Consumerism and the Possibility of an Authentic Self in Haruki Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*

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Abstract

With reference to Jean Baudrillard's theory of consumerism embedded in his scrutiny of power, this paper investigates the possibilities of an authentic self in Haruki Murakami's novel *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* within the context of Japanese consumerism in the 1970s and early 1980s. By alluding to the Baudrillardian discourse, I argue that the protagonist's choice to abandon his shadow at the very end of the novel is closely linked with his attempt to find an authentic self: in other words, an attempt to liberate himself from the power consumerism exerts on him.

Keywords: contemporary Japanese literature, Haruki Murakami, consumerism, Japanese society, Jean Baudrillard, power

Critics such as Matthew Strecher, Micheal Seats and Chiyoko Kawakami have already established a possible correspondence between Baudrillardian discourse and Murakami's works. Strecher, in *Dances With Sheep: the Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*, suggests an affinity between Murakami's employment of historical elements and Baudrillard's simulacrum. He argues that popular-culture icons in Murakami's works cross-reference to historical periods as an alternative to overt mention of major past events. Through such cross-references, Strecher claims, the past masked and reduced to the level of simulacrum by media is recovered in the realm of the fiction:

> Indeed, one can go even further, as Baudrillard does, and argue that "reality" in the hand of the mass media has been erased, its replacement with the so-called "simulacrum" only partially hidden from us. There is no particular reason why this argument should be limited to present reality; if mass media can "mask" its (re)construction of a simulated reality, why not also a history? Indeed this is precisely what has occurred in postwar Japan with the mass media's ever-delicate handling of Japanese war responsibility in the Second World War. (2002, p. 165)

Seats limits his Baudrillardian analysis to the very early works of Murakami in *Murakami Haruki: The Simulacrum in Contemporary Japanese Culture.* In contrast to Strecher's argument, he puts emphasis on Murakami's deliberate utilization of a simulacrum, in lieu of exposure of reality through less significant events, in his early works by way of literary devices and tropes in order to achieve a critique of contemporary Japanese society. For instance, in his investigation of *A Wild Sheep Chase*, Seats states that the photo, by means of which the narrator searches for a rare breed of sheep, reveals itself as an allegorical element and thus reduces reality to a signifier through the lens of a camera: "the copy of the artificially constructed photograph of the pastoral idyll is synonymous with 'the real', and the modalities of the camera lens and xerox machine are implicitly confirmed as the basis of a way of seeing which faithfully and accurately reproduces the object seen" (2006, p. 216).

In addition to these Western critics, independent Japanese scholar Chiyoko Kawakami applies Baudrillard's simulacrum to Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* in "The Unfinished Cartography: Murakami Haruki and the Postmodern Cognitive Map" (2002). Kawakami particularly highlights the power relations and how the city as an urban space in Murakami's works turns into a sphere of hyperreality, full of signs and simulations. For instance, the elevator scene, she argues, yields to the Baudrillardian idea of disappearance of meaning and representation through the protagonist's use of language and immediate fictionalization of the scene: "a still life: Man in the Elevator" (Murakami, 2003, p.3). According to Kawakami, the protagonist, in his choice of words in this particular scene, puts a distance between the real and the imagined experience. In this way, he takes the role of a cameraman, who surveys the scene through the lens of a camera with a third point of view. Thus, in the novel, Kawakami suggests, reality is frequently turned "into an object of his detached gaze. Real situations are thus constantly transformed into pictorial representations" (2002, p. 324).

With reference to Baudrillard's notion of simulacrum, it seems that the primary concern of Strecher, Seats and Kawakami is the representation of reality under the influence of the political in Murakami's works. In the selected early works of Murakami, while Strecher raises the controversial issue of representation of history with regard to the topic, Seats and Kawakami focus on the urban space as a medium for pictorial representations of the reality. In all their analyses, an allusion to the Baudrillardian notion of simulacrum is unequivocally instrumental in emphasizing the role of any form of power through the disclosure of the gap between reality and an idealized account of that reality. However, I argue that manifestation of any power structure, particularly that concerning political economy, is enunciated in more thorough and definite terms in Baudrillard's theory of consumerism. Thus, an analysis of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* through the theory of consumerism allows for an understanding of the individual's engagement in power relations on multiple levels.

In *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures,* consumerism, defined as "the immediately social function of exchange, of communication, of distribution of values across a corpus of signs" (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 78), extends beyond goods and services to include various concepts such as leisure, history, labour and family. With such a definition, Baudrillard separates himself from the 19th-century consumption Thorstein Veblen (1992) describes in *The Theory of the Leisure Class.* Veblen interprets consumption as a conscious purchasing process that allows individuals to fashion themselves in a certain way in their societies. Particularly, in the fourth chapter of *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, he underlines that "the utility of consumption … as an evidence of wealth is to be classed as a derivative growth. It is an adaption to a new end, by a selective process, of a distinction previously existing and well established in men's habits of thought" (61). Since consumption is as a result of a consumer's careful choice regarding his/her appearance and social relations, it is also simultaneously grounded on the determinate conditions regulating the individual's position in the social hierarchy: in other words, the antagonism of the elite, middle and working classes.

Baudrillard's theory of consumption, however, denotes a form of power that is no longer a uniform ideological institution. Rather, he identifies authority as a non-representational entity permeating and determining the social structure and relations with regard to the dissemination and exhaustion of values and standards such as leisure, labour, history and the arts. Thus, Baudrillard seems to derive his definition of consumption from his examination of Michel Foucault's description of power as a non-representational entity in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*: "power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength that we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (1990, p. 93).

Although Baudrillard's non-representational definition of consumption seems to be closely associated with Foucault's interpretation of power, two distinctively crucial aspects inform his examination of consumerism implanted in his understanding of power. First, Foucauldian discourse does not dismiss the determinate conditions or antagonistic forces such as production and consumption, terrorist and hostage, or the wealthy and the poor. Foucault considers such determinate conditions as existing on the level of the real. Under these determinate conditions, resistance, he explains in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977–1984*, is equally achievable with a meticulous scheme: "as soon as there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance. We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy" (Foucault, 1988, p. 123). Baudrillard, in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, quite the contrary, claims that antagonistic forces or determinate conditions are nullified within a vicious cycle of signification:

> there is still an illusion in thinking that the capitalist system, at a certain threshold of increased reproduction, passes irreversibly from a strategy of shortage to a strategy of abundance. The current crisis proves that this strategy is reversible. The illusion still comes from a naïve faith in a *reality* of shortage or a *reality* of abundance, and therefore from the illusion of a real opposition between these two terms. (2012, p. 33)

Second, highly pertinent to the reversibility of the antagonistic forces, Baudrillard observes a discontinuity concerning the political economy and referential reason[1] in the period before, during and after the Second World War. For instance, he assesses the 1929 crisis, "resolved by regulating demand in an endless exchange of finalities between production and consumption" (2012, p. 33), as a real one resulting from the social limitations of consumption. Conversely, preventative action against a possible shortage, he asserts, precedes a real shortage today. More precisely, reversible shortages and abundance, under an illusionary antagonism, duplicate society on a Marxist model "in order the better to mask the system's real law and the possibility of its symbolic destruction" (ibid, p. 31). Therefore, in a society circumscribed by such a mask, "social function and social organization far surpass individuals and impose themselves upon them by way of an unconscious social constraint" (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 78).

As a culmination of the above-named two propositions' playing a pivotal role in the formation of Baudrillardian consumerist discourse, the relationship between any antagonism, such as highbrow and lowbrow in literature, or revolution and conformity in politics, can be deciphered in a similar fashion to how that correlation between shortage and abundance is understood. In other words, today any binary opposition, on the level of the real, acts as a substitute for another and ultimately leads to production: "other societies have known multiple stakes: over birth and kinship, the soul and the body, the true and false, reality and appearance. Political economy has reduced them to just one: production" (Baudrillard, 2012, p. 38). From such a standpoint, consumption as a concept not only covers goods and services but is expanded into a wide range of areas, in particular media, fashion, sex and family.

Similarly, I shall investigate the representation of labour and leisure in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* in line with Baudrillard's theory of consumption. It is my argument that the antagonism between the protagonist's labour and non-labour/leisure activities, playing a crucial part in understanding the self, is invalidated under the influence of the policies of Japanese political economy and its consumer society. As the title suggests, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* has two distinct storylines: one is the hard-boiled land set in a futuristic urban Tokyo converted into a centre of high information technology. In this high-tech urban setting there are workers called 'Calcutecs' serving a quasi-governmental institution named 'the System' by processing and encrypting data through their subconscious. The second narrative is the end of the world, or the Town, as it is frequently referred to by its inhabitants. Life is conversely idyllic, and the Town's inhabitants perform jobs that do not really require any high technology. While the narrator is a certain nameless 'Calcutec' only known by his profession and consumption habits in the hard-boiled land, he tries to understand his significance in the Town through his profession as a dream-reader. Since the only information regarding the protagonist is his consumption habits and profession, it is his labour and non-labour activities, as a result, that impart the means through which self is understood in both narratives. Put another way, any meaning the protagonist attaches to the self is delineated either through his labour activity—his profession—or leisure activity—shopping and sightseeing. Thus, despite the apparent differences between the hard-boiled land and the Town, the protagonist in both narratives is under the leverage of policies of political economy as an apparatus of production through his labour and seemingly non-labour activities.

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[1] By "referential reason", Baudrillard refers to the disappearance of link between the word, meaning and referent.

The nameless narrator of the hard-boiled storyline, who defines himself as a born shopper, is indeed a typical consumer of 1970s and early-1980s in Japan. Conforming to Baudrillard's rejection of determinate conditions, he equally serves the system through his shopping or consumption, adhering strictly to a time span outside the labour hours. Any system, such as political economy or the arts, Baudrillard underlines, is deprived of antagonistic forces cancelling one another out. Neither, likewise, does non-labour time manifest itself as an opposition to the labour time. Rather, it establishes itself as the allotted span bought through one's wage, and the individual is "given a wage, not in exchange for labour, but so that you spend it, which is itself another kind of labour" (Baudrillard, 2012, p. 41). Thus, so long as "the system is charged with neutralising the symbolic retaliation *by buying it back through wages*" (ibid, p. 41, original emphasis), its domination over the individual never ceases. By comparing each ordinary day to that of "a squirrel in November, with mounds of little things" (Murakami, 2003, p. 71), the narrator of the hard-boiled land reveals himself as an object of such domination:

> At eleven o'clock, I left the apartment, headed for the supermarket near the station, stopping next at the liquor store for some red wine, soda water, and orange juice . . .. Then to the bookshop for two magazines, the electrical goods store for light bulbs and cassette tapes, the photo store for a pack of Polaroid film. Last, it was the record shop, where I picked out a few disks. By now, the whole back seat of my tiny coupé was taken up with shopping bags. (Ibid, p. 71)

The narrator's depiction of his daily shopping experience might at first seem a series of indiscriminate choices. However, when his justification for buying a car is taken into account together with his postulation about the sofa in the old man's room, it also becomes palpable to what extent his consumption habits are in line with two significant concepts shaping the advertisements and shopping habits of consumers in the post-war miracle years: namely, rationalisation and lifestyle status. Regarding these habits, in "New Tribes and Nostalgia: Consumption in the Late Twentieth Century and Beyond", Penelope Francks (2009) writes, "in the post-war and miracle years the purchase of new goods—a large proportion of them electrical consumer durables—could be based on their functionality and 'rationality', [and] by the 1980s Western-style furnishings had become more a matter of status and lifestyle choice" (p. 201).

The narrator, as a typical consumer of his day as portrayed by Francks, seems to be balancing these two concepts, the rationalisation of goods and goods as a sign of status and lifestyle. This born shopper chooses his car based on its functionality, ironically grounded on a justification of his excessive shopping: "I only wanted a car for shopping" (Murakami, 2003, p. 72). Much as he rationalises his consumption habits, the narrator equally considers evidence of lifestyle philosophy essential: "Procuring a good sofa … requires style and experience and philosophy. It takes money, yes, but you also need a vision of the superior sofa. That sofa among sofas" (ibid, p. 45). Therefore, when Junior and the Big Boy smash everything in his 'cosy and tasteful' house, the scene yields to the example of the Kwakiutl's potlatch. A potlatch is, according to the definition provided in the OED, "an opulent ceremonial feast (among certain North American Indian peoples of the north-west coast) at which possessions are given away or destroyed to display wealth or enhance prestige." Under this local tradition, the destruction or distribution of goods is equally emphasized as a manifestation of wealth and prestige. Therefore, Baudrillard, who argues the value of objects in consumer societies lies in their destruction as much as it does in their accumulation, refers to potlatch tradition in *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* to explain the illusionary opposition between these two terms. According to him, the destruction and accumulation of objects are indistinguishable in their effect, prompting the very same consequence—that is to say, '"tell me what you throw away and I'll tell you who you are"' (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 42). Correspondingly, the Calcutec revels in how his apartment, a symbol of his lifestyle and status, is being destroyed: "Big Boy was bringing *a new meaning* to the word destruction in *my cozy, tasteful apartment*. I pulled another can of beer out of the refrigerator and sat back to watch the fireworks" (Murakami, 2003, p. 142, my emphasis).

Much as the narrator is under the sway of the system as a typical consumer, he is equally controlled by the same system as a member of the labour force. This is because, as Baudrillard puts it, "a man must die to become labour power. He converts this death into a wage. But the economic violence capital inflicted on him in the equivalence of the wage and labour power is nothing next to the symbolic violence inflicted on him by his definition as a productive force" (2012, p. 39). In other words, the system robs the individual of any other value and reduces him/her only to productive force while the difference between his labour and non-labour activities is concurrently being negated. In similar fashion, although the narrator, as a Calcutec, can gain access to wide range of information, he is only permitted to receive and decode it in line with the System's needs and purposes. Moreover, depending on the type of data encryption, he can even be driven into the position of a mere container as in the case of 'shuffling'. He describes it as "nothing I can pride myself on. I am merely a vessel to be used. My consciousness is borrowed and something is processed while I'm unaware. I hardly feel I can be a called a Calcutec when it comes to shuffling" (Murakami, 2003, p. 115). Thus, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the narrator can claim his labour, whose productive results are denied to him, only through his wage and consumption habits. Moreover, despite the fact that he "can only follow the prescribed order of business" and "despite the meddling and raised eyebrows at the System", the narrator knows "no line of work that allows the individual as much freedom to exercise his abilities as being a Calcutec" (ibid, p. 115). While this further demonstrates the impossibility of an authentic self in the hard-boiled land, the narrator's physical death, on grounds of an experiment carried out on him as a work requirement, ironically highlights him more as a worker alienated from his own labour.

The Town, where the power of consumerism is also imposed on the narrator, can equally be seen as an aspect of 1970s and early-1980s consumer culture, particularly in connection with the Japan Railways 'Discover Japan' project. In her thorough article "Formations of Mass Culture" (1993), Marilyn Ivy characterizes 'Discover Japan', an outcome of a concentration on nature and self-reflection after Nixon and the oil shock exposed the fragility of the Japanese economy, as the most extensive project in Japanese history. The most significant result, according to Ivy, was that such a large-scale project "reorganized the entire cultural topography of Japan according to a continuum of "tradition" and "modernity"' (1993, p. 252). The outcomes of the project are particularly crucial because its launch coincided with the Nixon-era oil shock, a period that indicated a possible shortage after the affluence of the post-war miracle years.

From the Baudrillardian point of view, such simultaneity is closely linked with a need for shortages as a result of mythic accumulation of production and labour: "Capital, to avoid the risk of bursting from these liquefied values, thus becomes nostalgic" (Baudrillard, 2012, p. 32). In other words, it seems that a turn towards nature as a result of excessive accumulation of wealth and production became necessary to reverse the possible negative effects of excess after the Nixon-era oil shock. Hence "ecology, where the danger of absolute scarcity reinstates an ethic of energy conservation" (ibid, p. 32), becomes the solution in the form of the Town after the attack of the inklings. In this sense, the seemingly hostile inklings, a destructive force causing shortage through data erasure, indeed work towards the benefits of the system in the novel: "it's a strategic move…. [T]he government doesn't mind INKlings and INKlings don't mind the government" (Murakami, 2003, p. 138). Therefore, the attack of the inklings, interpreted as cooperation with the System, together with narrator's death evokes a yearning for nature and the past by marking the end of the hard-boiled land.

Contrary to the very high-tech and urban depiction of the hard-boiled land, the narration of the Town—following both Ivy's and Baudrillard's arguments—begins with a reference to a sphere strictly outside the urban: "this is the time when instinct compels the males to clash—after they have shed their winter coats, a week before the females bear young. They become so fierce, wounding each other viciously" (ibid, p. 17). Yet allusion to nature is not the sole aspect categorising the Town as a domain outside the modern. Time can be treated as another major element dissociating it from the modern or hard-boiled land. The depiction of a fight among golden beasts for the female—being repeated at a certain season each year—is a reminder of cyclical time, a notion analogous with the past and nature. In addition, the clock tower, a product of industrialisation and symbol of modernity, fails to function in the Town: "the clock has long forfeited its original role as a timepiece" (ibid, p. 38). The narrator of the Town, as revealed towards the end of the novel, is the Calcutec of the hard-boiled land and thus can be taken for the domestic urban traveller in the Town, the latter portrayed as against the hard-boiled land.

On account of having a living shadow, the narrator distinguishes himself from the inhabitants and fulfils the role of newcomer/non-member in a group. The narrator's existence in the Town as a newcomer/non-member conforms to the primary principle of tourism or travel warranting a destination outside home. Following this primary principle, all journeys, regardless of the destination and length of the stay, presuppose eventually going back home. Thus, the shadow not-so-surprisingly encourages the narrator to escape the Town as it simultaneously resorts to the discourse of "us" and "them": "We're the ones who are right. They are the ones who are wrong absolutely" (ibid, p. 248). In addition, John Clammer discusses in "Sites and Sights: The Consuming Eye and the Arts of the Imagination in Japanese Tourism" that it is not so infrequent among Japanese domestic tourists to visit a rural town in order to experience the 'natural' life as it once was. On such trips "one can visit the countryside, stay in a traditional inn, eat wholly natural foods" (Clammer, 1997, p. 150). Similarly, Murakami's narrator, like the domestic tourist Clammer mentions, stays in the Town and experiences life as its inhabitants live it. He consumes food different from what he is used to: "The food here is different than elsewhere. We only use a few basic ingredients. What resembles meat is not. What resembles egg is not…. Everything is made in the image of something" (Murakami, 2003, p. 224).

According to Clammer, domestic trips to rural areas not only promote economic growth but also lead to "a dual activity of construction: identity construction on the part of tourists and of the construction of the countryside on the part of urbanites with the complicity of the ruralites" (1997, p.150). Through his dream-reading job and experience of Town life, the narrator tries to understand not only the peculiarities of the Town but also the meaning of his own existence. Although the narrator acknowledges that it makes more sense to go back to his former world, he feels that the Town is a key to his existence and decides to stay: "I have discovered something that involves me here more than I could have thought" (Murakami, 2003, p. 398). The narrator's wish to stay implies a deviation from the standards the 'Discover Japan' project aimed at. The project "targeted Japanese desires for a simpler rural past, yet its recuperation of that past indicated all the more clearly the difficulty of escaping the managed society of the 1970s" (Ivy, 1993, p. 252). In other words, 'Discover Japan' was a project intended to evoke a sense of past and nostalgia not as a result of the traveller's independent experience but rather as "a system which secures the ordering of signs and the integration of the group" (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 78). As a natural consequence of a pre-decided experience, "the whole recent ecological turn … [is] no longer a crisis of overproduction as in 1929—[but is] the involution of the system, recycling its identity" (Baudrillard, 2012, p. 32), as in the case of the 'Discover Japan' project. Therefore, the narrator's decision to abandon his shadow and stay in the Town, in order to find an authentic self through his own unique and independent experience, can be regarded as an attempt to set himself free from the limits consumer society exerts on him.

As a matter of fact, the narrator's experience of the Town life is also governed by the system in spite of his wish to stay at the end. Initially, the narrator learns how to live in the Town according to the instructions given to him by the gatekeeper upon his entrance. More crucially, for the narrator to perform his dream-reading profession the same gatekeeper blinds the narrator's eyes. Both the act of blinding the eyes and instructions can be interpreted as an exertion of power on the narrator by the system. This is because they encourage the narrator to read the dreams and experience the Town life as desired by the system. As a result, both the information he can access through his dream-reading job and his leisure activity as a tourist are simultaneously manipulated and eventually converted into a means of production. However, the narrator, who tries to learn about the Town as much as possible in order to reunite with his shadow and plan an escape together with it, decides to stay in the Town at the very end. As opposed to his life in the hard-boiled land, where he renders up everything and emerges only as a productive force aligning with the system and its needs, the narrator unexpectedly finds something fundamental to his existence in the Town. Yet he does not try to persuade his shadow to stay together with him. The shadow, who makes a clear distinction between the narrator and the inhabitants of the Town, seems to belong to the hard-boiled land rather than the Town. With the adoption of an invidious approach to the inhabitants of the Town and its attempt to urge the narrator to leave the Town, the shadow seems to be a part of the system like the inklings are. Therefore, much as narrator's experience and self are shaped by the pre-decided consumption patterns in the hard-boiled land, so long as his shadow remains attached to him, there is no actual freedom as a domestic traveller in the Town, either. Under such circumstances, detachment from the shadow becomes a means of escaping the managed society Baudrillard talks of, as well as an emancipation of the self. In this way, the narrator hopes to recover an authentic self, although he is not certain himself whether such a deed is within the reach of possibility.

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