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## The Q is Chaos: Freedom 4 Artists is Ostranenie

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## Abstract

In this thesis, I suggest that *ostranenie* is the artistic equivalent of chaos and it can be used by artists to grab and maintain the perception of an audience through the disruption of norms or pre-established conditions. *Ostranenie*, the device of art introduced by Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky in his essay, “Art as Device,” is a device that gives absolute freedom to the creative person who isn’t afraid to use it to create original and engaging work. In the novel, *1Q84*, Haruki Murakami utilizes *ostranenie* to tell a simple love story in a manner that prolongs the reunion of his two main characters, Aomame and Tengo, until the conclusion of his maximalist tome. By analyzing his longest work, I aim to demonstrate how the relationship between chaos and *ostranenie* gives Murakami the creative freedom to play within familiar narrative structures while still challenging reader expectations.

*Keywords:* *ostranenie*, formalism, chaos, perception, art, disruption, freedom, delusion, reality, fiction

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

The Q is Chaos: Freedom 4 Artists is Ostranenie

By

Cristian Alba-Dominguez

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of English

Thesis Committee:

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THE Q IS CHAOS: FREEDOM 4 ARTISTS IS OSTRANENIE

A THESIS

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Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

2024

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**Table of Contents**

Abstract .....1

Part 1: Ostranenie is Chaos.....6

Part 2: Ostranenie is  $\infty$ .....11

Part 3: Memory  $\neq$  Reality.....14

Part 4: Chaos is 4 Creation .....23

Works Cited.....31

## Part 1: Ostranenie is Chaos

I decided to write this thesis on the artistic device Viktor Shklovsky's identifies as ostranenie because like art itself, ostranenie is infinitely complex, and yet simple to understand, see, and even utilize. Utilizing ostranenie in my own creative work gave me an understanding of art and form that I felt had been missing from my education in the arts up until my stumbling upon Shklovsky's essay "Art as Device" and subsequently, his book, *On the Theory of Prose*. Through the application of his concepts in my own creative endeavors, I started to understand Shklovsky's device as a tool of recognition and the prolonging of perception that is made manifest through the disruption of sensitive conditions, and also as a tool of freedom that can be used regressively and progressively in art and literature depending on the desires of the person using it.

Haruki Murakami is a writer who values his individualism and creative freedom above all else, describing himself as "spiritually free, beholden to no one" (*Novelist as a Vocation* 64). This belief is reflected in his writing, which often explores the theme of estrangement through the eyes of lonely individuals moving through the chaos of our inconsistent reality. Murakami's willingness to embrace his eccentricities and follow his own creative instincts has earned him a devoted following of readers who appreciate his unapologetically individualistic approach to writing. This is regardless of the opinions of the established literary circle in Japan, and their criticism of his original style that constantly challenges traditional Japanese novelistic conventions. When describing his contentious experience with the literary establishment of his country, Murakami writes:

In the case of literature, for a long time after the Second World War ended, the literary status of authors and their works was carefully arranged and slotted within an axis of fixed coordinates- “vanguard” vs. “rear guard,” “right wing” vs. “left wing,” “popular” vs. “serious.” At the same time, the big publishing houses (almost all of which were based in Tokyo) set the tone for what was considered good literature through their literary magazines, a set of standards that was confirmed by a system of prizes (or “goodies”) for authors. It was very hard to stand against this monolithic system. Leaving the axis meant forgoing all the goodies that were being passed around.

When I made my debut as a writer in 1979, this system was still firmly entrenched, its power basically unchallenged. Editors would say things like "There's no precedent for that" or "That's just not the way things are done." It had been my impression that one thing an author had going for him was that he was free to write whatever he wanted, so comments like these truly puzzled me.

I'm not the type of guy who enjoys fighting and arguing (really!), so I wasn't up for battling the system, or duking it out with any of the unwritten laws. I am, however, an independent person who likes to think things out for himself. Having taken the trouble to become a writer, and realizing that we all get only one chance in this life, I was determined from the start to forge ahead and do what I wanted in the way I wanted. The system could go its way and I would go mine. (*Novelist as a Vocation* 63-64)

Murakami's desire to stay true to his own creative vision and not conform to the established norms of the literary world drove him to pursue his own path regardless of the



novelistic expectations of his country, and this determination to embrace his own individuality is evident in his use of *ostranenie* in his writing.

*Ostranenie*, also known as defamiliarization, is described by Shklovsky as “the device of art [used to] magnify the difficulty and duration of perception in art because the process of perception is an end in itself and must be prolonged” (*On the Theory of Prose* 12). And I should note that it is my belief that it doesn’t matter what words one uses to describe this fundamental device of art, because *ostranenie* is an artistic device that can distort, disrupt, idealize, defamiliarize, make strange, and all the various other words and phrases used to describe the way a work of art captures an audience’s perception. Therefore, I will continue to use these words interchangeably throughout this paper to better highlight its different modes and usages. Although, I will try to use the Russian word “*ostranenie*” as the umbrella term for all the different ways that describe how this chaotic device can be used by artists to force their audiences to see an object or idea by bringing it into view.

But how exactly does *ostranenie* magnify and prolong perception?

Using Tolstoy as an example of how estrangement makes things visible, Shklovsky explains that “Tolstoy estranges a thing not by naming it, but by describing it as if he were seeing it for the first time, or describing an event as if it were happening for the first time. When describing something, he avoids the conventional names of its parts and instead names the corresponding parts of other things... Tolstoy constantly draws on this method of estrangement. In one of his stories (‘Strider’), the narrator is a horse and things are perceived not from a human, but an equine point of view” (*On the Theory of Prose* 13). This suggests that *ostranenie* is a device that always distorts perceived reality in some manner, and when pushed to its most strange, it can completely break it.

Murakami often uses *ostranenie* in his narratives in this reality-breaking manner by incorporating elements of surrealism and magical realism that take his characters and readers on journeys between worlds of the imaginative and the real. In “Imaginary Worlds and Real Ethics: Alterity and Transpositioning in Murakami Haruki’s Fractal Realism,” Christopher Weinberger explains that in a Murakami novel, “protagonists cross into what, even for them, are unreal or expressly novel worlds and must take responsibility for dispositions and actions toward fictional beings. In *1Q84*, for example, characters in dreams or dreamlike states of paralysis bear witness to sexual crimes they themselves commit against young girls- girls who may be physically embodied fictions created by a supernatural narrative power and not real people” (416).

In *1Q84*, Murakami uses *ostranenie* to disrupt the line between reality and fantasy, as the novel’s two protagonists, Aomame and Tengo, find themselves navigating a parallel reality where things are just slightly off-kilter. But Aomame and Tengo only become aware of the metaleptic fractures in their new reality after they both do something out of the ordinary in their original timeline. For Aomame, reality shifts after she decides to get out of her cab in the middle of the expressway. While for Tengo, it is through his agreement to illegally ghost write the novel “Air Chrysalis” for the mystifying 16-year-old girl named Fuka-Eri, an escaped member of the Sakigake cult, whose badly written but mesmerizing novel captures the attention of Tengo’s literary agent. These decisions that disrupt norms are what produce the butterfly effect that changes Aomame and Tengo’s perception of reality.

Murakami is no stranger to using *ostranenie* as a tool for the fracturing of reality in his novels, often playing with the metaleptic ruptures and using them as a tool of reflexivity that reinforces and highlights the thin line between fiction and reality. This is because Murakami is

aware that ostranenie, when used correctly, is a tool that enables artists to push boundaries of creativity by utilizing initial conditions to grab perception.

When explaining the limits of the device of art, Shklovsky states that ostranenie “can be found almost anywhere there is an image. In other words...the image is not a constant subject modified by changing predicates” (*On the Theory of Prose* 18). Critics have pointed out the contradictory nature of this statement, which makes the device sound limitless because if it can be found anywhere the eye can see, does that mean that ostranenie is everywhere? The answer to that question is yes, but ostranenie isn’t always perceivable because ostranenie requires disruption in order to manifest.

Ostranenie is purposely paradoxical and illogical because the device of art is art in and of itself. And it can be found anywhere because the device of art can be used in an infinite number of ways if the conditions required to make it visible are sensitive enough to disruption. In *The Essence of Chaos*, Edward N. Lorenz explains that chaos “is deterministic, or is nearly so if it occurs in a tangible system that possesses a slight amount of randomness, but does not look deterministic...Systems in which this is the case are said to be sensitively dependent on initial conditions” (6).

I believe that applying Chaos theory to the concept of ostranenie allows us to better understand how the instability and chaotic nature of this device in a work of the creative imagination forces the engagement of an audience with a work on a deeper level because it is through its disruption of initial conditions that the device of art demands active consumption and attention. Using Chaos theory to measure the limitless potential of Shklovsky’s device gives us the ability to track its usage and see it more clearly when it appears within our field of perception. That is why my aim with this thesis is simply to track some of the unique ways that

Murakami uses ostranenie in *1Q84*. In doing so, I hope to shed light on Shklovsky's device as a tool of artistic expression with the ability to transform the way we perceive reality.

**Part 2: Ostranenie is ∞**

*1Q84-that's what I'll call this new world, Aomame decided.*

*Q is for "question mark." A world that bears a question.*

Aomame nodded to herself as she walked along.

Like it or not, I'm here now, in the year 1Q84. The 1984 that I knew no longer exists. It's 1Q84 now. The air has changed, the scene has changed. I have to adapt to this world-with-a-question-mark as soon as I can. Like an animal released into a new forest. In order to protect myself and survive, I have to learn the rules of this place and adapt myself to them. (*1Q84* 138-139)

In *The Order of Form: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space*, Anna Kornbluh explains that "formalism [is] an alternative way to think about infinity as unavailable to perception but nonetheless thinkable or writable" (4). A formalist view of mathematics and aesthetics allows us to conceptualize infinity through variable representation that brings the image of infinity to mind through the recognition of the signs associated with it. This is how the image of infinity appears in the mind when the lemniscate: ∞ is used to represent the concept of incomprehensible limitless boundlessness. ∞ symbolizes a never-ending loop that cannot be fully conceptualized. Symbols like the lemniscate make concepts of the abstract comprehensible through a direct sensory experience achievable through the representation giving it form. A symbol of something beyond human comprehension allows us to see the intangible in a tangible and manageable way

that can be understood and communicated through variable representation. The letter Q in the title of Murakami's *1Q84* is a variable representation that makes tangible the incomprehensible reality that its characters find themselves in.

As Shklovsky explains, “we encounter everywhere the same *sign of the artistic*: it is intentionally created to push perception beyond automatism, its visibility is the author’s aim, and it is ‘artificially’ created in such a way that it holds perception, raising it to its highest possible potential and duration, so that the work is perceived not in its spatiality but in its uninterruptedness. These are the conditions of ‘poetic language,’ which, according to Aristotle, must have the character of something outlandish and amazing” (*On the Theory of Prose* 23). The use of *ostranenie* in Murakami's longest novel accomplishes that very task. This how the replacement of the number 9 with the letter Q in *1Q84* sets the stage for a reading experience that plays with expectations.

The title of Murakami’s novel, which purposely reminds us of Orwell's infamous dystopia, *1984*, a novel that has become a part of the cultural consciousness as a warning against oppressive governments and mass surveillance, serves as the inspiration and the initial conditions for Murakami’s defamiliarized take on a dystopian society. *1984* is a novel that has set the standard for the dystopian genre. Aware of this fact, Murakami uses the familiarity and expectations of form associated with an Orwellian dystopia and he imminently disrupts it by replacing the number 9 with the letter Q in the title, creating a feeling of *peripeteia* within the reader that forces them to reconsider their preconceived notions of the dystopian novel. The fact that the number 9 and the letter Q sound the same when read in the Japanese language immediately produces a cognitive dissonance that disorients the reader and makes them question their assumptions about dystopian literature. The Q in *1Q84* is *ostranenie* because Murakami

uses it to leverage the familiarity with Orwell's dystopia to grab perception and to create deeper engagement with his work, while simultaneously subverting the expectations of his readers.

The Professor stared at his hands for a time, then looked up and said, “George Orwell introduced the dictator Big Brother in his novel 1984, as I’m sure you know. The book was an allegorical treatment of Stalinism, of course. And ever since then, the term ‘Big Brother’ has functioned as a social icon. That was Orwell’s great accomplishment. But now, in the real year 1984, Big Brother is all too famous, and all too obvious. If Big Brother were to appear before us now, we’d point to him and say, ‘Watch out! He’s Big Brother!’ There’s no longer any place for a Big Brother in this real world of ours. Instead, these so-called Little People have come on the scene. Interesting verbal contrast, don’t you think?” (*IQ84* 295-296)

The above passage reinforces *IQ84*’s connections to Orwell, and gives Murakami’s fictional reality a metafictional layer of realism. Orwell’s fictional novel existing in the illusionary reality being represented in *IQ84* helps to further blur the lines between fiction and reality, making the reader question the fictionality of the novel. Memetic references like this one are a staple of Murakami’s fiction, which is littered with nods to various elements of pop culture. The letter Q in the title of Murakami’s novel is a clear use of ostranenie because it enforces an association to Orwell’s novel through its disruption of the very association it is enforcing on the reader. This use of ostranenie magnifies perception by challenging the reader to look and engage with the text on a deeper level as they attempt to find the similarities and differences between Orwell’s *1984* and Murakami’s *IQ84*, simulating the experience that Aomame and Tengo find

themselves in as they look for ways to distinguish between their original reality of 1984, and the one with two moons, 1Q84.

Aomame stepped out onto her balcony again the next night to find that there were still two moons in the sky. The big one was the normal moon. It wore a mysterious white coating, as if it had just burrowed its way there through a mountain of ash, but aside from that it was the same old moon she was used to seeing, the moon that Neil Armstrong marked with a first small step but giant leap in that hot summer of 1969. Hanging next to it was a small, green, lopsided moon, nestled shyly by the big moon like an inferior child. (1Q84 264)

The letter Q in *1Q84* serves that very purpose of making the new intangible reality with two moons that its characters find themselves in tangible through variable representation. This makes it easier for the characters in the novel to grasp the impossibility of their reality by stabilizing the image of the two moons in their minds with a concrete symbol. The letter Q then becomes a symbol for the strange and mysterious things that the characters in *1Q84* encounter, but must keep to themselves out of fear that disclosing their thoughts and ideas about reality will make them seem crazy to the people around them who cannot see the truth.

### **Part 3: Memory ≠ Reality**

The driver chose his words carefully: “It’s just that you’re about to do something *out of the ordinary*. Am I right? People do not ordinarily climb down the emergency stairs of the Metropolitan Expressway in the middle of the day—especially women.”

“I suppose you’re right.”

“Right. And after you *do* something like that, the everyday look of things might seem to change a little. Things may look *different* to you than they did before. I’ve had that experience myself. But don’t let appearances fool you. There’s always only one reality.”

(Murakami 11)

In the opening chapter of *1Q84*, Aomame, a fitness instructor and assassin, dismisses the warning from her cab driver about the consequences that a disruption to the ordinary can have on one’s perception of reality. Aomame seemingly understands this but gets out of the taxicab in the middle of the Metropolitan Expressway traffic and climbs down the emergency stairs transports, creating a butterfly effect that transports her out of her known reality of 1984 and into the strange reality of 1Q84. In the reality of 1Q84, ostranenie is everywhere, beckoning Aomame to explore the depths of her own perception and question her own memory.

Aomame frowned slightly. *Am I going crazy? I just saw a policeman wearing the old-style uniform and carrying an old revolver this morning. I’m sure I never heard a thing about them getting rid of every single revolver, but I also can’t believe that these two middle-aged men are wrong or lying to me. Which means I must be mistaken.*

“Thanks very much. I’ve heard all I need to about that,” she said to the bartender, who gave her a professional smile like a well-timed punctuation mark and went back to work.

“Do you have some special interest in policemen?” the middle-aged man asked her. “No, not really,” Aomame answered, adding vaguely, “It’s just that my memory has gotten a little foggy.” (*1Q84* 74)



At first, the differences around her are subtle enough to make Aomame doubt her memory and knowledge of historical and current events as she notices the subtle changes in the new reality she finds herself in. This feeling of doubting her own memory and facts of history, are clearly meant to replicate the themes found in *1984*, where Big Brother changes history to control the citizens of Oceania, who are constantly fed contradictory information to keep them obedient, ignorant, and too scared to question the truth. But in Murakami's novel, Aomame isn't scared of questioning the truth because an entity like Big Brother is not watching or policing her thoughts. If that had been the case she would have been arrested for murder long before the start of the novel. In Murakami's dystopia it is easy to go undetected because as long as you don't stand out, everyone is too busy with work, sex, and their dreams of a better life to notice you. Aomame, Tengo, and Ushikawa (the private investigator who tries his hardest to find Aomame in the city of Tokyo but is never able to find her), don't fear thinking, or breaking the law because they know they can get away with it. No one is really watching, except for maybe the crow... This is the dystopia of *1Q84*, a world where a cult leader can get away with brutally violating underage girls for years with no intervention from the government. A world where serial stranglers go unfound, and men can get away with beating and murdering their wives. And if punishment is ever given to the monsters of Murakami's dystopia, it is only given to them by regular citizens like Aomame and the Dowager, who take it upon themselves to seek justice where the authorities have failed.

In *1Q84*, connecting with others to even disclose weird or strange thoughts is almost impossible. Therefore, the characters in the novel have nothing to do but think freely about their views on the world. In fact, none of the point-of-view characters in the novel show any real worry about censoring their thoughts to themselves, so much so that Murakami seems to take joy

in using Aomame and Tengo's inner-most intrusive thoughts as moments of ostranenie that defer from the action of the story while building tension through character development. For example, while Aomame climbs down the emergency stairway, Murakami slows down the action of this scene by giving us a glimpse into Aomame's thoughts, which get disrupted by the memory of the lesbian experience she had with her dead best friend Tamaki Otsuka. Murakami writes:

Climbing down the stairway, Aomame thought about Tamaki Otsuka. She had not been intending to think about Tamaki, but once the thoughts began, she couldn't stop them. Tamaki was her closest friend in high school and a fellow member of the softball team. As teammates, they went to many different places, and did all kinds of things together. They once shared a kind of lesbian experience. The two of them took a summer trip and ended up sleeping together when a small double was the only size bed the hotel could offer. They found themselves touching each other all over. Neither of them was a lesbian, but, spurred on by the special curiosity of two young girls, they experimented boldly. Neither had a boyfriend at the time, and neither had the slightest sexual experience. It was simply one of those things that remain as an "exceptional but interesting" episode in life. But as she brought back the images of herself and Tamaki touching each other that night, Aomame felt some small, deep part of herself growing hot even as she made her way down the windswept stairway. Tamaki's oval-shaped nipples, her sparse pubic hair, the lovely curve of her buttocks, the shape of her clitoris: Aomame recalled them all with strange clarity. (Murakami 36-37)

As Aomame descends the stairway, her thoughts of Tamaki disrupt her focus and bring her intrusive memories to the forefront. This use of ostranenie within the narrative creates a

sense of disorientation within her own mind that also effects the reader getting to know Aomame through the untimeliness of her inner-most thoughts. For Aomame, memories like this one are not just recollections of past events, they are her reality. Her memories are what shape her decisions, guide her emotions, and give her the ability to see the truth in the changed world around her. This is demonstrated through her love of history because the pride she takes in her knowledge of the past is integral to her sense of self. Murakami writes:

Aomame loved history as much as she loved sports. She rarely read fiction, but history books could keep her occupied for hours. What she liked about history was the way all its facts were linked with particular dates and places. She did not find it especially difficult to remember historical dates. Even if she did not learn them by rote memorization, once she grasped the relationship of an event to its time and to the events preceding and following it, the date would come to her automatically. In both middle school and high school, she had always gotten the top grade on history exams. It puzzled her to hear someone say he had trouble learning dates. How could something so simple be a problem for anyone? (*IQ84* 4)

The world of *IQ84* challenges Aomame's view of the past as tangible and real as her knowledge of history proves itself to be falser than the fiction "she rarely reads." The new reality makes Aomame realize that history, like memories, can be unreliable and subjective. And as she starts to understand that the past is not as fixed and concrete as she once believed because it can be shaped and reshaped by individual perspectives and interpretations, Aomame must confront the ways in which memory shapes her understanding of her past, as well as her present reality.

Aomame's awareness that memories are distortable gives her pause because she becomes aware that memories are authored by the mind and therefore inaccurate in some manner. But Aomame is a character that is driven by her memories. The memory of her best friend Tamaki who was murdered by her abusive husband is what led her to become an assassin of men who harm women. While the memories she has of her soulmate, Tengo, from her childhood gives her hope throughout the entirety of the work that out there somewhere is the one person who can give her the love and connection she is missing due to her lonely and dangerous lifestyle.

David Shields, quoting Patrick Duff in *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* explains that "In a sense, all memories have been forgotten. Memories are predicated on loss. It's through the act of remembering that we bring these forgotten experiences back from oblivion. They require this rescuing because they've run their course. These experiences are complete and have been relegated to our memories. In other words, to remember is to recall what we've forgotten, but it's not as if our memories have been rubbed away by years of wind and rain like names and dates on a gravestone; instead, our memories are filled with gaps and distortions, because by its very nature memory is selective...The images we store in our memories are not exact replicas of what we experienced; they're what our minds turn them into. They are what we need to re-create the story, which is the full experience the image represents" (59). Shields's book, which defamiliarizes its structure through the use of literal montage, a collage style of writing that uses quotes from other authors in a fragmentary form throughout, deconstructs the notion of singular truth. Quoting Jonathan Raban, Shields explains that "The line between fact and fiction is fuzzier than most people find it convenient to admit. There is the commonsensical assertion that while the novelist is engaged on a work of the creative imagination, the duty of the journalist is to tell what really happened, as it happened. That distinction is easy to voice but hard to sustain in

logic. For imagination and memory are Siamese twins, and you cannot cut them so cleanly apart. There's a good case for arguing that any narrative account is a form of fiction. The moment you start to arrange the world in words, you alter its nature. The words themselves begin to suggest patterns and connections that seemed at the time to be absent from the events the words describe...That is fiction-making" (65).

The world of 1Q84 makes Aomame aware that memories and history are distortions of reality that cannot be fully trusted because like fiction, events recalled in memory can be interpreted and remembered in different ways by different people. This is because all forms of storytelling involve a level of fiction-making, or rather a level of distortion from reality that is always inaccurate in some manner. But unlike Aomame, who learns this while navigating the reality of 1Q84, Tengo is already aware about the unreliability of memory because as a wannabe author he understands that the act of remembering is a creative process that requires the distorting and rearrangement of reality from the single perspective of the individual doing the act of remembering. But for Tengo, this knowledge is a handicap that effects the way he lives his life. This is evident from the moment Murakami introduces him into the story.

Tengo's first memory dated from the time he was one and a half. His mother had taken off her blouse and dropped the shoulder straps of her white slip to let a man who was not his father suck on her breasts. The infant in the crib nearby was probably Tengo himself. He was observing the scene as a third person. Or could the infant have been his twin? No, not likely. It was one-and-a-half-year-old Tengo. He knew this intuitively. The infant was asleep, its eyes closed, its little breaths deep and regular. The vivid ten-second scene was seared into the wall of his consciousness, his earliest memory in life. Nothing came

before or after it. It stood out alone, like the steeple of a town visited by a flood, thrusting up above the muddy water. (*1Q84* 16)

Tengo's introductory chapter opens with this crippling memory of his most intrusive thought—a strange unreliable memory from when he was a baby, that cannot be verified as fact or fiction. This memory from his infancy haunts him, leaving him feeling unsure of his own reality and past.

This creates chaos inside Tengo and this chaos manifests itself repeatedly in his mind, causing him turmoil and confusion regardless of its impossibility because the effect of this memory has actual physical consequences on Tengo that can be seen and tracked when the image of the event appears in his mind. Murakami writes:

This vivid ten-second image would come to him without warning and without consideration of either time or place. He could be riding on the subway or writing formulas on the blackboard or having a meal or (as now) sitting and talking to someone across a table, and it would envelop him like a soundless tsunami. By the time he noticed, it would be directly in front of him, and his arms and legs would be paralyzed. The flow of time stopped. The air grew thin, and he had trouble breathing. He lost all connection with the people and things around him. The tsunami's liquid wall swallowed him whole. And though it felt to him as if the world were being closed off in darkness, he experienced no loss of awareness. It was just a sense of having been switched to a new track. Parts of his mind were, if anything, sharpened by the change. He felt no terror, but he could not keep his eyes open. His eyelids were clamped shut. Sounds grew distant, and the familiar image was projected onto the screen of his consciousness again and again.

Sweat gushed from every part of his body and the armpits of his undershirt grew damp. He trembled all over, and his heartbeat grew faster and louder. (*IQ84* 17)

When this memory from his childhood resurfaces from his subconscious, its lack of verifiability no longer matters because its effect on Tengo's life is real enough to send him into a shock-like state of confusion. The intrusive memory of his mother's breast in another man's mouth disrupts Tengo's perception of reality whenever the image appears in his mind. This image burdens him because the unreliability of this memory makes him unable to integrate his past experiences into his present reality due to the insecurity he feels about his memory's truthfulness.

Surely a one-and-a-half-year-old infant was unable to grasp what it meant for a man who was not his father to be sucking his mother's breasts. That much was clear. So if this memory of Tengo's was genuine, the scene must have been seared into his retinas as a pure image free of judgment—the way a camera records objects on film, mechanically, as a blend of light and shadow. And as his consciousness matured, the fixed image held in reserve would have been analyzed bit by bit, and meaning applied to it. But is such a thing even possible? Was the infant brain capable of preserving images like that? (*IQ84* 16-17)

For Tengo, this image ingrained in his consciousness estranges him from his own past because it makes him doubt the validity of his memories, even though the effect the memory of his mother has on him is very real when it appears periodically in his mind.

#### Part 4: Chaos is 4 Creation

I have already covered one of the main definitions of chaos, which allows us to track ostranenie when it appears through the disruption of norms or sensitive conditions. I have also highlighted some ways in which Murakami uses it in his novel, *1Q84*, to create intrigue for his readers, and as a tool of narrative development for his characters, whose out of the ordinary actions and thoughts propel the story forward and take it in unexpected directions. But I want to highlight the second popular definition of chaos that applies to ostranenie when it is used as motif throughout a work.

In *Chaos Theory: Origins, Applications, and Limitations*, Anthony Reed explains that there are “two relevant chaos definitions: one of them is the notion that chaos is associated with the appearance of periodic orbits of all periods” (3). In literature, this definition of chaos can be applied to the ways an author like Murakami uses ostranenie repeatedly as motif to weave the story together while creating a feeling of unpredictability and instability throughout the work. When used in this way, ostranenie becomes a tool of connection that bridges the gap between seemingly disparate elements in the story, creating a sense of cohesiveness and control within the chaos of creation.

In *Chaos and Control: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Unfolding Creative Minds*, Desy Safan-Gerard explains that “the move from chaos to control that underlies the creation of art is not limited to the artistic form...Chaos and control comprise the essence of creativity... The artist needs to work through the elicited chaos in the work so that he can eventually achieve a measure of control. This is the aim of artistic creation” (7). Artists need to control chaos because



it is through its control and release that artistic creation is achieved. I believe that all artists wield chaos in their souls even if they are unaware of their wielding of it. This is why artistic work is driven by the want of the artist to disrupt through creation. The need of the artist for their work to be perceived is the genesis of ostranenie because art, like magic, is a manifestation of chaos in a form that can be perceived by others who are free to misunderstand it.

“It’s because the Little People came,” she said softly. Tengo looked at her seated beside the Professor. As always, her face lacked anything that might be called an expression.

“Are you saying that something changed in Sakigake because the Little People came?”

Tengo asked her.

She said nothing in reply. Her fingers toyed with the top button of her blouse.

Professor Ebisuno then spoke as if taking up where Eri’s silence left off. “I don’t know what the Little People are supposed to mean, and Eri either can’t or won’t explain in words what the Little People are. It does seem certain, however, that the Little People played some role in the sudden drastic change of Sakigake from an agricultural commune to a religious organization.”

“Or something Little People-ish did,” Tengo said. (*IQ84* 295)

*IQ84* is a novel full of questions: Why are there two moons in the sky? Who is the leader of the Sakigake cult violating young girls? What are the magical little people? Where do they come from? What is an Air Chrysalis? Is the crow watching? Who is the collector knocking on doors? Is the collector the guy strangling women? These questions build on top of one another as they spiral endlessly around the fated lovers Aomame and Tango, bringing chaos into to their otherwise mundane lives. Aomame notices the chaos around her through the small differences

she sees in the world with two moons she finds herself in, while Tengo only starts to see the truth after rewriting “Air Chrysalis.”

“Air Chrysalis” introduces the concept of the little people to Tengo, who at first believes them to be a creation from Fuka-Eri’s imagination, but as he learns that the line between reality and fiction is nonexistent, he begins to see the creatures as real regardless of his lack of understanding of them or their purpose. The introduction of the Little People in “Air Chrysalis” serves as another instance of ostranenie in the novel, because their appearance disrupts the status quo and structure of the Sakigake cult before Fuka-Eri was able to escape their control. The Little People are described as tiny, yet powerful beings whose presence brought chaos to the Sakigake, turning their once peaceful community into a place of fear, madness, and oppression.

“I wonder, ultimately, whether it is possible for us to lure something out when we can’t even tell whether it has substance or not,” the Professor said, the smile still playing about his lips. “The ‘big tiger’ you mentioned could be more realistic, don’t you think?”

“Either way, that doesn’t change the fact that Eri is being used for bait.” “No, ‘bait’ is not the right word. She is creating a whirlpool: that is a closer image. Eventually, those at the edge of the whirlpool will start spinning along with it. That is what I am waiting to see.”

The Professor slowly twirled his finger in space. Then he continued, “The one in the center of the whirlpool is Eri. There is no need for the one in the center of a whirlpool to move. That is what those around the edge must do.” (*IQ84* 296).

It is only after Tengo, who is a writer and mathematics teacher, agrees to ghost write the mysterious novel “Air Chrysalis” for Fuka-Eri, and enter the novel into a prestigious literary prize that he starts to understand that the line between reality and fiction, as well as memory and

imagination is nonexistent. As a lover of math, Tengo is used to dealing in absolutes and concrete truths, but the world of “Air Chrysalis” challenges his perception of these truths, granting him access to the energy of delusion, which is needed in order to bring a work of the imagination to life.

Mathematics gave Tengo an effective means of retreat. By fleeing into a world of numerical expression, he was able to escape from the troublesome cage of reality... Where mathematics was a magnificent imaginary building, the world of story as represented by Dickens was like a deep, magical forest for Tengo. When mathematics stretched infinitely upward toward the heavens, the forest spread out beneath his gaze in silence, its dark, sturdy roots stretching deep into the earth. In the forest there were no maps, no numbered doorways. (*IQ84* 221-222)

Despite the uncertainty and chaos she brings into his life, Tengo cannot resist the pull of Fuka-Eri, and he is ultimately forced to give himself up to her, becoming a conduit for her to work through. It is Fuka-Eri’s chaotic nature that activates for Tengo the energy of delusion, which inspires him to finally write his own novel, unlocking the imagination within him that was only accessible to him after he let go of his ideas of a concrete, tangible reality. Murakami writes:

The concentrated work of rewriting *Air Chrysalis* might have dislodged a rock that had been blocking his wellspring until now. Tengo had no idea why that should be so, but he had a definite sense that a heavy lid had finally come off. He felt as though his body had become lighter, that he had emerged from a cramped space and could now stretch his

arms and legs freely. Air Chrysalis had probably stimulated something that had been deep inside him all along. (*IQ84* 248-249)

In *The Energy of Delusion*, Shklovsky explains that the energy of delusion is “the uncontrolled powers of nature, which erupt in various and unpredictable ways, creating the chaos that we call this world” (36). The energy of delusion, which Tolstoy also wrote about as quoted by Shklovsky in his book, is the “earthly, spontaneous energy that's impossible to invent. And it's impossible to begin without” when attempting make a creative work (36). This energy is what fuels the creative spirit and allows artists to tap into the infinite possibilities of the human imagination that, like a battery, powers ostranenie.

It is by imagining that an artist can create because the imaginary is a distortion of reality and, therefore, artistic. But having imagination alone doesn't make one an artist because art requires the revolutionary joy of creation. It is the artist who is brave enough to change the recipe when they tire of the instructions that is moved by the muse to create. And like a muse, Fuka-Eri inspires Tengo to explore the depths of his own psyche, unearthing his hidden desire for love through the writing of his own novel. This act of creation amplifies his childhood memories of Aomame in his mind, memories that he learns to accept as real and valid, even though they may have been distorted over time, and gives him hope that one day after the chaos settles they will find each other.

A deep sense of powerlessness came over Tengo. Even though something was about to happen, he had no idea what that something might be, and had no way of controlling it through his own will. His body felt nothing. He could not move. But his penis had feeling—or, rather than feeling, it had what might have been closer to a concept. In any

case, it was telling him that he was inside Fuka-Eri and that he had the consummate erection. Shouldn't he be wearing a condom? He began to worry. It could be a real problem if she got pregnant. His older girlfriend was extremely strict about birth control, and she had trained Tengo to be just as strict.

He tried as hard as he could to think of other things, but in fact he was unable to think about anything at all. He was in chaos. Inside that chaos, time seemed to have come to a stop. But time never stopped. That was a theoretical impossibility. Perhaps it had simply lost its uniformity. Taking the long view, time moved ahead at a fixed pace. There could be no mistake about that. But if you considered any one particular part of time, it could cease to be uniform. In these momentary periods of slackness, such things as order and probability lost all value. (*IQ84* 599)

Fuka-Eri is for Tengo a manifestation of chaos that he can perceive. She is the whirlpool pulling him in and changing his view of the world. Her presence disrupts Tengo's carefully constructed reality, made tangible through his love of numbers and the rules of math which can be proved and understood. To Tengo, Fuka-Eri represents a force that seems intangible, and her strangeness is something that he cannot fully comprehend, no matter how hard he tries to get to know her. Yet he is inexplicably drawn to her, becoming both a source of fascination and fear for him as he grapples with the unsettling truths that make up her reality and that put him in dangerous and dubious situations through no real fault of his own because around her, he is nothing but a mere conduit for the chaos that seems to follow her.

In "Reflexive Realism and Kinetic Ethics: The Case of Murakami Haruki's *IQ84*," Christopher Weinberger writes, "Murakami imbues his overtly metafictional novels with a

counter-intuitive emphasis on literalness, producing a tension between the self-conscious fictitiousness of his worlds and the dubiety of things and beings whose presence they make manifest. His novel others (as seen from protagonists' points of view) often exist simultaneously as real physical presences and as mere fictions; they come into being as characters through the palpable ethical pressures that their presences put on protagonists and readers, regardless of the ontological status of those presences. Despite their designations as fictions, "others" in Murakami not only set real events and bodies in motion but also come to matter as ends in themselves to protagonists, a situation highlighted in *1Q84* through the shuttling back and forth between the perspectives of protagonists who seek each other across ontological and diegetic gulfs" (114).

The use of ostranenie in depicting the love story between Aomame and Tengo allows Murakami to subvert traditional tropes of romance and sci-fi by complicating them with reality-breaking metalepsis that makes the lovers realize the fictionality of their circumstances. By constantly reminding the reader that they are engaged in a constructed narrative, Murakami creates a sense of distance that allows for deeper reflection on the themes and motifs present in his work.

Throughout *1Q84*, Murakami utilizes ostranenie to create a sense of surrealism in the narrative that is just as disorienting to the reader as it is for the characters in the novel who start to become aware of the metaleptic ruptures in their reality as the story unfolds and they notice that the boundaries between reality, fiction, and memory are constantly in flux. In this way, Murakami pays homage to Orwell's classic novel while simultaneously subverting its conventions, while creating a unique and thought-provoking narrative that resonates with readers long after they have finished the book. *1Q84* serves as a prime example of how ostranenie can be

utilized within a narrative structure to create a sense of chaos and uncertainty that engages an audience for prolonged periods. However, to defamiliarize one needs to imagine impossibility. The energy of delusion is what drives artists to create things that break free from the constraints and limitations of societal structures and ideals.

It is my opinion that every act of the creative imagination come to life is magic. But not all manifestations of the creative imagination contain the power of *ostranenie*, which should always be powerful enough to attract the eyes of many or should have the aim to attract eyes to it. Like chaos, *ostranenie* is a double pendulum that swings between order and disorder, creating tension and energy that captivates the viewer's attention. How *ostranenie* appears is impossible to predict, but when it does, its usage is perceivable within the confines that determine its visibility. *Ostranenie*, when used correctly, is a penetrative force that leaves an imprint on the mind and wakes up the senses when it appears in a piece of literature or artwork. And by tracking some of its uses in *IQ84*, I hope to have shown how and why *ostranenie* is a useful tool for the individual creative to use in their work if their desire is to create something uniquely original and engaging, by disrupting the sensitive conditions that allow the device to manifest.

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