as a possibility and love as an impossibility is eliminated in her sublimation. Love as a thing-in-itself instead of being a modern possibility-impossibility becomes a component of the modern Asian female *I* Natsuko forms in answering to her reproductive desire by way of choosing Aizawa as the father. This component is set against the reproduction of the *I*s inherent in the Law of the enforcing Father and that of the enticing West. In a way, it is a strategy adopted by Natsuko to treat love as a thing-in-itself momentarily, as it must be invested with the logocentric surety present in the production of the *I*s in the Law of the Father and that of the West. By being attracted to Aizawa for his non-conformity to the Law of seriality present in both the Law of the Father and that of the West and fantasizing the relation between them as love not as a possibility-impossibility but as a thing-in-itself, in a way, Natsuko is also forming her own *I* to which, locating an *outside* to Western modernity and to a decolonization that is patriarchal, is fundamental. Or, it can be understood the other way around, the *outside* is to feudalist patriarchy and to a decolonization by way of Western modernity which is also colonial.

For Natsuko, however, the arrival of such 'love' as a thing-in-itself seems to be indefinitely delayed. *Fantasizing* Aizawa as a figure where non-conformity to the Law of the Father and that of the West is harbored, and their relation as one of love that liberates her from the Law of the Father through the emergence of reciprocated individual choices and from the Law of the West, through liberating from the sense of

36 Theodore W Goossen, *The Oxford Book of Japanese Short Stories* (Oxford University Press, 2010): xiii.

insecurity and instability conditioned by an all-encompassing capitalization, enables Natsuko to imagine an *outside-ness* that she will reproduce through Aizawa in the child she gives birth to.[37]

This *outside-ness* becomes exactly the child she gives birth to. The birth, in this sense, promises the substantiation of the possibility of falling in (modern) love. I have argued above that the figure of Aizawa proffers to Natsuko a solution to the tension between conforming to the Law of seriality sanctioned by the idea of a modern state and resisting it. Aizawa appears as a figure who defies both the Law of bound seriality (he is not strictly Japanese by bloodline but by a process of naturalization) and that of unbound seriality (he has been assimilated into the Japanese household standing for the Japanese State). Aizawa's potential (national) *outside-ness* is reproduced in Natsuko's imagination of the child's *outside-ness*. At the end of the novel, the child is thus compared, in Natsuko's language, to "a nebula, breathing without a sound, millions of years away. Astral mist and stars spun from the total darkness, twinkling in every color of the rainbow, breathing silently."[38] The child becomes the materialization of an extra-planetary, all in all mythical fantasy. The shift of the novel's terrain from national/transnational to extra-planetary envisions Natsuko's escape from what appears to be an impossible project – namely, Asian modernization-as-Westernization. Taking recourse to the endless non-territory of cosmic dimension means, in this sense, also taking recourse to what in some way could be called a pre-historic force beyond the two ideological poles which cannot be brought together: the West and Asia. And such taking recourse means giving birth and thus, *outside* all tension, becoming a mother and a writing woman narrating becoming a mother.

However, such *outside-ness* still remains historical and is thus contained within modernity. The fantasy of an *outside-ness* can only function as Natsuko's

37 Aizawa, is, in no way, a figure *outside* capitalization. First, her initial attraction to him starts from hearing pieces of abstract information about his physique and profession: "single eyelid," "tall," "a medical student" (Kawakami 193). Second, he is also a potential inheritor of a large amount of fortune his wealthy adopted father's family has bequeathed to his biological mother, – "about two hundred million yen after taxes" (Kawakami 283). Third, as a freelance physician, he makes around "20,000 yen per hour" (Kawakami 265). Natsuko has expressed astonishment at both numbers (Kawakami 265 & 283). In Natsuko's narrative, though, Aizawa is represented as containing a child that he used to be, thus a potential to be and reproduce something *outside* the modern time they are in. Her tactile connection with him becomes a mythical originating force provoking Aizawa's proposal to have a child with her: "I went over to sit next to him and touched his shoulder. His back was broad and his shoulders were wide, but when I touched him, making contact for the first time, my palm connected with the boy he used to be, touching Aizawa as a child" (Kawakami 410).

38 Kawakami, *Breasts and Eggs,* 429.

survival strategy precisely through the surfacing of the ambivalence towards modernity within it.[39] Textual evidence of such ambivalence can be found in the shift from technology to the cosmos manifest in first a conversation between Aizawa and Natsuko that precedes Aizawa's proposal to Natsuko to have a child with him and later, Natsuko's account of childbirth. In this conversation, Aizawa tells her about his adoptive father, who, when he was a child, told him to think about the Voyager when something bad happened to him.[40] Specifically, he encourages Aizawa to think of the Voyager as a symbol of technology-facilitated eternity: "there would come a time when the sun has fizzled out, when human beings and this planet no longer exists, but the Voyager would still be out there, drifting ever deeper into space."[41] Read in relation to Asian modernization-as-Westernization, Aizawa's adoptive father, reading the Voyager project as positive, seems to approve of an expansion of Western modernity into space. Aizawa's evocation of his adoptive father's positive view on the Voyager seems to be in line with his view, as his evocation paves the way for his proposal to Natsuko to make a child together. Natsuko, meanwhile, by offering an account of childbirth as the birth of a nebula from which a sun is born counters such a view on Western modernity. The fantastical temporal reversal that returns to the time before the sun is born seems to negate seeing the Western modernity's expansion into space as the end point of history.

Nonetheless, it is unclear in Natsuko's narration how she views Aizawa's evocation of the Voyager. That is why I would term her view on modernity manifest in her narration as an ambivalence towards modernity within modernity. She, as the mother seeking for an outside-ness, retreats back to the earth after the birth. Before the birth, the mother describes her belly as "the center" of the universe.[42] After the birth, she returns to the earth and becomes the ocean spilled across the land: "the/her body became liquid, lukewarm and spilling across the surface of the earth."[43] This shift from extra-planetary back to earth suggests a stay inside modernity, if modernity means living in the tension between, on the one side, patriarchal kinship and modern Capitalism, and, on the other side, the possibility of a "self-chosen" love.

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39 Lauren Berlant defines ambivalence as such: "In ambivalence, we want and don't want what we want" (36).

40 The Voyager is a NASA-launched spacecraft where a record of natural sounds, music and human languages is stored and which is designed for potential contacts with extra-terrestrial beings.

41 Kawakami, *Breasts and Eggs*, 408.

42 Ibidem, 429–30.

43 Ibidem, 429–30.

4 Conclusions

What we have witnessed in Natsuko's account of childbirth is thus a constant seek after an *outside-ness*, first *outside* the Law of the Father and that of the West to which the Law of seriality is fundamental. Her subjective *I* thus arises as a contradiction between being under the Other's Law and being under one's own Law. Second, in answering to her reproductive desire and reproducing the *I* that is supposed to be *outside* seriality and modernity, fantasy has become a useful strategy through which she manages to suture together the contradiction between being in modernity and being *outside* modernity under the fantasy of the existence of an *outside-ness* to modernity. Through choosing a figure where potential non-conformity to seriality and thus to modernity is harbored as the father of her child, she chooses an action of childbirth that is based on a fantasy that overemphasizes positivity and possibility. However, the contradiction persists after the action, as suggested by the stay within modernity implied by the novelistic shift from extra-planetary back to earth at the end of her account of childbirth.

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