Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968)

Some Questions for Class/Further Study

These questions are *not* definitive. We won't be able to cover them all in one class. They are selectively based on my reading of the novel – and some selected criticism. The interpretive nature of literary study ensures there are other angles/perspectives. Use the questions as a platform, from where to leap into your own Zone.

(NB: Page numbers refer to my copy, Gollancz's SF Masterworks series, 2011.)

See SFS special issue of 40 essays on PKD: http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/covers/cov5.htm

1. Read these two excerpts. They contain several significant themes and issues from the novel. See how many you can identify. Note them down, with a view to discussing them at the start of the class.

a) The opening two pages, from "A merry little surge .... Until his wife had agreed to follow suit."

b) Rachael's "failure" in the Voigt-Kampff test. End Ch5, from "It he thought. *She keeps calling the owl it* ... Assuming he made it through alive." (pp. 46-48, my edn.)

2. To what extent is the post-apocalyptic setting and its social environmental conditions critical to the plot and issues in the novel? See for example, Ch1, p.5-6: "The morning air ...Because of my job." Opening of Ch2, 11-13.

3. The significance of the animal theme. See, for example, Isidore's incident with the dead cat, Ch7, pp. 56-57, "Dressed and ready to go ... his flight back to the repair shop." The *Reuter's* turtle epigraph; Deckard's electric sheep (Ch1, 8-9), his "need for a real animal" (Ch 4, 33-34)

4. ... and their "sacred" (128) comparison with "andys"? On p. 128 (Ch 14), Pris claims: "if you are not human, then it's all different." What is the novel's position on androids? What does this tell us about the category of "the human" (since the "posthuman" has become a significant feature of much sf)? See Deckard's point, p. 157 (Ch. 17): 'the life force oozed out of her...." Also, p. 97 (Ch11);
Are we to sympathise with "those poor andy's" (1, 138)? Or only to "empathise" with them (and if so, what's the difference?) Deckard's character is crucial here. See, for example, the point in the plot at the end of Ch12, where he is testing Resch 112-114. Here he comes to doubt everything (a typical moment in Dick's writing) regarding the distinction between androids and humans and the category/'tool' of empathy. (See also, Ch 9 (80-81)

5. Why is "representation" and/or "reality" a key element in *Androids Dream?* Think, for example, about the sub-theme of authenticity vs fakery, or of "the flattening of affect" notion (a phrase repeated on p. 30 and 137.) You may also want to think about the android's love of "pre-colonial fiction" (end of Ch13, pp. 119-120) and the role of technology, from the "Mood Organ" (opening pages and close) and "Empathy Box" Ch6, p. 53; Ch 15, p. 137) and Television, esp. the figure of Buster Friendly (Ch 7, 58-59) and his "exposure" of "Mercerism" Ch18, 163-165.

6. What is the significance of the Toad at the novel's conclusion?

Dick is a writer who produces memorable effects. Like most writers of pulp fiction, one thing he is certainly doing is aiming for the sensational and mind-bending, and he works his stories, and sometimes wrenches them, to produce it. What is exceptional about him, however, is the range and intensity of his effects, their dizzying alternations in a single novel or chapter of a novel, and their rich significances [...] humor and horror, are underlain by Dick's habitual, almost obsessive interest in transformation, indeed in the dissolution of reality, where reality is defined as the condition that a given character or group of characters had accepted as ordinary and more or less reliable until a few minutes ago. Dick is not the sort of SF writer who introduces his readers to some new, alternative reality and then meticulously and clearly describes it, tracing its ramifications and, perhaps, developments; instead he introduces a new reality, often without pausing to describe it in any orderly way, and then shows it dissolving, and dissolving again, so that even those who are supposed to know it are baffled or terrified, made to envisage strange possibilities or doubt their sanity or decency.

Most of Dick's fiction was published and packaged as SF; he was part of the American SF community in one of its most vigorous periods. In his stories we find robots and aliens, space colonies and rocket trips, the full panoply of psionics, and so on. But all this comes with a twist. Dick's relation to SF can be parodic and parasitic; he sends it up, he seems to utilize the range of its devices and tropes without really taking them seriously. Futurist appliances and devices and creatures are often given silly names, vugs and buggies and papoolas, wub fur and Ganymedean slime moulds. Dick can vividly dramatize the operation of advanced technology (for instance, the destruction of the observation satellite in *Lies, Inc.*, ch.7), but he seldom offers sober extrapolation, whereby the possibility of some future development is lucidly teased out. He seems impatient with many aspects of the genre but, rather than ignoring them, he plays with them, exaggerates them, presses them to extremes.

The context is always one of radical change and radical changeability, on every level from the condition of one's job or marriage to the state of the universe and the meaning and purposes of God (of some god or other, anyway). It is not only that the conditions of the novel's world and society have changed from what we know. These drastic changes, the result of ecological disaster, mutations, and so on, are not unusual in SF. What is unusual is the degree to which change, often in the form of transformation or dissolution, has entered into the very nerves of the characters. Their oscillations of mood and behav- ior register this. If SF is premised on the notion that change is the rule in modernity, extending beyond discoveries in science and developments in technology to affect beliefs, cultures, ideologies, and, perhaps, the way people live from moment to moment, then Philip K. Dick is a very thorough-going writer of SF.

We have arrived at Dick's almost manically productive decade, the 1960s. Whatever is going on in novels like *Ubik*, *Palmer Eldritch*, *The Simulacra* (1964), *Clans of the Aphane Moon*, and lots of others, written sometimes at a rate of three a year, it is related to the earlier novels, but hardly a clear development from them. We can say that Dick comes into this period with a set of interests and tropes – reality dissolution, subjectivity intensified almost to madness, an intuition that an "objective" state of affairs is no more normal, or stable, than the mood of the individual. Then we can say

that he is inspired by the breakup and efflorescence of the decade's politics and life-styles. That he takes up drugs, with their tendency to blur the boundaries between the objective and the subjective: as avocation, as topic for fiction (for instance in *Palmer Eldritch* and later *A Scanner Darkly*), or as trope (the novel as like a trip for the reader, a given episode as like a trip for the character or characters). And that at a deeper level he intuits that what is involved is not just a set of fashions and movements but a kind of epochal shift, from the modern to the postmodern, from the society of production to that of consumption, from the making and repairing of things (he is always interested in craftspeople and fixers) to the dissemination of signs. ... They are fascinated with fakes and models of all kinds – we can call them simulacra

...These novels both play with and are horrified by the instability of reality – environments that are not what they seem or that dissolve abruptly. This can be seen as postmodern instability. And as we have noticed already, the characters caught up in this variety of games and miscommunications, fakes, and reality shifts are themselves very unstable, given to moods, suspicions, depressions, betrayals.. the result is a kind of conflict between the radical, postmodern reality-dissolves, and the ethics that the main characters try to live by. Their actions count, they are capable of betrayal, cruelty, cowardice, or of kindness and sacrifice, even in a world in which what is real and what is authentic is both uncertain and constantly changing. **Christopher Palmer, *Philip K. Dick*, in David Seed (ed.) Blackwell**

The range of sf tropes for which animal studies is relevant forms an accurate measure of the topics with which the present age grapples: struggles over extinctions, extreme weather, climate change, and other indications of the ecological deterioration of the biome or ecosystem, and between relativistic and fundamentalist ideologies, nationalism and globalization, first and third worlds, and the organic and the technological. For these reasons, animal studies will continue to grow, and because all of these anxieties concern the future of our planet, sf will continue to be a vital method of exploration.

Descartes famously claimed that animals were organic machines, lacking not only reason but feelings, and thus we could use them as we saw fit without any moral qualm. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). The protagonist is named Deckard; pronunciation with the emphasis on the second syllable instead of the first results in a phonetic rendering of Descartes. Deckard's job is to retire (kill) androids which (who) are defined as organic machines. He can do so only as long as he can convince himself that the androids have no feelings, no empathy. Once the Cartesian claim becomes untenable, Deckard must retire (in the conventional way) from his profession. The theory, which joined us to the rest of the animal world, was employed in social Darwinism and eugenics to reaffirm hierarchical thinking.

A counter-view has existed in Western philosophy all along, although it has not dominated. Pythagoras saw animals as reincarnated human beings. Jeremy Bentham and Arthur Schopenhauer recognized that the ability of animals to suffer obligated human compassion.... As more Westerners learned about Eastern religions, and as East and West became increasingly interdependent, the traditional monotheistic stand on the strict division between human and animal worth also began to waver. **Joan Gordon, "Animal Studies", Bould et al, *Routledge Companion to Science Fiction***

To Dick, *humanness*, then, is not a genetic code or species designation. Existence may precede essence, but essence is behavior, performance, action – ethics, not biology….

The androids replace empathy with "friendly", the superficial appearance for the real, authentic thing, and that is the novel's central claim. That Mercerism is indeed ontologically bogus does not make it any less ethically useful. The alternative notion would be that all we experience is illusional. … True epiphanies can *only* be experienced by readers, their hands erotically fastened upon the corporeal novel that is, truly, an empathy box. **Neil Easterbrook, "Ethics and Alterity", in Bould et al**

Subject to societal collapse, daily nuclear fallout, and threats of biological and cognitive degeneration, Earth's inhabitants must cope with personal and cultural wounds caused by severe physical isolation, psychological alienation, and consistent and pervasive practices of discrimination. Despite the novel's conspicuous engagement with the traumatic, its critics avoid this area of study, focusing instead on a debate over what qualities, performative or essentialized, denote "authentic" human subjectivity. Certainly, Dick's novel foregrounds such inquiries, yet in a narrative so clearly dedicated to destabilizing any essentialized vision of the human through its carnivalesque play with human/android/animal relationships….I suggest that instead of asking what defines "authentic" humanity, *Do Androids Dream?* asks a more complicated and ethically relevant pair of questions: how might we manage trauma, absence, and loss in an era of simulation?

The post-apocalyptic culture depicted in the novel is based upon anthropocentric values constructed in such a way as to belittle and disem- power human and nonhuman others ("specials," androids, ersatz animals) by defining the human as a specialized category of being that has exclusive access to empathy. However, the narrative reveals this ability to empathize to be chimerical: the humans, perhaps because of their ideological entitle- ments, demonstrate little to no actual ability to empathize with human and nonhuman others. As Jill Galvin contends, "what passes for 'empathy' among humans derives far more from a cultural construction than from any categorical essence" (415). Thus, Dick's humans have become what they most fear and despise: "androids" incapable of feeling for or with others…classifying both androids and animals as scapegoats. In order to keep the myth of human exceptionalism alive, androids must remain culturally and ontologically marginalized, enabling a cultural displace- ment of the inherent absence in the human onto the android. To offset this ideological sleight-of-hand, the animal must be positioned as the android's opposite: it becomes the transcendental marker of humanity's unique ability to feel for or with the other. As Galvin argues, "live animals, in a post-nuclear era which finds them scarce, have been fetishized as the repositories of human empathy" (415).

In both Dick's post-apocalyptic San Francisco and his own culture of late 1960s America, these deferment practices postpone the realization that the human has always already been the *posthuman* and that reality is indeed, as Deckard states near the novel's conclusion, "a fake" (234).

In *Do Androids Dream?* the essentializing myth of the empathetic human becomes a

safeguard against trauma by coding both the android and the animal as *unreal* subjects, scapegoats that must suffer so that humans can avoid painful realities. Despite their ubiquity and significance, the android and the animal must be positioned as spectral or unreal quantities—nonhuman carriers of human meaning that are forced to maintain ontological borders.

Sherryl Vint argues, "So long as that boundary remains in place, unchallenged, presumed easily able to denote the gap between those who might be killed without any moral or legal consideration and those included within institutions of civil society and ethical community, this sacrifice will continue…humans relegate androids to a place in the cultural imagination as, at best, subhuman workers, commodities designed to fill human needs….The android fulfills both ontological and cultural needs that hide the novel's traumas: ontologically, it is purely inhuman in that it cannot empathize, allowing humans to define themselves in opposition to androids (they are what they claim androids cannot be); culturally, androids provide humans with something to despise, something to antagonize, something to offer the illusory feel- ing that they have an effect against entropy. As I have emphasized, these perspectives are cultural myths, master narratives that exist to establish a hierarchy in which humans hold a privileged and sacred position.

The final chapters of *Do Androids Dream?* thrust the reader into an ever-widening circle of marvelous events and uncanny reversals that exceed all ontological and ethical limits established previously in the narrative. Testing the borders of anthropocentric humanism, the novel opens up new avenues of subjective and ethical relations among humans, androids, and animals…relegating the human as little more than a trace that haunts these new trans-subjects…all previous conceptions of the human and the real lose their grip. Without a centralizing taxonomy, a code by which to categorize and classify, all things or beings become equal in that, while they may not have legal rights or accurate cultural designations, they deserve *response*.

In the novel's final pages, Dick maneuvers the reader through a series of traumatic occurrences that work to destabilize the self as a singular construction and experiment instead with the self as a site through which multiple environment-worlds co-relate.

By learning to treat the android as a self, Deckard becomes part of a posthuman collective. In this way,

Galvin considers the novel a "bildungsroman for the cybernetic age" that "describes an awakening of the posthuman subject"

Deckard does not hate the androids, nor does he kill them solely for money. He kills them because he feels for and with them; he becomes unnatural and thus becomes open to the radical ethics of posthuman trans-subjectivity.

He violates his hope, yet he also accepts what he has rejected most vehemently: the life of the electric animal. Gone are the codes and ideologies of anthropocentric humanism as well as the concerns for monetary gain and social status and the worries over what is or is not authentic. What is left is an electric toad to be fed with organic flies—the ultimate dynamic of acceptance of posthuman vulnerability that lets in the environment-worlds of others through a violation of the central, unifying conception of the self.

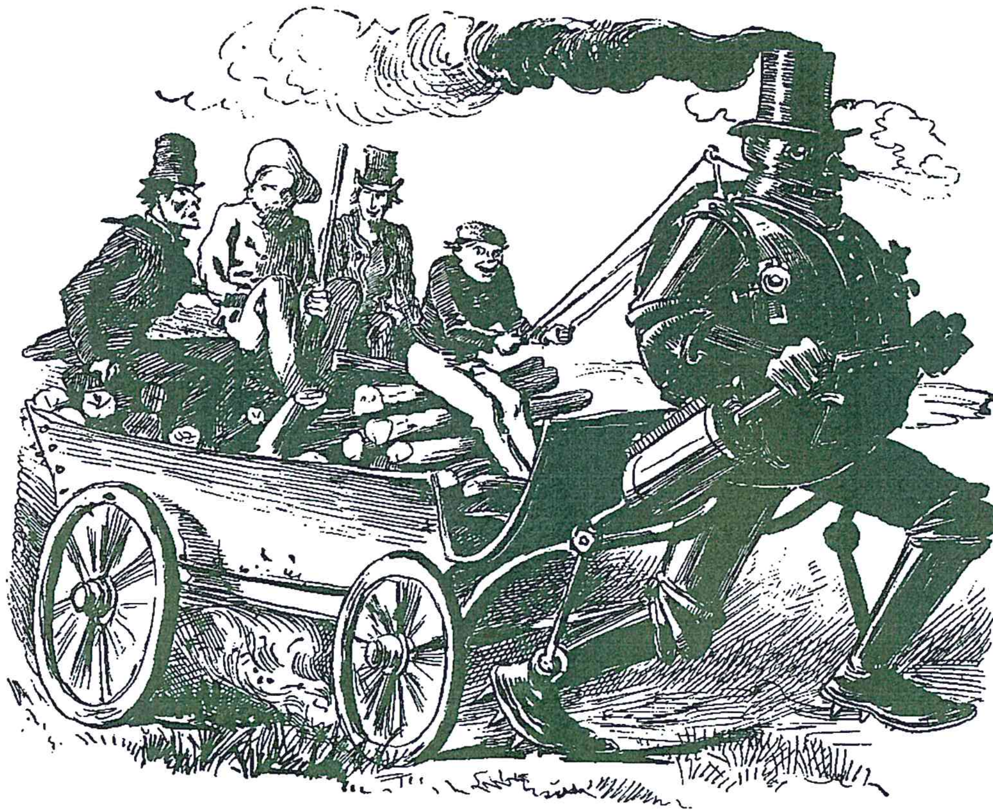
***Tony M. Vinci* "Posthuman Wounds: Trauma, Non-Anthropocentric Vulnerability, and the Human/Android/Animal Dynamic in Philip K. Dick's*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*?" Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association, Volume 47, Number 2, Fall 2014, pp. 91-112**

DAVID SEED OXFORD SHORT INTRODUCTIONS : SCIENCE FICTION

period of Raymond Chandler and film noir. Scott's habit of 'pictorial referencing' resulted in a unique blend of futuristic and period detail. One moment we see flying cars; the next a series of bicycles run past. The result is that, unusually, we see a future city with a history. Although he didn't live to see the final film, Dick did visit the studios and saw a television report of one shooting session, being impressed by the concrete detail of the method, and declaring: 'It's a world that people actually live in.' The film embodies power in the huge pyramid of the Tyrell Corporation and in the opening sequences uses the central image of an enlarged eye, suggesting at once surveillance, the activities of the blade runner himself as a latter-day private eye, and the only organ which can supposedly distinguish human from replicant.

Robots and cyborgs

The term 'robot' entered the language in 1920 from the Czech writer Karel Capek's play *R.U.R.: Rossum's Universal Robots*, in which the word carried suggestions of heavy labour, even of slavery. As the application of the term developed, it came to mean a self-contained, maybe remote-controlled 'artificial device that mimics the actions and, possibly, the appearance of a human being'. Prior to 1920, the existence of robot-like constructions stretches back to antiquity, devices known as automata or androids (literally, 'man-like'). They begin to appear in 19th-century literature with the dancing automaton in E. T. A. Hoffmann's story 'The Sandman', in Edgar Allen Poe's fascinated comments on Johann Maelzel's chess-playing device, and in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871), in which the household of the future includes domestic automata. The first detailed account of such a construction occurs in Edward S. Ellis's *The Huge Hunter or, The Steam Man of the Prairies* (1865), in which the machine is ten feet tall and constructed entirely of iron, and a boiler is housed in its body. By modern standards, it is a crude enough figure, even wearing the 'stove-pipe hat' of the Victorian gentleman. Ellis's machine was steam-driven and combined



10. Illustration to Edward S. Ellis's *The Steam Man of the Prairies* (1865)

elements of locomotion (motive power), humanity (shape), and horse (it was directed by reins).

Once robots begin to appear in 20th-century writing, a number of central issues become apparent. Sidney Fowler Wright's 1929 story 'Automata' evokes a grim future when the automata have superseded humans in a 'triumph' of evolution. In *Metropolis*, the inventor Rotwang constructs a replicant of the character Maria. And in *R.U.R.*, the robots take over the world economy. Displacement and replication become two of the main fears in robot narratives, fears of humans losing their centrality. Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), the original novel on which *Blade Runner* was based, makes the second of these fears into its central subject. Organic androids have been designed to work in the Martian colonies but have fled that chattel slavery to come to a ruined Earth following World War

Terminus. In his pursuit of these for the San Francisco Police Department, Rick Deckard constantly questions the nature of identity. The novel shows from the very first page a world already mechanized in many respects, and even the state religion, Mercerism, is named after an industrial method for treating fabrics. How then to distinguish replicants from human originals? Deckard has no answer to this and even demonstrates a reluctance to believe that all replicants are non-human. Similarly, in the third act of *R.U.R.* two robots begin to demonstrate human feelings, and so perhaps we should add a third fear to robots: that they might make it ultimately impossible to identify humans.

The writer who has promoted a consistently positive vision of robots is Isaac Asimov, who began publishing his robot stories in the 1940s and who, in a bid to combat technophobia – what he called the 'Frankenstein complex' – formulated his famous Three Laws of Robotics:

1) A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2) A robot must obey any orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3) A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

Asimov's simple strategy of describing robots rationally and 'as machines rather than metaphors' transformed their representation in science fiction. Apart from his commitment to technological representation, Asimov also extends the trope of robots as workers. 'The Bicentennial Man' (1976) is a particularly interesting example for its implicit treatment of race. In common with many of Asimov's later robot stories, the opening humanizes the subject as Andrew Martin, delaying the reader's recognition that he is a robot. Only the 'smooth blankness' of his face gives us a hint. Throughout this story, there is a running analogy between the robot and an African American; thus the ending, when Andrew

strives for recognition as a man, is loaded with racial as well as humanistic significance, especially given the circumstances of the story's publication during the national Bicentennial year.

Although the dividing line between the two is not hard and fast, the cyborg is different from a robot in being a hybrid creation. Coined in 1960 in relation to survival in outer space, a cyborg is a cybernetic organism, crudely a combination of human and machine. Martin Caidin's 1972 novel *Cyborg* describes how a pilot, grotesquely injured in a crash, has his body reconstructed by the secret government Office of Strategic Operations on condition that he works for them. The narrative extrapolates one of the most common applications of cybernetic organisms, namely in the field of medicine, and applies it to contemporary power structures. Similarly and more famously, in the 1987 film *RoboCop* a Detroit policeman is reconstructed by Omni Consumer Products, who have taken over the control of the city police force, and released on to the streets as a RoboCop, the ultimate irresistible law-enforcement officer imaged as a kind of armoured cowboy.

11. Still from Paul Verhoeven's *RoboCop* (1987)

Here, however, the experiment goes wrong. Although it doesn't produce a cyborg, *Frankenstein* sets the narrative paradigm. The RoboCop's original memory has not been erased, and the second half of the film follows his attempts to get revenge on his 'killers'.

The best-known film treatment of the cyborg is the *Terminator* series starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. In the launch film, the action is set in the present (1984) with two irruptions from the future of 2029: the Terminator and his antagonist. The Terminator is an armoured killing machine on the inside covered by a layer of living human tissue. He is, in other words, a cybernetic assassin, who for Donna Haraway, because of his capacity to repair himself, represents the 'self-sufficient, self-generated Tool in all of its infinite but self-identical variations'. It also breaks a mould for action movies in showing the Terminator's defeat at the hands of his intended female victim.

Donna Haraway has produced the major theorization of the cyborg in her 1985 essay 'A Cyborg Manifesto', in which she deploys the concept as a polemical tool for breaking down spuriously sharp distinctions like that between human and machine. Drawing on feminist SF by Joanna Russ and others, she gives the cyborg a cultural centrality as representing the hybrid nature of our contemporary existence and argues that Rachel, the replicant in *Blade Runner* simultaneously desired and feared by Rick Deckard, is the 'image of a cyborg culture's fear, love, and confusion'.

Haraway's use of the cyborg to examine social and sexual issues was followed in Marge Piercy's 1991 novel *He, She and It* (*Body of Glass* outside the USA), set in a Jewish enclave within the America of 2059. An illegal cyborg named Yod (the tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet) has been created to protect the settlement just as, according to legend, the Golem was created out of clay in the 16th century to protect the Jewish community of Prague. Piercy

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Philip K. Dick, In Memoriam

Philip K. Dick, who died in March at 53, was the Shakepeare of Science Fiction. Thirty odd novels over as many years made his name as familiar to SF enthusiasts as it was unknown in English departments, although he became a cult figure among French intellectuals. The most ineffectual way to argue Dick's greatness, however, is to claim his books as high literature (as when enthusiasts pass off Hammett or Chandler, say, for Dostoyevsky). A mass-cultural sub-genre like SF has different (and stricter) laws than high culture, and can sometimes express realities and dimensions that escape high literature.

Consider Dick's capacity to render history. Consumer society, media society, the "society of the spectacle", late capitalism – whatever one wants to call his moment – is striking in its loss of a sense of the historical past and of historical futures. This incapacity to imagine historical difference – what Marcuse called the atrophy of the Utopian imagination – is a far more significant pathological symptom of late capitalism than features like "narcissism". "Nostalgia art" from *American Graffiti* to Doctorow's (otherwise fine) novels testifies not to an interest in the past but rather to its transformation into sheer stereotypes. Even the lessons of older revolutionary theory and practice are often vitiated by historical nostalgia (*Reds* is also nostalgia a film, alas!).

Science Fiction is generally understood as the attempt to imagine unimaginable futures. But its deepest subject may in fact be our own historical present. The future of Dick's novels renders our present historical by turning it into the past of a fantasized future, as in the most electrifying episodes of his books. In one of the finest and most somber of his novels, *Ubik*, hapless protagonist Joe Chip is desperately trying to reach Des Moines and must travel across a landscape whose objects are rapidly decaying in time. In a first ominous note he finds that the coin-operated refrigerator of his own 1992 present begins to refuse money that has reverted to 1970s coinage.

The great airports are also presumably reverting (is there still a "New York Airport" in the late 1930s? he wonders), while even the ground transportation to get him across the island begins to become obsolete, the flapples and

helicopter taxis of his own day replaced by a classic museum-piece 1939 LaSalle. When he finally manages to rent a Curtiss-Wright biplane theoretically capable of reaching Des Moines sometime tomorrow afternoon (the LaSalle has in the meantime reverted to a 1929 Model A Ford), there is no guarantee the process will not regress beyond the age of aviation altogether.

In *Now Wait for Last Year* this quest for an impossible past takes the form of a complex that a senile tycoon builds on his private asteroid, a complex that reproduces with loving authenticity the Washington, DC, of his 1935 boyhood, 120 years earlier. Employees work overtime on the search for period artifacts to furnish this simulation of the past, unearthing such priceless treasures as an old package of Lucky Strike *with the green*, a radio recording of the soap opera *Betty and Bob* or of Alexander Woolcolt's "Town Crier".

In his most famous novel, *The Man in the High Castle*, Dick unfolds an alternate history in which the Germans and the Japanese won the Second World War and occupy and administer the two halves of the continental US between them. But while the Nazis (Hitler long since dead of syphilitic paresis, the succession having passed to Baldur von Schirach) have completed the genocide of Africa and are on their way to colonize the moon, the milder and more aesthetic Japanese have developed a passionate fad for genuine pre-war American artifacts.

Kipple and Biltong

The Dick future is no less peculiar than its collectable pasts – a bureaucratic world in which creditors' jet-balloons humiliate hapless debtors by hovering overhead and blaring out their financial standing to the surrounding crowds, in which the coin-op door of your own apartment refuses to let you out when (like Joe Chip) you never have any loose change on you, and automated cabs offer comments and advice more exasperatingly than any contemporary taxi driver.

In some of these near-futures an even more ominous phenomenon, kipple, makes its appearance. This is Dick's personal vision of entropy, in which objects lose their form and "merge faceless and identical, mere pudding-like kipple piled to the ceiling of each apartment" (from *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* filmed as *Blade Runner*). This late twentieth-century object-world (unlike the gleaming technological futures of Verne or Wells) tends to disintegrate under its own momentum, disengaging films of dust over all its surfaces, growing spongy, tearing apart like rotten cloth or becoming as unreliable as a floorboard you put your foot through.

Hence the obsessive compensatory theme of reproduction. In one of his most alarming fables, "Pay for the Printer", Dick imagines a steadily deteriorating post-atomic universe momentarily rescued by the arrival of a curious blob-like species, the Biltong, who appeared "in the closing days of the War, attracted by the H-bomb flashes" (Dick's work includes whole boarding

houses full of benevolent and likeable aliens). The Biltong can reproduce perfectly any item or object set before them. But with old age and exhaustion, their prints become blurred and lose definition – whiskey tastes like anti-freeze, doors rip off cars, houses collapse. At length, a population that has forgotten how to produce anything lynches its dying benefactors.

This post-catastrophe perspective may explain why in Dick's novels, as in other kinds of populism, handicraft skill (especially potting) becomes the privileged form of productive labor. Yet it is the related theme of reproduction and of the production of copies that makes Dick's work one of the most powerful expressions of the society of spectacle and pseudo-event, in which "the image is the final form of commodity reification", as Guy Debord puts it in *The Society of the Spectacle*. For Dick was also the epic poet of drugs and schizophrenia of a 1960s counterculture (not excluding the gnostic mysticism that he propounded insistently in his final years, after the renunciation of the drug culture in *A Scanner Darkly*, in 1977).

This is the Dick of *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (a sardonic commentary on Bradbury's idyllic *Martian Chronicles*), where conscript settlers on a barren Mars seek distraction from their deformed vegetables by a collective drug ritual in which they transubstantiate into the figures of a Barbie-doll-type lay-out, enjoying the proxy pleasures of a vanished jet-set Earth, driving Jaguar XXB sports ships over still pristine Californian beaches and making imaginary love with each other while their bodies lie immobile in Martian hovels.

End to individualism

But Dick was more than a supreme embodiment of 1960s countercultural themes. This is, for instance, a literature about business, and in particular the sector of image and illusion production. Its "average heroes" – an older, populist, Capraesque type of small employees such as record salesmen, self-employed mechanics and petty bureaucrats – are caught in the convulsive struggles of monopoly corporations and now galactic and intergalactic multinationals, rather than in the *Star Wars* feudal or imperial battles.

It is a literature in which the collective makes a fitful and disturbing reappearance, most often in a paralyzed community of the dead or the stricken, their brains wired together in a nightmarish attempt to find out why their familiar small-town worlds are lacking in depth or solidity, only to discover that they are "in reality" all immobilized together in some cryogenic half-life.

It is, finally, a literature of the so-called "death of the subject", of an end to individualism so absolute as to call into question the last glimmers of the ego, as when, in one of Dick's most chilling stories, an executive in an android-producing firm makes the shattering discovery that he is himself an android. "We didn't want you to know," his fellow employees console him gently, "we didn't want to tell you."

central novels in terms of the gnosis of new age spirituality and exotic theologies, and in short to seek Dick's "actuality" in terms of current pseudo-religious modes and fashions. To be sure, it would be more important to try to grasp the later "mystical" turn in purely formal and narrative terms, as an attempt to solve problems of content with which the Science Fiction matrix could no longer deal (just as it would be important to grasp the shift from the period of the "mainstream novel" in the same formal and formalizing terms). An absolute formalism, indeed, offers the only really satisfactory way of approaching the writer's concrete social and psychic content, by way of demonstrating the latter's unique and uniquely historical demands on representation. We cannot go so far here, as I have said; but the formalist approach to whatever motifs in our corpus present a religious appearance or religious associations – that is to say, an approach to these motifs as solutions to problems of representation inherent in their content – will be productive in a variety of ways.

First of all, it may help to discredit the facile word *theme* which seems at one and the same time methodologically unavoidable and overly humanistic or anthropomorphic: the "theme", in other words, seems to promise a meaning and to offer a general category that can range all the way from images to ideas. (I hasten to add that the term *motif*, used above, is not much better, but at least underscores the purely formal nature of the entity, at the expense of alleged meanings.)

Thus "empathy" is one of those motifs, and finds itself written into many of the early novels of our cycle as a constituent part of the plot (the empathy tests, which certify androidhood or schizophrenia), all the while seeming to offer a philosophical concept of some kind, saying something about human warmth or coldness in interpersonal relationships and sometimes (as in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*) even parading itself as a kind of privileged key to the novel's meaning or message. But it is precisely that notion of a meaning or message that (in the wake of so much modern theory, from the formalists onward) I would want to challenge here, and this with two remarks.

The first is a simple reminder of what so many critics since Shklovsky have maintained, namely that the "meanings" of a work, its ideas, its conceptual content, all of this is to be seen fully as much a part of the work's raw materials as everything more tangible (setting, psychological character traits, etc.). An absolute formalism demands a bracketing as radical as Husserl's in phenomenology, after which the various kinds of conceptual content, such as precisely this pop-psychological or pop-psychoanalytic notion of "empathy" in Dick, are to be seen as specific building blocks. From the perspective of a formalist bracketing, then, the work has no meaning of that humanistic kind (whatever Dick himself might have thought). To be sure, it has an utterly different kind of meaning as a historical symptom and as a socially symbolic representational structure. But in that case "ideas" like empathy are merely elements in that symptom or structure. They document Dick's intellectual involvement (however

naïve) in the pop-cultural debates of the period (something Anthony Wolk's research on his readings in psychiatric literature usefully underscores).

But this leads us to a second parenthetical remark, which may be termed the Angenot dilemma: indeed, in *1889* as well as in a host of other fundamental historical-archival inquiries, Marc Angenot demonstrates how the acquisition of information about a work's context stands in inverse proportion to the assessment of its value.[5] "Context" is in this sense more a matter of journalistic fashion than it is a function of that nobler and more democratic thing called the public sphere or civil society: it consists in making an inventory of everything "people" were talking about in the media and its real-life commentaries (kitchen, barber shop, bars and taverns) at any given time. Angenot shows us how even the most celebrated works can disintegrate into a tissue of allusions, gossip, trendy thoughts and "problems" when the informational context is restored with a certain degree of abundance and complexity. His example is Zola, but it might just as well be Shakespeare; and we may expect future scholarship to yield a volume of information about current events in the American 1950s and early 1960s which threaten our appreciation of Dick's inventiveness and "thinking" in much the same way, turning "engagement" into name-dropping and giving a novel twist to the classical notion of the artist as the "antennae of the race" (Pound).

As for the philosophical contradictions of this "concept", we will see that its difficulties, even more fundamental in the central notion of identification than with empathy or sympathy and turning obviously enough on the problem of thinking any relationship between the other and consciousness, do in fact find themselves registered in Dick's work, but in unexpected places and as representational dilemmas, and not in the form of pseudo-psychological theorizing.

Indeed, we must admire the way Dick's imagination parleys the whole vacuous theme of empathy into a new and novel religion, or California-style religious craze, namely the consolations of Mercerism, complete with the life story of the humble savior, the delivery mechanism (the "black empathy box" with its twin handles, a kind of cousin of the Penfield mood machine, or, in another avatar, of the Dr Smile suitcase), the ritual of the "imitation", the conception of the salvational value of suffering and sacrifice, and even the emergence of a kind of "higher criticism" (the revelation that "Mercer" was in reality a down-and-out actor called Al Jarry). We may also note the character of Mercerian theology: Buddhist or nihilistic conviction that "there is no salvation", the purpose of the ritual being "to show you that you are not alone"; to which a *Bhagavadgita* moral is added, appropriately enough for the

5 Marc Angenot, *1889: Un état du discours social* (Montreal, 1989). And see also my essay "Marc Angenot, Literary History, and the Study of Culture in the Nineteenth Century", *Yale Journal of Criticism*, Vol. XVII, No. 2 (2004), pp. 233–253.

ethical dilemmas of this middle-class bounty-hunter: "Go and do your task, even though you know it's wrong." I think it would be overhasty to characterize this, particularly in the later stages, as some kind of parody of religion, for the parodic elements are soaked up laterally into the SF conventions and framework, while the relationship of Mercerism to suffering and to the desolation of the post-atomic landscape freezes all possible grins into some mixed tonality or nightmarish zaniness preeminently characteristic of Dick's ontological and evaluative undecideability (of which more later).

The crucial point about "empathy", however, is that in Mercerism it is enacted in the form of "fusion" with the other, or, rather, with the televisual image of the other. Philosophically, in other words, it has seemed impossible to imagine any identification with the other short of a merging together of the two subjectivities. But this opens up some novel representational perspectives or possibilities.

First of all, the fusing with Mercer is grasped in terms of landscape:

> He saw at once a famous landscape, the old, brown, barren ascent, with tufts of dried-out bonelike weeds, poking slantedly into a dim and sunless sky. One single figure, more or less human in form, toiled its way up the hillside ... John Isidore gradually experienced a waning of the living room in which he stood; the dilapidated furniture and walls ebbed out and he ceased to experience them at all. He found himself, instead, as always before, entering into the landscape of drab hill, drab sky ...(18)

Not only is it the landscape which is the instrument of fusion with Mercer; one can also speak of a kind of metaphoric identification, a metaphoric slippage, between the desolation of the depopulated and radioactive San Francisco of the post-World-War-Terminus years and this barren and desolate hilly landscape, which however is in no way visually similar to the wasted city. The mysteries of substitution and sacrifice thus remain, only they are transposed onto the two landscapes, about which it continues to be unclear how the desolation of the one could in any way relieve the desolation of the other.

It is also worth noting that "fusion" blurs the distinction between individual and collective in a different way, one quite distinct from the dual relationship with Mercer; but this is something best observed in a very different situation, namely that of the colonists on Mars and their pastime, the Perky Pat layout (in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*). Here, an even less promising landscape seems imperiously to demand some form of escape, as Barney Mayerson's arrival makes clear:

> The sand-dredge had completed its autonomic task; his possessions sat in a meager heap, and loose sand billowed across them already – if they were not taken below they would succumb to the dust and soon ... The other hovelists

> gathered to assist him, passing his suitcases from hand to hand, to the conveyor belt that serviced the hovel below the surface. Even if he was not interested in preserving his former goods they were; they had a knowledge superior to his ... It hadn't upset him that much, seeing the half-abandoned gardens and fully abandoned equipment, the great heaps of rotting supplies. He knew from the edu-tapes that the frontier was always like that, even on Earth; Alaska had been like that until recent times and so, except for the actual resort towns, was Antarctica right now. (140, 150)

Although it is clear enough that even Barney himself is not reassured by this final denegation, we probably need to interrogate Dick's own exhilaration with such scenes: the "kipple" of the post-atomic San Francisco of *Do Androids?* (the term designates the way in which everything solid is frittering into dust), and the sand of the as yet incompletely colonized Mars, can neither of them be taken as outright visions of horror (unlike, for instance, Mercer's tomb-world or the menace of Jory in *Ubik*). In another way they seem to rhyme with the America of the 1950s of the mainstream novels, of which the least that can be said is that they reinvent the notion of provincial exile for the modern American tradition. It may not altogether be ineptly psychological to venture a diagnosis: if SF catastrophes are often the mere pretext for the re-invention of the small Utopian community of the future, one may perhaps hazard the guess that here Dick's own subjective malaise finds itself objectively (as well as collectively) motivated. Not only is it worse than any passing subjective depression, but it has to be shared and experienced by everyone else as well.

However this may be, there would seem to be little enough resemblance between the "stations-of-the-cross" agonies of identification with Mercer and the Frankie Avalon beach-movie wish-fulfillments made available to the colonists on Mars by the Perky Pat layouts:

> He was Walt. He owned a Jaguar XXB sports ship with a flat-out velocity of fifteen thousand miles an hour. His shirt came from Italy and his shoes were made in England ... Walt shut off the TV, rose, and walked barefoot to the window; he drew the shades, saw out then onto the warm, sparkling early-morning San Francisco street, the hills and white houses. This was Saturday morning and he did not have to go to his job down in Palo Alto at Ampex Corporation; instead – and this rang nicely in his mind – he had a date with his girl, Pat Christensen, who had a modern little apt over on Portero Hill.
>
> It was always Saturday. (44–45)

In this participatory, drug-assisted fantasy, the metaphysical complications of "fusion" are rather more comical, since any number of men can share the Walt figure, and any number of women that of Pat. Nor is the historical

of the novel in question [*Blade Runner*, Ridley Scott, 1982]). I believe, therefore, that Dick's focus is far more Cartesian than it is ethical or pop-psychological, an impression reinforced by recalling the ambiguities of Descartes' dualism, which makes him into the father of modern materialism and modern idealism alike. Animals are machines, and how do I really know that other people are not also automata? But Dick reactivates the Cartesian problem in a peculiarly virulent and modern way; and reawakens Cartesian doubt in an even more threatening and all-embracing fashion than the hypothesis of the "malignant genie". For in crucial stories like "Imposter" or "The Electric Ant" the questions now identified as involving Artificial Intelligence seep into and infect every experience of Descartes' realm of thought or consciousness, and it is no longer only the android who has to ask such autoreferential questions. What emerges at length is what I will call the "android cogito": I think, therefore I am an android. This reverses the external issue of testing into a permanent rift within self-consciousness itself; and it is symptomatic that the debates about *Blade Runner* (from which the Phil Resch episode, dramatizing the android cogito, has been removed) have slowly evolved into discussions as to whether Rick Deckard (unquestionably a human in the novel) might not be an android himself.

Yet in giving final shape to this particular thematic cluster – paradoxically organized around the philosophical problems raised by the individual consciousness, which is however (in a fashion reminiscent of the aggressivity of Lacan's mirror stage) dramatized as the enemy of humans rather than their alter ego – we must not omit to add a few other features linked to androids but also linked, at least metonymically, to the cluster itself.

One of those is surely the seme of the technological, which at once evolves in Dick's political imagination into that of the great corporations, with their monopoly on reproductive techniques and their social power (already the worry about the "organization man" and the related impersonal and anonymous business structures – monopolistic but not yet globalized – had become a popular theme of 1950s culture). At the same time we need to retain all the ambivalence of Dick's sense of this technology, most of the time mechanical, but occasionally throwing up stunningly organic images such as "Pay for the Printer", in which the alien Biltong faithfully reproduce any object set in front of them – a situation then grimly worked out for capitalism in *Now Wait for Last Year*, where the "Martian print amoeba" is made to retain its mimicry of animal furs: "the answer, developed over a period of many months, consisted in killing the amoeba during its interval of mimicry and then subjecting the cadaver to a bath of fixing-chemicals which had the capacity to lock the amoeba into that final form" (14).

In "Pay for the Printer", to be sure, the organic reproductive or mimetic technology is a kind of alien assistance in a postwar situation in which "real" human technology has been largely destroyed. But the emergence of the theme

as a feature of some future postwar devastation (just like the more conventional emergence of autonomous and lethal machinery in the *Terminator*-like landscape of "Second Variety", filmed as *Screamers* [Christian Dugay, 1995]) underscores a somewhat more paradoxical association, namely the relationship of this complex of thematics to the idea of the future itself. Why should the notion of the future ever be paradoxical in a genre most often largely defined in terms of extrapolation and systematic anticipation in the first place? But I think we should not take Dick's interest in the future as a given; indeed, we will shortly find that his sense of history is unexpectedly complicated and more original than any mere futuristic exercise.

At any rate, the completion of this cluster, in which individual subjectivity and the android cogito are linked to a perspective on the future along with technology in its strongest traditional form (not yet cybernetic, yet driving the reproductive and the mimetic to its very limits), can now by a kind of thematic inversion send us on to another crucial complex of themes. We have evoked the Rosen Association of *Do Androids Dream?* as a gigantic transnational, whose business practices (providing the android workforce of the off-world factories) are reminiscent of the Nazi slave labor organizations of *The Man in the High Castle*. But we have not yet observed that the Rosen organization is itself the outgrowth, in the far future, of that small family business on whose troubles the plot of *We Can Build You* (written some four years earlier) turns. It is indeed in *We Can Build You* that the very invention of the android, or at least the emergence of the Dickian android, with all its rich associations, can be observed.

For these first androids strike one as being of a very different kind and spirit from those of Roy Baty's menacing group of predators; and indeed I am tempted to say that Dick's invention of the Lincoln and the Stanton are among the most sublime achievements of his work. In the beginning, to be sure, they are meant to be working parts of a grandiose commercial version of something like Virgil Ackerman's Wash-35: only, as Maury describes it, this project aims at nothing less than

> a ten-year-spaced-apart centennial of the U.S. Civil War, and what we do is, the Rosen factory supplies all the participants, simulacra – that's the plural, it's a Latin type word – of *everybody*. Lincoln, Stanton, Jeff Davis, Robert E. Lee, Longstreet, and around three million simple ones as soldiers we keep in stock all the time. And we have these battles fought with the participants really killed, these made-to-order simulacra blown to bits, instead of just a grade-B movie type business like a bunch of college kids doing Shakespeare. (20)

This is the resurrection of the past and the dead with a vengeance, aiming at nothing less than a lifelike and realistic second death of all those thus revived. The project (we are after all only seven years after the launching of Disneyland