THINKING POST OEDIPAL
FROM RINGU TO ‘MIFUNE’ TO MURAKAMI HARUKI’S FETISH
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Nakata Hideo’s Ringu (1998) has established itself as a veritable global horror classic. How can horror achieve global receptivity? I propose to approach the nexus of global culture and horror by a less trodden path: the post-Oedipal family. The single mother at the diegetic center of Ringu most forcefully brought to the foreground this representational premise, which soon became a global cinematic preoccupation. Around the same time, in another part of the globe, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen’s comedy Mifune (1999) was released to critical acclaim and remains one of the best known Danish films. The title refers to the iconic Japanese actor Mifune Toshiro in his samurai role as impersonated by a yuppy older brother to his mentally handicapped younger brother’s infinite delight. Their relationship plays out against the background of the death of their father on their dilapidated family farm—which had still earlier been the site of their mother’s suicide. At first glance, Ringu and Mifune seem connected by nothing but a multicultural kitsch. Yet, with the post-Oedipal premise, it becomes possible, even necessary, to consider them as belonging to a common thematic paradigm, not merely in terms of the demise of the family but, emphatically, the structure by which they allow thinking, imagining, and redeeming of the contemporary family. In order to elucidate “Mifune” as exemplary of the knots (of values, complications, and antagonisms) binding the global post-Oedipal contemporaneity, I turn to Murakami Haruki for the overall logic of his fiction, which reached global prominence during the same period. This logic, premised as it is on a fetishism of the penis (clearly distinguished from its symbolic counterpart, the phallus), presents a striking plea for the sexual subject in (and against) the era of the post-Oedipal family.

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