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**Mediated Nights: Urban Space, Visual Regimes, and Fragmented  
Consciousness in *After Dark***

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**Abstract:**

*After Dark* by Haruki Murakami eases its path at night and it is difficult to say where it goes. It is dream-like of course--you can call it surreal as well--but that term lacks the actual hook of the book. It is not a mere fantasy that this is strange. It is laced in to the tangles of urban life. All that happens on one night in Tokyo a city that will not slumber. Night bars with patrons, neon skyscrapers, mirror displays, and passers-by--wholesale. Nobody is comfortable and not with oneself and not with others. Life flies into and out of the lives of people, uttering a few words, and vanishes. Read as a fantasy, *After Dark* doesn't work. Rather, Murakami burrows into the way urban living, technology and work-shifts of the night upset the idea of who you are. He is showing Tokyo the manner in which it really feels like it is continually on the move, it is constantly monitored, and it does not even appear to be touching. In this city, personal identity disappears, proximity disappears quickly and even the city itself appears to vibrate in and out of rest and motion with all its inhabitants.

**Keywords:** Surreal, Fragmented, Visual Regimes, Urban space, Mediated Nights.

Tokyo is not just a landscape as the first few pages tell. It is a living organism. The narrator goes to the extent of referring to it as one giant animal whose base metabolic humming has not stopped at night (Murakami 3). That matters. This is no background, Tokyo is a system, vibrating and agitated. When it is midnight, the energy does not wear off. Human beings, objects, data, sound--it all continues to tumble out.

Place the Denny where Mari is. It resembles any other restaurant but Murakami refers it as anonymous and interchangeable (Murakami 4). It is made efficient, yet it lacks personality. The spaces of the city work, all right, but they obliterate individuality. You are

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never alone, neither seen, to be seen. Essays named Mediated Night makes it crystal clear at night, the infrastructure of the city continues to flow bodies, thins the gaze, cuts up connection (Mediated Night 1). There's nothing mystic about Tokyo after dark, it is mechanical and impregnable.

The tone is set by the style that Murakami uses. The narrator does not consider himself a story teller but his camera walking about taking everything in a scan. We pass into the room of Eri Asai, and have a viewpoint floating way overhead looking at her as she sleeps (Murakami 25). It does not take long before we are informed that we are anonymous and invisible intruders (Murakami 27). That verse plays a queer jump. We are engaged but restrained- looking on like a video camera. The distance renders the city even more alien. Everybody is naked, but hardly to be known. We observe facts, no inner lives ever. This fact is also commented on by one of the critics who believes that the camera-like we voice in fact is performing the fragmented consciousness within the book (Mediated Night 1). And therefore it is not merely about solitude--the book throws the reader catapulted into that strange, distant realm, and so you do feel the alienation.

After Dark explores the strangeness of visibility in the urban realm, particularly through its emphasis on screens, mirrors and doubles. The room of Eri, as an example, her TV is not even plugged in, yet, it illuminates. This narrator refers to it as a new outsider in the room (Murakami 29). That word matters. The television is not inactive. It intrudes, alters the atmosphere and turns into one more figure in the visual labyrinth of the book. Eri loses herself in that uncomfortable world--in that of watchers and images and screens.

The feeling of discomfort grows up with the faceless man on the TV. He has nothing to look at--no one to indict. Murakami also resorts to mirrors. As Mari exits the Skylark restroom, it is indicated in the Skylark reflecting mirror in the restroom that nothing is left behind but an image of Mari (Murakami 67). The reflection remains behind--as a ghost- her body is gone. Mari later on says, I am me and not me (Murakami 180). There are identity divisions: body and image, to be there and only reflect, present and to perform. The essay coggers at the same- the book views consciousness as a hodgepodge of all these screens and mirrors (Mediated Night' 1).

Although distance pervades After Dark the novel does not remain cold. Murakami is keen in the glimpses of connection and particularly between Mari and Takahashi. Their dialogue is clumsy and incomplete, not quite ironic yet they boast of some warmth amidst the coldness of the city.

At the point where Takahashi says, everybody has their own battlefields, it is thrown off handed, it is as though he is joking, yet it hits. You get the sense that you are

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bearing loads on which you never lay eyes. And further on he writes to Mari: there is a gray in between. It is the knowledge and perceiving of the shadows in a healthy mind. One cannot find easy answers to that line. The point that Murakami makes: we exist in the grey realms and sympathy is not something that is easily gained.

These conversations matter. The dialogue, a sharp and visual but push back against the emptiness in the book. Even the slightest encounters create frail solidarity with some honest words. Relationships are also disposable, unfulfilled here, and that is not a blemish as "Mediated Night" would put it: that is the situation in Tokyo at night.

No other scene of the social criticism of Murakami strikes as much as the love hotel scenes. At Alphaville, Mari is an interpreter of a sex worker of Chinese origin, who is beaten up. Then all of the themes in the city become real. Night has become not only a feel, but a working environment, gender, as well as a violent space. Kaoru and his hotel workers come to the rescue: stitching up, changing sheets, cleaning. Their motion is as monotonous as crisis fatigued people (Murakami 36-45). Such little things do make a difference. They unveil the unseen work with which Tokyo night is supported. The sex worker is particularly vulnerable as he is poor, foreign, and in a web of exploitation. Murakami does not even bother to use her to push the story. Instead, he remains with her in her misery and who takes the risk in the dark. The night economy is cut-to-the-point in the essay where it depends on veiled service work which puts women in a state of special danger (Mediated Night" 4-5). You don't forget those scenes they are so rooted. Tokyo is not merely an imagined dream landscape, but powered by labor, which is characterized by danger and uncoveredness.

It is all through that Mari grows. In the beginning, she protects herself - stays out of shape, does not involve herself. However, caught up in the consequences of violence, she is powerless not to respond. She hearkens, she deciphers, she sits with the woman. It doesn't have a grandiose, lactose transformation-Mari is not able to salvage things. But something is broken open in the experience. She becomes evasive of family and connection, realizing above it all the silent struggles. It implies something important. Care may be taken even when the connections are broken. Murakami is an unobtrusive humanist. The conclusion remains free and that is appropriate. Here the puzzles discourage us--Eri, the man without a face, the screen aspect. Murakami leaves them unsolved, and that is just what a city story should be made of. The city life lacks conclusions. Violence, work, daylight all are the rut and the darkness does not miraculously fade away. It is high time the new day was on hand, the old one is lingering on with its sinkhole's skirts. That sums it up. Morning seems to creep along, yet still on Yesterday's dark side. The critical essay

discerns this in this as well: the unfinishedness of the novel reflects city-life, in which you never have more than a partial grasp of anything. Ultimately, *After Dark* is not merely a bizarre night out-you sense Murakami excavating how the Tokyo nightly never-ending and noisiness creates a sense of identity, interconnectedness and being out of place. Not to mention that he puts a lot in those hours: the breath of Tokyo, like a monster; floating, cold and detached narration; disturbing images and mirrors; fumbling dialogue; ugly scenes in a hotel. Each of the parts encapsulates the push-pull of urban living--all humans in the spotlight, all torn and scraping past each other.

But you see, looked closer, thou shalt find something warmer. The flashes of real care, Takahashi, Kaoru, the raped woman, are even in a disunited city. but that is what it left me feeling: how *After Dark* is hovering at the border of solitude and interconnection, the surface and elucidation, the city and your own confused, shifting self. The oddity and the humanness are bound together and we find them in conflict. And there the heart of the novel dwells.

*After Dark* by Haruki Murakami is a weird, surreal dream but it lacks something that would make it interesting to refer to it as such. The strangeness of the novel does not arise out of outright fantasy--it is twisted with the very chaotic reality of a large city. It happens all during a single night in Tokyo, where there is no actual sleeping in the city. It is a labyrinth of night cafes, hotels, vacant office spaces, luminous computer monitors and an assortment of lost souls. No one appears to be completely at ease, with him or herself or anyone. Characters stroll through the night, say a few words, and ultimately disappear without further notice.

Rather than considering *After Dark* to be a way out of reality, it is better to think of it as Murakami scratching the surface of how urban living, technology and night shifts confuse the manner in which people think and feel. He is demonstrating what it would be like to reside in city where you are never left without attention and always on the run, yet never really met. Identity disintegrates in this version of Tokyo, intimacy does not last long and even the city knows itself and gets on its nerves with all the people in it.

The novel does not even bother to look upon Tokyo as a backdrop; this is obvious in the very beginning. It has life-it almost lives like an animal. Ever since its basic metabolism does not run out even in the middle of the night, the narrator refers to it as being a single gigantic creature (Murakami 3). This point is important since it is not the mere landscape, but the entire system of Tokyo, full of life. This is not the case when it reaches midnight and the city is in no rush to slow down and shut down. People, products, data, and noise--all continue to run along.

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Even the Denny that Mari is sitting at is no ordinary restaurant. Murakami renders it as anonymous and interchangeable (Murakami 4), a performance of space that is created in order to be efficient, however, devoid of actuality. Such is more or less his argument about city life. Bars and restaurants are a good idea but they put everyone into a rut. You may be in the midst of people yet nobody is actually communicating. This is supported in the essay, *Mediated Night*. It claims that the city is at night an infrastructure that puts bodies into circulation and separates the overall attention of people (“*Mediated Night*” 1). Well, Tokyo at night is not that dreamy or mystical night. The machine is well oiled and it runs like clockwork.

The mood in here is largely influenced by the style that Murakami uses. His usage of the narrator is quite peculiar--it is not at all like an ordinary narrator. Rather, it resembles a camera moving about the sceneries. As we enter the room of Eri Asai, the second perspective changes to this floating, suspended camera, where it is suspended with just no space above her in her sleeping position (Murakami 25). Soon after, the narrator simply mentions, we are the invisible, unknown invaders (Murakami 27). That is important, as in this way the reader becomes not only emotionally attached to the story. We are observed through a window, virtually dogging at a distance, like a security police or something. This makes the city even more foreign--people are in the open, readily visible, but you know nothing about them. You get everything, but what is really going on with them remains on the inside. This is noted even by a critical paper which explains that the camera-like we voice, is just a way of enacting the disordered consciousness the book discusses (*Mediated Night* 1). It does not merely describe isolation: it not only moves the reader into that detached emotion, it leaves you, the reader, with the sense of alienation.

This disturbing problem of visibilities is particularly excavated in the novel, particularly in terms of screens, reflections and doubles. And why not her room, Eri—how is it that her television set is not even plugged in yet, and yet, it all of a sudden spring to life. It is referred to by the narrator as a newcomer into the room (Murakami 29). That word—intruder—matters. The television does not solitarily sit. It intrudes into it, alters the tone and establishes itself as a major participant in the overall visual space of the book. Eri is no longer a little girl who is sleeping. She is creeping into this queer, queasy world of images and watchers.

It is that feeling of danger that is further increased with the faceless man on the screen. He is all eyes and no face, anyone you cannot hold accountable of what he sees or does. Murakami teeters with these ideas once more with reflections and ghost images. As Mari exits Skylark restroom, there is only one image that of Mari in the Skylark restroom

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mirror (Murakami 67). It is like a ghost as she cannot get rid of her reflection. Later on Mari experiences a sense of self dissection-I am and I am not me (Murakami 180).

All these scenes add up to demonstrate the identity in the book as divided: body versus image or being there versus merely showing, being there versus merely playing a show. The essay is correct the book is not about consciousness as a solid part that lays deep within us, but a construction made out of all of these screens, mirrors, and spaces ("Mediated Night" 1).

After Dark does audible some distance-d word playing but it does not leave things cold. The novel is keen in attention to such delicate glimpses of the human connection, particularly in the conversations between Mari and Takahashi. Their dialogues are shaggy -- clumsy, ever sometimes somewhat ironic, and yet, somehow, they cut one of the few warm spots of the book.

The line that Takahashi utters about having battlefields of their own can be perceived as straightforward, almost redundant, but it has a lot of substance. You have the impression of everybody going around with battles that can be seen by no one. Takahashi later tells Mari that there is a gray zone between light and shadow and that it is the task of a healthy intelligence to notice and comprehend the shadows. In that line, there are no clean lines to what is easy or what is hard, or what is sure and what is in the grey. Human beings, Murakami appears to assert, exist and dwell in gray, dusty places, and true realization is time consuming.

The empty, cold city is challenged by Murakami in his dialogue. The small talk that can be made through a cursory interaction is enough to establish some form of solidarity even in a place where the majority of interactions do not last long. Similar to what is based in Mediated Night, the ties within this story are not formed around ideal understanding but rather on rush and ephemeral relationships. Its incompleteness is not a flaw, but merely what intimacy can be like in the middle of the night, and neon lights.

The love hotel scenes are the most gut-wrenching in terms of the social commentary in this novel. All of the big urban themes start to become very real when Mari finds herself at Alphaville to interpret the assaulted Chinese sex worker. The night in the city ceases to be only atmospheric or darker- it is an actual location that meeting the work, gender and violence. Kaoru and the other hotel employees come to their senses: they repair the woman, change the sheets, clean the mess and manage the crisis in some sort of a wearied routine (Murakami 36-45). The fact that they reveal a veil behind all the unseen handiwork that makes the city run at night makes those details rampant. The woman who is the victim of the assault is actually a weak figure, she is poor, migrant and is caught in a

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trap made of black-market men. Murakami does not employ her pain to motivate the plot. Rather he hovers around it, demonstrating who is the risk taker in the night urban city. It is true that the paper is correct when it asserts that the night economy relies on invisible service labor and also presents high stakes, particularly to women (Mediated Night 4-5). What makes these scenes soar is their reliance in the ground. Tokyo by night is not merely a fantasy-scape but fabricated space made up of work, risks and openness.

This episode is a transformation period of Mari herself. Initially, she has set her mind to maintain her distance with all the people, emotionless and attempting to stay out. Then she is pushed into the suffering of another and can do nothing but in response-she listens, translates and just hangs around. Murakami does not make a large heroic out of this. Mari is powerless to save the woman out of the situation and the novel does not lie so. But something is set to sleep in her by the experience. She finds herself being more sensitive to the plight of other people after being so much preoccupied with trying to avoid a family and relationships. This change is indeed important. It foreshadows that despite being in a city of broken connections, there are still times of caring. The kind of humanism that Murakami advocates is not obtrusive, but it has a ring to it.

The conclusion of the novel does not tell it all, but to be truthful, it is one of the best aspects of the novel. You will be left with enigmas, Eri, the masked observer, the bizarre screen-world will remain unexplained. However, that works in the world that Murakami exists in. Cities are not accustomed to explicating themselves. Violence occurs, people continue their work process, sun comes up and everyone continues with their activities. Describing how the new day is very close and the old continues to drag its heavy skirt with it is the best way to describe the whole tone when Murakami writes it. Day dawns, but the night does not disappear--it lingers. The critical essay, Mediated Night takes it on, indicating that the sense of incompleteness with the story is not an error. It, in fact, is quite spot-on with urban life, in which people can even be thrown together in the same streets and never actually get to know each other. It does not provide a set conclusion since in cities, life seldom does so.

**Conclusion:**

Finally, After Dark is not merely a dreamy, surreal night story- it is Murakami exploring how the Tokyo, with its 24/7 city vibrations, bends the perception we have of ourselves and each other. He crammed so much in that one night: the city breathing really like a living creature (or rather a camera), the writing that cuts comprised moments, sneaky television screens flickering in weird rooms, weird mirrors that put the itch in you, embarrassing dialogue, even weird love hotel sequences. The whole of it creates this image

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of urban existence that everyone is seen, divided, and barely more than loosely tied before falling into a state of slumber once again.

And it is not without its cold and distant. Care has space, should you be where where. When Mari walks by Takahashi, Kaoru and the woman that was attacked, you can tell that Murakami is still holding onto the notion that despite living in a cut up city, even these glimpses of actual recognition amid individuals matter. The remarkable thing is that After Dark is the one who walks that fine line--between solitude and discovery, between superficiality and depth, between scenes of its crowded streets and intimate pain. This is the gist of it. The oddness, the humanness- it is all enclosed in that strain.

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