

Quiet Refusals: Androids as Others in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: January 17, 2018

Accepted: March 15, 2018

Published: June 30, 2018

Volume: 9 Issue: 3

Advance access: May 2018

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

Key words:

Science Fiction,

Postmodernism,

Ideology,

Racism,

The Real

ABSTRACT

This study intends to show how science fiction literature in general and Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* in particular can be read as a symptom of the postmodern era we live in. Taking as the main clues the ideas of the cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek, who combines Marxism with the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, as well as his account of "postmodernism," the study discusses how, contrary to what capitalism dubs a "post-ideological" era, we are more than ever dominated by ideology through its cynical function. It further examines (through such Lacanian concepts as fantasy, desire, *objet petit a*, and *jouissance*) the way late capitalistic ideology functions in Dick's narrative, and discusses how the multiculturalist society prompts new forms of racism through abstract universalization which only accounts for and tolerates the other as long as they appear within the confines of that formal abstraction. Finally, it looks into how ideologies as such can be subverted from the Real point within the symbolic.

INTRODUCTION

Philip K. Dick has been hailed, by fans and critics alike, as one of the most influential figures in science fiction literature. The preoccupation with the nature of reality and the authentic human being appear as two major themes throughout his prolific career and insofar as ideologies and political/technological tools for controlling the masses (media, drugs, religion, etc.) emerge as an inseparable part of his works, thinkers such as Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek have shown strong enthusiasm for reading Dick's fiction to develop a theory of postmodernism which is essentially colored by Marxist ideas. Dick's wide appeal in academic scholarship can be justified through the embedment of his works in the science fiction genre: although the worlds depicted in science fiction stories are not immediately familiar to us, yet this strangeness and this difference is symptomatic of our own reality – of how we perceive this reality (conscious or otherwise), and how we shape it or are shaped by it. Through a phantasmatical depiction of our contemporary world, Dick aims to make the reader conscious of this difference which we take for granted and which is a significant and indispensable part of our (postmodern) existence. This also accounts for the form science fiction is written: it is presented to us in a fantastic form because the very thing it talks about is

precisely fantasy itself – the way we follow an illusion in almost every communicative act. And ideology is nothing but this fantasy.

Given the fact that Philip K. Dick was a very prolific writer (having written 45 novels in total and 100-plus short stories), and his firm position as one of the master of science fiction literature, it is no wonder that he has been (and is) the target of numerous academic studies and researches. In addition, a number of postmodern thinkers, such as Jean Baudrillard, Žižek and especially Jameson, have found Dick's fiction and ideas symptomatic of the postmodern condition and have drawn on his works in developing their theory. Thus, the critical works done by most scholars on Dick tend to take into account how his fiction lay bare the ideological kernel of capitalist society by discussing the role of technology in shaping the characters' perception of reality, and how in doing so Dick opens up a new perspective for the critique of ideology. Lejla Kucukalic, studying five novels by Dick including *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (hereafter *Do Androids*), identifies three major themes in Dick's works – namely, the construction of reality by media and technology, the containment of "reality" within the "self," and portrayal of different kinds of selves, demonstrating how Dick's fiction is a critique of digital culture of today's

American society. Joshua H. Lind examines the shifting realities of Dick's narratives as examples of contemporary social changes, arguing (via Baudrillard) that the transformation of culture from an industrial capitalist one, requiring restriction of human desire, to a consumer capitalist one, requiring on the contrary expanded desire, results in a supra-real world that sustains itself through representation and images of desire and happiness. Christopher Palmer, giving a powerful reading of a wide range of Dick's fiction including his short stories and his realist novels of the fifties, sees at the heart of Dick's fiction the complex conflict between humanism and postmodernism. Palmer's reading is focused on such postmodern tropes as consumerism, schizophrenia and the drug culture, simulacra and simulation, and the dissolution of boundaries between subject and object as the emblems of the postmodernity. Klaus Benesch, using Lacan's psychoanalysis and Taussig's anthropology, draws a parallel between Dick's novel *Do Androids* and Fritz Lang's classic movie *Metropolis* based on their shared ground in representing technology and cyborg culture, and argues for the role of social investment in determining the way which we confront technology. For Benesch, cyborgs encapsulate "the emergence of a basic cultural conflict within modern society, namely the dichotomic tendencies of accelerated technological progress on the one hand, and the establishment of the individual as a self-reliant, autonomous subject on the other hand" (391). Russell S. Aaronson examines the role of empathy in *Do Androids* and two early short stories ("Beyond Lies the Wub" and "Roog"), demonstrating that Dick's fictions are tied together with an emphasis on emphatic feeling towards both humans and nonhumans. While all the mentioned studies read Dick's *Do Androids* in a capitalist consumerist context, none draws on Lacanian psychoanalysis as a tool for criticizing late capitalist ideology; consequently, in demonstrating the boundaries between reality and illusion in *Do Androids* all fail to point out that reality, far from being a mere opposition to illusion, is itself formed in the shape of fantasy. Further, while the tension between human and android in the novel is aptly discussed in terms of self and other by the authors, none have read the issue in the light of liberal multicultural attitude of tolerance in today's so-called post-ideological societies.

The initial objective of this study is to show, from a Lacanian perspective, how the technological advances in the narrative of the novel create, shape, and sustain the reality for controlling the mass as well as for commercial purposes, and how different characters perceive this reality in the course of the story. The issue of technological advancement will then further be discussed in relation to the operation of ideology in the narrative of the novel. Dick's introduction of technological devices (such as empathy box and Penfield mood organ) will be argued to sustain the inherent ideology of the novel. On the same note, this study will investigate how the capitalist society of the novel gives rise to the tensions with the Other, and how with regard to Slavoj Žižek's discussion of today's biopolitics of fear, the androids of Dick's novel can be seen as the embodiment of this ethnic Other, or what Žižek elsewhere calls the Neighbor, evoking

the Judeo-Christian-Freudian weight of the term. Finally, within the theoretical context of the study the role of Rick Deckard as a hero will be discussed; it will be argued that Deckard's stance toward the androids at the end of the novel is constitutive of an ethical gesture in that he accounts for the Otherness of the Other. Such ethical stance is consequently the very space that makes possible the critique of ideology.

SCIENCE FICTION, POSTMODERNISM, AND BIOPOLITICS OF FEAR

In his seminal essay "On the Poetics of Science Fiction Genre," Darko Suvin identifies science fiction as *the literature of cognitive estrangement* ("Poetics" 372). Suvin sees as the necessary conditions of a science fiction work "the presence and interaction of *estrangement* and *cognition*" (375), and contends that science fiction – along with other family genres such as myth, fairytale, fantasy and pastoral, yet significantly different in approach and social function – bears an opposition to naturalistic literary genres (372) in that science fiction uses a *novum* (i.e. a "cognitive innovation") which is "infused into the [sf] author's [...] culturally defined [...] world" and which is "an important deviation from the author's norm of reality" ("Science Fiction Theory" 36). In other words, this *novum* or "strange newness" is something that transforms or elevates the author's immediate mundane world to an unknown one. Yet this estrangement is symptomatic of the author's reality. "Cognition" here thus "does not imply only a reflecting *of* but also *on* reality. It implies a creative approach tending toward a dynamic transformation rather than toward a static mirroring of the author's environment" ("Poetics" 377).

Suvin then aptly concludes that the cognitive methodology of science fiction is a critical and satirical one. Carl H. Freedman further states:

SF is of all genres the one most devoted to historical specificity: for the SF world is not only one different in time or place from our own, but one whose chief interest is precisely the difference that such difference makes, and, in addition, one whose difference is nonetheless contained within a cognitive continuum with the actual. (187)

Similarly, Dick's works are embedded within such critical inquiry and show close ties with theories of postmodernism. Since "postmodernism" is a problematic term that eludes clear-cut definition, in order to prevent confusion, my initial discussion of the term is turned toward Fredric Jameson's ground-breaking work *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, followed by Žižek's discussion of society of generalized perversion (which is the main framework of this study).

Jameson's argument on postmodernism begins inevitably with the way postmodernism breaks from modernism through its shift in representation of the things. "Postmodernism," Jameson contends, "is what you have when the modernization process is complete and the nature is gone for good. It is a more fully human world than the older one, but one in which 'culture' has become a veritable 'second nature'" (ix). Jameson's distinction between modernism and

postmodernism is grounded on the latter's different positioning in the late capitalist society in which culture itself has become a commodity. Jameson synthesizes the constitutive features of the postmodern as follows:

a new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation [...] in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum; a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private temporality [...]; a whole new type of emotional ground tone [...]; the deep constitutive relationships of all this to a whole new technology, which is itself a figure for a whole new economic world system [...]. (6)

Žižek further develops the idea of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism by adding a strong Lacanian dimension to it; namely that postmodern society is a permissive society, a society of generalized perversion, in which transgression has elevated into the norm (Sharpe & Boucher 146). The reason for such a transubstantiation of the culture, Žižek's informs us, is a certain demise in the paternal authority of the Big Other and therefore the disintegration of social efficiency, which is followed by the supreme reign of superego with its ruthless injunctions to "Enjoy!" Big Other, as Žižek explains, functions as a gaze that defines our public image. In other words, it is through a third party, namely the Big Other, that our socio-symbolic exchanges are possible. At their most elementary level, these symbolic exchanges are what Lacan calls empty gestures. An empty gesture designates a belief or a notion that involves two parties, neither of which believes in that belief directly but only *pretends* to believe for the sake of the other. This gesture, although *empty*, is nonetheless the most essential aspect in many acts of symbolic communication. Thus every symbolic gesture follows a formula of fetishist disavowal; that is, we tend to deny the Real in favor of the symbolic dimension behind it.

But apropos of the death of the Big Other, the so-called postmodern subject is no longer engaged in such fetishist disavowal, but now opts (has to opt) for the Real. This is, according to Žižek, more than what we bargained for, since the death of the Big Other subsequently means a demise in the social efficiency. What follows is that the symbolic order loses its performative power and our socio-economic position is now undermined. Such reflexivity culminates in emergence of the permissive society: in the absence of the paternal authority of the Big Other, the postmodern individual is now bombarded with superego's injunctions to "Enjoy!" The transformation of the symbolic order from one in which we are subject to Nature or Tradition, to one in which we are subject to choices has a paradoxical catch, namely that the apparent freedom that comes with the disintegration of the Big Other appears to the postmodern subject as an impossible duty to carry out, since the superego's sadistic command to enjoy is "far more effective as a way of hindering access to enjoyment than a direct prohibition from the Law not to enjoy." (Myers 55). Consequently, not seeming to keep up with the incessant demands of the superego to enjoy, the subject is driven toward assuming that there is a Big Other in the Real, or what Lacan calls "an Other of the Other." By constructing such paranoid fantasy, in which there

is an Other of the Other behind everything, the subject tries to shoulder off the burden of freedom which the absence of Big Other brings about.

On the other hand, with the supreme reign of superego in the postmodern society, everything is permitted, but, as Žižek is careful to note, everything is permitted *as long as it is divested of its dangerous property*. "On today's market," he observes,

we find a whole series of products deprived of their malignant property: coffee without caffeine, cream without fat, beer without alcohol... And the list goes on [...] up to today's tolerant liberal multiculturalism as an experience of Other deprived of its Otherness. ("Politics to Biopolitics")

It is against this background that Žižek's discussion of post-political biopolitics appears. Žižek views today's hedonism, as noted earlier, as the combination of pleasure with constraint. With regard to today's (bio)politics, Žižek sees as its main investment the fight against "unconstrained consumption [...]" as the main danger." Žižek further extends his example of constrained pleasure (de-caffeinated coffee, etc) into the ideological domain, stating,

Today's liberal tolerance towards others, the respect of otherness and openness towards it, is counterpointed by an obsessive fear of harassment. In short, the Other is just fine, but only insofar as his presence is not intrusive, insofar as this Other is not really other. In a strict homology with the paradoxical structure of [...] chocolate laxative, tolerance coincides with its opposite. (*Violence* 41)

Biopolitics has as its main goal "the regulation of the security and welfare of human lives" (40). Such politics is essentially a politics of fear since it "resorts to fear as its ultimate mobilizing principle: the fear of immigrants, [...] fear of harassment" (40-41). In short, the fear is always the fear of the Other's over-proximity. Žižek's has another name for this Other: Neighbor. "The proximity of the Neighbour [sic], with all the Judeo-Christian-Freudian weight of this term, is the proximity of the thing which, no matter how far away it is physically, is always by definition 'too close'" (45).

It is in this context that I wish to examine Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. Set in the post-apocalyptic site of a nuclear war (World War Terminus) which has left the earth practically uninhabitable, the plot follows the story of Rick Deckard, a police bounty hunter, who is assigned to "retire" (i.e. to kill) six escaped Nexus-6 replicants – the most advanced humanoids designed by Rosen Association that resemble humans in every possible bit yet without the capacity for emphatic feelings. This lack of empathy is in fact how Deckard is able to track down the otherwise human-looking androids: by administering the Voight-Kompff test which measures the emphatic abilities of the one taking the test. In the course of his 24-hour hunt, Deckard comes to call into question the morality of his job by showing a philosophical skepticism as to "what really is human."

The central theme of "human vs. android" in *Do Androids* therefore opens up a space for analyzing the discourse

of tolerance inherent in the postmodern culture of capitalist society. Dick's novel is symptomatic of the ideology of global capitalism and multiculturalism, and the rise of racial tensions at their core. In this regard, androids (as "the inhuman") stand as an ideal example for the ethnic Other, while the novel can be read as an allegory of the late capitalism and its discontents.

MERCERISM AS THE CANNED RELIGION

Set in a future 1992 at the finish of World War Terminus, the Earth of *Do Androids* is now plagued by a radioactive dust that renders it practically impossible for people to live in, causing a great number of people to emigrate to Mars or other colonies of the Earth. Those who have stayed are either too poor to settle in a new colony or banned from emigration by the government because of their lower intelligence. The narrative follows the story of the police agent Rick Deckard, living on Earth with his discontented wife Iran, who takes over the job of killing six slave android escapees. In a world literally surrounded by artificial life, Deckard is less motivated by duty to do his assignment than by a desperate need to buy a live animal to replace his ersatz sheep, as it is also deemed unethical and selfish by the Mercerist religion not to own and raise some kind of an animal. In the course of his 24-hour hunt, Deckard tracks down and kills all the nexus-6 androids with the aid of Voight-Kampff test. He is also engaged in a sexual relationship with Rachael, an unidentified android working for Rosen Corporation that originally made the nexus-6 type, who later kills Deckard's newly-bought live goat by throwing it off the roof. Through an encounter with Wilbur Mercer, the founder of Mercerism, Deckard manages to finish his job by killing the remaining androids who have been sheltered by the "chickenhead" J. R. Isidore. Deckard finally returns home to his wife Iran, content with an electric toad that Mercer has given him.

To see how ideology works in *Do Androids* is to examine how reality, in the Lacanian sense of the term as the socio-symbolic network through which subjects relate to world, is constructed in the narrative of the novel, and how it is transmitted to the subjects through belief machines. Lejla Kucukalic sees the reality of *Do Androids* "as a system of messages, the uninterrupted communication between humans and a variety of mechanical devices such as empathy box, Penfield mood organ, and TV announcement" (73-4). The question of ideology is ultimately tied to the function of desire (in its strict Lacanian sense) in the consumerist society. I will therefore examine Mercerism as the dominant system of relations to show how the subject experiences the reality in the technological world of the narrative, and how the governmental systems of representation maintain and reinforce the capitalist relations of production.

In the devastated and entropic world of the narrative, Mercerism emerges as the only dominant discourse bringing religious comfort and purgation to the characters, advocating empathy as its main discipline to its followers. By touching the twin handles of their empathy box, each person is immediately connected to a virtual world where they undergo a shared experience of suffering by witnessing the prophet

Wilbur Mercer climbing a hill and never reaching the top. For our purpose, Mercerism can be questioned on two levels: 1) political; that is, the way it keeps the individuals in a state of total separation by addicting them to a surplus desire, and 2) commercial; namely, the way it acts as the guarantor of the capitalist relations by engendering desire, and advertising the purchase of animals and consumption of artificial life as its ethics.

In his *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord brilliantly rereads Marx's notion of commodity fetishism in today's world of media and images. Debord sees as the defining feature of such society of the spectacle the moment when our social life is completely colonized by the commodity and consumerism (21), so that instead of directly living and experiencing, we merely consume the representation of things that corresponds to our desires. Following Debord, Jill Galvan emphasizes the totalitarian kernel of the Mercerite spectacle in exploiting the political subjects by keeping them in a state of total isolation and at the same time transfixed by the Mercer's screen image. Such a strategy, Galvan notes, operates as "a safety valve for sedition" (417) since the empathy box, rather than bringing people together, in effect keeps the individual users in separation by a unilateral communication.

The Sisyphean image of Mercer (always ascending a hill and suffering) can be read as a thorough metaphor for the unattainability of desire, which lays the ground to examine Mercerism more in light of Lacan's theory. There is a close structural affinity between Debord's concept of the spectacle and Lacan's desire. Etymologically, the word "desire" comes from the Latin *desiderare* "to wish for," and also *considerare* which literally can be translated to "to observe/look at the stars" and which is an essential aspect of Lacan's concept. In other words, desire is something that we look at and wish for. Furthermore, Lacan explicitly distinguishes between the words "need," "demand" and "desire": while need is a biological instinct (hunger, for instance) which can be satisfied, and demand is the articulation of this need, desire is an unconscious cry for recognition – strictly speaking, a recognition from the Other. When we demand something from the Other, we are also unconsciously asking for the Other's love. Žižek states: "The final purpose of demand for an object is thus not the satisfaction of a need attached to it but confirmation of the other's attitude toward us" (*Looking Awry* 5). Desire is thus the leftover of a demand that corresponds to a lack triggered by *objet petit a*. We should bear in mind that *objet petit a* is not the object of desire, but the object-cause of desire. This is why unlike demand, desire never tends toward a goal or full satisfaction. Rather, the real purpose of the desire is its aim, to always construct itself as desire. In other words, enjoyment in desire is nothing but the very postponement of enjoyment.

Thus, Mercerism creates a virtual space (a fantasy) that gives the coordinates to the participator's desire of being recognized by an Other in an otherwise empty, lonely existence. The allure of Mercerism is precisely this fantasy of belonging to a community of co-sufferers – this illusion of unity and participation – that ultimately serves as an ideological apparatus to keep the population from forming a combined

force. Mercerism, as a virtual network, has its own reality in which Wilbur Mercer stands as the Big Other whom the subject identifies with as the ego-ideal and whose gaze defines the subject's public self, allowing him to be part of a virtual community. Consequently, both Isidore, an outcast living in a "giant, empty, decaying building" (*Do Androids* 15), and Iran, left alone at home with her schedule of "six-hour self-accusatory depression" (4), can now trade the loneliness and emptiness of their daily reality by merging in with Mercer and consuming his image, which stands for suffering and redemption. Since, according to Bukatman, in spectacular society "all images are advertisements for the status quo" (qtd. in Galvan 417), such consumption of the images of happiness in the supra-reality created by Mercerism has a major role in keeping the balance of the capitalist marketplace, as well as the surveillance over the citizens, by projecting the desire onto the next image *ad infinitum* and thus keeping the subject always addicted.

On the commercial level, as mentioned earlier, Mercerism acts as the guarantor of the capitalist marketplace by generating a desire to buy animals. The obsession with animal life is derived from the central tenet of Mercerism: empathy. Further, the way Deckard always carries a monthly copy of Sidney's *Animals & Fowls Catalogue* with himself to be aware of the options his salary allows for buying an animal shows how preserving the natural life is woven into the tapestry of social relations. It is somehow compulsory for an individual to participate in this reconstruction of the nature at the face of the total devastation of the dust-ridden Earth, since humanity in the novel, and the question of authenticity also, are defined by the ability to empathize with the natural/animal life. What's more, owning a real animal (as opposed to an ersatz one) clearly elevates the status of the owner in the social hierarchy of the narrative, as Deckard's conversation early in the novel with his neighbor Bill Barbour suggests, where Barbour informs Deckard that his horse is pregnant. Deckard who, unbeknownst to his neighbor, owns a fake sheep tries to convince Barbour to sell either his horse or its colt to him, since "[h]aving two animals is more immoral than not having any" (*Do Androids* 10). The conversation reveals that Deckard originally had a genuine sheep that his father-in-law had given him. After the sheep dies of a disease, Deckard desperately replaces it with an ersatz one so that his neighbors won't know about this humiliation. Deckard reflects that owning a fraud animal demoralizes one, yet society makes it imperative to own and maintain an ersatz in the absence of the real article. During the conversation, Barbour remarks that one of their neighbors, Ed Smith, might only be pretending to have a cat, since no one has ever seen it. Upon receiving the news that Deckard's sheep is a fake, Bill Barbour pityingly reassures Deckard that he won't say this to others, and even suggests Deckard that he can buy a cricket or a mouse at modest prices. The conversation highlights the fact that social position in the novel is tied to the ownership of animals. Deckard clearly feels inferior to Barbour, since Barbour owns not only a real animal but a large one too. Deckard's bitter remark that Barbour's horse may die one day just like his sheep, shows how Mercerism

creates a whole new network of social relations where having a large, real animal indicates the higher position of the owner over the fellow owners of smaller animals, as well as those who own ersatz ones, or, in the case of Ed Smith, those who don't own any. Subsequently from a different angle, the whole novel can be read as Deckard's quest to save his marriage by buying a large genuine animal, since that seems to be his only motivation to hunt the escaped androids, even before the task is actually assigned to him.

According to Žižek, there is always adhered to a commodity something beyond its functionality that produces a surplus meaning. This surplus X, to see it in the Lacanian light, is the Real point within the chain of the signification of the object – the *objet petit a*, what is in the object more than the object – which provides the identity of the object by functioning as a meaningless signifier that merely produces a difference, and which "contains no necessary mode of its [own] symbolization" (Žižek, *The Sublime Object* 97). Žižek argues that it is this radical contingency of naming and not its cluster of properties that ultimately defines the object. The Mercerist consumerism aims precisely at this Real point in the object-commodity by producing a surplus meaning (of empathy) which elevates the common commodity to a religious/cultural entity where owning and maintaining an animal equals a higher position in the society.

In addition, Joshua Lind remarks on another dimension of Mercerism as "a system that distributes pain" and thus punishes the individual "for whatever slim happiness [he] may achieve." He concludes that the social system keeps a balance between desire and punishment by simultaneously "deterritorializing" and "reterritorializing" desire through the supra-real worlds of media and shared suffering, respectively (89-90). Although for Lind, Mercerism takes the form of a self-regulating panopticon for controlling the political mass, yet in the light of our study Mercerism clearly shows the function of superego in the late capitalist-consumerist society, where the subject is bent down by the weight of the demands to enjoy, and, at the same time, ridiculed and punished by his unconstrained and dangerous consumption of enjoyment.

PENFIELD AND THE DELEGATION OF BELIEF

Peter Fitting remarks on the naturalization of ideology in capitalism, stating that "[u]nder capitalism, bourgeois ideology works not only to ensure the reproduction of the capitalist system, but seeks also to deny its status as ideology and to present its own particular construction of reality as natural and universal" (233). Furthermore, in identifying various moments of ideology in Dick's novels, Fitting observes how "the characters' need for illusion" is a central part of capitalist ideology in such novels as *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (227), as well as *Do Androids*, as we shall see. Fitting's remark on the need for illusion is indicative of the ideological break between feudalism and capitalism and of what Žižek (via Peter Sloterdijk) dubs the cynical function of ideology: the subject is no longer ignorant of the illusory dimension, but he needs to prolong it in order to escape the traumatic Real.

The Penfield moon organ makes its appearance in the very first page of the novel as a gadget that creates artificial emotions. By dialing a combination of numbers, the device sends out a surge of electricity that by stimulating different parts of the brain, simulates artificial feelings that range from “professional businesslike attitude” and “ecstatic sexual bliss” to “self-accusatory depression” (*Do Androids* 4). Penfield moon organ is, therefore, a device that enables individuals mainly to experience (artificial) happiness at the face of their unbearable life, and which allows, in the case of Rick and Iran, to make up for the emptiness and coldness of their surroundings. The first thing, then, that Dick draws the reader’s attention to regarding this uncanny gadget is the way it functions to wipe out the cold facts engulfing the individuals – a reaction to the devastated world of loneliness. In a world where human organic desire no longer exists, capitalism not only generates desire for the subject but also consumes it on his behalf. Although the mood generated by Penfield remains an illusion, the subject nonetheless yields to the “authenticity” of this ersatz reality in a gesture of fetishistic disavowal. Iran’s remark that “how unhealthy it [is], sensing the absence of life [...] and not reacting” (5), indicates clearly that the Deckards already know that Penfield creates inauthentic moods, and that the machine is not really helping since especially Iran has scheduled for her day a “six-hour self-accusatory depression,” but they still dial the numbers. The inefficiency of the device is also shown when Iran reveals, after Rick returns home, that she “changed” her mood right after Rick dialed for her the number for “pleased acknowledgment of husband’s superior wisdom in all matters” (7) before leaving for work – which defeats the whole purpose of Rick’s dialing in the first place.

Lind argues, via Jean Baudrillard, how Penfield represents “magical thinking” in so far that it induces a certain primitive mentality in the user, and by extension the whole community, by overwriting signs of happiness in the social text, maintaining in addition that “Dick extends the primitive into the dystopian future by allowing subjects to technologically obscure their emotional reactions to environmental ruin and extinction, making human thought not only potent but divorced from worldly events, utterly phantasmic” (85). The “utterly phantasmic” nature of the kind of reality that Penfield mood organ produces, and the fact that through it the subject represses the Real of his living – this traumatic void that gazes at him constantly – reveals the purely ideological kernel of this device that not only *believes* in the place of the subject, but also *enjoys* on his behalf. This phenomenon of transposing the belief/enjoyment onto the other was first identified by Lacan in the figure of Chorus in Greek tragedies who does the “emotional commentary” on behalf of the spectators who are “too preoccupied with their [daily] affairs” to directly engage with the show, so that the Chorus enacts the purification for them (*Ethics* 247). Robert Pfaller, after Lacan, christens this phenomenon “interpassivity.” Exploring the theme of “believing/enjoying through the other” in a psychoanalytical context, Pfaller links belief and enjoyment to what he calls “objective illusions,” contending that individuals “delegate” their beliefs and enjoyments to oth-

ers, not wanting to “be identified as the original ‘possessor’” (van Oenen 1). Žižek in addition considers “interpassivity” as the uncanny double of “interactivity,” defining the former as “the situation in which the object itself takes from me [...] my own passive reaction of satisfaction [...], so that it is the object itself which ‘enjoys the show’ instead of me, relieving me of the superego duty to enjoy myself” (*Plague of Fantasies* 144).

We should note that interpassivity as believing/enjoying through the other can be signified on two levels: first, in the sense that the subject practices passivity by delegating his belief/enjoyment to the other so that he can escape the burden of directly believing and/or actively engaging in enjoyment; and also in the sense that the Other must always be present for belief/enjoyment to work. Note also that belief and enjoyment here are consonant with two different elements of subjectivity – the symbolic and the Real, respectively.

To account for the paradoxical nature of this phenomenon, Žižek maintains that the transference of enjoyment to the other has an emancipatory potential which relieves the individual from the compulsory duty to enjoy. As we mentioned earlier, the superego’s injunction to “Enjoy!”, which at first glance stands at the opposite side of the public symbolic Law that *directly prohibits*, acts as a far more savage prohibition in the eyes of the subject, since it takes the form of a “monstrous duty” (*Plague of Fantasies* 148).

The experience that the Penfield mood organ induces in the subject is utterly phantasmatic. As noted before, fantasy works primarily to conceal a Real lack; or put another way, fantasy is the subject’s answer to the Real that traumatizes him. The phantasmatic world of Penfield, which precisely stands for the symbolic order of relations, allows the characters to replace meaninglessness with meaning. According to Lacan and Žižek, reality cannot reveal itself to the subject but as fiction. For the subjects to engage in communication with another, they have no choice but to subscribe to a common fantasy that effectively makes possible such communication. This fantasy is the reality, for reality is nothing but an ideological distortion that blinds the subject to a lack, to what is indigestible for the subject. On other hand, the “postmodern” world of the narrative, just like its counterpart in our own world, seems to have dispensed with the figure of Big Other, replacing it with the superego of enjoyment and promiscuity. The Deckards’ insistence on using the device, even though they have seen its inefficiency, shows the cynical form of ideology where although the subject knows that what he believes and how he acts is not based on what is Real, and that he doesn’t really believe what he shows to believe, he, nonetheless, acts as if he believes. Such cynical use of Penfield device is indicative of a new form of paranoia in Philip K. Dick’s works: in a world that a Big Other no longer “exists,” the subject has to find meaning by constructing an Other of the Other through submitting to the belief of an Other-Machine. This is what Pfaller aptly calls “imagination without owners” (15). Just as the subject’s subordination to Law is strictly grounded on the assumption that *others do that*, thus for any belief to be a belief at all, the other must be present. Interpassivity also makes it clear that belief is

always external, and in this regard it fulfills the symbolic position of the Big Other. On the other hand, the enjoyment itself is derived from escaping the direct enjoyment of things. For Žižek, interpassivity is a “*defence* against *jouissance*,” because

[b]eing directly transfixed by the object [...], is ultimately unbearable: the open display of the passive attitude of ‘enjoying it’ somehow deprives the subject of his dignity. [Thus] I defer *jouissance* to the Other who passively endures (laughs, suffers, enjoys) on my behalf. (*Plague of Fantasies* 150)

ANDROIDS AS THE NEIGHBORS

Examining how human identity is constructed in the technological society, Benesch believes cyborgs can be seen as the representatives of the cultural Other that by mirroring and doubling our fears and desires can help us articulate just what human identity is (388). What is important for Benesch is the symbolic function of the cyborgs as a cultural text which enables us to arrive at a definition of self, since the self can only be defined as opposed to the other. The self/Other opposition is of course pivotal in Lacan’s theory of subject. From Lacan’s perspective, the Other is always something that resembles us almost identically, yet at the same time it appears to us as a completely foreign entity. What creates the difference between the self and the other, *objet petit a*, can be either the subject of love or hate. This *objet petit a*, which transforms the other to an alien, that thing which causes our desire for the other, is given coordinates by our fantasies surrounding the other in which we attribute evil powers to this other. According to Žižek, violence appears in the picture when we try to destruct this very dimension of the other, this *objet petit a* that bothers us, which by definition is *indestructible* (*Interrogating the Real* 286).

Reality is never fully symbolized. There is always a point within, the Real, that cannot be wholly covered by the symbolic fiction. This is where the specter comes into play: the function of the spectral apparition is to fill up the gap of the Real. Žižek contends: “What the spectre conceals is not reality but its ‘primordially repressed’, the unrepresentable X on whose ‘repression’ reality itself is founded” (293). As soon as we (as subjects) respond to the call of interpellation, as soon as we fill out a certain position in the symbolic constellation, we have blinded ourselves to the Real of antagonism. Furthermore, Žižek argues that the social fiction (i.e. the repressed reality) and the specter (i.e. the Real of antagonism) are two sides of fantasy: on one side, fantasy is the illusion of an undisturbed, harmonious society, a paradise; on the other, the illusion of the intruding Other that is splitting the society (296-7).

Žižek calls this figure of intruding Other in the multiculturalist society, the Neighbor: the Neighbor is the other who possesses a Real *jouissance* which bothers me. The figure of Neighbor, as Žižek notes, can be seen as the prime example of Lacan’s Borromean knot where all the orders intersect: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. Consequently, the Neighbor is my *semblant* (the Imaginary) with whom I am socially engaged through the Big Other (the Symbolic),

but whose otherness, that thing in him more than himself (the Real), transforms him in my eyes into a Monster-Thing who has to be avoided. In other words, my minimal social engagement with this Neighbor is only possible when he keeps his over-proximity from me. Such a distance guarantees that the Neighbor is divested of the substance that makes him dangerous, so that this “decaffeinated Other” cannot possibly harass me. This is what the Judeo-Christian practice of “Love Thy Neighbor,” as well as the postmodern multiculturalist attitude of tolerance, effectively amounts to: to keep your neighbor always at bay.

It should be clear how the androids of the novel can be seen as the equivalent of the multiculturalist concept of Neighbor: the androids resemble the humans to a degree that they cannot be detected unless with the Voigh-Kampff apparatus; as long as their inherent potential for creating danger is inhibited, they are part of the symbolic network of relations (even if only as servants in the Earth’s colonies, or in the case of Luba Luft as an opera singer); and finally, there is something about them, something inhuman (i.e. their lack of empathy) that immediately demotes them to aliens. In Deckard’s mind anything that lacks empathy is likened to a “solitary predator” like a spider, or what in Mercerism is known as The Killers. In fact, thinking of androids in those terms makes Deckard’s job “palatable” for him. The fantasy surrounding the figure of the android in the narrative, which also justifies “retiring” one, stems primarily from Mercerism itself:

You shall kill only the killers, Mercer had told them [...]. For Rick Deckard an escaped humanoid robot, which had killed its master, [...] which had no regard for animals, which possessed no ability to feel empathic joy for another life form’s success or grief at its defeat – that, for him, epitomized The Killers. (*Do Androids* 31)

Thus Mercerism is the principal fantasy that drives the android-killing, insofar as the androids are identified as ruthless animal killers who constitute the real danger and who have to be eliminated for harmony to be restored to society. By providing an illusory unity between its members and creating an organic Body, Mercerism sustains the fantasy that androids are the external enemy whose dangerous excess embodies all the fears and failures of the Society and for that reason they should pay the price.

This brings us to the role of Rick Deckard as the hero in the story. What Deckard as the hero achieves at the end is precisely eliminating the very distance that the post-political biopolitics insists on keeping with the Other; that is, he reaches directly to this Real Other. Such an act not only liberates the individual from the closure of the capitalist subjectivity, but also provides a point in the symbolic fiction of the everyday life where one can question or attack the ideology from within.

In the course of the novel, Deckard becomes more and more empathic toward the androids. A key moment in this journey is when Deckard considers having a sexual relation with a female android. The temptation comes to Deckard before he even meets his first female android, Luba Luft, and it remains a curiosity until it is heightened again when he finds

himself caught between his duty to kill the androids and his attraction to them, at which point Phil Resch suggests to him to reverse the order by going to bed with them first and killing them later. Deckard's subsequent sexual engagement with Rachel Rosen is significant in that afterwards Deckard cannot discard the fact that Rachel and Pris Stratton (of the remaining three androids) are of the exact same model: he cannot just kill an identical model of Rachel because killing her would be killing somebody he has feelings for. Deckard's development of empathy through his sexual engagement with a female android is clearly indicative of the abolition of the distance that he had to, from a *politically-correct* point of view, keep from the Other. In other words, Deckard no longer can turn a blind eye to the suffering of this Other. This is effectively Žižek's understanding of divine violence:

We cannot go *directly* from capitalist to revolutionary subjectivity: the abstraction, the foreclosure of others, the blindness to the other's suffering and pain, has first to be broken in a gesture of taking the risk and reaching directly out to the suffering other – a gesture which, since it shatters the very kernel of our identity, cannot fail to appear extremely violent. ("Lenin's Choice" 252).

Rachel advises Deckard to forget the remaining androids and go back home to the goat he has recently bought by the killing money. But when Deckard returns home after finishing his job, he is informed by Iran that their live goat is dead: a slim, black-haired woman (Rachel) has pushed the animal off the edge of the roof. Ironically, the goat's death is a redemptive event in Deckard's life. The goat (or any other animal for that matter) is nothing but a distorted and fetishized object of desire, which as Lind observes, "contains [Deckard's] continued servitude to the socioeconomic system" (95). Given that the ownership of animals in the novel is tied to the social position, the death of Deckard's goat entails a degradation and humiliation. However, there is another side to this degradation, namely the way the *pure* subject emerges through what Žižek dubs the subject's scatological (excremental) identification; that is "when I allow/provoke the other to [empty] me of all substantial content, of all symbolic support which could confer a modicum of dignity on me" ("Lenin's Choice" 252). For Žižek, the very first act of liberation consists of the realization that "*the master is superfluous*." In other words, Deckard's authentic passivity, the accommodation and the acceptance of the other in the social existence of the narrative, eliminates the thing in him that binds him to the master. By dint of this realization, "the servant's masochistic libidinal attachment to his master is brought to light, and the servant thus acquires a minimal *distance* towards it".

Deckard's final epiphany comes at the penultimate scene of the novel where he wanders into a desert near the Oregon border and witnesses,

the land below him extended seemingly forever, gray and *refuse-littered*. Pebbles the size of houses rolled to a stop next to one another and he thought, It's like a shipping room when all the merchandise has left. Only fragments of crates remain, the containers which *signify nothing in themselves*. Once, he thought, crops grew here and animals grazed. What

a remarkable thought, that anything could have cropped grass here.

What a strange place he thought for all of that to die. (*Do Androids* 228) [italics added]

Curiously, Žižek regards waste as such as the other side of capitalism, and contends the first step should not be trying to get rid of it but, on the contrary, we should try to accept it – to accept that there are things that *do not function*. With a nod to Walter Benjamin, Žižek believes that to understand what history means, or "what it means for us to be historical beings," we should examine precisely the moments when we confront this waste of culture – when we see that there are things that do not signify anything and are of no use (Žižek, *Pervert's Guide to Ideology*). Žižek emphasizes how this confrontation with the waste creates "a chance for an authentic passive experience... Maybe something new only emerges through the failure, the suspension of proper functioning of the existing network of our life."

Coincidentally, "failure" is the mood that dominates Deckard at this point as he feels he has become "an unnatural self": "I've been defeated in some obscure way," (*Do Androids* 230) he ponders. Yet through this failure emerges a new understanding of life. Deckard finds a toad which he first believes to be a natural one. But when Iran reveals to him that the toad is mechanical, instead of disappointment, Deckard's reaction is indicative of the fact that he no longer differentiates between what is natural and what is mechanical. He has surpassed the capitalist ideology of empathy, or to put it in clinical terms, he has *traversed the fantasy*. As Galvan notes, Deckard, by renouncing "the ideology of a living community restricted to humans and humans alone," comes to an awareness of a posthuman society in which men and androids "coexist and coriginat" (427-8). The very last philosophical thought that embodies Deckard before he goes to sleep sums up his passive heroism: "The electric things have their lives, too. Paltry as those lives are" (244).

CONCLUSION

The arguments in this study can be justified through the single yet complex notion of "desire" in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacan's basic definition of desire is that "man's desire is the desire of the Other" (*Seminar II* 235), which is significant on more than one level. First and foremost, desire is situated in the field of the Other – which is to say it is unconscious. Accordingly, the subject is not conscious of why he desires a particular object and it is the Other's job to present that desire. This research identified the spectacle of Mercerism as the major discourse of the Other in the novel and argued how it gives shapes to a certain desire in its members by marketing empathy. On the second level, desire for Lacan signals the subject's desire to be both loved and recognized by the Other. Thus one can possibly take Wilbur Mercer in the novel as the embodiment of the ego-ideal or the Other from whose viewpoint the subject is given a place in the symbolic network. From the same angle, Mercerism is an extension of governmental control which creates a whole new spatiotemporal network in which the illusion of unity and of belonging to a community is experienced by

the members as a way of disavowing the Real of the environmental catastrophe that forms the texture of the narrative. On the next level, Lacan contends that it is *qua* the Other that the subject desires, which means that the subject always desires something that the Other desires. In this respect, Mercerism again is generative of the desire to buy animals (genuine or mechanical), and further ties the social position in the narrative to this type of ownership and thus engages the individuals in a compulsory consumption of empathy. Lastly, desire is always the desire for something else, and enjoyment in desire works through the deferral of enjoyment. This study discussed how Mercerism guarantees the dominance of the marketplace by transposing the enjoyment from one commodity to another in a circular fashion.

Another major theme of this thesis was to show how universalization/homogenization (such as linguistic and cultural ones) as the core constituent of contemporary civilization gives rise to new forms of racism, since democracy only accounts for the other on its universal abstract level, only insofar as this other is divested of its cultural particularities. The irony is, as Žižek notes, democracy is essentially anti-humanistic since “it is not ‘made to the measure of (concrete, actual) men,’ but to the measure of a formal, heartless abstraction. (*Looking Awry* 163). Thus the paradox of “tolerant” subject lies in his intolerance toward the Other’s overproximity. Conclusively, I have discussed that the androids in the novel can be read as Ethnic Others and that the novel’s protagonist Rick Deckard can be considered a hero through his authentic passivity of accepting the Otherness of the Other by including a space for this Other in the socio-symbolic network of inter-relations. The authentic human being for Dick is one who “instinctively knows what he should not do... I see their authenticity in an odd way: not in their willingness to perform great heroic deeds but in their quiet refusals.” (*Shifting Realities* 279)

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