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'Elusive Bodies': Liminal Urban Spaces in Works of Haruki Murakami and Irina Denezhkina

This paper will take the characters' movements through the urban spaces of Tokyo respectively Petersburg as starting points of an analysis focused on narrative technique in portraying the borderlands and characters' movements between them, with a particular view to the interconnectedness of mobility and identity.

The very first lines of *After Dark* imagine the city as a living organism, seen from a bird's – eye view: "Eyes mark the shape of the city. Through the eyes of a high – flying night bird, we take in the scene from midair. In our broad sweep, the city looks like a single gigantic creature – or more like a single collective entity created by many intertwining organisms" (3). The image of the city as a living organism, made up of different parts that are together yet distinct from each other, making up its "elusive body" (3), encapsulates the complexity and contradictions that characterise the urban space and the borders intrinsic to it. In a narrative style imitating the filmic technique of the zoom, the text then focuses on the "amusement district" (3f.) to reach a Denny's, where two of the principal characters first meet in the middle of the night. Encompassing a single night from midnight until 7 am, the time turns even seemingly central places into quasi – liminal spaces that are different to their daytime existence, emphasising the focus of the novel on the interrelatedness of space and time. The importance of time is emphasised by each chapter bearing the time as a quasi – title.

The liminal spaces present in this text include a "love ho" by the name of 'Alphaville', in which an IT executive violently beats up a Chinese prostitute, as well as a public park and, finally, the suburb. My paper will investigate how the narrative portrayal and function of the urban liminal spaces in Murakami's earlier work *Dance, Dance, Dance*, which also prominently features a hotel as a classic urban liminal space in old and modern incarnations, differ from those in *After Dark*, and moreover draw on the liminal spaces in Irina Denezhkina's *Give Me (Songs for Lovers)* (2002), which describes the erotic and other pursuits of a group of teenagers in Petersburg.

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