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The Walled Town as Simulation: Mapping Power and Control in *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*

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Abstract: *Murakami's preoccupation with dreamscapes in The City and Its Uncertain Walls shapes a hyperreal world where the distinction between the real and the unreal collapses. The walled town born out of the collective imagination of the protagonist and his high school sweetheart, functions as an artificial construct that has no referent. This paper examines the novel through the theoretical framework of Jean Baudrillard, particularly his work Simulacra and Simulation. The self-contained town is maintained by artificial mechanisms of surveillance, fear and paranoia, sacrifice, and dream reading. This paper also engages with Foucault's perspective on power, space, and control. The substitutes for food, labor, and knowledge illustrate the town's hyperreal status where the world is replaced by its models and copies. Further, the characters' confusion between their real and shadow selves underscores the tension between truth and illusion. Murakami's refusal to resolve such ambiguity highlights the postmodern destabilization of reality. The endlessly shifting walls of the town, having gained sentience of their own complicate attempts to map the town. The fluid reality of the town parallels Baudrillard's idea that representation precedes reality. The mechanical regularity with which the town operates such as the strict opening and closing of the gate, the scenery resembling stage sets, and the presence of unicorns, mirrors the model of Disney-like theme park. The novel ultimately exposes the instability of truth in a regulated system where the distinction between the authentic and the fabricated becomes almost impossible to discern.*

Keywords: *Baudrillard, Foucault, Hyperreality, Murakami, Simulacrum, Simulation,*

Introduction

Murakami's novel *The City and Its Uncertain Walls* anchors itself on the blurring lines between reality and imagination. It is through the representation of the walled town and the characters' confusion about their real and shadow selves that this premise is established. The protagonist remarks, "this was nothing but an imaginary town you and I had dreamed up over the course of a summer" (87). However, the town feels real to him and to a teenage boy named M, who is about sixteen or seventeen years old and referred to as the Yellow Submarine boy. Although their motivation differs, but they both willingly enter the town. The narrative establishes the autonomous nature of the town. After a certain point, the imagined town became detached to its originator and acquired a will of its own. The protagonist loses control over something he himself invented. It renders the imaginary town as a postmodern landscape that dwells on the blurring realities between truth and imagination. Murakami's postmodern aesthetics thrive on the interplay between dream and reality. Throughout the narrative, the protagonist questions the truth of his dream states and reality, unable to establish which is real and which is imagined or dreamt. The girl who imagined the town along with the protagonist, meticulously records her dreams that feel quite real to her. The protagonist remarks, "For you, dreams were almost on the same level as events in the real world…" (22). The ontological instability of the novel echoes McHale's notion about postmodernist fictions. Such fictions foreground strategies that explore the problems of worlds in collision and the effects of collapsing boundaries between them (McHale 10). In the text, the world of dreams and reality bleed into each other, without one superseding the other. The characters take their dreams seriously and even take decisions based on their unconscious dwellings. After quitting his job, the protagonist experiences a dull life for about two months, until he dreams about an ordinary library

far from Tokyo, possibly in a mountain valley. He perceives the dream as some sort of an indication and concludes that he needs a new working place. Also, the work place had to be a library, as he had seen him working in one in his dream. Driven by this powerful vision, he not only searches for such a kind of library but also volunteers to work for it. The library is located in a town which is surrounded by mountains and a river ran around it. The geographical setting and landscape of the town mirrored what the protagonist had dreamt. Even the specific details of the dream manifest as tangible realities in the supposed real world. During his interview with Mr. Koyasu, the protagonist notices a beret on the desk which is exactly similar to the one he saw in his dream. Later, he finds a woodstove in the subterranean room of the library which resembles the one he saw in the library of the walled town. Also, he notices that his wristwatch had no hands just like the clocktower in the walled town. The striking similarities between the protagonist's dream world, the Z** and walled town, destabilize his notion of reality. It leaves him disoriented, "I had a sense of a twist warping, ever so slightly, space and time. The feeling of two things mixing together, as if a part of a boundary had collapsed, become vague, with something else mixed in, here, and there, with reality" (189). Postmodern fictions often depict contradictory and fluid spaces which defies conventional logic and systems of order (McHale 44). The interconnected worlds of the text, therefore, blur the line between imagination and reality, without privileging one over the other. The ontological pluralism where Murakami presents alternate worlds and realities within the same narrative space is a key feature of his postmodern fictions (Murakami 137). The protagonist often feels drawn to the walled town and recalls what he experienced there. While working in the subterranean room of the Z** library, he questions why he was here and not in the walled town. For him, the experiences he had in the walled town felt more authentic than his present reality. Although he had consciously decided to stay back in the town, he had somehow retuned back to Tokyo. He wonders if he actually did go to that town or it was just a long dream he experienced. He acknowledged the existence of parallel realities comparing it to the dividing currents of a river:

> The flow of the river became an elaborate maze, and, just as it traveled deep underground, our reality, too, seemed to proceed inside us, branching out down several paths. Different versions of reality mixed together, different choices became intertwined, out of which a composite reality–or, what we come to understand as reality–took shape. (131)

Murakami never resolves the ambiguity of which of these parallel realities is authentic, keeping the narrative multivalent, fragmented and irresolvable. For Murakami, no single narrative can totalize the experience of absolute reality. His fictions exemplify a way of thinking about reality itself– a metaphysics in itself (Chin 33). Although the parallel realities and narratives do not merge or resolve, they affect each other. The experiences of the walled town alter the protagonist's perception about the supposed "real" world. After returning from the town, he feels detached from this world and finds no interest in things he enjoyed here before. He finds the everyday scenes of the ordinary life like people walking dogs and children going to school as artificial and staged. However, the memory of the town feels vividly real to him. He clearly remembers the river, the unicorns, the clock without hands, and the Gatekeeper's hatchet. It suggests how the experiences of the walled town have altered and destabilized his perception of the real. In a way, the town lives and breathes through the memory of the protagonist, irrespective of the confusion that which of these worlds are more authentic. While contemplating M's map of the walled town, the narrator reflects on the Z** library room's disorienting nature, "A closer look showed that the whole room was wriggling, wet and slimy like the inner walls of an internal organ" (388).

Murakami's universe of alternate realities highlights the interplay between the conscious and the unconscious and/or the physical and the metaphysical (Strecher 37). In the text, not only the protagonist grapples with the physical reality of his world(s) but also his own existence. He enters a river, "on the other side of the wall. Or maybe on this side" (400). There, he is physically transformed and becomes younger which blurs his notion about the reliability of his true self. Also, when he is in the supposed real world, he often wonders if it is his shadow self that has entered this reality. In the afterword, Murakami himself remarked that the work integrated disparate realities within its narrative. He concludes, "Truth is not found in fixed stillness, but in ceaseless change and movement" (449). The

metafictional comment underscores the novel's thematic exploration of fluid boundaries and shifting nature of reality. Further, it situates the novel within the ontological status of postmodern fiction, which questions the nature of reality itself.

Literature Review

Murakami's *The City and Its Uncertain Walls* (2024) shares thematic and structural similarities with his earlier novel, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. The 1985 novel features the same walled-in town and a dual narrative structure. Murakami himself has acknowledged that *Hard-Boiled* was written as a response to his 1980 novella, titled the same as his 2024 novel. He openly recognized his dissatisfaction with the novella, "As the years passed by, though, and as I gained more experience as a writer and grew older, I couldn't help but think that I hadn't seen this unfinished, or perhaps immature work, *The City, and Its Uncertain Walls*, through to its conclusion" (448). In both the novels, the walled town can be perceived as an artificial construct. In the *Hard-Boiled*, Murakami's approach is more scientific in contrast to his 2024 novel where imagination takes over. In both the novels, the protagonist enters the town sacrificing his shadow which has symbolic consequences. Mathew Strecher has discussed the artificiality of the town in his article *Magical Realism and the Search for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*. The town is perceived not just as a physical reality, but a dreamlike mental space simulated out of the protagonist's own consciousness. The severance of the shadow is considered a symbolic act that reinforces the imprisonment of the protagonist. The shadow represents the protagonist's memory, past experiences, selfhood, and thus his inner landscape (Strecher 280). The protagonist chooses to stay back in the town, although he could have escaped it. A simulacrum is designed to manipulate perceptions and alter the sense of reality leading to overconsumption. The protagonist of *Hard Boiled*, Boku hates his job and feels what he is writing is useless. Yet, people consume it as information. His words create images in the reader's mind that don't match with reality. In Baudrillard's sense, information is detached both from truth and utility. Murakami's novel therefore encapsulates the themes of artificiality and the struggle to choose authenticity. In the 2024 novel, Murakami reconfigures the thematic exploration of simulation and artificiality. The protagonist questions the authenticity of the real world and even contemplates the reality of his own self. He describes the real world, "like scenery neatly put together to fit the situation, a clever flat scene made to look three-dimensional" (134). It hints at the depthlessness of the real world, preoccupied with outward forms. The postmodern status of Japan is reflected here that was already present in its aesthetics and cultural practices. In the early Japanese culture, it represented a part of the whole essence of a thing. This echoes Clammer's argument about how Japanese society was preoccupied by what Baudrillard called simulation. Japan's cultural orientation towards surface, packaging and signification made it postmodern long before capitalism (Clammer 21). However, Clammer claims that Japanese culture remains committed to preserving their core values and authenticity. His argument against interpreting Japan as purely Baudrillard is criticised and contested. Seats, in his work *Murakami Haruki: The Simulacrum in Contemporary Japanese Culture* contends that Murakami's fictions dissolve the distinction between real and the symbolic, producing a simulacrum that already reflected all forms of representation in the post-industrial world of Japan. He also argued that Clammer failed to recognize the intensified operation of the simulacrum in the hyper real world (82). The blurring realities of wandering shadow and split selves in the narrative align with the intensified presence of second-order representation. The imaginary landscape of the walled town that later generates a will of its own suggest the changing core of the very fabric of reality. Characters in the novel struggle to situate reality because of the loss of the referent and disappearance of history. Murakami underscores the all-encompassing simulacral world of the text to critique the contemporary society of Japan. Chiyoko Kawakami in his article *The Unfinished Cartography: Murakami Haruki and the Postmodern Cognitive Map* explored the fragmented, unstable and shifting realities of postmodern Japan in Murakami's work. The idea resonates with the mapped structures of the walled town in *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*. Both the protagonist and M attempt to map the outline of the walled town. During his stay in the town, the protagonist struggled to draw it accurately. He acknowledged the challenge, "No one around me grasped the accurate shape–or even an approximate one. Not you, nor the Gatekeeper, nor the old folk in my

neighborhood had reliable knowledge of what shape the town was, and they didn't seem to care to know" (50). Later, M draws a surprisingly accurate map of the town based on fragmented, contextless information he overheard through the protagonist's words at Mr. Koyasu's grave. After making some minor corrections to M's map, the protagonist even questions these changes and his own memory of the place. Nevertheless, those changes are incorporated in the revised edition of the map that M gave him. The shifting nature of the town is further emphasized as the narrative presents the walls of the town as unstable and ever-changing. In Murakami's fictions, the individual is caught up in spaces (institutions, signs and simulations) that resist comprehension (Kawakami 312). His protagonists oscillate between reality and imagination. They often wander or descend to places that have no original. The town exists in the memory of both the protagonist and M that actually has no origin. The mysterious town at the end of the world [in *Hard-Boiled and the End of the World]* represents a "simulacrum", shaped by fabricated images lodged in Watashi's subconscious mind (Kawakami 327). Steiner describes the end of the world (town) as a virtual reality that is essentially constructed from simulacra (39). Although, Murakami presents the concept of simulation in *The City and Its Uncertain Walls* more through surreal imagery, he extended and developed the postmodern thematic and structural frameworks of his previous work. His novels dramatize the tension between blurred realities and identities, confronting the pressures of contemporary society which has become overwhelmed with excess information and significations.

Theoretical Framework

Baudrillard and the Postmodern Condition

Murakami represents the walled town as a conceptual model generated without an origin or reality. Based on an abstract archetype rather than an organic reality, it embodies Baudrillard's concept of Simulacra and Simulation. The characters' inability to distinguish the reality between the walled town and their present worlds reflects Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality. He describes it as a condition in which, "the real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control– and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these" (2). The protagonist continually reconfigures and expands the image of the town through his memory and notations. Even after leaving the town, he relives it in vivid detail, thinking of the poor unicorns, the herbs, the Gatekeeper's horn, the river and the sweet apple dish. M constructs a precise map of the town through fragments of information he grasped from the protagonist's words at Mr. Koyasu's grave. For M, the map became the reality of a town he actually never visited. It represents Baudrillard's concept of the "precession of simulacra" where the map or the model precedes the actual location. Further, in the walled town there are numerous dreams stacked on shelves containing people's memories and emotions and yet the dream readers' inability to read them properly renders them useless at one point. The protagonist accepts the struggle in deciphering dreams, stating, "it's so tiring to read even one dream. Maybe I'm doing it wrong" (26). In the world of the hyperreal, the influx of information is constant yet it's meaning remains insignificant. It resonates with what Baudrillard called "implosion of meaning". It's a world, "where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning" (79). The protagonist remains indecisive of leaving the town due to its psychological barriers and the built in security system. By altering the protagonist's eyes, severing his shadow (thoughts and feelings) and creating stories of the dangerous pool, the system neutralizes any possible disruption. The possibility of something real happening in an artificially constructed world is deterred through these measures. Deterrence works by producing signs of reality to prevent the actual event from happening (Baudrillard 7). The dangerous myths surrounding the pool and the psychological barriers are modes of deterrence used to maintain the hyperreality of the walled town. In the novel, the barriers are shifting and hard to pin down (Ni). The walled town is an exemplary case of a hyperreal place that survives on control and regulation. The manufactured reality of the town is sustained throughout the novel. The blurring distinction between the real and the imagined and the complex interplay between them challenges notions of absolute reality. Also, it makes the return into the real world quite challenging since reality itself is questionable. The model has superseded the authentic experience of the world.

Spaces of Discipline and Control

The town consists of incompatible spaces set against each other signifying spatial paradox. In this heterotopic space, the conventions of normal world are inverted. Heterotropia is a unique place that is different from ordinary spaces and it consists of contradictory spaces that co-exist simultaneously (Foucault 6). Although Foucault referred to places like prisons, hospitals, cemeteries, brothels and others, McHale appropriated the term for possible worlds of fiction that challenge traditional ontological boundaries. Besides, the narrative establishes that the town despite being originated through imagination, has a strong physical presence, making the imagined feel real. The protagonist and his shadow interact in an assigned closure. The library in the walled town is devoid of books and needs special qualifications to enter. Also, the conventions of time and reality are disrupted. The distribution of individuals in a particular, assigned space echoes Foucault's concept about disciplinary spatial distributions. The motivation to keep the town enclosed and regulated stems from a never-ending epidemic. It aligns with Foucault's plague model in which confinement, "gave rise to disciplinary projects" (198). In this framework, the division of people is not based on simple exclusion but followed a more complex method of segregation through strict surveillance and control.

Maintaining the Hyperreal: Artificiality, Surveillance, and Control in *The City and Its Uncertain Walls*

The walled town is initially conceived through the shared imagination of the protagonist and his high school sweetheart. The girl claims that her real self resides in a town surrounded by a high wall and the present self with the protagonist is, "only a stand-in. Like a wandering shadow" (4). It exemplifies Baudrillard's notion of simulacra. It is not fake or unreal in the traditional sense rather it is "exchanged for itself" (6). The protagonist and M's discussion about the fluid boundaries between self and shadow clearly illustrate this exchange. The protagonist remains concerned that his shadow has replaced him in the outside world, leaving him as only a shadow. The boy responds that it doesn't matter which is real and which is the shadow as both are equally "him". Through their conversation, Murakami comments on the loss of meaning and authenticity in the world of hyperreal. The narrative suggests that the real doesn't matter anymore since it has been replaced or has merged with the simulated double. The prerequisites of entering the walled town are regulated accordingly. It exemplifies what Baudrillard called "liquidation of all referentials" (2). It means that the real-world references are dissolved or erased. The protagonist has to surrender his shadow, alter his perception (makes changes to his eyes' vision) and agree to an unmistakable contract that he would never leave the town. The enforcement by the high wall restricts the protagonist from leaving the town. Further, the artificiality of the town is repeatedly hinted in the narrative. From its imaginary origin to the shape-shifting walls, food substitutes and absence of shadows, the town asserts its hyperreal status. It also mirrors Foucault's description of disciplinary institutions that achieve regulation not through intensified coercion but calculated and subtle means. The protagonist willfully enters the town after his high school sweetheart disappears from the real world, and she implicitly tells him to find her in the walled town. The pool acts as a psychological enclosure of fear to maximize docility in the people of the town. The fabricated narratives around the pool are constructed to keep people from accessing it which is the only alternative other than the gate to leave the town. The protagonist's shadow asserts, "The town has convinced people that the southern pool is a dangerous place. The reason is that the pool is the only means for the town's residents to go outside the wall" (122). The real event here, which is "escaping the town" is continuously deterred through an artificial control system. The implementation of deterrence in a simulated reality doesn't allow conflicts and counter stories to progress freely (Baudrillard 33). The psychologically simulated fears create doubt and skepticism in the minds of people of the town and keep them attached to this place. The never-ending "epidemic of the soul" (306) can be seen as one such fabricated crisis used to justify control and deterrence. The seeds of this epidemic are considered as the roots of thinking and emotions such as "sadness, confusion, jealousy, fear, distress, despair, doubt, hatred, bewilderment, anguish, skepticism, self-pity…and dreams, and love" (103). In the walled town, these impulses are not only considered useless but harmful. Therefore, the simulated barriers of the town not only affect the body but the soul as well. The protagonist's role as a dream reader is to eliminate the human emotions and impulses. This mirrors the penalty form in modern disciplinary institutions of Foucault that target

the soul of the offenders. In such institutions, reforms are not portrayed as directed through punishment but are reframed as cure and remain concealed (Foucault 10). Therefore, to eliminate the soul, the wall altered the town and its residents, reconfiguring the establishment to create a tightly regulated system. People in the town don't dream or weep suggesting a controlled, emotionless existence. The individuals are made docile reducing them to controllable units. The individuals in the town lack emotions and are subservient yet cater to the working roles they have been assigned to do. The foods and drinks that people of the town consume are described as serving a particular purpose and act as substitutes. The special green herbal tea prepared for the dream reader is disguised as a healing provision. It is supposed to heal the dream reader's wounds while simultaneously making him submit to the town's system. Such discipline and control produce individuals that are both docile and competent (Foucault 138).

The system is maintained through segmentation, constant surveillance, and simulated sacrifice. The high wall acts as a blockade between the two worlds. The "shadow enclosure" between the town and the outside world exemplifies control of individuals in partitioned spaces. Within this enclosure the shadow's movement is restricted and there is strict control over social contact. This careful division of people and segregation of spaces aligns with Foucault's concept about disciplinary systems wherein "each individual has his own [fixed] place" (143). The gatekeeper constantly observed the protagonist and his shadow during their interaction. The wall also acts as a mode of surveillance. The shadow explicitly mentions that the knots in the wall constantly observe his movements and actions. Their watchfulness is constant, "They move around at night to different spots. In the morning they're in different places" (86). This aligns with the concept of "Panopticon" which functions on the rule of constant visibility. The panoptic composition enables a mechanism where individuals are constantly visible (Foucault 200). It is a means of control, making surveillance more effective than direct force. Further, to maintain the illusion of reality in the town, the beasts of the town are made scapegoats. During winters, many beasts die from cold and hunger, and their corpses are dragged and tossed in a hole and burnt. The protagonist's shadow explains that the reason they die so quickly is because they absorb the burden of the town's existence. They are touted as sacrificial beings that pay the price for maintaining the town. The pretension to protect and preserve the town is implemented through simulated sacrifices. The hyperreal, therefore, relies on fabricated stories and reality. The protagonist's shadow states, "…this town is a very technically clever, artificial place. The balance of everything that exists is carefully sustained, with elaborate measures that work to maintain the entire system" (122).

The narrative establishes that the town was created as a model. The protagonist along with the girl, imagined and mapped out the town. The girl described the town's layout and the protagonist recorded the details, shaping them into words and making it more concrete. The protagonist claims, "You were the one who created the town. Or maybe it was there, inside you, already" (8). By mentioning it as a concept inside the girl's mind, the protagonist hints at its intangibility. Also, by imagining and transcribing the details of the town even before its physical existence, they create a model/map that initiates a reality. Even M is able to draw a surprisingly accurate map of the town despite him never having been there. However, all such maps and notations about the town are rendered useless as the reality of the town keeps changing. Every map of the town eventually becomes outdated. The maps of the town held by the protagonist and M are conceptually same but differ depending on their perception of reality. The characters don't have something real they can rely on because the real doesn't exist. The town's origin is unknown and is full of contradictory stories. Further, the distinction between the real and the imagined is difficult to discern. The unstable wall explicitly states, "that map you made is utterly worthless. It's just lines scribbled on a scrap of paper" (119). The factual inaccuracies in the map of the town that M drew highlight an altered reality. The protagonist's own attempt to map the town failed which makes him question his memory. He wonders, "Isn't it possible that my memory was subtly reworked to line up with the map the boy drew" (287)? The map that precedes reality blurs the line between the protagonist's lived experience and M's representation. It not only reflects a territory but actively helps to create it. Moreover, in a simulated world, models and copies can be reproduced endlessly. M expresses firmly, "The town, and the wall, will change ever so slightly to fit in with me" as the new dream reader (440). It indicates the adaptability and constantly shifting reality of the town.

The town can be reconfigured to maintain its system, signifying the replication of models. Further, the "theme park" analogy professed by the protagonist's shadow represents the town as a perfect model of simulacra. He elaborates that, "there's scenery, like a stage backdrop, all over the place. There are even unicorns roaming around" (88). The depiction highlights the artificiality of the town, where everything is performatory. The town's functioning is carefully designed to support its self-sustaining nature. The shadow also reminds the protagonist, "Aren't you the one who created this town in the first place" (123)? Further, the town lacks basic modern utilities such as electricity and gas. The industries have collapsed, the canal has dried up, the factories have shut down long ago, and the houses in workers' district are on the verge of collapse. Beyond the unicorns, the town has no animals, not even cats or dogs. Due to the absence of domestic animals, no dairy products are available. The docility of the people and their acceptance of the town lacking in basic utilities and food highlight its hyperreal nature. The world outside the town can be taken as reference point to make the inhabitants of the town recognize its artificiality. But it is liquified by making people docile, not through coercion but through subtle mechanisms of control. If the inhabitants were able to see the outside world, they might realize that this town is devoid of any deeper reality because of its constructed nature. It aligns with Baudrillard's statement, "The simulacrum is never what hides the truth–it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true" (3). In other words, in the world of the hyperreal, there is no hidden truth waiting to be revealed, the simulation itself is the replaced reality because the real never existed as we believed it to be. Also, the ambiguity as to which world is authentic hints at the ultimate loss of the real.

Apart from the town's spatial paradox, its inverted notions of time and identity highlight its heterotopia. The town has a strict system of operation and requires rituals for entering. The town's atemporal status and its rejection of shadows, countless dreams, and emotions and impulses hint at collapse of meaning and signification. There is no underlying order although everything seems to be following a pattern. This artificiality emerges through its temporal unconventionality. The tower clock, "doesn't have any hands" (4), signifying the fluidity of time. In other words, it has no meaning. The break with traditional time, signifies the concept of "heterochrony" as an endless accumulation of time. Both the protagonist and M concede the eternal state of the town. When the protagonist reflects on his parting with the woman, who is actually his high school sweetheart from the real world and works at the library, he realises that the goodbye has no meaning. It may feel like an ordinary goodbye but carries no weight because of the eternality of this place. M comments on the dissolution of meaning in the town where time is fleeting, "What looks like accumulation is nothing but a transitory illusion cast by the present" (430). Murakami underscores here that reality is fluid which keeps getting revised with no finality. In the simulated town nothing solid or enduring remains since the actions have no meaning or consequence.

Conclusion

Through the interplay between imagination and reality, Murakami foregrounds the ontological instability present in the text. The characters' not only question the reality of their world but also their own self. The incompatible worlds in the text, bleed into each other, making it impossible to discern which of them is real. The walled town operates through systems of control, domination of models and deterrence techniques that highlight its hyperreal status. The disciplinary practices of the town shaped its people into submissive yet skillful beings. Further, the innumerable stacking of dreams and the contradictory stories of the town led to the loss of meaning. As a consequence of severing their shadow, the people of the town endure loss of memory and hence their history. The loss of history signifies the loss of real. Through the depiction of the simulated reality of the town, Murakami comments on the contemporary society that has succumbed to artificiality and fabrication of their world. The intensified operation of simulacrum has changed the very fabric of reality. The question therefore is not what is reality but if there is any real to refer to. The simulation has merged with the real in a way that the authentic is almost impossible to discern. The town lacks a genuine origin, its inhabitants lead passive, ahistorical lives and the order of the town is regulated through discipline and control. Further, the library in the town that should represent knowledge, instead dissolves people's emotions. The town therefore

is rendered meaningless, existing as a theme park which includes unicorns and staged scenery. Characters navigate a world that is built on imagination where identities are fluid and time is eternal.

The adoption of specified roles after ritualistic sacrifices and altered perception of the world and their own selves transform the individuals of the town, characterized by loss of a coherent reality. The protagonist's struggle to control and escape the town he co-created reflects a loss of agency where the model has preceded the reality of its creator. The placid lives of the townspeople reflected the loss of meaning on a collective level, illustrating the reworking of their society into controlled units. By depicting the simulated and controlled reality of the walled town, Murakami portrays the devastating effects of societal control and loss of agency and meaning in a world full of contradictions and fabrications. The pervasive influence of such control and simulation has affected the townspeople physically, psychologically, socially, and even spiritually. Simultaneously, Murakami questions how we see reality which is revealed to be fluid, constructed, and often fragmented.

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