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The Nature and Function of Images in the Science Fiction Works of Philip K. Dick

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The Nature and Function of Images in the Science Fiction Works of Philip K. Dick

（フィリップ・K・ディックの SF 作品におけるイメージの性質と機能）

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Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the nature and function of images in the science fiction works of Philip K. Dick. The term image is broadly understood as encompassing diegetic entities such as characters, material objects, and electronic images that exist as representations, copies, or doubles, of other entities. In addition, commodities, insofar as they operate like signs and constitute signifying practices, are also made part of this inquiry. The thesis is divided into three chapters that explore images from three different perspectives, respectively metaphysical, socio-economic, and psychoanalytical-literary. There are four main contributions of this thesis to the body of criticism on Dick: 1) a careful and detailed use of the concept of the simulacrum to understand Dick's problematization of representation, 2) an original emphasis on the formal effects of images—in particular media—on personal and social relationships, with a special attention to isolation and the process of consumption as a signifying practice, 3) a methodical exploration of the Dickian protagonist's desire to escape, its possible origins, and the spatial and temporal hatches he fantasizes about, and 4) an attempt to understand gender bias in the works of Dick by relating them to the *locus classicus* of Dick's interrogation on reality, *viz* the reality principle.

In the first chapter, I examine those works by Dick where images are treated as magical objects capable of having an effect on the very texture of reality. The focus is on the metaphysics of images, and such issues as the relationships between copies and models, the ontological and axiological differences between the former and the latter, and the fear associated with representation are considered. The core of this chapter is an in-depth discussion of *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* using the key concept of the simulacrum to account for the complete subversion of reality in the novel, and the impossibility to define the borders of the synthetic world generated by the hallucinogenic drug Chew-Z. While N. Katherine Hayles has opened a path to understanding the origin of

the impossibility by suggesting that it is the result of the narrative's strategy to escape the nihilistic consequences of the simulation generated by Chew-Z (*My Mother Was a Computer* 74), she does not explain why the notion of simulation in particular should lead to both inconsistency and indeterminacy. By regarding the character Palmer Eldritch as a simulacrum of the Christian Divinity, I show that the narrative dynamic of the novel expresses the alternation of two movements of domestication and destabilization. In the final part of the chapter, I suggest that the wanderings of the characters in the labyrinthian worlds of Chew-Z can be read as a portrayal of the experience of the postmodern subject lost in his electronic environments.

In the second chapter, attention shifts from the ontological scope of the Dickian discourse on images to its epistemic scope, for it is no longer the substantiality of images that interests us but their social character, in particular the role they play in mediating human relationships. After examining several examples of Dick's fiction where personal human relations are articulated by various images and media systems such as the polls, the electoral system, and the commodity system, the chapter ends with a long analysis of the separation induced by media in the short story "Chains of Air, Web of Aether" through the lens of Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard. This analysis considers successively two types of alienation (alienation from others and self-alienation) that results from interaction with media in Dick's short story. While mediated technologies may be held responsible for the breakdown of communication between the two protagonists, they also threaten to alienate the protagonists from their own selves by commodifying desire and creating an idolatrous relationship between human subjects and media products. Finally, the chapter attempts to understand the structure of the specific mediated technology described by Dick in relation with the issue of social control. It shows that the story endorses a Debordian criticism of the unilaterality of media by chiefly viewing the protagonists as passive consumers.

The third chapter surveys the contradictory views that Dick puts forth about the creation of images (and fantasy in general), when he seems to desire that a) images can achieve a critique of the state of things, while simultaneously fearing that b) they compensate for reality, and are therefore coopted by dominant forces and used as safety valves to release social discontent. By focusing on three early short stories: “The Troubles with Bubbles” (1953), “Small Town” (1953), and “Exhibit Piece” (1953), I show that at the level of content, Dick views fantasy in turn as wishful thinking, an ally of power, and a subversive activity. On another level, insofar as they are self-reflexive portrayals of fantasizing, all three stories can be read as indirect commentaries by Dick on his literary activity. Finally, this chapter ends by looking at several works in which Dick seems to view the reality principle as something inherently gendered, with female characters (in their roles as wives, mothers, and consumers) cast as enemies of fantasy, at least of those fantasies that potentially express the revolt of the male protagonist against the definition of reality forced upon him by his society.

Introduction

Practically all scholars of Philip K. Dick (and Dick himself) have recognized that the interrogation about the nature of reality constituted one of, if not his major, concerns. Very often his works depict the collapse of consensual reality or the supersession of one reality by one or several others. The overwhelming part played by images in those disruptions is striking and invites one to wonder if for Dick, as for other thinkers before him, there is an intrinsic link between images and the human perception of reality.[1]

In *Now Wait for Last Year* (1963), Philip K. Dick, speaking through one of the characters, claims the sense of sight to be "the primary conduit linking the mind with external reality" (33). The abundance of sight metaphors and the richness of the semantic field associated with vision in *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) is reported by John L. Simmons (269), in particular the classic Dickian formula "seen through a glass darkly," which is borrowed from the First Epistle to the Corinthians (*1 Corinthians* 13:12) and can be found repeatedly throughout his oeuvre.[2] In addition, Christopher Palmer observes that "radio is almost invariably benign, and television almost invariably malign, in Dick's fiction" (138). This statement is confirmed by the countless examples in Dick's works where the characters are deceived by spurious visual representations. It seems, then, that images have a special importance for Dick, not only because they link the subject with the outside world, but also, and especially, because they are so often endowed with the power to mislead and held responsible for the predicament of the characters. At the same time, the reader can also sense here and there the author's desire to believe that images might allow one to escape the drudgery of everyday life (the short story "Small Town" (1953), which will be examined in this study, is here exemplary). In fact, W. J. T. Mitchell's claim that "Milton's poetry is the scene of a struggle between iconoclastic distrust of the outward image and iconophilic fascination with its power" (*Iconology* 36) most aptly describes the fundamental ambivalence

of the works of Dick and behooves us to consider in details the types and properties of Dickian images, as well as the various functions they perform.

Epistemology and Ontology

It is possible to identify two general poles between which Dick's discourse on images oscillates. On the one hand, there is an epistemic pole where images are conceived as tools of ideological manipulation and control which are used by repressive regimes and/or corporate power as in the novel *The Penultimate Truth* (1964). On the other hand, there is a metaphysical pole where images are not only endowed with the power to constitute the subject's knowledge of reality, but also with the capacity to alter the "real" itself. Images can thus vie with mundane reality for ontological primacy as in the short story "Exhibit Piece" (1953), or even replace the diegetic real as in the novel *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1964).

It is perhaps the entanglement of these two stances about images in Dick's fiction that has led some scholars[3] to situate their reflection in a metaphysical context, whereas others[4] have favored a socio-political reading of the consequences of the manufacture of images. In some cases, Dick's turn to metaphysics—which Darko Suvin dismisses as the "red-herring of ontologico-religious speculations" ("P.K. Dick's Opus" 16)—has even been understood as political escapism. It can be argued, however, that the political is usually not so much being abandoned as "transmuted" into ontological concerns, for political choice has become akin to ontological commitment in the worlds imagined by Dick.

The problem is that for a realist like Suvin, confusing socio-politics and ontology is a category mistake in which an epistemic problem is treated as an ontological one. One realist "vindication" of Dick is to argue that his resort to ontology is a powerful metaphor that is much more successful than a mere epistemological perspective in capturing the ways socio-

political realities are so thoroughly encapsulating as to be viewed almost as distinct ontological realms. According to this view, Dick's metaphor would be similar, for example, to Marx's famous comparison of capital to a vampire: "Capital is dead labor, that vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor" (257). Obviously capital is not a vampire but the recourse to this rhetorical device most forcefully illustrates the predatory nature of capitalism. Likewise, when the eponymous character of *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* is depicted as a Satan-like salesman who literally preys on others, the simile is almost required by the monstrous, excessive, invasive, and literally soul-wrenching quality of the scheme of this "mad capitalist" (to borrow Suvin's expression).

Yet, this realist account does not fit well with Dick's view that people are in a very real sense inhabiting different realities. In this sense, political commitment (or any ideological view) defines a corresponding ontology. The reader is not faced with revealing and cogent metaphors, but rather metaphors themselves are literalized.[5] Thus, in "Faith of Our Fathers," the sway of a political leader becomes a divine intervention on the very texture of reality precisely because for Dick the consequences of politics are so crucial and absolute as to change not only the perception and knowledge of reality but reality itself. Likewise, the revelation that the despotic boss of Eric Blake, the protagonist of the short story "A Present for Pat," is a god coming from another dimension is not meaningless and may rather suggest that for Dick, in the microcosmic world of the capitalist corporation, the legitimacy of authoritarian figures is not fundamentally different from the divine right of kings.

Another way of grappling with this problem could simply be to acknowledge that in the world outside the stories, *i.e.* our world, the "real" world, socio-political entities and concepts are treated (whether rightly or not is not the question here) as ontological entities and concepts. Reification, naturalization, essentialism, biological determinism, etc. are strongly connoted terms that all refer to the attempt (again, whether legitimate or not is irrelevant

here) to ground various notions in the realm of substance. One can think, for example, of notions and theories such as race, gender, human nature, *homo economicus*, the "end" of history, etc. It follows that the conflation of epistemology and metaphysics that so often occurs in the text could be understood as a move that mimics what actually takes place in the "real" world.

Yet, when Fredric Jameson locates the source of the power of Dick's vision in his "effort to retain possession and use of both apparently contradictory, mutually exclusive subjective and objective explanation systems all at once" (*Archaeologies* 350), he simultaneously tells us that it may not be possible to favor either an ontological or an epistemological stance. Surprisingly, undecidability does not result from underdetermination, but, on the contrary, from overdetermination of the main figures and events. For example, Palmer Eldritch is a capitalist, an alien, Satan, a gnostic demiurge, etc., all at the same time.

Structure of the Dissertation

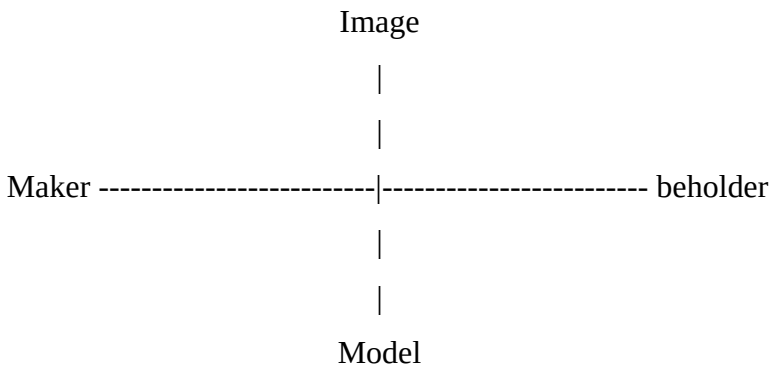
All that precedes has consequences for the approach employed in this study, for if it is indeed very nearly impossible to favor one perspective over the other, it will be necessary to consider both the epistemic and the ontological poles in order to do full justice to Dick's complex and versatile treatment of images. In so doing, we will discover with surprise that his discourse revives many of the arguments pro and con on images that have been formulated throughout the history of the sacred icon, in particular the idea that images (and more generally fantasy) are the expression of a (legitimate) desire for transcendence and, contrastingly, the perennial fear that they lead to idolatry. In addition, we will encounter works that insist that the material aspect of images is what accounts for their effects, whereas other works will see them first and foremost as social practices. As a result, the thesis is

divided into three main chapters successively focusing on the magical, socio-economic, and psychoanalytical character of images.

However, before looking at the structure of this study and the various issues that arise in relation to images, it is useful to very briefly explicate what is meant here by the term image. Our definition is as broad as possible and encompasses things that have a tangible reality in the short stories and novels studied hereafter (thus excluding figures of speech and strictly mental images). We call images all the objects and entities that are viewed as copies. In this group we find 1) iconic objects such as models, maps, charts, dioramas, and dolls, and 2) diegetic entities that imitate a model: androids, robots, alien, and deities. In addition, we consider virtual and media images. The third type of things included in our definition is commodities. While the first two acceptations of the term are rather unproblematic, the third is less straightforward and will therefore be justified in due course.

While reading this study the reader may have the impression of encountering the same narrative situation over and over again. Such a feeling is not fortuitous, for, indeed, the scenes, events, and dilemmas examined in the following three chapters share strong commonalities. One can thus notice an obsessive desire to escape and, as we already signaled, the haunting presence of idolatry. In fact, it is not so much the themes and motifs contemplated in each chapter that differ, as the foci used. For instance, while idolatry is looked upon from a metaphysical point of view in the first chapter, it is its social consequences that are addressed in the second chapter.

The following graph, used by Mitchell (“Representation” 12) to illustrate the “structure” of representation, is of some help to understand the articulation of this study:



While the horizontal axis, which Mitchell calls the “axis of communication” (12), links the maker to the beholder, the vertical “axis of representation” (12) connects the thing that is being represented to its representation.

The first chapter (“Chapter One: Images as Magical Objects”) is primarily concerned with the axis of representation and interrogates the conflictual relationships between the model and the copy. In the second chapter (“Chapter Two: Images as Social Relations), it is what takes place along the axis of communication that interests us. The focus is on the relationships between maker(s) and beholder(s) on the one hand, and on beholders on the other hand. Finally, the last chapter (“Chapter Three: Fantasy, or: Images as Critique and Compensation) focuses on the motivations of the maker of images and their potential for critique and cooptation.

Notes

1. Thus, for Descartes, the mind is contained inside the body whence it perceives the outside world (*res extensa)* through sensory perceptions. The knowledge of the *res extensa* that can be gained by the mind is not direct but is obtained through the images conveyed by the senses. These images are thus *representations* of the external world. Interestingly, Descartes’s theory of perceptions as mental representations is directly inspired by an apparatus (the *camera obscura*) used for aesthetic representation. Considering the examples of Descartes and Locke, Don

Ihde shows (72-74) how the representational technology of the *camera obscura* inspired these two philosophers in formulating their theories of knowledge.

2. Besides *High Castle*, the reference to *Corinthians* runs from *The Cosmic Puppets* (102) through two speeches ("The Android and the Human" *Shifting Realities* 208, and "Man, Android, and Machine" *Shifting Realities* 215) to *A Scanner Darkly* (146, 169).
3. See for example Lorenzo DiTommaso's "Redemption in Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*" or Gabriel McKee's *Pink Beams of Light*.
4. See for example Merritt Abrash's "'Man Everywhere in Chains': Dick, Rousseau, and *The Penultimate Truth.*"
5. See the short story "The Eyes Have It" for a humorous example.

Chapter 1

Images as Magical Objects

> *According to Manichaeism, the reality of the world is a total illusion; it is something which has been tainted from the very beginning; it is something which has been seduced by a sort of irreal principle since time immemorial. In this case what one has to invoke is precisely this absolute power of illusion—and this is indeed exactly what the heretics did. They based their theologies on the very negation of the real. Their principal and primary convention was that of the non-reality, hence of the non-rationality, of the world. They believed that the world, its reality, is made up only of signs—and that it was governed solely through the power of the mind. This idea of the world as being constituted only by signs is, if you like, some sort of magic thinking.*
>
> Jean Baudrillard. *The Evil Demon of Images*

I. Introduction

Several scholars have already noticed that the process of doubling or copying is central in Dick's fiction. Thus, Eric S. Rabkin claims that "the feel of Dick's fiction is determined by his many devices for replication" (168). Likewise, Scott Bukatman contends that "Dick's novels and stories are 'about' the processes of reproduction" (49). Regardless of the nature of these processes (artistic, industrial, hallucinogenic, media, or magic), it can be argued that the plot of most of Dick's works is organized around—or at least critically affected by—the doubles and copies that constantly appear in them. For instance, the industrial manufacturing of human-like androids in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* leads to two major problems:

1) how to distinguish the android from the human, that is, how to distinguish copy and model?
2) is the protagonist really human? Or, to put it in more general terms: in what respects does the process of copying threaten the privileged status of the model? How is the original retroactively affected by the copy?

As Neil Easterbrook observes, "what disappears in Dick is the conception that doubles are secondary copies" because "the motif of doubling renders simulacra" (26).

The idea that copying is, in itself, problematic or dangerous is illustrated in the short story "Explorers We" where extraterrestrial figures assume the shape of a group of astronauts who died during a mission to Mars in order to come to Earth. Even though the aliens are perfect copies, themselves convinced of being humans, they are killed by FBI agents. One FBI agent seems however to have qualms: "If it was up to me, Wilks asked himself, what would I do? Try to find out what they want? Anything that looks so human, behaves in such a human way, must *feel* human . . . and if they – whatever they are – feel human, might they not become human, in time?" (154, emphasis in the original). There is, therefore, only one difference—important enough to justify the anathema and ensuing eradication—between "real" human beings and copies: it is precisely that the latter are…copies.

The consequences of copying on the conception of the centered subject are explored by Easterbrook in his analysis of "Impostor," a story that anticipates "Explorers We" by posing a fake human being (in fact an android) who still believes he is human. For Easterbrook, the narrative suggests that self-consistent identity does not exist, and he concludes that Dick's works force us to "rethink all the old categories and conventions, both of ontology and ethics" (36).

In another context, the ontological difference between copy and original in "Pay for the Printer" is discussed by Michael Camille who argues that Dick's depiction of simulacra as

ontologically degraded copies in this story "takes us back to the very beginnings of the Platonic anxiety about things as real and as mere representations" (47).[1]

Indeed, the reference to the simulacrum inevitably calls to mind the larger historical context—the domain of religious and aesthetic thought—in which this notion first arised.[2] In fact, it could be argued that Dick's problematization of copying may be the expression of a more general and primal discomfort with the process of representation itself. According to this view, copying, insofar as it can be regarded as a type of representational process, leads to the same questions that are associated with representation: what is the nature of the relationship between image and prototype? What are their difference in terms of value and ontology? And what if the copy were mistaken for the original? The semiotic of Charles Sanders Peirce offers a useful understanding of representation by differentiating three types of representational relationships:

-Icon: relation based on resemblance.

-Index: actual relation like physical proximity or connectedness.

-Symbol: relation based on convention.

Interestingly, the attempt to classify the various ways in which images interact with their model in Dick reveals three distinct "magical phenomena" that closely correspond to Peirce's tripartite approach:[3]

-Similarity magic

-Contagious magic

-Nominal realism

The purpose of this chapter is first to investigate Dick's metaphysics of images by providing a few examples of those three types of magical images in Dick's fiction. The problems associated with representation find their richest exposition in the famous novel *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* where the figure of Eldritch functions as a simulacrum of the

Christian God. We will thus see how similarity and contagious magic intertwine to create an extremely complex reflection that brings together religious and technological issues.

II. Similarity Magic

A type of magical images very often found in Dick's fiction is the iconic image, whose interaction with its model follows Sir James George Frazer's first law of magic: the law of similarity. The law of similarity states that "things that resemble one another share fundamental properties" (Fernandez and Lastovicka 280). In other words, an image (a visual representation or a manufactured replica) that superficially resembles a prototype is believed to exhibit deeper qualities that are inherent in the original. For example, in Hindu religion, "iconic representation of deities are ritually animated and then become viewed as vessels that literally contain the relevant deities" (Fernandez and Lastovicka 280). Frazer's law of similarity corresponds to Peirce's iconic relationship.

It is striking to find Frazer's law of similarity rephrased by Dick in one passage of the early novel *The Cosmic Puppets*. The characters have constructed maps of the town they inhabit, Millgate, to help them "bring back" the real town, which has been bewitched by dark forces. Here is how one of the characters describes the operation:

> "These maps," Hilda said, "are to be considered adequate symbols of the territory below. For this attempt we use the basic principle of M-kinetics: *the symbolic representation is identical with the object represented*. If the symbol is accurate, it can be considered the object itself. Any difference between them is purely logical."
>
> M-kinetics, the correct term for the archaic, timeless processes of magic. The manipulation of real objects through symbolic or verbal representations. The charts of Millgate were related to the town itself; because they were perfectly drawn, any force affecting the charts would affect the town. Like a wax doll molded to resemble a person, the charts had been constructed to resemble the

> town. If the resemblance were perfect, failure was impossible. (115, italics in the original)

The "timeless" law of similarity is elevated to the status of a natural law. Resemblance, iconic similitude, between prototype and copy establishes a causal link between the two poles of representation.

The fear that images may challenge the logical and causal anteriority of the referent in relation to the copy explains perhaps Dick's fascination with models of all sorts. Maps, scale models, dioramas, board games, and so on, can be found at the turn of every page, for example in "Small Town," "Exhibit Piece," "Stability," "Return Match," *The Cosmic Puppets*, *Eye in the Sky*, *Time Out of Joint*, *The Game-Players of Titan*, etc. An especially clear example is the short story "Small Town" (1954), where the protagonist devotes his time to the creation of a perfectly faithful scale model of the town where he lives. This creation is at first an iconic representation of the real town. However, when the protagonist decides to modify his scale model, the reality is turned upside-down and the scale model of the town literally replaces the "real" town. This story, thus, offers a clear illustration of the problematic relationship between the "thing" represented and the image used to represent it. If there is indeed an intimate connection between model and copy, then altering the former also alters the latter. Mimesis is seen as a magic process that is capable of having an effect on the prototype.

III. Contagious Magic

The second law of magic identified by Frazer is called the law of contagion and holds that physical contact between the source and the target results in the transfer of some effect or quality from the source to the target. As Fernandez and Lastovicka explain (281), it rests on two forms of magical thinking: contiguity ("contact produces contagion") and synecdoche ("the part is seen to be the same as the whole"). The structure of the law of contagion is indexical in the sense of Peirce.

Dick's first published story "Beyond Lies the Wub" inaugurates an endless series of works where contact between two entities (or more generally two realities) results in various phenomena, such as transformation, substitution, and fusion, which all entail the alteration of the substance (ontology) of one of the entities.[4] It would be a tedious, and perhaps unrewarding, task to consider separately all such cases of contagious magic. In view of our discussion of *Stigmata* in the last section of this chapter, it is, however, useful to spend some time delineating the characteristics of the peculiar type of contamination that involves godlike figures: the theophany.

While theophanies happen all the time in Dick's fiction, the originality of the novel *Valis* is to provide direct authorial comments on its nature. First, it is described as an "invasion of our world" (39) by God, then as a "devouring" of the world identical to Christian "transubstantiation" (70). As a result, it is necessary to prevent the divine "contamination" of the universe by mediating its irruption: "This is why we seek a mediator between us and him [God]; we approach him through the mediating priest and attenuate and enclose him through the sacraments. It is for our own safety: to trap him within confines which render him safe" (178-79). According to this view, in liturgy signs are used not only to summon God but as containment vessels. The representational process by which the absent is rendered present in and through the sign goes wrong when the sign fails to ensure its mediatory function and, in a

terrible instant becomes the original. As Michael Taussig puts it, “the representation shares in or acquires the properties of the represented” (*Mimesis and Alterity* 47). As a result, the distance, between “him and us,” between “here” and “there,” disappears. God, no longer far removed from the world, no longer transcendent, becomes immanent and appears everywhere.

Gabriel McKee compares Dick’s peculiar rendition of transubstantiation, “God, as a mimicking, undetectable being superior to human beings, is altering the substance of the universe and infusing it with and thus incorporating it into his infinite Being” (62) with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s idea of the “cosmic or Universal Christ” (61) and his notion of the “substantial transformation of the universe into God” (62). According to McKee, Dick’s interest in transubstantiation dates back to his conversion to the Episcopalian Church in 1963 (at the time he was writing *Stigmata*). There are two problems with this view. First, depictions of the conversion of the universe into the divine can be found before 1963, as in the 1954 metaphysical horror story “Upon the Dull Earth” (discussed together with *Stigmata* below) and in the novel *The Cosmic Puppets* written in 1957. Secondly, McKee does not seem to consider the role played by desire in these narratives. Yet, as we will see below, the desire for God, of its presence in the same plane of existence as that of the characters, is a crucial aspect of the representational process and often a necessary condition for the theophany or transubstantiation to take place. It is possible to surmise that the motif of divine invasions is, despite its similarities with de Chardin’s formulation, an elaborate and extreme enactment of contagious magic.

IV. Nominal Realism

The third instance of magical thinking found in the works of Philip K. Dick is the action of thought on objects via symbols, in particular words. This is underlain by what is called "nominal realism" by Jean Piaget in his study of young children. The notion is defined as the child's difficulty to distinguish between the signifier and the referent and his belief in an ontological relationship between the former and the latter. In other words, in nominal realism, the name of an object is an inseparable part of its being. Interestingly, Piaget's concept has a counterpart in some trends of Judaism and Christianity, where the Adamic language is believed to be a primordial language in which there was a total correspondence between things and the words used to designate them.

There is a famous scene in the novel *Time out of Joint*, where the protagonist Ragle Gumm discovers that what he thought to be reality is in fact a delusionary world. Standing in front of a soft-drink stand, Ragle witnesses its sudden and complete dissolution. In its place there is now a piece of paper with the mention "SOFT-DRINK STAND." Musing about this inexplicable phenomenon, Ragle wonders about the relationship between things and words:

> Central problem in philosophy. Relation of word to object . . . what is a word? Arbitrary sign. But we live in words. Our reality, among words not things. No such thing as a thing anyhow; a gestalt of the mind. Thingness . . . sense of substance. An illusion. Word is more real than the object it represents.
>
> Word doesn't represent reality. Word *is* reality. (45, emphasis in the original)

One could read this confusion between signifier and referent as a harbinger of the poststructuralist idea that perception is always mediated (a term that is crucial in this chapter) from the start by language. For instance, in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the*

Sign (1972), Baudrillard suggests the counterintuitive idea that the referent is not external to the sign but its product. This is not, however, to say that the material world does not exist but rather that it is seen and interpreted through the sign: "the 'real' table does not exist. If it can be registered in its identity (if it exists), this is because it has already been *designated*, abstracted and rationalized" (qtd. in Merrin 31). The real is only the world "as it is filtered and processed through the linguistic and imagic sign" (Merrin 31). Representation (including language), insofar as it produces signs of the world, participates in the construction of what is called the "real," and from the start actual perception is divorced from an ideal (but impossible) "direct" experience of the world.

A good literary example to understand this notion is a passage in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) where the protagonists visit a barn in the United States. The barn is announced by several signs bearing the mention "THE MOST PHOTOGRAPHED BARN IN AMERICA." The protagonist remarks: "Once you've seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn" (12), by which he suggests that the signs about the barn determine the way the barn (the referent) is perceived. Instead of having a direct access to the referent, the visitors "see only what the others see" (12). This mediation is described as an irreversible process: "What was the barn like before it was photographed? . . . What did it look like, how was it different from other barns, how was it similar to other barns? We can't answer these questions because we've read the signs, seen the people snapping the pictures" (13).[5]

This literal substitution of objects by words is strikingly similar to Baudrillard's account of the eclipse of the real by its signs. At the same time, one can sense a difference between what DeLillo has to say about the waning of experience—something that pertains to epistemology—and the more ontological concerns of Dick in some passages of his works. Even though the predicament of the characters of *Time Out of Joint* caught in their illusory

town has been forcefully equated with an entrapment in ideology,[6] this interpretation seems to leave aside an important aspect. The episode of the slips of paper suggests instead that Ragle's confusion between symbols and objects happen because those are really conflated in the reality of the novel. In other words, language does not only structure one's experience of reality but reality itself, reality is language. As Baudrillard puts it *a propos* the Manicheists: "They believed that the world, its reality, is made up only of *signs*—and that it was governed solely through the power of the *mind*" (*The Evil Demon of Images*, emphasis in the original). And if the world is made up of words, then it is words which give access to its reality. Umberto Rossi observes that words are what allow Ragle to escape the illusion and reach the other world, the real world:

> The slips of paper he [Ragle] is left with are made of the same substance (paper, from the scientific point of view; language, from the philosophic and literary point of view) of the copies of *Time* from 1997 he finds at the Keitelbein's (119-20), where he begins to discover who he really is . . . We could also say that *Time Out of Joint* is the story of the discovery of a hidden text; that text is the *logos* . . . (75)

In the optimistic rendition of *Time Out of Joint*, the collapse of the distance between the thing represented and the representational material is epiphanic, for it allows the protagonist to see through the falsity of the mundane world and eventually transcend it. It is because there is this other real world that encompasses the illusion that Ragle comes to realize that reality is an effect of the sign. In the following section, however, we will read in details a pessimistic counterpart to this novel. We will examine in particular the failure and reversion of the

representational process, when the “fall” of the referent onto the sign does not lead to epiphany and transcendence, but instead to an immanence of the sign.

V. The Apotheosis of Palmer Eldritch: Simulation and Simulacrum of the Divine in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*

I did not *find God . . . but I found something better.*

Palmer Eldritch

The theories about the Fall must be revised; an intellectual error, not a moral error, must be presumed. One can almost—almost—view Satan's activity as a high technology in which the simulation of a world order is achieved.

Philip K. Dick. *In Pursuit of Valis*

There is no harm in reminding ourselves from time to time that the "Prince of this World" is a great P.R. man, a great salesman of new hardware and software, a great electric engineer, and a great master of the media.

Marshall McLuhan, *Letter to Robert J. Leuver, 1969*

Yes, the digital is not a sign, but a signal . . . It is information: you can move about it in any direction because there is no longer any mediation. There is an immanence, an immediation of things. That's what is new. It isn't the death of reality since reality as a whole passed into the sign. The sign absorbs reality. Images devour reality.

Jean Baudrillard *"The Murder of the Sign"*

Introduction

Philip K. Dick's novel *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1965) [hereafter *Stigmata*] has been the object of a number of brilliant interpretations by such scholars as Suvin, Peter Fitting, and Scott Durham.[17] These interpretations have often favored a socio-political approach towards the novel, sometimes going as far as to regret the attention Dick devotes to ontological speculation.[28] However, addressing the novel from a metaphysical angle may usefully complement Marxist interpretations by accounting for the vast diversity of theological references scattered throughout the story. This is what N. Katherine Hayles demonstrates in an analysis combining the socio-political approach with a reflection on the nature of the neo-reality depicted by Dick. Firstly, Hayles interprets the drug Chew-Z as a "simulation [that threatens] the autonomy of the world itself" (*My Mother* 74) because it acquires "the power to usurp reality" (*My Mother* 78). Secondly, she construes some of the novel's inconsistencies[9] as an expression of the narrative's retreat from its earlier portrayal of Chew-Z. Thirdly, discussing the nihilistic power of the simulation induced by the ingestion of Chew-Z, Hayles contends that "the distinctions that enabled the fake and the real to be constituted as separate categories" (*My Mother* 76) are broken down. Although she insists on viewing Chew-Z as a simulation drug, Hayles does not explain in what sense it is responsible for the overlapping of these categories. The main purpose of this reading is to include Hayles's insights in a larger reflection drawing upon the theories of the simulacrum, especially those of Gilles Deleuze and Baudrillard, in order to account for the subversion of reality in the novel. My general contention is that the oscillation between ontological stability and instability identified by Hayles expresses the narrative's reaction to the simulacral power of Chew-Z. The result is a series of narrative propositions and events successively contradicting each other.

The first part of this section briefly surveys the history of the concept of simulacrum and the way it has been analyzed by Plato, Deleuze and Baudrillard. The second part examines the depiction of Can-D (the first drug that appears in *Stigmata*) and shows that although it is first introduced as a simulacral threat against reality, it is eventually reinterpreted as a conventional drug with the power to induce illusion. The third part follows Hayles's reading by investigating in which ways the eponymous character Palmer Eldritch can be considered a simulacrum of God and the Chew-Z world a simulation of reality. The fourth part examines the role played by desire in the (failed) representation of the divine. Finally, the conclusion shows that the theological framework in which the whole novel is cast can also be read as Dick's idiosyncratic attempt to portray the experience of the postmodern subject lost in his electronic environments.

1. Simulacrum

The history of the notion of the simulacrum begins with the distinction Plato makes between the real model existing in the World of Ideas, the good copy (*eikon*) which internally resembles the model, and the bad copy or simulacrum (*phantasma*) whose similitude with the model is merely external. In this ternary structure, the simulacrum is defined negatively as a copy deprived of ontological grounding. In "Plato and the Simulacrum," Deleuze has, however, famously offered another reading of the simulacrum by insisting on its positive capacity to create a new reality. According to his view, the simulacrum is not a debased copy of its model, but instead acquires a new autonomy by challenging the very relation existing between model and copy. In the Deleuzian version of the simulacrum, it is no longer the simulacrum's divergence from the Platonic Idea that is emphasized but, instead, the act of simulation itself. As Scott Durham explains, "the simulacrum no longer appears merely as the

vain or unfounded image: it appears as at once the mask and the creation of subversive powers of the false" (*Phantom Communities* 9).

In the history of simulacra, the problem of representation ceases to concern only the practice of Art and becomes even more urgent when it enters the domain of theology. The representation of the divine has always been controversial because sacred images were sometimes criticized for hiding the perfection of their model behind the crudeness of their own imperfect material ostentation. Thus, the interdiction by the Iconoclasts (the breakers of images) on representing God is commonly construed as having been motivated by their fear that pictorial or sculptural representation would somehow draw the faithful's attention on itself at the expense of the model. This view echoes Plato's prejudice against Art, which he accuses of concealing the intelligible world from the eyes of men, and signals the influence of Platonism on Christianity. What is worth noting is that this conception does not invest images with any power to subvert reality. The simple inconvenience they cause is to hide the divine Truth, which itself remains aloof and impervious.

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard construes icons not as mere representations of the Divinity but as daemonic simulacra that only pretend to represent their model, when in fact they abolish the distance between model and copy, and lure the faithful into the vertiginous proximity of their own reality. According to Baudrillard, the Iconoclasts were thus not frightened by the veil placed over God by sacred images, but instead, by their power to substitute themselves for the idea of God and thereby threaten His existence. The difference between the epistemological argument against images and Baudrillard's is clear: according to the former God is only hidden behind distorted material reproductions and representation is synonymous with dissimulation (betrayal), whereas the latter conception stresses the capacity images have to compromise their referent by reversing the very order of

representation. The unmediated, imaginary conception of the invisible God is replaced by the visibility of the icon in a move that Baudrillard calls “precession of simulacra.”

At this point it is important to clarify the notion of simulation which underlies Baudrillard’s interpretation of Iconoclasm. In the first place, Baudrillard states his definition of the reality principle according to which the real exists only insofar as it is separable from the imaginary (which can be viewed as a sort of background world upon which the real stands out by contrast like the elements in a painting) and disappears when the distance between real and imaginary is abolished. While representation still assumes a distance between model and copy, simulation is the operation by which the model is *realized* by the simulacrum, that is, it is displaced from the order of the imaginary into the order of the real. According to Baudrillard, this “hemorrhage” of the imaginary into the real leads to the era of simulation in which “there is no longer a God to recognize His own, no longer a Last Judgment to separate the false from the true” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 6). This paradoxical death of the real by an excess of reality informs Baudrillard’s entire reflection on virtual reality and will be crucial to our understanding of Dick’s novel.

Dick is famous for his treatment of the notion of the simulacrum in such novels as *The Simulacra* or *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* in which technologies (media and biotechnologies) are used to construct fake human beings and generate fake realities for purposes of totalitarian control. However, technologically generated simulacra come later in Dick’s works and such short stories as “Exhibit Piece” and “Small Town” already depict miniature models and dioramas that simulate reality without specific references to technology. Likewise, the short story “The Days of Perky Pat,” which serves as the basis for *Stigmata*, does not mention the drug Can-D (the chemical “technology” introduced later in *Stigmata*) and focuses only on the doll Perky Pat, a sort of modern idol made of plastic. What is remarkable with all these iconic artifacts is not only their capacity to enthrall the characters in

Dick's stories, but also the tendency they evince to replace mundane reality. Although these short stories are interesting in themselves, I shall limit myself to investigating the case of *Stigmata* where these issues are addressed more extensively.

In *Stigmata* the problem of representation is complicated by introducing a simulacrum of God (the eponymous character Palmer Eldritch) and two hallucinogenic drugs (Can-D and Chew-Z) that simulate reality. According to Baudrillard "whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself" (*Simulacra and Simulation* 6). This struggle is particularly useful in accounting for the two incompatible movements—the domestication of the Chew-Z world and the following re-affirmation of its power to infuse real and fake—that Hayles identifies in Dick's novel. On the one hand, a series of statements and events tends to interpret both the God-like figure of Palmer Eldritch and the "hallucination" of Chew-Z within a Platonic framework as merely hiding the authentic reality. On the other hand, the narrative opposes this interpretation by insisting on the fearsome capacity of Eldritch to simulate God and usurp the legends and motifs of Christianity.

Before considering Dick's elaborate presentation of the simulation drug Chew-Z, let us examine the first threat to the real, Can-D, which, although eventually unsuccessful as a simulacrum, nevertheless generates a debate about the veracity of the realm it gives access to.

2. Can-D: Fake Eucharist and Illusion

In the twenty-first century, colonists of Mars use a hallucinogenic drug called Can-D to escape their depressing daily routines. The drug is used, together with a miniature set of dolls (a Barbie-like bimbo named Pat and her Ken-like boyfriend Walt) and accessories called Perky Pat layouts (P.P. layouts), in order to experience a collective hallucination (called "translation" in the novel) into an idealized reconstruction of life on Earth. An intense

controversy regarding the nature of the experience provided by the drug divides the colonists. While the "sensualists" (42) regard Can-D only as a way to escape reality and access an illusory artificial paradise, others have developed a religious doctrine according to which the collective use of Can-D can be related to the Eucharist, the Christian sacrament during which bread and wine are said to be transubstantiated into the body of Christ. For these "believers" (37) the translation is not an illusion because it functions as a real ontological change. As one of the characters, Sam Regan, explains, believers "affirmed the miracle of translation—the near-sacred moment in which the miniature artifacts of the layout no longer merely represented Earth but *became* Earth" (37, emphasis in the original). The translation is described by using the vocabulary of scholastic philosophy, especially that of Saint Thomas of Aquinas who himself borrows from Aristotle the concepts of substance and "accidents" (41).[10] While the "accidents" (the appearance) of the P.P. layout do not change during the translation, they are alleged to become the Earth in essence. At the same time the participants in the translation become Pat and Walt in essence, reenacting one of the mysteries of Christian theology, the problem of the nature of Christ: "two figures comprising the essences of six persons. Two in six, Sam Regan thought. The mystery repeated; How is it accomplished? The old question again" (48). This exact difficulty was faced by Christian theologians in their endless arguments to determine how human and divine natures could both coexist in the single person of Christ. Adding to this religious characterization of the use of Can-D, believers also claim that the translation is a purifying experience because it allows the participants to lose their corporeality and "put on imperishable bodies instead" (41). Now, because Christianity links the experience of corporeality to sin, the translation is equated with salvation (the loss of sin) through death (42) and purported to grant immortality.

The interpretation of the effect of the drug within the framework of Christian theology is of major importance in understanding where, for Dick, the lure of synthetically generated

fantasy lies. The temptation is strong indeed to view the translation as real and the artificial paradise it gives access to as the Kingdom of God. The colonist Anne Hawthorne is fully aware of this danger when she compares the experience provided by Can-D to salvation and resurrection in eternal life (148-49). Thus, from the very beginning of the novel, the characters face a first simulacral threat. Can-D produces a synthetic realm that endangers its model (God's paradise) by imitating its most eminent narratives: the disparagement of the body, the promise of immortality and salvation through corporeal death and spiritual rebirth.

However, the world of Can-D (also called the world of Perky Pat) eventually fails to convince the colonists that it is anything more than an escapist illusion. Firstly, the translation is certainly not the equivalent of salvation in that the paradise it gives access to is a hedonistic world whose materialistic pleasures blatantly refute the original idea of purifying experience.[11] The operation is said to be "secular . . . in that it's temporary and [attains] only a physical world" (126). Secondly, it is revealed that the P.P. layouts are not necessary for the translation. When Anne Hawthorne wonders what would happen to the colonists if the Perky Pat layouts were destroyed Barney answers: "They'd go on with their fantasy," for "It was established, now; the props were no longer necessary as foci" (142). This undermines the believers' claim about transubstantiation. Thirdly, Hayles perceptively signals what is perhaps the surest indication that Can-D functions as a conventional drug when she remarks that on several occasions the narration assumes an objective stance towards the hallucination. Thus, the inert bodies of the drugged colonists participating in the translation are described from an external viewpoint by a character who is no longer under the influence of the drug (48, 139, 147).

Nevertheless, if Can-D proves unable to answer the religious expectations of the colonists, an important dialogue (149-51) between protagonists Barney Mayerson and Anne Hawthorne suggests that the rival drug Chew-Z does not exhibit the same limitations. Both drugs pretend

to substitute their own reality for the reality of God, but whereas Dick eventually decides to depict Can-D as a hallucination, he chooses to unleash the power of the simulation Chew-Z and the evil simulacrum of God, Palmer Eldritch.

3. Chew-Z: Inverted Eucharist and Simulation

Michael Camille[12] clearly pinpoints the ambiguity regarding the status of images in Christianity when he remarks that "at the same time that [the image] was a Platonic 'false claimant' it was also the means by which God created man 'in his own image' and Christ was incarnated" (36). These two major issues of Christian theology, which animated centuries of elaborate and recondite debates, are explicitly addressed throughout the novel in a double interrogation about both the nature of Palmer Eldritch and the effect of Chew-Z on the nature of man. Dick restates the ambiguity described by Camille by formulating incompatible statements regarding Eldritch, who is sometimes viewed as a fallen deity preying on human beings so as to reproduce itself, and sometimes as God Himself. This is particularly clear in a remarkable dialogue between Barney Mayerson and Anne Hawthorne (216-20). When Barney affirms that Eldritch is God, reporting that he has felt about him "a presence of the deity" (217), Anne contests his claim by explaining that Eldritch manifests the presence of God because, like man, he was "shaped in His image" (218) without being His true *incarnation* like the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist, or like Christ himself. This dialogue is remarkable because it reproduces the ternary structure of the Platonic theory of the model, the good copy and the simulacrum. What is at stake here for Anne is to reassert the priority of the Divine referential by distinguishing between the model (God), the good copy (Man before the Fall) and the simulacrum (Eldritch).

To repress the simulacrum, Plato's strategy consists of unmasking it as an inferior imitation of its Divine model. In *Stigmata*, the inversion of several Christian motifs can be

read as a way to carry out this program of Platonism. Firstly, Eldritch does not hesitate to sacrifice man in order to survive. Barney reflects that instead of God dying for man, "*the* superior power ask[s] us to perish for *it*. Does that make it evil? he wondered, . . . it certainly makes it inferior to what came two thousand years before" (220, emphasis in the original). Secondly, it is possible to view the return to Earth of Palmer Eldritch from Proxima after a decade-long absence as an inversion of the Second Coming of Christ (*parousia*). The commonalities are numerous. For instance:

- Like Christ, Eldritch is first expected as a savior (26).
- Eldritch is thought to bring—by the means of Chew-Z—eternal life, redemption, and resurrection in the Kingdom of God to the colonists on Mars and the people on Earth. It is also worth noting that the colonists are described as living deads trying to be born again via Can-D.
- Chew-Z is later compared to the apple in the Garden of Eden by Anne Hawthorne (219). Likewise, eating Chew-Z is equated to the Fall (223).
- The stigmata of Eldritch are an inversion of the stigmata of Christ.
- "Instead of God dying for man" (220), Eldritch asks man to die for him.
- The second advent of Christ is explicitly mentioned by Barney when he compares Eldritch to "what came two thousand years before" (220).

Moreover, Leo Bulero, one of the characters, presents himself as a Christ-like savior (227) invested with powers to protect mankind from Eldritch's "evil, negative trinity of alienation, blurred reality and despair" (229), thus reproducing the Christian agon. Finally, the most important inversion concerns the effect of Chew-Z on the nature of man, which is thus described by Barney:

> Once you've taken Chew-Z you're delivered over. At least that's how dogmatic, devout, fanatical Anne Hawthorne would phrase it. Like sin, Barney Mayerson thought; it's the condition of slavery. Like the Fall. And the temptation is similar.
>
> But what's missing here is a way by which we can be freed. (187)

This passage not only compares the absorption of Chew-Z to the Fall of Man but also points out how the drug functions as an inverted Eucharist during which, as Hayles puts it, "rather than taking the product inside him, he [the consumer] has been imprisoned inside the product" (*How We Became Posthuman* 170). Dick thus expands upon the Burroughsian insight that the merchant debases and sells the consumer to his product, by literally exiling the latter into the hell of the Chew-Z world. Dick's remarkable connection between consumption and imprisonment has been construed as the fluctuations of subjectivity under the assaults of power fantasies generated by capitalism.[13] However aptly this sophisticated approach accounts for the shrinking of the consumer's subjectivity, it seems to leave aside the specific theological references to sin and the numerous soteriological considerations (148, 193, 225, 229). In this context, the reference to the notion of simulacrum is valuable in that it ties the problem of the nature of man to that of reality. In particular, it sheds a new light on the *locus classicus* of Dick's metaphysics, namely his statement that "fake realities will create fake humans. Or, fake humans will generate fake realities and then sell them to other humans, turning them, eventually, into forgeries of themselves" ("How to Build a Universe" 263-64). Deleuze provides the key to link the inauthenticity of Chew-Z to the inauthenticity of those who consume it when he remarks that through the Fall, man loses the resemblance he has with God and becomes himself a simulacrum (295). In the context of the novel, Eldritch, the inferior copy of God, lures man (the good copy) into the false realm of Chew-Z,

thereby causing his fall *i.e.* his ontological debasement as another bad copy. At this point it is interesting to consider Jakob Böhme's *On the Election of Grace* as a work that provides a similar account of the Fall of Man. According to Böhme, it is the very act of consumption that led man to fall and to be "imprison[ed] in phantasy" (91), subsequently losing his resemblance to God: "the Holy Spirit retired into its principle, and Adam became weak and feeble in the image of God" (91). Böhme's interpretation of the ontological degradation of man during the Fall in terms of consumption strikingly parallels the way Dick's narrative enmeshes the motif of Eldritch as a Satan-like salesman seducing the protagonists into the phantasmatic realm of Chew-Z.[14]

Although all these inversions of Christian motifs participate in a Platonic repression of the simulacrum, it is worth noting that in other passages Eldritch is not described in terms of his negative attributes but instead harbors positive powers of affirmation. I would like here to examine in what sense Eldritch can be said to succeed in appropriating the narratives of the Christian god he simulates. The first passage of the novel that substantiates my contention is a dialogue between Barney and Anne (148-50) that serves as a transition between Can-D and Chew-Z. After having experienced the hallucination induced by Can-D, Anne expresses her disappointment over the fact that it gives access to a spiritual void: "[it was] pointless. I found nothing there" (147). This statement is, however, immediately contradicted by her confession that during the translation she had the impression of being resurrected:

> We're all blighted, according to [Saint] Paul, not just our bodies but our souls, too; both have to die and then we can be reborn again, with new bodies not of flesh but incorruptible. See? You know, when I was Perky Pat, just now . . . I had the oddest feeling that I was—it's wrong to say this or believe it, but—"

> "But," Barney finished for her, "it seemed like a taste of that. But you expected it, though; you knew the resemblance—you mentioned it yourself, on the ship."
>
> "Yes," Anne admitted. "But . . . *being translated is the only hint we can have of it this side of death.* So it's a temptation." (148-49, emphasis in the original)

This exchange reveals how the simulacrum operates by appropriating the discourse (names, legends and motifs) of the model it simulates, thus constituting such a formidable threat. However, as we have already seen in the preceding section, Can-D eventually does not exhibit the subversive power of the simulacrum and fails to meet the spiritual aspirations of colonists such as Anne, whose strongest temptation is not that of the flesh but the desire to abandon her body and to escape the weight of sin by being born again. The situation is very different with Chew-Z, which indeed provides a substitute for the salvation promised by Saint Paul. Furthermore, whereas God only promises eternal life, Eldritch provides it *hic et nunc*. It is the daemonic[15] aspect of Eldritch's product, its capacity to simulate resurrection and immortality that causes Anne's metaphysical despair: "you'll understand why I feel as I do about Chew-Z . . . why it's such a spiritual problem for me" (150). Her despondency, which parallels that of the Iconoclasts, results from the fact that the very existence of Eldritch renders obsolete her belief in God. At this point, the simulacrum has superseded the model by showing itself to be both truer and better and by promising "not the big lie . . . but instead the big truth" (150). The death of the divinity is thus paradoxically due to excess.[16]

Hayles explicitly construes the world of Chew-Z as a simulation, observing that reality "is the exterior husk and the simulation is the underlying essence that keeps breaking through" (*My Mother* 74). Her claim is underpinned by a passage of the novel strikingly

reminiscent of Baudrillard's depiction of the holographic reality projected by the screens of televisions and computers:

> The entire panorama evaporated, as if the method by which it has been projected, stabilized and maintained had clicked to the off position. He saw only an empty white expanse, a focused glare, as if there were now no 3-D slide in the projector at all. The light, he thought, that underlies the play of phenomena which we call "reality." (106)

Hayles also asserts that the ultimate result of the ingestion of Chew-Z is to "break down the distinctions that enabled the fake and the real to be constituted as separate categories" (*My Mother* 76). Reflecting on the capacity of simulacra to replace their models in the conscience of the observer, Deleuze points out that "the spectator is made part of the simulacrum, which is transformed and deformed according to his point of view" (296). This is perhaps what uniquely characterized the narrative treatment of Chew-Z. As we have seen in the preceding section, Dick places the narrative standpoint in an objective relationship with regard to the colonists when they are under the influence of Can-D, whereas Chew-Z's diegesis is never observed from an external viewpoint. From the moment Eldritch forces Leo Bulero to take Chew-Z (74) neither the reader nor the protagonists can ever be sure of their position with regard to the Chew-Z world. In addition, as Camille observes, "the simulacrum takes over at the moment of perspectival accommodation" (45) namely the moment when the point of view induces the beholder to believe in a true likeness between the model and the simulacrum. Barney Mayerson experiences such an accommodation when he contends that the evil character of Eldritch is in fact only an aspect of his subjective experience (213). This movement of accommodation testifies to the subversive power of the simulacrum, which

induces Barney to change his previous definition of the Divine, and it is in this sense that one can understand how Chew-Z alters the very categories used to apprehend reality, and therefore makes it impossible to return to the real as it was before the advent of simulation.

4. Desire for God

The sacred image, the icon, has been regarded throughout history as a way to bridge the gap between the world of matter and the celestial world, and provide a glimpse of what lies beyond. As Barasch contends, "the desire to create, or discover, a "mediator" between the two different levels of being [the spiritual and the material, the invisible and the visible] was a powerful motivating force" (137-38). The icon is a mediator between man and god, it fulfills an anagogic function by allowing man's gaze to, as it were, ascend toward the ineffable. Barasch thus calls the sacred image "the starting point of the flight to heaven" (179). Interestingly, in religious thought, it is the sense of sight that is privileged for leading man to the divine (Barasch 277-79). Yet, insisting on the superior value of vision over the other senses is not without consequence, for, as Barasch observes, "the inherent significance of the icon is made possible by the elevated position of sight" (67).

In what precedes, the analysis of the theological function of Can-D and Chew-Z highlights the importance for Dick of the role of images as mediator between man and god. It is therefore not surprising that Dick's characters are faced with the same central issues and dilemma that have haunted the history of Western thought on images. Is it possible to represent the divine? How to be sure that the image will not take precedence over the prototype? How to guarantee that the gaze of the worshipper will indeed soar toward heaven rather than remain trapped in the material confines of the image now turned into an idol?

What Baudrillard calls the "wager on representation" (*Simulacra and Simulation* 5) is the desire and belief that a sign could make present something absent. This model is, however,

predicated on the distance between sign and referent, and is endangered when that distance is abolished. As we already saw in the section about the simulacrum, Baudrillard contends that representation becomes simulation when the object that belongs to the imaginary is placed in the real. Paradoxically, by rendering too present the prototype, the sign threatens to exterminate it, to make it less real by making it too real (because reality is a function of the distance between real and imaginary). The Christian narrative (like other Utopian narratives) draws its power from the creation of a transcendent imaginary (the divine imaginary), a universe radically differing from the real, otherworldly, beyond the real and inaccessible by ordinary means. It is because he is transcendent and invisible that the figure of God and his realm become invested with belief and desire.

Likewise, distance is the core concept underlying Jean-Luc Marion's reflection on the representation of god, in particular for the distinction he establishes between the icon and the idol. For him, the idol kills the prototype by making it available: "Subsidizing the absence of the divine, the idol makes the divine available, secures it, and in the end distorts it. Its culmination mortally finishes the divine" (7). In idolatry, God is absorbed and anchored in a material sign which is not the divine itself but the spectator's own experience of the divine. Idolatry is thus a sort of narcissistic curtailment of the ineffable alterity of the divine.[17]

In *Stigmata*, however, it is not the case that simulation freezes the divine as in Marion's view of idolatry. To start with, there is a strong desire for God (already expressed at the outset of the novel [26]) and a gradual movement in the novel by which the divine is rendered more and more present. First an absent figure placed in the remote and fabulous space of Proxima (Baudrillard's imaginary order), Eldritch gradually approaches, fills in the void, abolishes the distance that separates him from the spectator, from the worshipper. But when the god ceases to be transcendent, inaccessible, and becomes instead more and more present,

it is to the point of saturating the diegetic space of its immanence, which is impervious to mediation:

> Symbols of its inhabitation, he thought. In our midst. But not asked for. Not intentionally summoned. And—we have no mediating sacraments through which to protect ourselves; we can't compel it, by our careful, time-honored, clever, painstaking rituals, to confine itself to specific elements such as bread and water and wine. It is out in the open, ranging in every direction. It looks into our eyes; and it looks *out* of our eyes. (219, emphasis in the original)

Through its simulacrum, God is certainly not circumscribed to, and contained in, a material sign. Instead it contaminates the whole space and at the same time reabsorbs the subject. It remains to understand the link between idolatry and this sort of divine contagion. Examining other works can give us some indications.

In "Upon the Dull Earth," the same universal contagion is already presented as a consequence of the illicit creation of a material image by false deities. In this metaphysical horror story, unknown superior beings, after having mistakenly ravished the soul of the protagonist Silvia, try to help her regain the material world. They have, however, destroyed her body (called "the clay part" [211]) and are not capable of creating a material receptacle to welcome Silvia's soul, for such an action remains a divine prerogative. Instead they "infuse" Silvia's soul in the inanimate body of her sister Betty Lou, thus following the Neo-platonician notion of sympathy.[18] The result is a sort of "ontological catastrophe" where all inhabitants of the world become Silvia in a manner reminiscent of the propagation of Eldritch's stigmata. It is important to notice the role of desire in this story. Like Anne in *Stigmata*, Silvia yearns for transcendence, for "transfiguration—from clay into gods" (206).

Moreover, her cataclysmic "fall back" into the world of matter seems to be the direct result of the desire of her lover Rick to bring her back. Rick doubly violates the Mosaic Law when he makes an idol out of Silvia and demands the superior beings to revive her. Silvia understands that this action is sacrilegious: "They [the superior beings] altered His [God's] work . . . A mistake – they should have known better than to alter the balance. It's unstable and none of them can control the…" (214). Yet, Rick's obsession with Silvia is made clear when he claims that "*anything*" (214, emphasis in the original) is worth her resurrection. The alteration of the Universe's balance and the self-replicating image of Silvia can then be understood as an outcome of Rick's own fall into idolatry.[19] Looking at Dick's inspiration for this story buttresses our interpretation. The title of the story is taken from a line in Scene 2 of Act IV of Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Several passages of this comedy exhibit a play on shadow and substance, and oppose the picture to its model. For instance when Proteus expresses his love for Silvia:

> Madam, if your heart be so obdurate,
> Vouchsafe me yet your picture for my love,
> The picture that is hanging in your chamber;
> To that I'll speak, to that I'll sigh and weep:
> For since the substance of your perfect self
> Is else devoted, I am but a shadow;
> And to your shadow will I make true love. (Act IV, Scene 2)

Proteus's love (like Rick's) can be called idolatrous. His obsession with Silvia destroys his own identity (a fate that ultimately also befalls Rick in Dick's story): "For since the substance of your perfect self/Is else devoted, I am but a shadow," and his worship goes to an image of

Silvia: “and to your shadow will I make true love.” This blind adoration is not without theological connotations as is shown in a later passage where Julia tries to understand why Proteus prefers Silvia to herself:

> If this fond Love were not a blinded god?
> Come, shadow, come and take this shadow up,
> For 'tis thy rival. O thou senseless form,
> Thou shalt be worshipp'd, kiss'd, loved and adored!
> And, were there sense in his idolatry,
> My substance should be statue in thy stead. (Act IV, Scene 2)

Not only is Proteus’s love for Silvia viewed again as idolatry “If this fond Love were not a blinded god?” but Julia also yearns to be transubstantiated from “shadow” to “statue.” No doubt that Dick was strongly moved by these motifs and decided to bring the analogy between psychology and theology even further.

Another explicit formulation of the consequences of transgressing the taboo on images is to be found in “Holy Quarrel” where the character Herbert Sousa is considered the incarnation of the “Evil One” because he has manufactured small plastic toys to be sold to children. When the sentient computer that passed the anathema on Sousa is asked the reason of this unintelligible judgment, it answers that Sousa has created “living beings out of nonliving clay” (152), an act that is “demonic” if “unsanctioned” (153) by God. On the contrary, an image is judged lawful if and only if it is made “*in accord with* the wishes of the divine creator . . . as a sacred reenactment of the *original* holy miracle” (153, emphasis mine). In parallel to this iconoclastic condemnation of representation, the narrative also introduces the motif of contagion (like in *Palmer Eldritch*) by describing an extraterrestrial form of life

capable of reproducing by division like cells, which eventually submerges the entire world by taking advantage of Sousa's toy business. Dick does not seem to be able to make up his mind as to the exact nature of the threat faced by the characters: shall they fear the consequences of violating the taboo on images (the creation of Sousa's toys) or rather the invasive extraterrestrial life form? Those two motifs do not dovetail neatly and as often we end up with overdetermination. To this reader, what is really at stakes here is the issue of idolatry and its (fantastic) consequences. Indeed, the figure of the invading E.T. simply constitutes an attempt to imagine a non-magical explanation for the universal contamination resulting from idolatry. In so doing, the generic instability of the story is overcome. The alien figure relocates "Holy Quarrel" into the genre of science fiction.

It seems possible to posit a relation between, on the one hand, the violation of the Mosaic Law against both the creation of images and idolatry and, on the other hand, the uniformization of reality under the invading figure of the simulacrum (Eldritch, Silvia's image, Sousa's toys). To be more precise, it is as if the simulacrum, by challenging the precedence (logical, chronological, and ontological) of the divine referent, could impose itself as a new horizon of reference. In contrast with the icon which points toward a world beyond, the simulacrum engulfs the gaze of the spectator in the prison of its self-reference while at the same time forestalling any possibility to conceive of an "elsewhere." In that sense, the manifestation of Eldritch's stigmata by almost all the characters in the novel significantly differs from that of the wounds born by historical stigmatics. While historical stigmata are indexical signs of a transcendent presence and commemorate (represent) a remote event, Eldritch's stigmata no longer refer to anything besides themselves and only testify to the omnipresent immanence of their bearer. While the divine constitutes the inaccessible frontier of the icon, it is immediately available and ubiquitous in the Chew-Z simulation, infinitely close to one's sight (because the sight itself becomes that of Eldritch)

and actualizing everything (eternal life, disembodiment) that was only promised by the icon. Under the regime of the simulacrum, referents are swallowed up by the serial image of Palmer Eldritch. The simulation does not hide anything, but "realizes" the remote, the imaginary, and renders explicit everything that was implicit. One can also understand why the simulation of Chew-Z is at times identified with absolute reality. Nothing remains hidden to (or distorted by) human subjectivity, or rather, Chew-Z allows subjectivity to become coextensive with the real. What is most disturbing and mysterious in Dick's treatment is that the effect of the simulacrum is not restricted to the spectator's perception of reality but extends to reality itself.

Conclusion: The Stuff Virtual Reality Is Made Of

The main purpose of this reflection was to account for the series of contradictory statements regarding both the nature of Palmer Eldritch and the drug Chew-Z. In a move to reestablish ontological security, the narrative first attempts to circumvent the threat posed by Eldritch and Chew-Z by reinterpreting the former as a fake god who merely masks its divine model, and the latter as a hallucination. This strategy is similar to the way Platonism tries to repress the simulacrum by viewing it as a false representation of a real and impregnable model. However, it is the very nature of simulacra to resist this domestication and to instead impose their own reality. The case is made even more difficult because in Dick's novel it is the divinity itself that is simulated, with the consequence of undermining the whole of reality in a move of destabilization. The narrative thus swings back and forth between the need to domesticate the simulacrum and the latter's resistance, with the final result being that it remains impossible at the novel's end to distinguish between real and fake or, even, to decide if this distinction is still meaningful.

At this point, one may argue that the novel's characters' desperate attempts to resolve their metaphysical dilemmas are little more than intellectual niceties not quite relevant to our common realm of experience. It is important, however, to remember that Dick's depiction of synthetic realities is motivated in the first place by his concerns over the effects of technologically mediated experience. As a result of simulation, as Stanislaw Lem puts it, "abstract and highbrow dilemmas of academic philosophy [descend] into the street so that every pedestrian [is] forced to solve for himself such contradictory problems as 'objectivity' or 'subjectivity,' because his life [depends] upon the result" (79). Because of the increasing impact of technology on the categories of experience, one may legitimately contend that the conundrums faced by Philip K. Dick's characters are more than ever worthy of our attention.

In fact, if Jameson is right in claiming that "theology offers a thinly disguised deployment of the impasses of representation" (*Archaeologies* 370), our survey of the metaphysics of images would not be complete without shifting our attention from the problem of theological mediation to that of electronic mediation. In so doing, our discussion begins to make a transition from the (mainly) ontological matters we have been concerned with so far (put simply: what images do to reality) to epistemology (what images do to people's perception of reality), and introduces some of the issues that will be discussed in the next chapter.

Dick himself conflates theological and electronic mediations early on in *Eye in the Sky* where characters try to "tackle this basis problem of man's existence: keeping a well-functioning wire open between Earth and Heaven" (47) and design systems of "[c]ommunication between man and God" (48). The sacred icon as a bridge between man and God is replaced by electronic devices such as the television, which serves as the voice of God in a remarkable passage (106-115).

Furthermore, the way Dick expresses his interest in the theological function of hallucinogenic drugs is somewhat peculiar, as when he states (in 1966) *a propos* the short story "Faith of Our Fathers":

> One theme in the story, however, seems compelling to me, in view of recent experiment with hallucinogenic drugs: the theological experience, which so many who have taken LSD have reported. This appears to me to be a true new frontier; to a certain extent the religious experience can now be scientifically studied . . . What if, through psychedelic drugs, the religious experience becomes commonplace . . . (*The Eye of the Sibyl* 391)

Here, the theological-psychedelic experience is viewed as a scientific experiment, something that can be repeated at will, as if one just needed to ingest a mind-altering chemical in order to "plug" into God.

In addition, Baudrillard describes the drug-like state induced by hyperconnectivity to communication devices as follows: "Hence the comfortable dizziness produced by this electronic interaction that acts like drugs. One can spend one's entire life at this, without any interruption. Drugs themselves are only the perfect example of a crazed, closed-circuit interactivity" ("Violence of the Virtual"). This is very clear in *Stigmata* and makes it possible to establish a parallel between the effects of both Can-D and Chew-Z on the characters and what Baudrillard calls the schizophrenic influence of media on the postmodern subject. In fact, the convergence between theology, drugs, media, and schizophrenia in Dick is so pronounced that Jameson has even claimed that "in Dick drugs and schizophrenia are bad, not because they provoke hallucinations, but because those hallucinations are too closely related to television" (371).[20]

Let us consider first the drug Can-D. At the outset of the novel, the Can-D experience is described as a sort of communion, a sacred experience allowing the forlorn inhabitants of the Martian hovels to fuse. The layout and the drug function like a media around which is organized a ritual. They are invested with a sacramental dimension. Not only are the practitioners supposed to become affectively closer, but they are also able to leave the profane world of everyday life to enter an entirely different mode of being, that of the sacred. This view is identical to the depiction of television by the early McLuhan of the *Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) who is convinced that contemporary electronic media recreate the sacred communal mode of experience of tribal societies. Dick does, however, soon depart from McLuhan's generally optimistic vision.[21] Even if some elements gesture toward the sacred character of the translation of the colonists, the material circumstances in which their experience takes place are not a bit changed by it. They remain instead passive consumers, both physically exiled on the desolate Martian world (Baudrillard's "desert of the real") and alienated subjects plunged in the social limbo of capitalism. In the end, what we have in Dick's version of social tribalism is a fragmented constellation of "global hovels" instead of McLuhan's global village.[22]

Like Can-D, Chew-Z is at first supposed to give access to a personal world in which the subject is endowed with unlimited powers, allowing him to modify its environment, adding objects and building domains here and there according to his whim. This anticipates the promises of virtual reality, a technology supposed to open a new space free of control and with rich creative potential. However, the implosion of the world's temporal and spatial dimensions celebrated by McLuhan in *Understanding Media* (93) does not elicit exhilaration in the characters of Dick's novel. Quite the contrary, terror becomes the dominant response to the schizophrenic mode of being that is experienced by the users of Chew-Z. Again,

Baudrillard's characterization of the schizophrenic experience of media interaction resonates uncannily with the novel's depictions:

> [A] state of terror which is characteristic of the schizophrenic, an over-proximity of all things, a foul promiscuity of all things which beleaguer and penetrate him, meeting with no resistance, and no halo, no aura, not even the aura of his own body protects him. In spite of himself the schizophrenic is open to everything and lives in the most extreme confusion . . . The schizophrenic is not, as generally claimed, characterized by his loss of touch with reality, but by the absolute proximity to and total instantaneousness with things, this overexposure to the transparency of the world. Stripped of a stage and crossed over without the least obstacle, the schizophrenic cannot produce the limits of his very being, he can no longer produce himself as a mirror. He becomes a pure screen, a pure absorption and resorption surface of the influent networks. (*The Ecstasy of Communication* 27)

In the Chew-Z simulation, everything is transparent and substanceless. The users are variously called phantoms (97, passim), ectoplasms (98) and phantasms (195, passim); the world appears as a hologram (106). Motion occurs at the speed of thought. Metamorphosis and contamination through contiguity characterizes the metonymic operations of the simulation. Spatial and temporal distances are effectively abolished but this does not mean a greater unity, for as Barney observes about Chew-Z: "the communal world is gone" (179). Paradoxically, the greater proximity of everything implies at the same time a greater separation. While for McLuhan electronic media produce an acoustic space, Chew-Z is essentially a realm of visual stimulations.

The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch is one of the richest works in Dick's opus. The overdetermination (typical of Dick) of the main figures and elements (Palmer Eldritch, Can-D, Chew-Z, etc.) can lead to various interpretive approaches. Thus, one could also fruitfully discuss the novel in terms of a more modernist thematic of spectacular alienation *à la* Debord,[23] or as a sustained critique of total systems such as Weber's "Iron Cage" or Baudrillard's hyperreality. For Jameson, the characteristic of these totalities is "to eliminate any possibility of the *negative* as such, and to reintegrate the place of an oppositional or even merely "critical" practice and resistance back into the system as the latter's mere inversion . . . [so that] even the works of an overtly oppositional or political stance [become] instruments ultimately programmed by the system itself" (*Political Unconscious* 92).[24] Here, one can think of Leo Bulero's (94-96) and Barney Mayerson's (177-78) respective attempts to escape from the Chew-Z simulation. Both strategies are *preempted* by Eldritch. As Bulero realizes:

> Our tactics [against Eldritch] required that Barney chew away . . . and so we played right into Palmer's dirty hands . . . The fantasy worlds that Chew-Z induced, he thought, are in Palmer Eldritch's *head* . . . And the trouble is, he thought, that once you get into one of them you can't quite scramble back out; it stays with you, even when you think you're free. It's a one-way gate. (185, emphasis in the original)

At the end of the novel, however, the issue of control remains somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, it is suggested that Eldritch controls all the Chew-Z universes, shaping and haunting them at will. This view is congruent with the pessimistic evaluation of virtual reality as yet another technology of totalitarian control that isolates each individual in its own bubble. In this view, there exists a central agency (Eldritch) whose power is derived from its ability to

control information and manipulate the technology by which it is propagated and reproduced (the drug is the equivalent of the Baudrillardian *code*). On the other hand, Eldritch himself is said to have ingested too much of his drug whereby he became a sort of wanderer (like the Flying Dutchman or William Austin's Peter Rugg) lost in the labyrinth of his own hallucinatory creations. In this quasi-technodeterminist view, there is nobody behind the simulation, which is instead a sort of autonomous phenomenon sets loose on the world in a manner that evokes the late Baudrillard of *The Intelligence of Evil*.

Notes

1. In the novel *A Maze of Death*, the items copied by the alien creature called Tench are also inferior in substance to their models (78).
2. The history of the notion of simulacrum is briefly set forth in the last section of this chapter. See below "1. Simulacrum."
3. Roman Jakobson relates Frazer's laws of similarity and contagion with the tropes of metaphor and metonymy respectively. In addition, he observes that these in turn have equivalents in Freud's dream theory: metonymy with displacement and condensation, and metaphor with identification and symbolism. See Jakobson and Halle 95.
4. Besides "Beyond Lies the Wub," one can think of "Autofac," "The Cookie Lady," "Colony," "Faith of Our Fathers," "Human Is," "The Last of the Masters," "Of Withered Apples," "Upon the Dull Earth," "Rautavaara's Case," *The Divine Invasion*, *Galactic Pot-Healer*, *Ubik*, *Valis*, etc.
5. The influence of Dick on DeLillo is perceptible in the idea of the fictional drug Dylar whose side effects include the inability to distinguish between words and objects: "I could not distinguish words from things, so that if someone said 'speeding bullet,' I would fall to the floor and take cover" (193).

6. See Fitting's "Reality as Ideological."
7. See Suvin's "P.K. Dick's Opus: Artifice as Refuge and World View (Introductory Reflections)," Fitting's "Reality as Ideological Construct: A Reading of Five Novels by Philip K. Dick," and Durham's "P.K. Dick: From the Death of the Subject to a Theology of Late Capitalism."
8. Thus, Suvin writes that the novel "starts squarely within the political and physical field . . . and then drags away across it the red-herring of ontologico-religious speculations" ("P. K. Dick's Opus" 16).
9. For example the drug Chew-Z is alternately viewed as a mere hallucination and as "absolute reality" (219).
10. The word translation also evokes Basil of Caesarea's important notion of *translatio ad prototypum* ("the honor paid to an image passes to its prototype") which was used during the Iconoclasts controversy to reassert the legitimacy of icons. According to Saint Basil, the *translatio* connects the icon to the prototype by a psychological process: it establishes a bridge between the visible and the invisible, between the material universe of the image (in the novel, the Perky Pat Layout) and the immaterial universe of the prototype (the Can-D world). Thanks to the *translatio*, the image can be simultaneously an object (the layout) and a spiritual process (elevation of the colonists into the world of Perky Pat). On Saint Basil's notion, see Freedberg 393.
11. The abandoned sensuality and the signs of riches evoke instead the passage of the Golden Calf in the Exodus and equate the practice of Can-D to idolatry. See Exodus 32.2-6.
12. Camille analyzes Dick's treatment of the simulacrum in the short story "Pay for the Printer" (1956), arguing that the diegetic reality is disrupted because it "has been increasingly removed from the model and made from copies of copies" (47).

13. In “P. K. Dick: From the Death of the Subject to a Theology of Late Capitalism,” Durham explains the double death of the Dickian subject,

> first as an expansion of subjective powers in which desire is freed from its contemplative prison and immediately invests a complicit everyday; secondly, as the triumph over the subject of desire by raw matter which seems paradoxically endowed with an antagonistic subjectivity of its own. (176)

14. The name of the German mystic Jakob Böhme is mentioned in Dick’s *Valis* (1981) and Böhme’s ideas are woven into Dick’s own theology in the essay “Cosmogony and Cosmology” written in 1978. I ignore whether Dick was acquainted with Böhme’s ideas before that date but it is likely that he was, since as a voracious reader of Carl Gustav Jung, Dick would not have missed the numerous citations of Böhme in the writings of the Swiss psychologist.
15. Both Deleuze and Baudrillard emphasize the daemonic aspect of the simulacrum *i.e.* its capacity to come to the forefront by subverting the very notion of Platonic resemblance. While Deleuze insists on the “*effect* of resemblance” (295, emphasis in the original) produced by the simulacrum, Baudrillard mentions the “diabolical seduction” (*The Evil Demon* 13) it exerts.
16. It is worth noticing that Dick converted to Catholicism in 1963 exactly at the moment he was writing *Stigmata*. His reflections about the ontology of electronic environments and their effects on human consciousness anticipate those of McLuhan (himself a Christian) who, in a pessimistic moment, writes in a 1969 letter to Jacques Maritain that “Electric information environments being utterly ethereal foster the illusions of the world as spiritual substance. It is now a reasonable facsimile of the

mystical body, a blatant manifestation of the Anti-Christ. After all, the Prince of this World is a very great electrical engineer" (370).

17. We find a counterpart to the idea of the death of God by excess in the Lacanian account of desire. The scope of Lacan's theory is wide and applies also to the realm of mediated commodities. Durham explains the mechanism as follows:

> Jacques Lacan has justly emphasized . . . the desire of the spectator for an originally absent object that exists only as the beyond suggested by the "screen" or "veil" that "dissimulates" it . . . Television offers the hallucinatory possession of the object only insofar as that object is already displaced into a "hyperspace" that is desirable precisely because it exceeds the possibilities of the determinate space of everyday consumption. Hence the perpetual disappointment of the consumer described by the Lacanian theorist of consumer culture, Slavoj Žižek: "this" (the object actually consumed) is never "that" (the virtual object of desire, which, when actually acquired, loses its relation to fantasmatic space that rendered it desirable). Thus, in consumer culture, Žižek argues, "the availability of the object is paid for by its *de-realization*." (*Phantom Communities* 198-99)

In *Solar Lottery*, the discovery of the Flame Disc (both an epiphanic image and a utopian motif) by the settlers is first depicted as a moment of disappointment and frustration: "it's only an image" (187). The encounter "in the flesh" with the prophet Preston, the collapse of the spatial and temporal distance between him and his votaries, signify his death and de-realization, for he has now become a mere sign.

On the relation between idolatry and narcissism, see also below Chapter Two, section "The Self as the Other: Idolatry, Narcissism, and Self Alienation" 90.

18. Here sympathy is obviously another form of Frazer's law of similarity: being Silvia's sister, Betty Lou resembles her. Like *Stigmata*, "Upon the Dull Earth" combines both Frazer's laws of magic. On Neoplatonician sympathy, see Barasch 76.
19. On the fall as a consequence of idolatry, see Mitchell 198.
20. Anthony Enns has done a remarkable and comprehensive synthesis of those salient Dickian motifs. See his "Media, Drugs, and Schizophrenia in the Works of Philip K. Dick."
21. In all fairness, it should be noted that McLuhan himself has sometimes mixed feelings toward the electronic revolution, observing that panic terror is a natural state in "a small world of tribal drums, total interdependence, and superimposed co-existence" (*Gutenberg* 37). See also note 10.
22. On Can-D as a critique of television, see Fitting's "Reality as Ideological" 227.
23. Debord: "The spectacular is the material reconstruction of the religious illusion. Spectacular technology has not dispersed the religious mists into which human beings had projected their own alienated powers, it has merely brought those mists down to earth . . . The spectacle is the technological version of the exiling of human powers into a "world beyond"; the culmination of humanity's internal separation" (*Society of the Spectacle* 28-29 thesis 20). It is important to notice that to focus on the issue of control and alienation is to return to a more modernist critical thematic in comparison with the postmodern thematic of schizophrenia and the death of the subject. It is the coexistence of both thematics in some works (in particular *Stigmata*) that renders critical interpretations so manifold.

24. In *Eye in the Sky*, the Christian-like world of Arthur Silvester functions on the same basis as total systems. When one character wonders why immorality is allowed by Silvester's God if his world operates by moral laws, another character offers the following explanation: "This bar is necessary to the moral order. This is a sinkpit of corruption and vice, a fleshpot of iniquity. You think salvation can function without damnation? You think virtue can exist without sin? That's the trouble with you atheists; you don't grasp the mechanics of evil" (67). In Silvester's totality, the negative is artificially generated by God himself. It is an integrated function which, far from being a threat, is sanctioned by the system, for it serves the moral "sorting process."

Chapter 2

Images as Social Relations

The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images.

When the real world is transformed into mere images, mere images become real beings – dynamic figments that provide the direct motivations for a hypnotic behavior . . . But the spectacle is not merely a matter of images, nor even of images plus sounds. It is whatever escapes people's activity, whatever eludes their practical reconsideration and correction. It is the opposite of dialogue.

Guy Debord. *Society of the Spectacle*

I. Introduction

1. From the Material Mode of Being to the Social Mode of Being of Images

The previous chapter investigated images from the viewpoint of ontology, that is, by insisting on their nature, their existence, and especially the problematic relationships they have with "reality." In contrast, in this chapter images are viewed as social practices between members of social groups, and attention is placed on the social effects of images rather than on the ontological disruptions they provoke. The difference in these two approaches can be readily grasped by comparing *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* with the short story "The Days of Perky Pat" on which the novel is based. As with the Martian colonists of *Stigmata*, the life of the protagonists of the short story revolves around the Perky Pat game, which is also viewed as a substitute for reality. The layout, the figures and dolls used to play

the game are treated by their owners as idols or perhaps totems, for they are seen as emblems of the clan and even relatives of its members (308, 312, and 313). Strong communal investment in the figures can cause frictions and iconoclasm (320) is the ultimate answer to the anxiety over images. It is, however, worth noting that in contrast to the novel, the effects of these images are strictly social. After a visit to another clan the characters Norm and Fran Schein are expelled from their clan because their contact with the images of the other group is supposed to have altered their behavior and way of thinking: “You don’t live here anymore. You’re different than you were. You – changed” (320) and “Their [The other clan’s] game, their particular doll, it taught them something” (321). Rather than, as it were, magically disturbing reality itself, the power of the images of “The Days of Perky Pat” lies in their capacity to influence the mindset of people. In other words, it is as social practices that they act upon reality.

Although “The Days of Perky Pat” might perhaps be viewed as a rather crude way of describing the capacity of images to mediate relationships between social groups, it is but one instance among many in which the manipulation of images literally results in cultural upheaval. To better understand this, let us consider briefly two other short stories, “Souvenir” and “War Game,” that emphasize the social power of images. “Souvenir” is a wonderful skeptical reflection on the notion of progress that could be read as a postcolonial and anti-imperialist parable. The people living on a colony planet (called Williamson’s world) which had been isolated from the rest of civilization during three centuries refuse to be assimilated into the larger human society. Their own civilization is modeled on the medieval society and includes a large number of self-sufficient agrarian communities. It is animistic, patriarchal, divided into clans and with no central agency. It refuses advanced technology and incorporation into the dominant culture (called the Galactic Relay Center). The problem as stated by Rogers, one of the officials of the Galactic Relay Center, is that the inhabitants of

Williamson's World are not "free to prefer an inferior cultural stage. Every culture has to keep pace with the general trend. Relay makes actual a uniformity of development" (358) and "Cultural variation must be avoided if the Galaxy is to have peace" (362). The Relay operates a bit like global capitalist imperialism by forcing different cultures to participate in its logic of open markets and free transactions. Stability, uniformity, and unification, are the defining norms of the Relay's ideology. Rationality is supposed to underpin the whole system but deep contradictions in Rogers's discourse on technology reveal that its logic is more probably a kind of *ex post* rationalization. Thus, while insisting that technology is a neutral instrument whose use is simply a matter of rational choice (man as the *homo economicus*: technology and work are means to answering preexisting needs), Rogers simultaneously claims that "Man is the tool-making animal" (358) (man as the *homo faber*: the tendency to work and to produce objects *are* intrinsic needs) thereby essentializing technology. Faced with Rogers's contradictory juxtaposition of rationality and instincts, the people of Williamson's world reaffirm the legitimacy of their putatively irrational behavior: "[We fight for] some real things like land and women. Some imaginary. Prestige for instance" (359). Alas, refusal to submit to cultural hegemony is punished by obliteration as the autochthons soon tragically discover. Toward the end of the story, while members of the Relay believe that their culture has been preserved, that "the idea, the concept of a separate culture with its own ways, its own customs, had been disposed of" (364), a *coup de théâtre* takes place in the last lines. A soldier back from the battlefield brings back a souvenir to his son, a hand-made wooden drinking cup he acquired on Williamson's world before its destruction. The effect of the cup on the young boy is immediate: "A strange light grew in his eyes" (365). The ending suggests that the drinking cup is a seed of discord that will one day destroy the Galactic Relay. It is worth noting that the image (the drinking cup) is called a souvenir and defined as "something that reminds you of a different place" (365). It is viewed as a fragment of another culture—

another reality even—that has been introduced into the reality of the Galactic Relay. The image is thus invested with a revolutionary power. In the clash of civilizations it can contaminate or infiltrate the enemy. It has the power to change mindsets and, as such, it has a very concrete material effect on reality.

"War Game" is also an exuberant little piece of imagination and offers quite interesting commentaries on psychology, economy, and the role played by images in social control. While Earth and Ganymede are fighting an economic battle that threatens to escalate into a full-blown war, employees of the Terran Import Bureau of Standards inspect imported Ganymedian toys in order to determine whether or not they are harmful. The first toy that retains their attention is a type of war game in which a group of soldiers attack a citadel. One of the characters offers the following interpretation of the game:

> Psychologically speaking, [the citadel] symbolizes the external reality. The dozen of soldiers, of course, represent to the child his own efforts to cope. By participating in the storming of the citadel, the child undergoes a sense of adequacy in dealing with the harsh world. Eventually he prevails, but only after a painstaking period and effort, and patience. (159)

This interpretation is later developed in a direction that strongly evokes Donald W. Winnicott's theory in *Playing and Reality*, in particular his notion of a "transitional object." One character thus views the game as "a therapeutic toy. Helps give the child confidence. The disassembling of the soldiers . . . ends the separation between him and the world. He becomes one with it. And in doing so, conquers it" (168).[1] If we endorse the Winnicottian interpretation of the game as a bridge between self and reality, it follows that the function of

the image is relational. It mediates the relationships between self and world, and teaches the practitioner how to relate with things distinct from his subjectivity.

The fear of the ideological content of the image is reinforced with the second toy—a board game called Syndrome—inspected by the testers of the clearance bureau. Syndrome is similar to Monopoly except that the purpose is now to get rid of one's stocks. The testers, who fail to understand the threat it poses, see Syndrome as a reflection of capitalist economic exchanges: "It's clear that this game is a replica of typical interculture economic ventures . . . children playing this would acquire a healthy attitude toward economic realities. It would prepare them for the adult world" (166). As with the citadel-game, Syndrome also mimics the story's general context of an economic war between different cultures. Moreover, as in "Souvenir," this could be read as a sort of postcolonial criticism targeting in particular the aggressive competition inherent to the capitalist logic of exchange. If the market is not free, it must be "forced" to be free. Dick seems to delight in mixing the ideas of game, war, and economy, to the extent that the reader begins to wonder whether war is the continuation of capitalist economy by other means or vice versa. We have the following situation: an economic war results in a war, which is won by a weapon (the game Syndrome) based on economics.[2] What is even more significant to our concern is that Dick endows images with the power to educate people. Playing the game is learning a certain way of thinking and a certain behavior. The conclusion of the story makes this clear by suggesting that the Ganymedians will likely win the war by teaching Earth's children "the naturalness of surrendering their holdings" (171).

While the invasion of one reality by another described in "Souvenir" and "War Game" somehow evokes the magical contaminations that were investigated in chapter one, it should be noticed that almost no reference to ontology is being made here. While the fact that the cup is hand-made in "Souvenir" may be of some relevance to its potency and impact on the

characters, it is only the *practice* of the image that stands as the cause of change in "War Game." Dick's idea that images may have an effect on reality not through their ontology but through their social character has an interesting parallel in the history of the image. In his authoritative study of the history of icons, Moshe Barasch thus observes that Tertullian, one of the Fathers of the Church, was among the first thinkers about images to put forth the idea that the image has an effect insofar as it is a social practice: "In contrast to the critics of superstition . . . [Tertullian] insists that the material nature of the image is totally irrelevant to the function it fulfils in society" (122). What matters for Tertullian is the social mode of existence of the image. For him, "the social beliefs in what the idol is are not external to it; they *are* the idol" (122, emphasis in the original). Tertullian's definition of the image is truly original, for it takes into account the beliefs about it. Likewise, in "Souvenir" and "War Game," Dick does not treat the image as an ontological threat but, in the manner of Tertullian, as a social threat. At the same time, emphasizing the social character of images instead of their ontology does nothing to allay Dick's fear of their strength. Rather, by virtue of their capacity for social manipulation, the images of "Souvenir" and "War Game" are very similar to Tertullian's characterization of idols as "the powerful agent[s] of a foreign religion and culture" (Barasch 122).

2. Complexity of Dick's Discourse on Media

Among all the types of images that induce social relations, media images have a special importance in Dick's opus, and it is to his customary intricate portrayal of the effects of media on society that we now turn our attention.

The presentation of media in the works of Philip K. Dick has been the subject of insightful analyses by a number of scholars such as Fitting, Jameson, Jill Galvan and Anthony Enns. Thus, Fitting interprets the characters' addictive use of the technological

apparatus called P.P. layout in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1965) as a "critique of the role and function of television in our lives" (227). Likewise, Galvan treats the empathy box as a media technology which allows the followers of the pseudo-religion called Mercerism to share empathy in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968).

The point of contention lies with whether Dick views media as a neutral technology merely serving the interests of political power or, like Baudrillard, as intrinsically totalitarian. The instrumental position is thus stated by Galvan:

> *Do Androids Dream* [*of Electric Sheep?*] does not bear out Baudrillard's somewhat Luddite perspective on the problems of an advanced technological society. In Dick's narrative version of mass-media culture, the fault lies not with a totalitarian essence in the media itself; rather, all blame falls upon the authoritarian forces who bring the image to life. On this matter, then, Dick would most likely disagree with Baudrillard, as with Marshall McLuhan before him: the medium is *not* the message; it simply provides a venue—in itself neutral—for the affirmation of political power. (422, emphasis in the original)[3]

Scott Bukatman goes in the same direction when he claims that "it is less technology per se than the mythifying uses to which it is directed by the forces of an instrumental reason that serves as the targets of Dick's satire" (53).

In contrast, for Jameson, Dick's writings evince the "fear of a 'certain fusion' with the medium and a loss of individual autonomy" (371). This fusion and its spectacular manifestations are extensively surveyed by Enns who demonstrates that Dick envisages consciousness itself as a "medial interface" (70), a field "thoroughly extended into and

penetrated by the electric media environment" (69). According to this interpretation, then, in Dick's fiction the very exposure of human consciousness to media has both psychological effects for the protagonist (schizophrenia) and ontological consequences in the diegetic reality (dissolution of boundaries between self and world and the countless reality breakdowns that pervade Dick's works).

It is difficult to favor one position over the other because the portrayal of media technologies either as a vast and secret enterprise to control citizens and sustain political power (the novel *The Penultimate Truth* [1964] is a canonic example), or, contrastingly, as an intractable force that in itself poses a threat to human agency and personal integrity, can often be both located in one single work (*The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* is a case in point). Likewise, Dick's non-fiction stories also abound with conflicting formulations of these two positions. Enns thus quotes a passage of one of the author's speeches where he explicitly describes technology as 1) an impartial instrument that is potentially liberatory, before insisting on 2) the menace of reification: as technological artifacts are themselves becoming alive, human beings are becoming more machine-like (70-71). To these two perspectives singled out by Enns, one may add Dick's following commentary on one of his short stories:

> I was already beginning to suppose in my head the growing domination of machines over man, especially the machines we voluntarily surround ourselves with. . . . I always feared that my own TV set or iron or toaster would, in the privacy of my apartment, when no one else was around to help me, announce to me that they had taken over, and here was a list of rules I was to obey. I never like the idea of doing what a machine says. (*The Minority Report* 375-76)

In contrast to the arguably more subtle idea of the reification of human beings, Dick's technophobia endorses in this passage a literal and familiar *Matrix*-like scenario of technological enslavement by machines, a fear as old as Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872). All this demonstrates that what characterizes the Dickian discourse on media technologies—and technology in general—is heterogeneity rather than coherence.

3. The Content and the Form of Images

For the sake of clarity it is possible to group the effects of images into two main categories. The first way by which the practice of the image can have an impact on the practitioner is through its content. This is obvious, for example, in "War Game" where the changes brought on by the game Syndrome are due to the message of surrendering it carries. There exists, however, another approach to the effect of images which insists that their ideological impact largely derives from their form, that is, from the way they mediate human relationships.

While the following section (see below II. The Ideological Content of Images) very briefly tackles the issue of content, the purpose of this chapter is mainly to address the formal aspect of the social character of images, which is considered in details in the last section (see below III. Ideology as Form). To that end, we examine several examples of Dick's fiction where interpersonal human relations are articulated by various images and media systems such as polls, the electoral system, and the commodity system. The section ends with a long analysis of the separation induced by media in the short story "Chains of Air, Web of Aether" through the lens of Debord and Baudrillard.

II. The Ideological Content of Images

As content, images are spontaneously often thought to induce social relations. For instance, an analysis of the influence of media sympathetic to the Frankfurt school may claim that a message praising passivity or equanimity is likely to encourage passivity in receivers and thus strongly shapes the nature of the social structure. The social relations induced by images can take place between senders and receivers (in which case it is often equated with the relation between producers and consumers) or between receivers. The most standard type of ideological image is propaganda and it is also among Dick's favorites. For instance, in *The Penultimate Truth*, a wealthy elite living on the surface of the Earth feeds an underground army of workers with fake video footages of an inexistent war in order to enjoy an easy life and keep all the riches for itself. The short story ("The Mold of Yancy") on which the novel is partly based is remarkable in its depiction of a society where consent is obtained through media manipulation rather than brute force:

> If this were a police state . . . there'd be some kind of resistance movement. Some sort of 'subversive' group trying to overthrow the authorities. But in this society you're free to complain; you can buy time on the TV and radio stations, you can buy space in the newspapers—anything you want . . .
>
> Nevertheless . . . these people are living in a one-party society with a party line, with an official ideology. They show the effects of a carefully controlled totalitarian state. They're guinea pigs—whether they realize it or not. (58)

This suggests that freedom of speech is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a democracy and offers a forceful reminder that the right to protest does not amount to much if

alternative ways of thinking are preempted. Ideology is seen as a more efficient social cement than force because it is almost invisible:

> Torture chambers and extermination camps were needed only when persuasion failed . . . A police state, rule by terror, came about when the totalitarian apparatus began to break down. The earlier totalitarian societies had been incomplete; the authorities hadn't really gotten into every sphere of life. But techniques of communication had improved. (62)

Dick's paranoiac oeuvre is rife with countless other examples of images used to manipulate people into obedience either by deceiving them as to their real conditions of existence or by providing compensations for reality.[4] One can think of, for examples, *The Man Who Japed* (152-161) *Eye in the Sky* (28), *The Simulacra*, "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale," *Galactic Pot-Healer* (20-22), "If There Were no Benny Cemoli," *Lies, Inc.* (6,25, *passim*), *The Divine Invasion* (112, *passim*), and so on. Since the ideological content of images has already been extensively surveyed in the body of criticism on Dick,[5] I will conclude this section here and move on immediately to the real concern of this chapter.

III. Ideology as Form

1. Indicting the Media: Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard

Requiem for Big Brother

The idea that social control is ensured indirectly by isolating individuals through technological means of communication (rather than by direct surveillance carried out by armed police) was hardly new at the time Debord wrote *Society of the Spectacle* in 1967. For instance, when Lewis Mumford claims in 1961 that "with the present means of long-distance mass communication, sprawling isolation has proved an even more effective method for keeping a population under control" (qtd. in Debord 115), he already points out the obsolete character of dystopian visions of all-encompassing surveillance à la Orwell. Debord's original contribution is to place images at the center of this strategy of control by arguing that interactions between people are more and more mediated by images, signaling the passage into a new mode of social relation that he calls the spectacle. The spectacle pushes commodity reification to a further, "imagic" stage: "The spectacle is a concrete inversion of life, an autonomous movement of the nonliving" (24) in which while "the real world is transformed into mere images, mere images become real beings" (28). As images interpose between people, draw their entire attention and require an ever increasing emotional investment, they ultimately isolate spectators into a quasi phenomenological bubble while themselves becoming endowed with human-like attributes. Man's relations with his own kind are replaced by a narcissistic intercourse with the images of the spectacle. As Debord lyrically puts it, the spectator is "imprisoned in a flattened universe bounded by the *screen* of the spectacle that has enthralled him, . . . knows no one but the *fictitious speakers* who subject him to a one-way monologue about their commodities and the politics of their

commodities. The spectacle as a whole serves as his looking-glass" (140, emphasis in the original).

Baudrillard begins his analysis of media by challenging both the Orwellian view of media as a "state periscope spying on everyone's private life" (*Critique* 172) and the unorthodox Marxist's thesis—advocated by Hanz Magnus Enzensberger—according to which media are fundamentally liberatory tools which are simply "monopolized by the dominant classes" (*Critique* 168) as a means of ideological dissemination. In contrast, for Baudrillard, who inherits Marshall McLuhan's emphasis on form (*vide* his famous statement "the medium is the message"), it is the very structure of the media that should be held responsible for its totalitarian effects: "It is not as vehicles of content, but in their form and very operation, that media induce a social relation; and this is not an exploitative relation: it involves the abstraction, separation and abolition of exchange itself" (*Critique* 169). To put it in other words, this simply means that notwithstanding what they are about (their message), media institute, promote and generalize a particular mode of personal and social relations. Thus, to be successful, social control *as per* Baudrillard would neither require a panopticon-like apparatus to watch over people, nor a relay for the ideological management of the consciousness of citizens (the manufacture of consent): "The situation as it stands is more efficient than that: it is the *certainty that people are no longer speaking to each other*, that they are definitively isolated in the face of a speech without response" (*Critique* 172). In the Baudrillardian version of "decentralized totalitarianism" (*Critique* 181), social control is indirectly carried out by replacing "authentic" interactions by a "simulation model of communication" (*Critique* 179), and the media are the most reliable agents of this substitution.

Unilaterality and Reversibility

Although Debord's and Baudrillard's denigration of the media shares commonalities, there also exist profound discrepancies as is shown by the former's claim that if "all contact between people has become totally dependent on these means of instantaneous communication, it is because this 'communication' is essentially *unilateral* . . ." (30, emphasis in the original).[6] While for Debord—in accordance with Enzensberger—it is the one-way structure of the media that is responsible for both social control and the hampering of communication, Baudrillard contends that reversibility *i.e.* allowing the receiver to become a transmitter, only promotes an ersatz of communication and a simulated response that "fails to place the mass media system in check" (*Critique* 182). Inasmuch as feedback and interactivity are "the very logic of cybernetics," they are integrated by the system as an illusion of counter-power: "the media are quite aware how to set up 'reversibility' of circuits (letters to the editor, phone-in programs, polls, etc.), without conceding any response or abandoning in any way the discrimination of roles" (*Critique* 181). Accordingly, for Baudrillard, Debord's castigating the passivity encouraged by a unilateral media such as television misses the point, for even reversible media such as the Internet, which allows the user to produce (potentially subversive) contents, in fact, negate what they host: "Transgression and subversion never get 'on the air' without being subtly negated as they are: transformed into models, neutralized into signs, they are eviscerated of their meaning" (*Critique* 173). This is Baudrillard's idiosyncratic interpretation of McLuhan's "the message is the medium": the media establishes a strict equivalence between all the different types of messages (notwithstanding their contents) it transmits because these messages are treated as signs which derive their meaning in relation to each other (*Consumer Society* 187-88). As soon as something is placed in the space of the media, it becomes an object for consumption or entertainment among other objects. In Baudrillard's utterly pessimistic vision of mediated

experience, the way one watches a video of political activism on the Internet is fundamentally no different from the way one watches an advertisement or a movie.

When Baudrillard accuses the media of enacting a "*simulation model* of communication," (*Critique* 179, emphasis in the original) he targets more generally the theories that reduce communication to the transmission of a message (*i.e.* information) and emphasize the mutually exclusive role of transmitter and receiver, thus expressing "a certain type of social relation, namely, in which one speaks and the other doesn't" (*Critique* 178-79). To this abstraction, Baudrillard retorts that communication should be understood as an exchange where participation is immediate, active, and reciprocal. Exchange can involve antagonism and sometimes even violence. It allows the ambivalence of meaning and human interactions, whereas this is precluded by the message-transmission model of communication theory. For Baudrillard, mediated communication negates emotional investment by establishing a distance between its participants as well as between the subject and the referent of the spectacle. William Merrin provides useful examples of this:

> Phone calls, for example, act not just as a means of communication but also as a means to *avoid* communication. 'Keeping in touch' by phone allows us to forestall physical contact while retaining a nominal friendship, and now even the physical time and effort of the phone call can be conjured away with email . . . .(23, emphasis in the original)

Media technologies allow cybernetic man the comfortable and vicarious pleasure of communication without presence—and thus without the antagonism and conflicts that inevitably accompany it—through pseudonyms and avatars, thus partitioning off society into a collection of insulated spectators occupied solely in the transmission back and forth of

messages. To illustrate this condition, Baudrillard summons a powerful image of man so engulfed in communication that he has himself become a mere media appendage:

> Today one's private living space is conceived of as receiving and operating area, as a monitoring screen endowed with telematic power, that is to say, with the capacity to regulate everything by remote control. Including the work process, within the prospects of telematic work performed at home, as well as consumption, play, social relations, leisure. (*Ecstasy* 16-17)

This science fictional nightmarish vision of a home that has become an empty shell haunted by the ectoplasmic silhouettes flickering on computer screens and the disembodied voice of the television eerily evokes the bleak habitat of the characters of so many of Dick's works that it behooves us to examine in more details the different ways by which he sees images as mediators of human relationships.

2. Polling

In "The Variable Man" and "The Minority Report," both the behavior of the characters and the decisions made by official agencies are based on cybernetic scenarios. In the former, the war policy of the Earth against Proxima is made according to a statistical estimation of success which is itself based on an extrapolation of *future* technological realizations rather than existing technology. In the latter, prediction of murders by means of precognitive power enables the police to arrest potential criminals before they commit the deed so that, as Baudrillard observes, "the real crime is prevented and punished before it even takes place, before anyone knows whether or not the crime would have taken place" ("Violence of the Virtual"). However, the three "precog reports" do not necessarily provide the same

estimation because each report is modified by its taking into account the previous report. The two stories thus hint that the knowledge derived from measuring a state of thing modifies that state and has a retroactive effect on future measurements. But, more importantly, in both stories the real has to conform to a given model: the "gestalt of the vast flow of data that poured in endlessly" (164) in "The Variable Man," and the eponymous reports of "The Minority Report." As Baudrillard puts it: "Digital and programmed, the real does not even have time to happen. It is sanitized (prophylactisé), pulverized, short-circuited in its shell like the crime in *Minority Report* (sic). Thinking itself is anticipated by models of artificial intelligence" ("Violence of the Virtual"). Anything that might upset the order of things—crime in "The Minority Report" and the eponymous character of "The Variable Man"—is seen as a threat.

These stories could be taken as science fiction versions of the very real practice of polling. Estimating the behavior of the voters by analyzing a representative sample of the population has an effect on that behavior. What is at stakes is no longer the accuracy of the measurement but the risk entailed by polling of restricting the number of choices available by focusing on those that are most statistically significant or even, according to the most pessimistic scenario, by constructing public opinion. According to this last hypothesis, polling creates a simulation of public opinion that will then retroactively serve as a model for the public. The model comes to precede the real (precession of the model) and the polls become a "self-fulfilling prophecy."

Originally, the purpose of polling is to provide a faithful image, a representation, of public opinion, and in that sense it is supposed to function merely as a statistical tool, a mirror reflecting the choices of social agents. However, it may not be far-fetched to view it as something that actively participates in social life. Both Baudrillard and Pierre Bourdieu have emphasized that the fact that the question is articulated by pollsters rather than people is

already a proof that polls are not reciprocal.[7] According to this view, polling is in essence a totalitarian process because it prevents citizens from defining and formulating themselves the question. An issue that must be responded is artificially created above and submitted to people who are thereby prevented from putting forward what they think should be responded. The subject does not speak but instead answers, and his answer is already partly shaped by the question. Polls reduce the conflicts inherent in politics to a game of question/answer and to a binary logic of yes/no: “The response is implied in the question itself . . . It is a speech that answers itself via the simulated detour of a response” (*Political Economy of the Sign* 171). Galvan brilliantly analyzes this aspect in her discussion of the Voigt-Kampff test in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, demonstrating that the content of the test (the questions) are irrelevant to the relation it creates between the tester and the testee:

> It is not the scenarios that Rick posits that might prove Luba Luft guilty; rather, it is the resolute relationship of signifiers and signifieds—the vise-like stability of the dialectical code—that proclaims the law's authority and thus already brands her a criminal. Deputized to administer the test, Rick insists repeatedly upon Luba's "response," but in Baudrillard's view, of course, that response would only confirm the operation of the hegemonic code. To respond means to submit to the code's inherent lack of reciprocity and thus to forfeit all chance of dodging the totalitarian order. (421)

3. Election, Politics, and Television

The outcome, the *raison d'être*, of the whole polling process is the election, the one true poll so to speak, supposed to express the choice of citizens. In Dick, however, the inextricable mixing of spectacle and politics endangers the “sanctity” of the electoral system.

In “What’ll We Do with Ragland Park?,” the owner of the educational channel called CULTURE hires a folk singer (Ragland Park) with the psi ability to influence reality: “Relationship between Rags’s made-up ballads and reality is one of cause and effect. What Rags describes then takes place. The ballad precedes the event and not by much” (354-55). We can choose to consider Ragland Park’s psi-power literally and enjoy the story as simply another sf yarn about mutants of not much consequence, or prefer to view Ragland’s peculiar ability as another literalized metaphor for the immense power of influence with which the media are vested by Dick. When Ragland sings on TV, the events described in his songs happen in reality, a bit as if the messages circulating in the mediascape would determine what takes place in the world. Besides this representation of the ideological power of media as vehicle of contents, Dick shows the political manoeuvers as entirely embedded in the category of the spectacle: they are seen through the eyes of the TV and their effects are appraised by media means.

This is more developed in the prequel to “Ragland Park,” a story called “Stand-By” where the TV news clown Jim Briskin tries to win the presidential election by making use of his power over media. The manipulative techniques he uses are rather crude: saturate the network, broadcast political messages, and create a fake audience—*i.e.* in fact a simulation of public opinion—in order to boost up his ratings, are all methods that evoke the simple artifices of propaganda. What is more interesting, however, is the transformation of Briskin as a media personality into a political candidate in a manner that anticipates the trajectories of people like Sonny Bono, Al Franken, Ronald Reagan, and Arnold Schwarzenegger (just to mention a few names).

The experience of the political as a spectacle is one of the major theme of *Solar Lottery*. In the society of the novel, after the head of the world government (called the “Quizmaster”) has been selected at random by a computerized lottery, a televised show (or is it a political

event? The distinction seems impossible) called the “Challenge Convention” is organized to elect an assassin (so while the quizmaster is randomly selected, his murderer is elected by people!) whose mission is to attempt to kill the Quizmaster. If he is successful he will earn a one million dollar prize. Not only does Dick entirely blur the boundaries between politics and spectacle, but his formal treatment is also worthy of notice. A conversation at dinner between old friends (44-50) is completely mediated by “that shrill thing [the TV] yelling at the tops of its lungs” (50). The characters’ dialogue is interspersed with extracts from the TV. Not only the subject of the conversation, but also its pace and rhythm are shaped by the TV, whose mediation extends beyond the household and reaches other spheres: “I [Laura] can hear the neighbors’ set and they’re choosing the assassin *right now!*” (50, emphasis in the original). Laura can hear the TV set of her neighbors but not her neighbors themselves. The TV sits at the center of human relationships. It gives them their meaning. The citizens participating in a significant political event are shown as estranged spectators (they bet on the outcome of this institutional murder) and consumers. Through their TV set, they can savor “the cruel exteriority of the world [as] something intimate and warm” (*Consumer Society* 35). The spectacle permeates all the interstices of society. Under its domination, in the words of Baudrillard, “the political re-emerges under the category of *faits divers* . . . while the category of *faits divers* has totally invaded politics” (*Critique* 175). In “Stand-By,” the TV newscaster Jim Briskin is called a “news clown,” an oxymoronic title that simultaneously suggests that the news are a joke and jokes are news, and brilliantly summarizes the very structure of the TV discourse: the contradictory concatenation of various subjects; politics, weather bulletins, scandals, shows, crime news, cooking programs, human interest stories, sports, war, feature stories, commercials, documentaries, etc., all succeed to each other at a vertiginous speed, constructing a sort of vast postmodern collage and creating an impression of secret intimacy: “The primary function of each message is to refer to another message. So Vietnam [war]

refers on to advertising, advertising to the TV news, etc., the systematic juxtaposition of these things being the discursive mode of the medium, its message, its meaning" (*Consumer Society* 122). Not only in Dick but in the "real" is it possible to witness this entanglement. Politics as spectacle: in the media treatment, the war (for instance the Gulf War) appears as a video game, a show ("served up at room temperature" [*Consumer society* 35]) to be relished, among other more tangible delicacies, by Western viewers seated at table. Spectacle as politics: the love affair of a French president (François Hollande, to name no names) is treated as a major political event and gives rise to a heated debate in the media (Boorstin's notion of pseudo-event is here of the utmost relevance) concerning the desirability of an official status of Prime Lady for the spouse or companion of a leader.

4. Conspicuous Consumption

> *What we consume is always to a certain extent an* idea *rather than a material thing: this is the very essence of the distinction between use and exchange values, that the object no longer exists primarily to satisfy a need, understood by analogy with the needs of the body, but rather as a kind of abstract and emblematic value in which we can no longer clearly distinguish between need-satisfaction and artificial stimuli.*
>
> Fredric Jameson. *Marxism and Form*.

> *Use value is often no more than a practical guarantee (or even a rationalization pure and simple) . . . Below their concrete visibility (*évidence*), needs and functions basically describe only an abstract level, a manifest discourse of objects,*

> *in regard to which the largely unconscious social discourse appears fundamental. An accurate theory of objects will not be established upon a theory of needs and their satisfaction, but upon a theory of* social prestations *[i.e. a mechanism of discrimination and prestige] and* signification.
>
> Jean Baudrillard. *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*.

From Marx's classic notion of commodity fetishism to Baudrillard's structuralist notion of consumption as a system of exchange and social differentiation (see *Consumer Society* 60-61), and notwithstanding the huge differences between these approaches, commodities have commonly been viewed as mediators of human relationships. While for Marx, the social relation between people involved in production assumes "the fantastic form of a relation between things" (165), Baudrillard claims that in consumption "in and through objects this relationship [the human relationship] is at once consummated and abolished; the object becomes its inescapable mediation – and, before long, the sign that replaces it altogether" (*The System of Objects* 219). Baudrillard views commodities as social signifiers expressing status values: "You are always manipulating objects (in the broadest sense) as signs which distinguish you either by affiliating you to your own group taken as an ideal reference or by marking you off from your group by reference to a group of higher status" (*Consumer Society* 61). For him, the whole process of consumption is a media system through which explicit and implicit messages regarding one's position within society are conveyed.

In this section, I choose to extend the definition of images to material commodities to bear witness to Jameson's claim (quoted in the epigraph) that the role of commodities in consumer society should be understood not so much by referring to their materiality as in terms of their intangible nature as ideas or signs. The aspect of commodities as social

mediators examined here in the context of Dick's writings relates to "conspicuous consumption," a notion developed by Thorstein Veblen and which largely informs Baudrillard's own theory of consumption. According to Veblen, conspicuous consumption occurs when commodities are bought in order to display the buyer's wealth rather than to meet an original need. It is therefore a mechanism of social differentiation, for it allows consumers to signal their social standing through commodities. For example, an expensive watch (say a Rolex) might be bought for such a reason. In that case, appeal to the object's use-value or intrinsic value (the watch is very expensive therefore its quality is very high, it is robust, it can be used a long time, etc.) is often an *ex post* rationalization of the true motive for buying it and merely conceals the fact that the value of the object (what Baudrillard calls its sign value) largely, if not entirely, stems from its capacity to communicate something about the buyer, to have a specific meaning in human relationships.[8] Conspicuous consumption gives rise to a process of social imitation by which people from lower classes will try to emulate those from upper classes in the acquisition of luxury goods. For example, while a very rich individual may display his status by buying a yacht, someone "only" moderately wealthy might be forced to content himself or herself with an expensive sports car, and so on downward the social ladder. Conspicuous consumption is often associated with "conspicuous waste," a phenomenon by which goods or resources are wasted only for the purpose of showing others that one is rich enough to afford such a loss. What follows examines a few of Dick's works in light of Veblen's concepts and shows that Dick is an astute observer of the social mechanisms at work in the American consumer society of his time.

The two early short stories "Nanny" and "Foster, You're Dead" already clearly evince Dick's awareness that the logic of consumption is not grounded in objective needs but is based on the interactions taking place among social actors. Thus, in "Nanny" where the

characters are forced to buy baby-sitter robots (the eponymous "Nanny") at an increasing rate to counteract the planned obsolescence of the products. Dick literalizes built-in obsolescence by making it the result of the robots' aggressive behavior against each other: when two Nannies meet, the newer model destroys the older, thereby forcing its owner to replace it with an even newer model. Strikingly, even though consumers may realize that this devious strategy serves the interest of the manufacturers at their own expense ("When one [Nanny] is destroyed, that means you [the company] sell another one. That means a sale for you. Money in the cash register" [394]), they do not seem able to withdraw from the "game" of consumption. In fact, the story ends with one character more willing than ever to take up the gauntlet after his Nanny has been destroyed:

> I'm going to shop for another Nanny . . . The best damn Nanny I can get. Even if I have to go a hundred stores. I want the best – and the biggest . . . *Nobody's going to get ahead of me . . . I'll show them, all of them.* Even if I have to get a new size designed. Even if I have to get one of those manufacturers to *turn out a new model for me*! (396-97, emphasis mine)

Here, clearly, the use-value of the commodity is completely forgotten and becomes an "alibi" (to borrow a Baudrillardian term) for more primal urges. What drives the participant in the Red Queen's race of consumption is the desire to keep his place in the social competition. Nannies are acquired to stay in front, to show other social actors what one can do, and thus to differentiate oneself from the rest. The Nannies can even be personalized, thus fulfilling the sacrosanct communicative ideal of consumption: expressing one's inner self through the means of commodities.

The same logic of fear, planned-obsolescence, and social differentiation underlies “Foster, You’re Dead” Because of the Cold War between America and the Soviet Union, characters are induced by fear to buy bomb shelters and participate in local civil defense organizations. The refusal of the protagonist (Bob Foster) to be part of this forced consumption results in his family being socially ostracized by his community. What finally convinces him to buy a shelter is the inability of his wife and son to endure the judgment of their peers. The scene that follows his purchase is worth to be quoted at length because it reveals the importance of the sign value attached to the shelter:

> Mike Foster [Bob’s son] stood with his mother and a small group of admiring neighbors on the back of the porch of the house. “Well,” Mrs. Carlyle [a neighbor] said finally, “now you’ve got a shelter. The best there is.”
>
> “That’s right,” Ruth Foster [Bob’s wife] agreed. She was conscious of the people around her; it had been some time since so many had shown up at once. Grim satisfaction filled her gaunt frame, almost resentment. “It certainly makes a *difference*,” she said harshly.
>
> “Yes,” Mr. Douglas [a neighbor] from down the street agreed . . . He shook his head admiringly. “Mine’s an old ’69 model. Good for only six months. I guess maybe –“
>
> “It’s still good enough for us,” his wife cut in, but *there was a longing wistfulness in her voice*. (230, emphasis mine)

On the face of it, the difference in question in this exchange does not refer to any objective difference in the situation of the protagonists. In fact, the concrete use of the shelter is largely superseded by its social function. Through it one can be admired and envied, one can acquire

status within the community. Although the older model is "still good"—*i.e.* retains its use-value—people seem to feel an inexplicable yearning to acquire a more recent model. This is because only the newer model will enable the consumer to differentiate himself or herself from other consumers.

Differential consumption is also alluded to in *Solar Lottery* where eating the food called "protine" marks one as a member of the lowest class of society ("the unks"). As the character Laura Davis explains: "We never have protine . . . It's terribly costly to buy natural foods, of course, but it's worth it. Protine is for the unks" (40). Not only food, but also cultural goods serve the purpose of social differentiation. The s-Channel, watched by upper class people, uses advertisments and colorful images to symbolize the events it describes: "On the tv, glorious ads played back and forth like liquid fire . . . ads were the highest art-form; the finest creative talent was at work behind them. Ads combined color, balance, rhythm, and a restless aliveness that pulsed from the screen and into the cozy Davis living room" (41). When Al Davis suggests to switch to 1-Channel, his wife protests: "Don't put that 1-Channel on; all the unks watch that. That's why they have it both ways, this [s-Channel] for us [upper class] and the literal [1-Channel] for them [lower class]" (41-42).

The importance of sign value is immediately apparent in the phenomenon of counterfeit goods: fake Rolex watches, fake Vuitton bags, and so on. Many buyers of fake items are very well aware of their inauthenticity at the moment they decide to acquire them. In such cases, use-value cannot be invoked to justify the purchase. Rather, these commodities are bought in order to send status signals; the prominence of the brand name is usually the only criterion that motivates consumers. Faced with budget constraints, they can decide to buy fakes of a famous brand in order to deceptively enhance their status.[9] The very same logic underlies the economy of the world of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* in which animals have become almost extinct due to radiation fallouts following a world war. In this context, they

function as signs of status and wealth, and are therefore strongly coveted: “The man’s eyes glazed over, imagining such possessions [animals]; he drifted by degrees into a trance” (10). However, the fact that animals are extremely expensive has given rise to a flourishing industry of artificial copies that are used as fake to keep up the pretense (Repair shops for artificial animals even masquerade as real veterinary clinics in order that nobody finds out that the animals of their clients are simulacra). As the protagonist Rick Deckard ponders: “Owning and maintaining a fraud [an artificial animal] had a way of gradually demoralizing one. And yet from a social standpoint it had to be done, given the absence of the real article. Even were he not to care himself, there remained his wife, and Iran did care” (9). Thanks to copies, all those buyers unable to acquire real animals can avoid being “look[ed] down” (13) upon. There even exists a monthly catalogue referencing the various prices of animals as each represents a different rung of the social ladder. Dick’s somewhat zany but subtle humor often surfaces in the most improbable and incongruous situation, as when Deckard, depressed after killing three androids, tries to make himself feel better by spending the bounty he earned on a real rabbit and receives the following advice from the seller: “The thing about rabbits, sir, is that everybody has one. I’d like to see you step up to the goat-class where I feel you belong. Frankly you look more like a goat man to me” (168). After the purchase, he attempts to justify his spending in a way his wife may find acceptable: “My job requires it, he thought, scraping bottom. Prestige. We couldn’t go on with the electric sheep any longer” (170). In Deckard’s society, owning an animal is so important for self-respect and to gain social consideration that needy consumers are almost forced to buy counterfeits. For the majority of people—and despite the idea developed gradually throughout the novel that caring for an animal is a way to prove one’s empathy—animals do not seem to serve any function apart from that of socio-economic markers. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that animals are owned not only by individuals but also by companies such as the powerful Rosen

Corporation: “A major manufacturer of androids [the Rosen Corporation] . . . invests its surplus capital on living animals” (41).

Dick’s anti-consumerism integrates another of Veblen’s insights, that of conspicuous waste. The novel *Martian Time-Slip* takes place on Mars, an arid setting where water is extremely precious. In the following scene, the rich and powerful Arnie Kott is enjoying a bath:

> The air, full of steam, condensed around his feet and drained off across the tiles, to be voided. That was a touch which pleased him: the baths had been constructed so as not to preserve the run-off. The water drained out on to the hot sand and disappeared forever. Who else could do that? He thought. Let’s see if those rich Jews up in New Israel have a steam bath that wastes water. (11)

Arnie’s behavior relates to conspicuous waste neither because he squanders water nor because he uses it in a way that could be viewed as thoughtless or morally illegitimate. Indeed, it is anything but thoughtless, for Arnie’s expenditure is carefully planned so as to reach a goal that is very meaningful to him: the goal of social differentiation. As Veblen explains, “nothing should be included under the head of conspicuous waste but such expenditure as is incurred on the ground of an invidious pecuniary comparison” (99). Arnie’s expenditure is competitive; it aims at establishing what Veblen calls an “invidious” distinction or comparison *i.e.* a “comparison of persons with a view to rating and grading them in respect of relative worth or value—in an aesthetic or moral sense—and so awarding and defining the relative degrees of complacency with which they may legitimately be contemplated by themselves and by others” (34).

5. "A Human Life Won and a Synthetic Media Image Wrecked": Media, Communication, and Alienation in "Chains of Air, Web of Aether"

> *Once I heard a schizoid person express himself—in all seriousness—this way: "I receive signals from others. But I can't generate any of my own until I get recharged. By an injection.". . . Imagine viewing oneself and others this way. Signals. As if from another star. The person has reified himself entirely, along with everyone around him. How awful. Here, clearly, the soul is dead or never lived.*
>
> Philip K. Dick. *"The Android and the Human"*

> *The alienation of the spectator, which reinforces the contemplated objects that result from his own unconscious activity, works like this: The more he contemplates, the less he lives; the more he identifies with the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own life and his own desires.*
>
> Guy Debord. *Society of the Spectacle*

> *We know that the simple presence of television transforms our habitat into a kind of archaic, closed-off cell, into a vestige of human relations whose survival is highly questionable.*
>
> Jean Baudrillard. *The Ecstasy of Communication*

Introduction

The purpose of this last section is to complement my exploration of the role of images as form and contribute to the existing analysis of the depiction of media technologies in the works of Philip K. Dick by considering an example of his fiction where media environments do not seem to be viewed solely as tools for state surveillance or propaganda, but instead as

mechanisms of social control that operate indirectly by isolating consumers.[10] To that purpose, I want to consider the short story "Chains of Air, Web of Aether" (1980) [hereafter "Chains"],[11] for it is a compendium of most of the various forms of media we mentioned above. It explicitly reflects on the deleterious effects of media technologies on human relationships and communication in a manner reminiscent of Edward Morgan Forster's prophetic masterpiece "The Machine Stops" (1909). Notwithstanding its science fiction setting, Dick's story remains for the most part realistic and consistently focuses on the details of the interaction between its protagonists. In particular, it develops throughout an opposition between direct and mediated communication and a criticism of the process by which human relationships are mediated by images in terms that may be fruitfully analyzed by referring to Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1970) and the early Baudrillard of *The System of Objects* (1996 [1968]), *The Consumer Society* (1998 [1970]), and *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1981 [1972]).[12]

"Hell is Other People": Alienation from Others

The story takes place at an unspecified time of the future when a part of humanity is living inside hermetic domes scattered across the surface of a distant and inhospitable planet. With the exception of the "food man," whose task is to distribute food to the settlers, nobody seems to travel outside his or her dome to engage in direct contact with others. Labor, daily activities, communication, and social relationships are all carried out entirely within the confines of the domes which are connected to each other and to artificial satellites in orbit around the planet via an electronic system that can receive and transmit both audio and video signals. The two protagonists are Leo McVane, a music lover who spends his time manipulating his cybernetic environment and listening to the current pop idol Linda Fox, and Rybus Rommey, a woman slowly dying alone of multiple sclerosis in the dome next to

McVane's. The narrative begins when McVane is told of Rybus's condition by the "food man," and reluctantly decides to contact his suffering neighbor.

It is no coincidence that the title of the story refers to two elements—one actual and the other mythical—that are themselves invisible and imperceptible media. As McLuhan wittily observes that fish are not likely to be the discoverers of water (*Culture* 191), likewise, the mediated communicational environment in which McVane and Rybus are living has become so natural to them that they do not perceive their radical isolation. Only the "food man," who seems to be the only one on the planet to experience direct contact with others, notices this strange situation and urges McVane to call Rybus and talk to her. In addition, the title of the story links media with the words "chains" and "web," which both suggest subjection. In the context of media, the word "web" has come to be used as a synonym of network, but it also means something that ensnares, and although it suggests fragility, we will see that this is not necessarily the case.

McVane's distaste of human contact is unmistakable and made even more blatant in the modified episode of "Chains" included in the novel *The Divine Invasion*, where the protagonist Herb Asher (who plays the part of McVane in this novelized version) exclaims: "Contact with another human. Herb Asher shrank involuntarily. Oh Christ, he thought. He trembled. No, he thought. Please no" (*Divine Invasion* 15). As a way to rationalize his fear of direct contact, McVane reasserts the priority of his job which he defines as "information traffic between planets, information that connects us with home and keeps us human" (336). It seems, then, that the all-pervasiveness of mediated communication in the world of "Chains" serves the vital and noble end of allowing contact between human beings kept apart from each other by a hostile environment. But this appeal to use value is only an apologetic strategy. Indeed, the argument of geographical separation is later exposed as a mere pretense when Rybus, although weakened by her disease, succeeds in walking from her dome to visit

McVane. In fact, what the man hopes, and what is effectively enabled and even promoted by electronics, is to keep a physical and emotional distance between him and Rybus, and avoid by all means (even if it requires lying to her) a direct encounter: "*I've got to keep her out of my dome*" (339, emphasis in the original). To that purpose, using a telephone (or in this case a videophone) is a way to hypocritically assuage his guilt toward the sick girl without committing himself. The attitude of Rybus is very different in that she longs for human presence: "It would mean a lot to me, someone to sit with for a little while" (338). In contrast to McVane, who is more than content to converse with Rybus via electronics and who defines communication as the transmission of information (336), Rybus simply needs a human presence, someone with whom she can talk and eat a meal now and then. The kind of relation she yearns for is not the rational form of communication that emphasizes the transmission of a message, but instead direct contact with someone to whom she can express her fear of dying, her pain and distress, and the concomitant hatred she feels toward the world. It is precisely antagonism and ambivalence—which Baudrillard singles out as those necessary constituents of human intercourses that are overlooked by mediated communication—that are constantly evinced by Rybus's attitude.

From the onset, the narrative consistently develops large semantic fields opposing non-mediated interaction to mediated communication. The former is associated with terms and notions such as real, human being, concrete presence, the earthly realm, and life, to which are opposed respectively the terms media image, abstraction, aether and death. This explains why discussing the pop star Linda Fox constitutes such an important issue for McVane and Rybus. For McVane the image of the media idol is more alive than the dying Rybus:

> But I will hang onto the Fox [Linda Fox]; the Fox will outlast you [Rybus Rommey]. And so will I. You are not going to shoot down the luminiferous aether which animates our souls.
>
> I will hang onto the Fox and the Fox will hold me in her arms and hang onto me. The two of us—we can't be pried apart. I have dozens of hours of the Fox on audio- and videotape. (341)[13]

Rybus objects that what McVane finds disgusting in her disease (her hair falling out, her emesis, the dirtiness of her dome which she is no longer able to keep tidy, all these earthly manifestations of the flesh that are opposed to the pure and clean spectrality of the synthetic image) is synonymous with life as it is: "This isn't death. You know what this is? In contrast to what's coming out of your audio system? This is life" (341). Life and lived experience necessarily involve pain and conflicting emotions, in contrast to the abstract and "recycled sentimentality" (338-39)—*i.e.* emotions prefabricated and mass-produced for distribution and consumption on a large scale via the media system—embodied by Linda Fox.

As the story approaches its conclusion, McVane seems to escape the bewitching influence of the media Lorelei. His melancholic acknowledgement that he "saw and heard a synthetic image. It was not real. Rybus Rommey had sucked the life out of the Fox" (347), is immediately followed by a scene where the previously-dying Rybus informs him that she has recovered and attributes to him the miracle of this sudden revival. "Chains" thus gives the impression of describing a trade-off—epitomized by the line: "A human life won and a synthetic media image wrecked" (349)—between the abstract life of a media personality and the life of a real human being, which echoes in reverse Edgar Allan Poe's "The Oval Portrait" (1842).[19] With McVane's final recognition of the fundamental unreality of the media simulacrum and the apparently successful exchange between Linda Fox and Rybus, Dick's

narrative appears to agree with Debord's belief in the ability of individuals to see through the illusions propagated by the media system and tie again meaningful relationship. Yet, this optimistic interpretation is contradicted by the ultimate scene of the narrative which shows Rybus engrossed in a TV soap opera and entirely oblivious of McVane's presence, turned, in the words of Umberto Rossi, into a "sort of soulless robot, having sacrificed all those emotions that give life much of its meaning" (237). Besides the Sartrian definition of alienation as "hell as others," the notions of self-alienation and reification are also helpful to understand the relation of the protagonists to each other and to the electronic images that surround them.

The Self as the Other: Idolatry, Narcissism, and Self-Alienation

As a musical product manufactured only to be reproduced and consumed, what characterizes the media idol is its seriality: "Linda Fox is not a person. She is a *class* of persons, a type. She is a sound that electronic equipment, very sophisticated electronic equipment, makes. There are more of her. There will always be. She can be stamped out like tires" (*Divine Invasion* 86, emphasis in the original). Like tires, cultural products are submitted to obsolescence and the "law" of change, but this is not related to the contents of culture; indeed, the music of the Fox is a recycling of "high culture" (the lute compositions of John Dowland) through advanced technology: a mix of "high" and "low" culture so to speak. Rather, as Baudrillard contends, the decisive factor is the form taken by culture, its subjection to "the same pressure to be 'up-to-the-minute' as material goods" (*Consumer Society* 101-02). Hence, the necessary function of the media personality to advertise and "distribute" cultural contents through the type of relation, namely idolatry, she ties with the consumer. This constant recycling of culture according to the "needs" and expectations of consumers is explicitly described as a retroactive process:

> Big Noodle [the A.I. system] had first imagined the Fox. The A.I system had invented her, told her what to sing and how to sing it: Big Noodle set up her arrangements . . . even down to the mixing. And the package was a complete success.
>
> Big Noodle had correctly analyzed the emotional needs of the colonists and had come up with a formula to meet those needs. The A.I system maintained an ongoing survey, deriving feedback; when the needs changed, Linda Fox changed. It constituted a closed loop. (*Divine Invasion* 86)

The survey conducted by the A.I. system (via media channels) constitutes an abstraction of the needs of the consumers. It abstracts a part of what they want, desire or expect, and commodifies it into a cultural artifact (here the media personality). But as the expression "closed loop" makes clear, the process is retroactive in the sense that the cultural product resulting from the survey becomes in turn a *model* that informs consumers' behavior. This is identical to the process identified by Daniel J. Boorstin in his analysis of the mechanism of opinion polls, which he views as operating like a mirror:

> Having been polled as a representative of the public, [the citizen] can then read reports and see how he looks. . . . Public opinion—once the public's expression—becomes more and more an image into which the public fits its expression. Public opinion becomes filled with what is already there. It is the people looking in the mirror. (238)

In other words, this is just to say that the results of polling retroactively influence the opinions of those who are polled. Although the purpose of the survey is originally to *represent* with accuracy the needs or the desires of a given population (the original), the product of this act of representation becomes in turn a model for the individuals who are polled. After a few iterations of the survey, the dividing line between original needs and the needs produced by the result of the survey becomes blurred.

In *The Divine Invasion*, the renaming of the protagonist as the "Linda Fox man" (12) by the media people who provide the music to him signals not only the creation of a profile of the consumer's tastes by the industry of the mass media, but also and more significantly, shows the reduction of the individual to the only attributes that are useful for his activity qua consumer. As Boorstin claims, the consequences of this "mirror effect" are striking for the radical reduction of human experience it entails threatens to dehumanize man:

> The more planned and prefabricated our experience becomes, the more we include in it only what interests us. Then we can more effectively exclude the exotic world beyond our ken: the very world which would jar our experience, and which we most need to make us more largely human. (256)

Because the "Linda Fox Man" is only confronted to what has been deemed potentially interesting for him by the media, his encounter with "alterity" is negated and replaced by a reflexive greed in which his self preys on itself. Dick's story accordingly ties idolatry—McVane's yearning to embrace and be embraced by the media simulacrum of Linda Fox, who is said to be "a phantasm of yours [Herb Asher's]" (*Divine Invasion* 159)—and narcissism. McLuhan had already used the myth of Narcissus to describe the illusion of otherness created by media technologies:

> The youth Narcissus mistook his own reflection in the water for another person. This extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image. The nymph Echo tried to win his love with fragments of his own speech, but in vain. He was numb. He had adapted to his extension of himself and had become a closed system. (*Understanding* 51)

The extension of the self that is promised by technological apparatuses is in fact a form of projection; through the media, the self seems to be desperately trying to grasp its own image rather than other persons.

Yet, the topology of the mirror may be misleading in one respect for it overlooks the alienating effects of idolatry. Indeed, it is not oneself in its entirety that one sees in the idol but an abstracted self, some fragments of subjectivity stolen by the media and molded into the mass media idol. As Erich Fromm perceptively remarks: "The idol is the alienated form of man's experience of himself" (37). Instead of a faithful reflection in the mirror, the idolatrous McVane contemplates his own unfulfilled needs and frustrated aspirations as they are caricatured, fetishized and poured into the hollow shell of Linda Fox. The reflection cast back by the media is a view of the self as something foreign: the self as Other.

Remembering the pervasiveness of the motif of the double in Dick's fiction,[15] it is possible to go further in the interpretation. The real being (Rybus), its evil doppelgänger (Linda Fox) peeled from the mirror—here the TV screen—and made substantial by the devil (the media), the struggle between the being and the tempting image for the soul of the protagonist (McVane): all these are familiar motifs that haunt the works of romantic and symbolist literature as well as expressionist cinema. Works such as Adelbert von Chamisso's

Peter Schlemihl (1814), E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Tale of the Lost Reflection" (1815), Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910) and the movie (based on a scenario by Hans Heinz Ewers) *The Student of Prague* (1913), all stage the competition between the alienated image and the self by associating the motifs of the double with that of the magic mirror.[16] These stories represent reification and the protagonist's self-alienation as the loss of a precious part of himself and the concurrent animation of what was formerly inanimate. Theodore Ziolkowski shows how the alienated part (the soul of the protagonist or the subject's desire) may either "emerge from the glass in the form of a ghost" (161) to torment the protagonist or, on the contrary, may disappear forever into the mirror's limbos with dire social repercussions for the victim. Baudrillard similarly insists on the consequences that alienation entails:

> There is a part of us which gets away from us in this process, but we do not get away from it. The object (the soul, the shadow, the product of our labour become object) *takes its revenge*. All we are dispossessed of remains attached to us, but negatively. In other words, it *haunts* us. That part of us sold and forgotten is still us, or rather it is a caricature of us, the ghost, the spectre which follows us. (*Consumer Society* 189, emphasis in the original)

The opposition between image and reality, which constitutes the focal point of the story, dwells richly upon the traditional romantic motifs of the mirror and the double, and can be interpreted in different ways. On the one hand, Linda Fox functions as the artificial evil doppelgänger of Rybus, which competes against her rival both for animation and McVane's soul, in a manner that evokes the animistic contest between the painting and the model in Poe's "The Oval Portrait." On the other hand, if we prefer to understand the screen of the

electronic media as a modernization of the motif of the magic mirror, then Linda Fox can be viewed as the soul of McVane (his feminine psyche), which after having been dissociated from him and commodified by the cultural industry, emerges from the screen in the form of a hologram (337) to lure him into the web of a narcissistic passion, estranging him at the same time from human society.

The fate of Rybus is no more enviable, for although she appears by the end of the story to have won both the physical battle against her disease and the duel against the simulacrum, her final absorption into the world of TV soap operas is equated to a death of the spirit (340). In fact, when "Chains" ends, it is the TV which is alive, whereas man has been transformed into a passive thing, petrified by the medusa-like gaze of television, and like Narcissus, forever bent over the fountain of the screen. Deprived of its own momentum, consciousness merely reflects the always available but inaccessible spectacle that unfolds behind the impassable surface of glass. Accordingly, in contrast to what is alleged in favor of mediated experience, in "Chains," there seems to be no exchange between people within the space of the media, but rather an exchange between human and the media. The ambiguous conclusion of the story signifies perhaps the ironic reversal of the sentence "a human life won and a synthetic media image wrecked" (349).

To conclude this section, it is interesting to succinctly compare "Chains" with its illustrious and visionary forerunner: E. M. Forster's "The Machine Stops." Although there would be much to say, it is enough here to focus on the authors' respective attitudes toward electronic images and sounds.[17] Forster's Machine,

> did not transmit *nuances* of expression. It only gave a general idea of people—an idea that was good enough for all practical purposes, Vashti [the protagonist] thought. The imponderable bloom, declared by a discredited

> philosophy to be the actual essence of intercourse, was rightly ignored by the Machine. . . . Something "good enough" had long since been accepted by our race. (53, emphasis in the original)

With McVane's recognition of the falsity of Linda Fox ("He saw and heard a synthetic image. It was not real" [347]), Dick, like Forster, also appears to condemn once and for all mediated experiences as an inferior ersatz for genuine experience. Yet this interpretation is somewhat called into question by the lines immediately following McVane's dismissal of the synthetic image: "[McVane] put on a Vivaldi concerto for bassoon. There is only one Vivaldi concerto, he thought. A computer could do better. And be more diverse" (347). Although both stories denounce the alienation owing to mediated experience, their characterizations are different. While Forster unambiguously disparages indirect intercourses as an inferior substitute for direct contact, Dick is more equivocal, for his narrative suggests both that the protagonist has become aware of the fundamental unreality of electronic images and the contradictory claim that the simulacrum may in some occasions provide a superior form of experience. To the systematic loss of nuances and the "good enough" that denotes both the operational definition of human intercourse and the limits of technology in "The Machine Stops," succeeds the "better" of electronically synthesized classical music in Dick's story.

For Forster, the psychological shift that results from man's interaction through and with machines constitutes such an impoverishment of the realm of experiences and a moral regression that it eventually leads to a cataclysm compromising the very survival of humanity. It is worth noticing, however, that death is experienced as a moment of revelation and disalienation by the characters of Forster's story: "We have come back to our own. We die, but we have recaptured life . . ." (77). Contrastingly, although "Chains" also mourns the lost ability of its protagonists to communicate, here reification does not appear to bear upon the

stability of society, let alone its survival. It is this "sustainability" of a reified humanity that paradoxically renders Dick's lugubrious status quo even more pessimistic than Forster's technological apocalypse. Even though Rybus passes victoriously through the ordeal of her disease and remains alive, she does not experience the liberation that death brings to the protagonists of "The Machine Stops."

Structure of the Media and Social Control

In its depiction of McVane alternatively as an exploited technician prisoner of his labor schedule cycle (what Debord calls the "pseudocyclical time" [106] of alienated labor) and an apathetic consumer (even leisure is alienated), the story endorses a Debordian critique of the media that stresses its effects in terms of alienation from others and self-alienation. Leisure time is controlled by an entertainment industry largely operated by the state (Dick's vision still corresponds to an earlier stage of capitalism in which companies are essentially appendages of the state). This stage of the reflection on media is comprehensively summarized by Steven Best and Douglas Kellner:

> The stage of the spectacle described by Debord, congruent with Sartre's analysis of the fate of subjectivity in the present age . . . was that of the consumption of spectacles in which individual subjects were positioned to be compliant and pliant spectators and consumers of mass consumer society and media. In this early stage theorized by Debord and later Baudrillard, the subject sat more or less passively in front of a movie or television screen . . . there was domination of the subject by the object, and categories of passivity, serality [*sic*], separation, and alienation accurately described the contours of this stage.

In the world of “Chains,” the success of social control is, arguably, only a function of the unilaterality of the media insofar as the attitude of the two protagonists toward their electronic equipment is one of passivity. Moreover, they are isolated in both their activities as workers—the reception, storage and transmission of messages are entirely managed within the confine of their domes—and as consumers. In contrast to what is hinted in *The Divine Invasion*, in “Chains,” there is apparently no Machiavellian plot to program the media for thought control. Instead, revolt from harsh and unjust living conditions is effectively prevented by putting an end to social relations between colonists and by encouraging individuals to escape from their plight into fantasy. Incidentally, the absence of media conspiracy is not incompatible with the presence of ideological contents. Consider for example the following passage: “When his [Job’s] sorrows came as fast as floods, Hope kept his heart till comfort came again. As the Fox would put it” (348). This could perhaps be read as a subliminal message designed to foster McVane’s apathy in the face of adverse conditions by instilling a false hope in the future, and thereby forestalling a possible revolt. Yet, nothing indicates that this “message” has been planted on purpose by authority, and even supposing that it is indeed a conscious attempt at ideological manipulation, it is arguably supererogatory to the main function of the media—viz. to disrupt the bonds of the collectivity—insofar as they are regarded as a system of control.

Nevertheless, if it is the unilaterality of the media that can be first and foremost held responsible for their alienating effects, then, in agreement with Debord and Enzensberger (and *contra* Baudrillard), it would seem enough to allow reversibility—the consumer to become producer, the receiver to become transmitter—to liberate the media and escape social control. It is worth noting, however, that the telematic apparatus used by McVane and Rybus is not a mere TV but allows—besides reception—the storage, manipulation and transmission

of information. In this respect, it is analogous to modern computers with Internet access, and does not preclude, in principle, a productive and creative use. To be sure, in "Chains," the media is depicted as functioning in a singular direction from producer (the media industry, Linda Fox) to consumer (McVane, Rybus), but its structure allows for interactivity.

To support her claim that Dick views technology in general as neutral and susceptible to be used by individual out of the sphere of governmental control, Galvan mentions the typical Dickian character "who co-opts machinery for his own purposes" (422). In "Chains," although we learn that McVane has mastered the electronic equipment that surrounds him and "illegally" (333) redesigned every device to make his life more comfortable, it is obvious that all his "electronics-savvy" has no consequences beyond the privacy of his dome. This looks like an example of isolated resistance practices such as desertion, pilfering or sabotage, which neither lead to outright confrontation with power, nor impugn the unjust foundations of the system. Likewise, even if Darko Suvin is right to see Donna's speech (in *A Scanner Darkly*) "about ripping off Coca Cola as a capitalist monopoly (ch. 8) [a]s an instance of the genuine, somewhat crazy plebeian resentment not too far from Pirate Jenny's song from Brecht-Weill's Threepenny Opera" ("Goodbye and Hello" 370), it remains that her action has no effect whatsoever on the structure of her society. Contrastingly, in a Baudrillard-like manner, it could be argued instead that the psychological comfort Donna derives from her revenge against Coca Cola, and McVane's smug satisfaction at having circumventing the government's rules in fact benefit the powers that be, for it extends the status quo and cancels in advance other forms of (potentially) more effective resistance. It may as such constitute a sort of illusory force of opposition (counter-power) that paradoxically contributes to the durability of the system it opposes: "The equivalent of Sunday tinkering on the periphery of the system" (*Critique* 182).

Some readers may regard Dick's vision of monadic domes united by telematics as a mere rehearsal of the endless technophobic (and some might say reactionary) attacks on mediated interaction that can be found throughout science fiction, especially in dystopias. Furthermore, does not the structure of our more recent interactive media such as the Internet radically differ from McVane's and Rybus's numbing communicational apparatus, in that it allows the user to express her creativity and sometimes even engage in a meaningful social practice or political praxis?

With the widespread and daily use of manifold means of mediated communication, the analysis of their effects on human relationship and the reflection on what we call communication become urgent tasks. In this respect, "Chains" (and Dick's work in general) functions as a fictional laboratory for the critique of media. It may, in particular, suggest that despite their claim at facilitating contact between people who would not otherwise be able to speak to each other, the media simultaneously promotes a form of aloofness and an estrangement from the lived experience. This paradoxical tendency, already commented upon by Baudrillard with regard to "old" technologies such as telephony, might also be brought against social networks like Facebook or Twitter, and web sites for personal expression such as blogs, which allow users to have distant relationships with hundreds of "friends" whom they will never meet and with whom they will never develop a relationship beyond a few words occasionally exchanged.

There is a moment in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* when the impersonal sharing of one's emotion through media means is made at the expense of more meaningful direct relationship. In this scene, the protagonist Deckard has just bought a live animal; his overjoyed wife insists that they share their happiness with other people by using the empathy box (a device which enables people everywhere across the country to "fuse" and share their emotions): "I want you to transmit the mood you're in now to everyone else . . . I want

everyone to know" (173). The problem is that the fleeting, spontaneous burst of joy experienced by Deckard and his wife is, as it were, dissipated in the void of the empathy box; their present and direct experience—what they feel together, what circulates between them at that very moment, in the intimacy of their conflictual relationship—comes under threat as soon as it is broadcasted. One could argue that the same happens with people busy to "tweet" their experience in order to share it with others: "I'm at X concert! Live! Awesome! Check the vid!" Relationships with people in the immediate surrounding gradually lose their vitality (quite literally they flicker like intermittent signals) as attention becomes focused on screens and the virtual presence of others, lost somewhere on the network.

Another interesting point signaled by Dick's story concerns the media user in its relation to culture which becomes paradoxically more personal and more abstract. Thus, as *The Divine Invasion* suggests, the polling system implemented by the media creates a circular interaction between, on the one hand, the particular tastes of individual consumers and, on the other hand, the abstract result known as public opinion. The referendum-like system of rating (the buttons "I like it" and "I don't like it" one finds on YouTube, for instance) by which the media system conducts permanent survey to probe the reaction of the consumers not only fosters the "closed-loop" system depicted in the story, but may also reduce the horizon of our (interactive) relation to culture to curt judgmental comments at best, and to bare approval or dismissal at worst.

This being said, if we attempt to locate the criticism of media found in "Chains" within the history of critical media theory, we should insist on the fact that in Dick's characterization, mediated interaction is largely regarded as a loss, a threat to identity insofar as the latter is regarded as something autonomous. By contrast, in the next stage of the critique of the media, while the fundamental issue becomes the communication with the media itself, alienation is replaced by schizophrenia and the implosion of the difference

between subject and object as the germane analytical categories. Instead of an impoverishment of the subject's identity, what this later stage emphasizes is the collapse of consciousness and electronic fields into each other, and the ensuing creation of a fluctuating identity with no discernible boundaries as we have seen in our reading of *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* in the preceding chapter. In Dick's fiction, Besides *Stigmata*, this type of concern is most vividly illustrated by works such as *Ubik,* "The Electric Ant" (1969), and *A Scanner Darkly* (1977). Although written after these more "postmodern" works, "Chains" appears to return to an earlier critical stance.

Notes

1. It is worth noting that the game not only mimic the general narrative situation (the citadel as Earth and the soldiers as Ganymede) but could also be thought to illustrate Dick's recurring fantasy of the siege (obsidional delirium ?), in which case the citadel no longer symbolizes external reality but, contrariwise, represents the self besieged by external reality. The next chapter will focus on the psychological aspect of games in Dick's fiction (see below Chapter Three). On the notion of "transitional objects" and "transitional phenomena," see Winnicott 5.
2. Several other works also mix the motifs of game, foreign or alien invasion, and forced consumerism. See for instance "A Game of Unchance," "The Little Movement," "Return Match," *The Game-Players of Titan*, etc. No doubt, Dick would have had interesting comments on president William Clinton's claim that "as philosophers from Thucydides to Adam Smith have noted, the habits of commerce run counter to the habits of war" ("Remarks at the American University Centennial Celebration February 26, 1993" 210).

3. Although in this passage Galvan contests the relevance of the Baudrillardian perspective on media for the reading of Dick's works, she brilliantly invokes (420-21) Baudrillard's critique of Roman Jakobson's model of communication to construe an important exchange between two characters of Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*
4. The role of images as compensation is examined in the following chapter (See below "Chapter 3: Fantasy: Images as Compensation for and Critique of Reality").
5. See for instance Disch's "In the Mold of 1964: An Afterword"; Warrick [1983] 199; Bukatman 253.
6. The Situationists' influence on the French theorist of simulation is well known and may account, together with a common Marxist heritage, for some of the thematic and methodological similarities between Debord and the early thought of Baudrillard. As Baudrillard gradually severs his links with Marxism from *The Mirror of Production* (1975 [1973]) but especially in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993 [1976]), the divergences with Debord become more and more obvious. In *The Ecstasy of Communication* (1988 [1987]), Baudrillard himself views his critical career as originally endorsing Debord's theorization of the spectacle as alienation, "Simulation . . . was at first described in critical terms, in the light (or shadow) of a problematic of alienation. It was still the society of spectacle, and its denunciation, which was the focal point" (77) before moving away: "*We no longer partake of the drama of alienation, but are in the ecstasy of communication*" (22, emphasis in the original). An in-depth comparison of Debord and Baudrillard is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but the interested reader may refer to Anselm Jappe's "Baudrillard, détournement par excès."
7. See Bourdieu's "La fabrique des débats publics."

8. In 2009, French advertising magnate Jacques Séguéla unwittingly acknowledged the dominant importance of sign-value when he infamously claimed that “if you don't have a Rolex by the time you reach 50, then you have clearly failed in your life!” (original: “Si à cinquante ans, on n'a pas une Rolex, on a quand même raté sa vie !”)
9. The over importance of the brand name has been humorously derided by TV personality Jimmy Kimmel in a recent video. After sticking an Apple logo on the back of an old Casio watch, he led several passersby on Hollywood Boulevard (one can hardly imagine a more appropriate place for such a prank) into believing that the watch was an Apple’s Iwatch. The answers of the interviewees are unsettling:

> Interviewer: "Do you like that it [the pseudo Iwatch] tells you the date, and the time?" One interviewee: "Yes, that's a neat feature." Another interviewee: “I just like that it has an Apple insignia on the back." A third interviewee: “I mean, if it’s Apple, it’s good, right?” . . .
>
> Interviewer: “What do you like about this watch?”
>
> Interviewee: “Really because it’s Apple. Apple is a brand name that I love, and I have the computer and I have the phone and I have the iPad. So because it’s Apple, that would be what would impress me.”
>
> Interviewer: “So you would buy anything?” Interviewee: “I would buy pretty much anything from Apple.”

The use-value (“it tells you the date and the time”) is clearly a pretext. What really counts is that the watch is supposedly an Apple’s product (“It has an Apple insignia on the back”).

10. Even though the story discussed here hints at a coercive governmental power, the alienation and the breakdown of communication it depicts are described as direct consequences of the structure of mediated interactions.
11. I will also refer to Dick's novel *The Divine Invasion* (1981) for it integrates and develops further the plot of "Chains." It should be noted, however, that the treatment of media in the novel is more complex than that of the short story, for it deals with the power of media both as content and as form.
12. The original date of publication of the French edition of Baudrillard's works is added in brackets so that the reader can locate these works within Baudrillard's evolving thought.
13. In his study of the simulacrum in art, Victor Stoichita evokes the Greek expression *agalma nepheles* (literally "a statue made of clouds, a statue made of aether") to characterize the double of Helen, an eidolon supposedly manufactured by the goddess Hera and made of aether (85). The oxymoron "virtual reality" is synonymous to *agalma nepheles* and the media eidolon Linda Fox is the modern equivalent of the ancient simulacrum.
14. In his study of the motif of the haunted portrait in Gothic literature, Theodore Ziolkowski thus observes that Poe's "The Oval Portrait" is "concerned principally with the animistic contest between the portrait and the model for the life-force that they must divide between themselves" (123).
15. According to Neil Easterbrook, "most of Dick's fiction inscribes the problematic of the double" (26). See his "Dianoia/Paranoia: Dick's Double 'Impostor'" for an important discussion of doubles in Dick's fiction.

16. See Ziolkowski 168-201 for a close reading of Chamisso, Hoffmann, and Rilke. Especially relevant to our concern is Ziolkowski's argument according to which the motifs of the double and the mirror are employed to depict reification:

> Human beings are gradually becoming depersonalized in our society while, in a compensating movement, things and objects take on human characteristics. Thus at the end of the mirror-scene, the mirror-image becomes real and Malte [the protagonist of Rilke's novel] feels that he has been reduced to the function of the reflecting surface, merely reflecting the other. (201).

The Student of Prague is commented upon by Baudrillard who argues that "the alienated human being is not merely a being diminished and impoverished but left intact in its essence: it is a being turned inside out, changed into something evil, into its own enemy, set against itself" (*Consumer Society* 190). On the link between Dick and the German Romantics, see Warrick [1987] 119, 199-200.

17. Forster's and Dick's stories share an impressive number of commonalities. Both deal with mediated experience in terms of alienation and reification. Both authors contrast direct human contact through the body to what they regard as the abstraction of mediated communication and use the same type of vocabulary to express this opposition. Compare for example Forster's "seraphically free/ From taint of personality" (70) with Dick's "the luminiferous aether which animates our souls" (340). Finally, both stories are concerned with the disappearance of the world in its representation.

Chapter 3

Fantasy, or:

Images as Compensation for and Critique of Reality

Poor fellow, sick with love for that which never was!

Put him in irons — must we? — throw him overboard?

Mad, drunken tar, inventor of Americas...

Which, fading, make the void more bitter, more abhorred.

Charles Baudelaire. *Travel*

He sat down on the floor, knees drawn up, face solemn, eyes wide. There was no sound but that of the generators; the world above was completely cut off. He was in a little self-contained cosmos; everything needed was here – or would be here, soon: food, water, air, things to do. Nothing else was wanted. He could reach out and touch – whatever he needed. He could stay here forever, through all time, without stirring. Complete and entire. Not lacking, not fearing, with only the sound of the generators purring below him, and the sheer, ascetic walls around and above him on all sides, faintly warm, completely friendly, like a living container.

Philip K. Dick. *"Foster, You're Dead"*

I. Introduction: Escape from the Real

A specter haunts the soul of the characters created by Philip K. Dick—the specter of escapism.[1] The Dickian protagonist is almost invariably pressed by an imperious desire to escape the conditions in which he lives. His dissatisfaction with reality and subsequent "*need for illusion*" (Fitting "Reality as Ideological" 227, emphasis in the original) are so strong as

to often constitute the forces that set the plot into motion. A novel by Dick typically begins with the depiction of a despondent character brooding over the emptiness of his present life and the seeming impossibility to change matters. His (quite seldom, her) dissatisfaction with everyday life has explicit social roots, whether failing relationships within the couple or the family, distressing working conditions, or interestingly a mix of both. To provide just a few examples: Joe Fernwright in *Galactic Pot-Healer*, Ben Tallchief in *A Maze of Death*, Ted Benteley in *Solar Lottery*, Chuck Rittersdorf in *Clans of the Alphane Moon*, Silvia Bohlen in *Martian Time-Slip*, Sam Regan in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, etc., the list could go on and on. In fact, the notion of escape is of so much import to Dick that an exhaustive inventory of the works where it appears would have to include almost every novel and short story.

In their original study of escape, *Escape Attempts*, Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor loosely distinguish between three main ways (or strategies) of escaping what they call "paramount reality" (*i.e.* the reality of everyday life):

1) going away

2) going inside

3) going above[2]

1) Going away involves the spatial distancing from the world, which is viewed as a prison. The individual attempting to go away from the world may engage in distancing activities such as sex, hobbies, games, sports, and artistic contemplation or creation. Other, more literal, flights include holidays, journeys, and adventures.

2) Going inside is an escape into the inner recesses of the self, either voluntarily sought for by means of various techniques such as meditation, therapies, and drugs, or, involuntarily reached in madness. Psychological distancing can also be achieved by raising self-awareness about one's life and routine through irony and cynicism.

3) Going above is a deliberate transgression of moral and social laws as a way to assert the primacy of the self over the requirements of the external world. It comprises psychopathic and sociopathic behaviors such as murders and terrorism. The important point is that deviant acts A) are purposefully committed in order to assert one's freedom and negate any ideas of psychological or social determination of the individual, and B) do not signify anything beyond themselves and have no other justifications than that of violating laws.

In Dick, the means for achieving transcendence are manifold; technology, drugs, religion, and art are all employed at various points in his works to seek the longed-for liberation. The novel *Galactic Pot-Healer* is a case in point, for it provides a condensed summary of various types of escape ways. At the beginning of the novel, we see the protagonist Joe Fernwright brooding over the impossibility to obtain fulfillment through his work. After considering successively "giv[ing] up" (3), committing "suicide," or "a major crime, [like] killing someone high up in the hierarchy of the Peaceful International World Senate [*i.e.* a representative of power]" (4), engaging in a distancing activity by participating to a multiplayer game called simply "The Game" (4), and breaking the law (6), he is eventually being offered the possibility of giving meaning to his life by embarking on a religious quest (28), which might eventually allow him to achieve a sort of religious transcendence by being absorbed in a god-like entity called the Glimmung (158). It is striking not only that the three main categories of escape identified by Cohen and Taylor are all represented in Fernwright's imaginary maneuvers, but also that most of them are juxtaposed in the space of only four pages at the very outset of the novel. This reveals, I believe, the central, urgent, and systematic character of Dick's reflection on the issue of escape. The classification of escape ways in Dick would be a task of monumental proportion, but it will be sufficient in this chapter to look at those ways that are related in one way or another to our theme of study: images.

Very often in Dick the privileged hatch out of paramount reality is a game or a hobby, and this chapter will concentrate on this type of distancing activity. Both hobbies and games can be a way for the person who engages in them to claim that real life is elsewhere. In *Time Out of Joint*, one of the characters observe that "a man can work harder on a hobby than down at the office . . . [because] it's not drudgery . . . it's creative" (16). In this context, hobbies usually consist in a retreat from society and an attempt at mastering the inanimate world (for instance: the hobbies in "Small Town," "Exhibit Piece," "The Trouble with Bubbles," *Time Out of Joint*, and *Now Wait for Last Year*), whereas games attempt to recreate social life around new rules (for instance: the games in *Galactic Pot-Healer*, "The Days of Perky Pat," *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, "War Game," and *The Game-Players of Titan*). The hobby is "a microsphere of manageable objects like the child's world of play and it is obsessive and ritualistic" (Cohen and Taylor 115). But one needs to be careful in manipulating the typology established by Cohen and Taylor, for even though they place games and hobbies in the category "going away," the matter is less clear in Dick. Thus, Vernon Haskel's hobby in "Small Town" can be regarded both as a going away type (finding a sanctuary within daily life) and a going inside type (returning to the world of the past and to the psychical unity it guarantees). The same applies to the escapist activity of the colonists in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*. The Perky Pat layout points in the direction of the "going away" category, whereas the so-called "translation" induced by the hallucinogenic drug Can-D is associated to standard mystical visions typical of the "going inside" category. Classification is complicated by the over-determination of phenomena characteristic of Dick's fiction, what Jameson refers to as the "use of both apparently contradictory, mutually exclusive subjective and objective explanation systems all at once" (*Archaeologies of the Future* 350).

Before outlining the purpose of this chapter, a few words on the form of Dick's writings are necessary. The key term I would like to introduce at this point is that of fantasy. Fantasy is a very useful concept because it allows us to link the thematic content we have delineated thus far, the problem of escape, to the specific literary genre in which this problem is cast. In a far-reaching essay on fantasy, Darko Suvin crucially suggests that the specificity of this genre (in contrast with the genre of science fiction) lies in the relationship it entertains with everyday life. According to him, the fantastic mode is, to put it bluntly, not so much concerned with the disruption of natural laws as with protesting against the reality of everyday life:

> [W]hat Fantasy reacts against, and as a result inscribes itself into, has primarily to do with experiences of everyday life, arising out of ongoing socio-economic history, stifling central aspects of personality. The laws of gravity, biological aging, intra-atomic composition or speed of light can be challenged in SF; Fantasy's worlds as a rule do not delve into them. ("Considering the Sense" 223)

Bearing in mind Suvin's distinction and the observation made above regarding the pervasiveness of the theme of escape from everyday life in Dick's works, it is not far-fetched to entertain the idea that large segments of Dick's fiction could be treated as belonging to what is usually called the genre of fantasy. Thus, the reader notices not only that fantastic elements are often used here and there as a narrative device to further the plot (instrumental use), but also that quite often fantasy constitutes the generic frame in which the story is cast. Many works blend diverse generic conventions: horror ("Of Withered Apples," "The Cookie Lady," *The Cosmic Puppets*, *Eye in the Sky*, *Ubik*, etc.), low fantasy with elements of high

fantasy (“The King of the Elves,” “Strange Eden,” etc.), a type of stories that share commonalties with Northrop Frye’s definition of romance (“Stability,” “Upon the Dull Earth,” *The Cosmic Puppets*, *The Divine Invasion*, etc.) and so on. What is more, even those works that evince the motifs and tropes commonly associated with conventional science fiction more than often do not bother to offer any scientific (or even pseudo-scientific) explanations to account for their departure from the natural order. In some extreme cases, the display of the protagonist’s fantasies even seems to stand as the only justification for the story (“Small Town,” “The Trouble with Bubbles,” and “Exhibit Piece”). At this point, the logic of the narrative is thoroughly contaminated by the convulsions of the protagonist’s subjectivity. Magical thinking, wish-fulfillment, repetitions, plot inversions, and circularity, are the narrative operations associated with fantasy.

Although Cohen and Taylor treat fantasy separately as a specific type of escape involving “mental magic”(88), I want to argue that in Dick, hobbies, games, and even to a certain extent space travel, are almost sure signs of the characters’ engagement in fantasy. One issue that will be addressed in this chapter concerns the relationship between images and desire. Questions are numerous.

—Whose desire: does the protagonist’s urge to escape have the support of the author? Could the constant staging of escape fantasies be understood in terms of authorial catharsis?

—Should the prevalence of the theme of space travel be accounted for by the requirements of the genre?

—Can images be viewed as embodiments (material or textual projections) of the desire to escape (the authoritative Freudian view of images as symptoms), or do they also function as supports or springboards for the display of fantasy? In many places, Dick appears to provide an explicit answer to this question. Thus, in *Galactic Pot-Healer*, the protagonist’s commitment to the game is regarded as a substitute for something else:

> [Joe Fernwright tried] to fathom the craving lodged deep within him, the need which had caused him to break that law [the prohibition to smoke] several times. What do I really yearn for? he asked himself. That for which oral gratification is a surrogate. Something vast, he decided; he felt the primordial hunger gape, huge-jawed, as if to cannibalize everything around him. To place what was outside inside.
>
> Thus he played; this had created, for him, The Game. (6)

Both oral drive and the wish to play "The Game" are here understood as displaced expressions of another desire. Is it the manifestation of Joe Fernswright's death drive, the desire to escape from the world into nothingness? Whatever the answer to this question, it is clear that in the specific case of *Galactic Pot-Healer* the activity of playing is viewed as a *symptom*. We will see, however, that objects (and more generally material practices such as gaming and hobbying that involve fantasy) can also function as supports for the expansion of fantasy. Another crucial problem that arises in every discussion of fantasy concerns the way it intersects with paramount reality. To put it roundly, is fantasy escapist, or can it function instead as a critique of paramount reality? Does it have an effect on daily life? While both Cohen and Taylor on the one hand, and Suvin on the other, are quite pessimistic as to the capacity of fantasy to challenge paramount reality, we will see that the matter is less clear cut for Dick.

In order to investigate these issues and examine Dick's ambivalent treatment of fantasy, the first part of this chapter (see below "II. Desire, Openness, and Closure in Three Early Short Stories") focuses on three early short stories: "The Troubles with Bubbles" (1953), "Small Town" (1953), and "Exhibit Piece" (1953) where the attempt made by the protagonists to dissociate themselves from the world of everyday life is expressed through the

practice of a hobby. Although they lack the richness and delightful deviousness of Dick's more mature works, these stories already contain the germination of many of Dick's recurrent concerns: the critique of epistemological and metaphysical realism, the aesthetic rendering of this critique as an antinomy between openness and closure, and the critique of power. In fact, it is because they are unadorned, almost to the point of starkness, that these three short stories are helpful to investigate Dick's treatment of all these issues. Moreover, as Umberto Rossi remarks of "Town" (but this also applies to "Bubbles" and "Exhibit"), the value of this story for scholarship on Dick also lies in its paradigmatic expression of the reversals that characterize the plot of most of his works (217). Through this discussion we will examine if for Dick there is a possibility for the individual to imagine an alternative reality, and the risks entailed by such resistance projects (unwitting reproduction of the system, destruction of society, and so on…). In parallel to the detailed analysis of these three short stories, other texts will be referred to in order to extrapolate our assertions and offer general statements about Dick's opus. Firstly, Dick's contradictory account of fantasy as wishful thinking, an ally of power, and an agent of subversion capable of molding social and historical realities will be considered in the first five sections of this part. Secondly, insofar as they are self-reflexive portrayals of fantasizing, all three stories will be read as indirect commentaries by Dick on his literary activity. Finally, these portrayals are set against Dick's explicit statements about the genres of science fiction and fantasy. Here also, what arises is a conflicting assessment of creative imagination, which is at times invested with the power to destabilize the grounds of reality, while at other times it can be suspected of escapist wish-fulfillment. The project of constructing some type of alternative reality is threatened from two directions. On the one hand, there is the danger of co-option signaled by Cohen and Taylor, that is, the discovery that what we thought to be small subjective enclaves out of paramount reality were in fact merely artificial outlets, institutionally encouraged by society

in order to alleviate discontent or even manage resistance. On the other hand, the attempt to discover or create elsewhere the conditions of happiness is marred by human limitations and seems irremediably condemned to closure. As in Charles Baudelaire's "Travel", the journey to distant lands and the quest for otherness seem only to lead to the bitter knowledge that "The small monotonous world reflects me everywhere:/ Yesterday, now, tomorrow, for ever — in a dry/ Desert of boredom, an oasis of despair!"

In the last section of this chapter (see below "III. Gendering the Reality Principle in the Works of Philip K. Dick"), fantasy is examined with an attention to gender issues. Even the casual reader of Dick cannot fail to be struck by the pervasiveness and fierceness of gender conflicts in his works. In a scene that is repeated again and again, the male protagonist's wife is seen as reviling her husband, reproaching him his puerility, his failure as a breadwinner and more generally what could be called his lack of involvement with reality. The situation presents recurring aspects that suggest a consistent—if not entirely reflective—perspective on the role supposedly played by women in the task of enforcing the reality principle. The first and second sections look at how, in their roles as wives, mothers, and consumers, female characters are often viewed as enemies of fantasy, or at least of those fantasies that potentially express the revolt of the male protagonist against the definition of reality given by his society. While the third section examines the sexual economy of the Dickian couple, the last deals with the relationship between women and the frontier.

II. Desire, Openness, and Closure in Three Early Short Stories

"The Troubles with Bubbles", "Small Town", and "Exhibit Piece" [Hereafter "Bubbles," "Town," and "Exhibit," respectively] seem an almost literal illustration of Freud's claim in "Creative Writers and Day-dreaming" that fantasy is an attempt to escape or improve unsatisfactory reality. Thus, the protagonist of "Town," Vernon Haskel, locks himself up every day in the basement of his house (an obvious metaphor for the unconscious as the location of the creative process) and devotes his time to the construction of a giant maquette of the town where he lives. The construction of this maquette is explicitly compared with child's play (342) and mimics Freud's characterization of child's play as a rearrangement of "the things of [the child's] world in a new way which pleases him" ("Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 144). The Freudian connection is strengthened with allusions to the child's narcissism, omnipotence of thoughts, and the displacement of Haskel's unsatisfied libido (the trains as power fantasy). In "Exhibit," the main character Miller is also depicted as an alienated member of a repressive futuristic society who engages in the construction of an historical diorama representing a section of an American town from the twentieth century. Here again fantasy is regarded as an escape from reality (especially social reality) and as a longing for the past and for values and ideals (such as individuality, independence, and freedom) either extinct in the bureaucratic world of the future, or at best crushed under the yoke of instrumental rationality. While "Exhibit" is mostly concerned with the temporal dimension, in "Bubbles" the emphasis is put on space. The world of "Bubbles" is entirely mapped: all locations on Earth are connected and readily accessible (the story significantly begins with a report on the achievement of building a road connecting America and Asia) whereas space exploration is over because the universe has been found to be devoid of life. Society has achieved apparent stability due to a strict social stratification dividing the

population into classes, a leisurely lifestyle made possible by technological progress, and, perhaps, a curiously tolerant attitude toward sexuality somehow at odds with the otherwise rigid construction of society (repressive desublimation?). The whole of reality appears to be known, stable, and circumscribed by distinct geographical and social boundaries. As a result, people suffer from boredom and their dissatisfaction takes the shape of an irrepressible yearning for another frontier. As in "Exhibit" and "Town," in "Bubbles" the solution to the problem of closure is a compensatory move which allies art and technology. It consists in creating material "*substitutes*" (197, emphasis in the original): the eponymous bubbles are miniature worlds that enable people to escape from boredom and find a simulacrum of novelty.

On an individual level, the view of the protagonists' investment in fantasy as a form of narcissistic regression is further sanctioned by the authoritative figure of the psychoanalyst who is omnipresent in the three stories. Thus, in "Town," Doctor Tyler expounds with "suave confidence" (346) on Haskel's inability to reach a stage of mastery over the world of objects, whereas the psychoanalyst of "Exhibit" interprets Miller's anger as a reaction against "the whole petty frustrations and defeats of . . . [his] whole life" (162). But fantasizing is also endowed with a socially acknowledged utility when it serves as an outlet for what a character in "Bubbles" calls "man's innate destructive tendencies" (198) (compare with Freud: "The inclination to aggression is an original, self-subsisting instinctual disposition in man" [*Civilization and Its Discontents* 122]). It is the putative function of fantasy to sublimate these impulses and thus preserve civilization from destruction.

1. Break on Through to the Other Side: The Inestimable Value of Novelty and the Quest for Otherness

> *It is only in the most completely humanized environment, the one most fully and obviously the end product of human labor, production, and transformation, that life becomes meaningless, and that existential despair first appears as such in direct proportion to the elimination of nature, the non- or anti-human, to the increasing rollback of everything that threatens human life and the prospect of a well-nigh limitless control over the external universe.*
>
> Fredric Jameson. *The Political Unconscious*.

> *To each his own bubble; that is the law today. Just as we have reached the limits of geographic space and have explored all the confines of the planet, we can only implode into a space which is reduced daily as a result of our increasing mobility made possible by airplanes and the media . . .*
>
> Jean Baudrillard. *The Ecstasy of Communication.*

If the Kingdom of God was the great utopia of medieval Europe, shopping malls, amusement parks, casinos, reality TV, advertising, and so on, are identified as the great utopias of late capitalism by a number of intellectuals and scholars, mostly from the left.[3] The remedy to oppression and alienation, or to boredom (all plagues for which, the aforementioned thinkers argue, the system is responsible in the first place), is provided in the guise of various simulated escape ways: consumption of material commodities or "ideal" commodities (ads, the news), extreme sports, packaged adventures tours, survival courses,

material accumulation…After the drudgery of the week days, the week-end is the time of leisure and consumption where one can wander in the shining labyrinths of supermarkets, or dream about the hyperreal experiences provided by artificial encapsulated environments such as Disneyland, Las Vegas, or Dubai. At the same time, one senses a powerful urge to escape contrived experiences by recreating authentic or natural experiences. Everywhere, the uneasy perception that these utopias and escape ways are mere commodities results in an escalation in the attempt to find genuine experience and "touch" the "real." Ways to counteract the "death" of experience are manifold. Extreme sports are sought for when one becomes aware that conventional sports have become institutionalized escape route; adventure trips or survival journeys (involving real physical risks) promise travelers jaded by conventional packaged tours to rediscover the sensations of the seasoned 19th century explorer; in addition of being healthier, organic food is supposed to bring the consumer into closer proximity with nature and enable him to experience again "real" flavors.

In his criticism of the rationalization of life due to instrumental rationality, Erich Fromm asserts that capitalism's most praised virtues, "individual initiative, the readiness to take risks, independence—have long disappeared from industrial society and are to be found mainly in westerns and among gangsters" (34). Likewise, Tim Amstrong understands modern man's desire to "return to violent life, to frontier life" as an attempt to recover his "natural drives" and an answer to the "technological conquest of nature" (170) and to the dehumanization of modern life that is thought to accompany technological progress (E. M. Forster's mourning of the loss of "the sense of space" (62) in "The Machine Stops" is archetypal). Idealized visions of struggle and discovery on the ever-receding edge of the world are the staple of such diverse sub-genres as Victorian adventures in lost worlds, westerns and space operas. They often perpetuate the romantic opposition between city and countryside as respective sites of

alienation and freedom. When viewed as compensatory fantasies, the power of these visions is proportional to the perceived unsatisfactory conditions of life under capitalism.

The desire to get away is by no means uncommon in the literature of science fiction. For instance, in a sub-genre such as space opera, outward movement, and the search for new experiences, wonder, or extra-terrestrial truth, often partly reflects discontent with local circumstances. The frontier myth, one of the founding myths of American culture, is transposed as it stands in science fiction and quintessentially expresses this desire. According to Rabkin, however, while the possibility of an actual return to nature is still entertained in the industrial novel, such a return is made impossible by the disappearance of nature in the post-industrial novel (168). There is little doubt that Dick's works largely belong to the latter category. As Baudrillard (124-25) and Christopher Palmer (50-51) both claim, Dick's fiction is one of implosion, in which the urge to escape, albeit seemingly legitimate and necessary, generally only leads to further entrapment. Palmer's view that Dick's works may be seen as a rejection of modernity's (especially America's) celebration of expansion and the concomitant association of technology with progress is most persuasive (56). In Dick's works, the return to nature and frontier life is either debased (*Martian Time-Slip* [1964] and *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* [1965]) or impossible (*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* [1968]). According to Henry Nash Smith, American's image of the Western frontier is formed by two symbolic landscapes: the Garden of the world and the Great American Desert.[4] Although Dick largely borrows from this imaginary in his works, the move toward the space frontier almost never reveals bountiful nature: his gardens are often desiccated, failing to survive in the midst of the immense inhospitable desert of the Martian settings (see *Martian Time-Slip* and *Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*).[5] The frontier is more often than not, either a fantastic dream or a place of exile rather than a new land of opportunity and adventures. As Rabkin contends, technology is often regarded by Dick simultaneously as the

cause of nature's destruction and the only way to remedy this loss (168). In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and "Precious Artifact," the simulacra of animals are necessary to the psychological balance of the human characters. Likewise, the synthetic life forms created by the technician Himmel in *Now Wait for Last Year* are viewed as a vital force countering the death drive (11, 223). The situation of the Dickian protagonist in this regard is remarkably similar to the predicament of modern man as per Hannah Arendt: "Wherever he goes, [man] encounters only himself. All the processes of the earth and the universe have revealed themselves either as man-made or as potentially man-made" (89).

Yet, although nature has disappeared and movement often leads to further entrapment, there remains in almost all of Dick's works an indomitable desire to move away from present circumstances. There is a fundamental ambivalence in Dick's appraisal of movement and novelty, which Palmer, making use of Jameson's notion of political unconscious, interprets as Dick's "response to his society" (58). To be more precise, the modern perception of change as both destructive and a guarantee against stasis and entropic regression informs the tensions between static and kinetic that lie at the core of Dick's fiction and "[twists] modernity towards postmodernity: we have change without direction . . . rather than a movement to something new" (Palmer 59).

The tensions between static and kinetic are already most clearly delineated in the early but significant novel *Time Out of Joint*. Most of the novel could be read as a narrative of conflict between the pull towards novelty (epitomized by space travel) and the attraction of the past. In a crucial passage too long to be quoted *in extenso*, the narrator Ragle Gumm infuses the concept of mobility with an anthropological—even universal—quality:

> [Journeying out into space] answered, for him, a need that he had never been aware of. A deep restless yearning under the surface, always there in him, throughout his life, but not articulated. The need to travel on. To migrate.
>
> His ancestors had migrated . . . When they had reached the Mediterranean they had settled down, because they had reached the edge of the world; there was no place left to go. And then later, hundreds of years later, reports had arrived that other places existed . . . They made now, in these ships, the final leap. Every variety of life made its migration, traveled on. It was a universal need, a universal experience . . . An instinct, the most primitive drive, as well as the most noble and complex. (203-04)

Motion toward novelty is seen here as a transhistorical phenomenon and the need to move as an intrinsic component of man's psyche or even a sort of vital force pushing life forms away from their cradle.[6] It is quite puzzling, however, that Gumm's somewhat grandiloquent encomium to exploration is immediately followed by a remembrance of his childhood. His nostalgia takes the shape of a psychotic return to the past: "Spending his time meditating about the 'fifties . . . one day, he found himself back in the 'fifties. It had seemed a marvelous event to him" (204). A detailed account of a scene from his childhood then reveals the significance of commodities in Gumm's "Golden Age":

> *Trade-in on electric razors, he thought as he watched his mother and father go off toward the drug department of Ernie's Shopping Center. Seven-fifty for your old razor, regardless of make. No ominous preoccupation: the pleasure of buying. Above his head the shiny signs. Colors of shifting ads. The brightness, the splendor. He wandered about the parking lot, among the long pastel cars, gazing up at the signs,*

reading the words in the window displays. Schilling drip coffee 69¢ a pound. Gosh, he thought. What a buy.

His eyes took in sight of merchandise, cars, people, counters; he thought, What a lot to look at. What a lot to examine. A fair, practically . . . The excitement.

(. . .)

'Do you enjoy this?' the woman asked. 'Roaming around here in the different stores while your parents are shopping?'

'Sure,' he said . . .

The woman said, 'Is it because you feel that everything you might need is available here? A big store, a supermarket, is a complete world in itself?' . . .

'So there's nothing to fear,' the woman said. 'No need to feel anxiety. You can relax. Find peace, here.' (205-06, italics in the original)

This striking vision of the shopping mall as a colorful, exciting, and fulfilling self-enclosed totality ("a complete world in itself"), a phantasmatic retreat away from the anxiety caused by reality, already captures the utopian resonances that such places of consumption will gradually acquire in the course of the development of consumer society. Moreover, it is worth noting that in spite of the praise previously devoted to spatial move (and the unusual happy ending of *Time Out of Joint*), the withdrawal into the past is often the only move allowed to Dick's characters.

This being said, the impulse behind spatial motion is the same persistent psychological urge that drives the characters to return to the past. It is fundamentally a utopian longing and its existence is not predicated on the outcome of the emancipatory attempts it gives rise to. Hence, while one can hardly disagree with Palmer's claim that science fiction's habitual celebration of motion is problematized in Dickian fiction, it remains more difficult to

construe, as Palmer does, Dick's spatial thematic as a mere borrowing from the megatext of SF (Palmer 50). Rather, spatial motion is as much a common trope of science fiction as the vehicle (and the *frame*) through which the urge to escape and to find novelty are disclosed in Dick's fiction. What Palmer perceptively describes as the "absence of the experience of the kinetic" (51) or the "nullity" (52) between destinations found repeatedly in Dick's works testifies to the author's brilliant insight into the change in the experience of travel. Boorstin is one of the fiercest commentators of this new modern travel experience. For him, "the experience of going there . . . has become diluted, contrived, prefabricated" (79), the traveler is "passive" (84), and merely consuming a "commodity" (85). The automobile (like Dick's spaceship) is "the new moving 'picture window' through which we can look out from air-conditioned comfort" (111) at a fast unfolding stream of meaningless and unconnected images. But in Dick's fiction this absence of fulfillment is as significant as the celebration of movement found in other science fiction writers. The global failure of motion to meet its utopian promise does not prevent Dick to come back again and again to the motif of space travel, not so much because it is his megatextual starting point, as because it somehow retains its value for both expressing and *constituting* the utopian longing. Spatial motion is both posed as the object of desire and retroactively constructs desire.

In "Bubbles" the possibility to discover the unknown is a psychic necessity. Only movement into the new can ensure the release of dangerously pent up libido and fight *ennui*, which is why reaching the edge of the world is such a catastrophe. The problem faced by human society here is that the map entirely covers the territory leaving no natural outlet, and the only solution that remains is to manufacture one: "All of us have energy, the desire to move, act, do. But we're bottled up here, sealed off, on one planet. So we buy Worldcraft bubbles and make little worlds of our own. But microscopic worlds aren't enough" (198). The failure of the bubbles to compensate for the real thing is explained in terms of their lack

of authenticity. This may be an illustration of Dick's unfailing distrust of mass production. If, as Rabkin affirms, in Dick's works rational replication "steals value from nearly everything" (168) through the overall equivalency it establishes amongst the copies, it is no coincidence that the problem of the authenticity of the bubbles is discussed in the context of the commodity system. In addition to being mass produced, Worldcraft bubbles are advertised and marketed before being sold, and furthermore they give rise to spin-off, educational materials for using the bubbles, and official tournaments as a way to incite consumers to stay up-to-date. It is an escape way that is culturally promoted, institutionalized as it were, thus thoroughly undermining its authenticity.

Walter Benjamin understands Baudelaire's praise of "the inestimable value of novelty" (to use Benjamin's terms) as the French poet's attempt to counteract the commodification of art and distinguish genuine art from commodity. For Baudelaire novelty constitutes a non-commodifiable absolute, preserving the work of art from reification (22) and thus saving it from the disappearance of value entailed by commodification. By adducing the case of fashion, however, Benjamin shows that newness is in no way immune to commodification, but quite to the contrary that the valorization of novelty may in fact strictly mark the neurotic logic of consumerism: new products serve the dual functions of perpetuating the system and remedying boredom, which is, however, a natural state under capitalism. In a likewise manner, the characters of Dick's story derive their frustration from their sensing that instead of revealing another world and allowing them to find newness (as space exploration would supposedly do), the bubbles are specifically designed to promote the consumption of a false novelty. Desire for genuine novelty (Rimbaud's "change life" and Marx's "change the world") is cathected onto commodities. The irrational rationality of consumption demands that consumers follow a sort of repetition compulsion. The quest for novelty becomes a series of obsessive repetitions of past disappointments with commodities: the latest commodity is

no different from the last in that it fails to gratify desire. The bubbles are deprived of value by the logic of commodification and by being treated as means. In this respect, bubbles are identical to the package holidays and organized tours analyzed by Boorstin on the one hand and Cohen and Taylor on the other: the contrived, functionalist, commodified nature of the experience they provide is, in the end, unlikely to satisfy the aspirations of the users.[7] Nevertheless, while the tourist described by Cohen and Taylor might be able to comment ironically on his disappointment over his package holidays, irony is not available to the characters of "Bubbles," for their anger is not the result of understanding that they have been "done" but the terrible realization that authenticity itself has disappeared from their world. In other words, the problem is not that the trip is not real, but instead that real trips are no longer imaginable. In this context, the plea of the main character for recognizing that the life forms contained in the bubbles are real may be read as an ultimate attempt to guard them from the reification caused by the commodification process (200). Indeed, to grant autonomy to these artificial civilizations, to recognize their capability of creating individual histories, that would make them truly new, truly different, rather than the technological projection of human interiority. The bubbles are originally an attempt to find otherness. They embody the search for an alternative reality.

In the insightful chapter he devotes to the study of novum, Istvan Csicsery Ronay, Jr. evokes Ernst Bloch's conception of the Novum:

> A Novum . . . is a moment of newness in history that refreshes human collective consciousness, awakening it from the trancelike sense of history as fated and empty, into awareness that it can be changed. The Blochian Novum is "the unexpectedly new, which pushes humanity out of its present toward the not yet realized. (*Seven Beauties* 47)

The failure of the bubbles to embody Bloch's Novum may be an indication of Dick's distrust of techno-capitalist solution to the problems of history. Instead of a Novum releasing it from its stasis, what the desperately bored civilization of "Bubbles" obtains is a commodified novelty, for that's only what technology is able to produce when it operates under the sway of a consumerist logic.

We can understand the ending of the story (in a final reversal the characters' reality is revealed to be a bubble and starts collapsing) by identifying the bubbles as technological artifacts with the characters' mental "bubbles" of fantasy. The destruction of the world is thus not so much a fitting moral punishment (humans have destroyed the bubbles and the beings they contained, now it's their turn) as a fantasized vengeance (of both author and characters) against the world: the revenge of the death drive. Homeopathic spending of energy (namely simulating spatial motion, exploration, and discovery in the miniature worlds of the bubbles) is not psychologically satisfactory and sustainable, causing the end of the fantasy (that is the destruction of both the technological bubbles and their psychological counterparts in the Characters' mental space). But this does not mean acceptation of reality, of the world as it is. Quite the contrary: repressed energy breaks loose and takes the shape of nihilism: a desire that the world ends, not with a whimper, but a bang.[8] Or, as Jameson puts it in another context: "Rather nihilism than ennui, rather an orchestral pessimism and a metaphysical vision of cosmic entropy than too stark and unpleasant a sense of the systematic exclusion of "value" by the new logic of capitalist social organization" (*Political Unconscious* 252). The destruction of this absurd and hateful world from which all value has disappeared is the ultimate attempt to imagine something that escapes human control. When all real alternatives are precluded by the system, change simulated, and value stolen by commodification, only

death can bring about genuine novelty.[9] Baudelaire forcefully chants this in his journey into nothingness:

> We've seen this country, Death! We're sick of it! Let's go!
> The sky is black; black is the curling crest, the trough
> Of the deep wave; yet crowd the sail on, even so!
>
> Pour us your poison wine that makes us feel like gods!
> Our brains are burning up! — there's nothing left to do
> But plunge into the void! — hell? heaven? — what's the odds?
> We're bound for the Unknown, in search of something new!

2. Paradise Lost

The only true paradise is a paradise we have lost.

Marcel Proust. *In Search of Lost Time*.

When the move toward the new is impossible, there remains the possibility to fantasize the return to a golden age of freedom, opportunity, and power. This direction has the preference of many characters of Dick. Thus, in contrast with “Bubbles,” “Town” and “Exhibit” evoke such a return to the past by strongly drawing on Freud’s comparison of the realm of fantasy to natural and historical reserves. The Freudian account deserves to be quoted at length, as it throws light on the recovery of the past, which is staged many times in Dick’s works:

> The creation of the mental realm of phantasy finds a perfect parallel in the establishment of “reservations” or “nature reserves” in places where the

> requirements of agriculture, communications and industry threaten to bring about changes in the original face of the earth which will quickly make it unrecognizable. A nature reserve preserves its original state which everywhere else has to our regret been sacrificed to necessity. Everything, including what is useless and even what is noxious, can grow and proliferate there as it pleases. The mental realm of phantasy is just such a reservation withdrawn from the reality principle. (*Introductory Lectures* 372)[10]

Clearly, the maquette of "Town" and the diorama of "Exhibit" are material equivalents of psychic recesses supposed to protect the subject from destructive change and repressive society either through a return to the past ("Exhibit") or the suspension of time ("Town"). Accumulation of memories, of objects from one's life story, and recreation of the past in every minute detail are all ways to hold to the unity of the self. This is made clear in other works. For instance, in *The Cosmic Puppets*, the protagonist's return to the town he inhabited in his youth is explicitly understood as a quest for identity: "I came here [hometown] to find myself" (59) (see also 28 and 38). Memory is also the seat from which is undertaken the quest for the real (109). Jameson observes that "psychologically, the drive toward unity takes the form of an obsession with the past and with memory" (*Marxism and Form* 62). At the same time, we will see in the next section that Dick seems to entertain the idea that the unity of the subject (of the centered self, of the autonomous subjectivity) is itself a "bourgeois move," a *compensation*, and a defense mechanism: the "fortress" of the ego is erected higher and higher in the face of the growing sense of fragmentation brought on by the corrosive forces of the capitalist external world. The cases of Haskel and Miller do not, however, forthrightly support the optimistic belief that "the *recherche du temps perdu* becomes the vehicle of future liberation" (Marcuse [1955] 19, italics in the original).[11] Instead, the

gratification they obtain is, here also, as much a relief from the reality principle as a manifestation of the death drive: the impulse to die on one's "own terms" rather than the "death" of the self that is wrought by the world of capitalist alienation. A propos "Small Town," Dick himself observes that the frustrations of Haskel are "transformed into something sinister: the force of death" (*Collected Stories Volume 2* 381). While Verne Haskel is described as an impotent human being, "this conceals a drive at his core self which is anything but weak . . . he may be a mask for thanatos: the antagonist of life; he may not secretly wish to rule; he may wish to destroy" (*Collected Stories Volume 2* 381).

To avoid any misunderstanding: the "death" that is looked for in the death drive is a death on one's "own terms" (Freud: "The organism wishes to die only in its own fashion" [*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 312]) and must be distinguished from the "death" of the self that is brought on by the total incorporation into an alienating society. In this context, the *idea* of suicide can be understood as a paradoxical nihilistic affirmation of the self, an ultimate protestation against alienation and dislocation. Cohen and Taylor observe: "The killing of oneself . . . becomes a declaration that personal identity transcends every societal inhibition: individual autonomy is absolute" (210). In *Now Wait for Last Year*, there is an extended discussion of the ethicality of allowing a patient to commit suicide. The protagonist (and surgeon) Eric Sweetscent holds a paradoxical view regarding suicide: "Despite his code, the ethical under-structure of medicine, he believed – and it was based on certain very real experiences in his own life – that if a man wanted to die he had the right to die" (44). Rather than the ethicality of suicide, what is at stake is really the death drive, that is, the freedom of the self to choose its own death. Thus, when a patient of Sweetscent, Gino Molinari, is able to feel better simply by knowing that there still remains open a way out ("[Molinari] seemed now to relax a little, to experience some peace" [43]), Sweetscent understands "Gino Molinari's yearning for death . . . as a release – the only dependable release that existed" (50).

The death drive also informs the ending of the short story "Sales Pitch," in which only suicide enables the protagonist Morris to escape from his society. The vertiginous plunge of his spacecraft into deep space is experienced as a sort of sublime reconciliation with the universe, a joyful return to nothingness:

> The splintered debris that had been his ship was still hurling toward Centaurus . . . In the viewscreen the vast flaming bulk of the twin suns grew quietly, inexorably.
>
> He was glad. In the silence of the ruined ship he lay buried beneath the debris, gratefully watching the growing bulk. It was a beautiful sight. He had wanted to see it for a long time. There it was, coming closer each moment. In a day or two the ship would plunge into the fiery mass and be consumed. But he could enjoy this interval; there was nothing to disturb his happiness . . .
>
> A vast peace descended over him. He could lie here without stirring, and the flaming magnificence would come nearer and nearer . . . (186)

Morris's comforted dive into the conflagration, the collapse of the bubbles, Haskel's mind gradually fossilizing into his small town, and Miller losing himself among the inanimate facades and empty chambers of his replica: all these dissolutions exemplify Freud's characterization of the drive as a "return to the quiescence of the inorganic world" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 87).[12]

Taken together, "Bubbles," "Exhibit," and "Town" illustrate Dick's ambivalent treatment of movement and stasis as a response to two issues. On the one hand, there is what Palmer calls "the contradiction between SF's confident kinetic extraversion and the unbalanced nature of change" (59) in modernity, and, on the other hand there is capitalism's

simultaneous extolment and deflection of novelty. While returning to the past is simultaneously viewed as a legitimate attempt to escape the frustrations of everyday life under the regime of capitalism and condemned as compulsive repetition or narcissistic regression, Dick's portrayal of futuristic societies as oppressive bureaucracies casts serious doubt on the idea of progress. Likewise, while the quest for novelty may originally express a genuine desire to change life, it is soon neutralized and becomes a structural underpinning of consumerism.

Jameson signals that for Bloch, "the doctrine of hope has not one, but two basic philosophical adversaries: nihilism and anamnesis; or to put it another way, the experience of hope has not one, but two opposites: anxiety and memory" (*Marxism and Form* 128). With its wish to replace dissatisfaction with nothingness "Bubbles" corresponds to nihilism, whereas the search for plenitude in the past found in both "Exhibit Piece" and "Town" corresponds to anamnesis. It would seem, then, that Dick adheres to a dystopian view of fantasy. The following two sections attempt to understand why fantasized replacements of reality fail to fulfil their utopian promise.

3. The Individual, the Social, and the Death of the Subject

In all three stories, escapism constitutes a form of social criticism, in the sense that it is a direct reaction to alienation, which is in turn identified as the disruption of collective bonds (especially within family and the workplace) by both capitalism and the rational organization of every aspect of life. At first glance, fantasy is an attempt to distance oneself from the conditions of being in a place and time whose contradictions have become unbearable, as well as an imaginary restoration of that which has been alienated. As Marcuse puts it:

> The manifold forms of regression are unconscious protest against the insufficiency of civilization: against the prevalence of toil over pleasure, performance over gratification . . . They aim not only against the reality principle, at non-being, but also beyond the reality principle- at another mode of being. (*Eros and Civilization* 109)

Drawing on Lacanian theory, Rosemary Jackson shows how "fantasies try to *reverse* or rupture the process of ego formation which took place during the mirror stage, i.e. they attempt to reenter the imaginary" (90, emphasis in the original). In particular, she views fantasy's staging of the retreat from the Lacanian symbolic order into the imaginary order as a protest against the prohibitions of society. Dick's insistence on the social origin of the protagonists' dissatisfaction may then allow us to read their attempt to escape as a desire to return to the imaginary order preceding socialization. While in Victorian tales of dualism such as *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) or *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), the revolt against social norms is carried out by the double of the main character, in Dick it is reality itself that is doubled so as to create a space where the subject has the illusion of being freed from the rules of society. Among the three narratives considered, Haskel's fantasy appears to bear the most striking similarity with Jackson's description of the imaginary order as "a state of primary narcissism [where there is] no discrepancy between self (as perceiving subject) and other (as perceived object)" (89). Yet, for Dick, it is seldom a matter of simply opposing the individual to society. Rather, there is a profound contradiction at the core of the individual's behavior: a simultaneous denial and longing for the collective. Thus, Haskel's small town is neither a romantic escape from society nor the mere negation of everyday life, but rather a nostalgic and reactionary attempt to recreate a lost sociality. In the fantasy of regaining the consideration—or at least frightened deference—of others, we sense

a hunger for unity and unanimity. Difference is not to be tolerated, for it threatens the community (incidentally, inequalities of wealth among the citizens of Haskel's town are toned down presumably less for the sake of justice than for fear they might cause social unrest). Haskel aims at reversing the fragmentation of both the external world and the subject that is entailed by capitalism. The nature of his hobby is therefore not irrelevant. Building a town anew has deep political and psychological resonances (one needs only to remember the numerous comparisons between the city and the body-soul in the writings of Plato or Aristotle for example). In "Exhibit," Miller's fantasy of living in Twentieth Century America is also a dream of reintegration into social wholeness. His rejection takes the shape of an opposition between, on the one hand, the putative "organic" character of family and community, and, on the other hand, incorporation into what he calls a mechanistic "impersonal cultural totality" (156). Finally, Jackson's likening of Freud's death drive to a "desire for undifferentiation" (72), which characterizes the subject's return to the imaginary order, echoes Dick's own reference to Thanatos for explaining Haskel's withdrawal (*Collected Stories Volume 2* 381).

The problem of the individual and society is not an isolated phenomenon in Dick's works. The threat posed by society to the autonomy of the individual subject is, on the face of it, the major impetus which sets in motion the process of fantasy, but we need to examine in more details first the social and then the economical contexts in which this confrontation takes place in order to delineate the nature of this threat. To that purpose, it is useful to turn our attention to longer works in which these elements are more fully developed.

In *The Man Who Japed*, the necessity of recognizing human reality, that is, the reality of other human beings is undermined by the awareness of the likely alienation entailed by social integration. Thus, the protagonist Allen Purcell's belief that "a man was primarily responsible to his fellows, and it was with his fellows that he made his life" (26-27) is contrasted with

that of his friends Gates and Sugermann who decided to live outside society in order to preserve their autonomy:

> There're two men [Gates and Sugermann] . . . squatting in the ruins, off in Hokkaido. That place is contaminated. Everything's dead, there. They have one future; they're waiting for it. Gates and Sugermann would rather be dead than come back here [society]. If they came back here they'd have to become social beings; they'd have to sacrifice some part of their ineffable selves. And that is certainly an awful thing. (27)

The death drive surfaces here again in the idea that conforming to the social order implies a curtailment of the self so unbearable that escape (even into death!) is preferable. There is a fundamental contradiction, however, in the appraisal of the behavior of Gates and Sugermann, for their exile from society is simultaneously viewed as an escapist move and "a protest of some sort" (27). Purcell's wife hints at the other implications of refusing social integration (even to the point of dying): "But in dying they make an important point" (27). In this novel, as elsewhere, the reader of Dick constantly senses the author's inability to decide once and for all between the moral condemnation of escapism and the powerful urge to pack it all. The narrative's closure is similar to the downbeat endings of many other works. After being offered an ultimate chance to flee his stifling society and begin a new life on Sirius (a planet where he can be free, work, and live a meaningful life), Purcell eventually refuses and prefers to face the consequences of his social rebellion. The reason for such a decision is not very clear. In the last pages (170-72), hints are given that Purcell feels that his duty commands him to remain with other oppressed individuals in order to continue the fight to change society, whereas going to Sirius would mean to choose the easy way out.

In *Solar Lottery*, the dilemma of the protagonist Ted Benteley is also constituted by his desire of social integration ("I want to obey the laws! I want to respect them!" [151]) and the recognition that the common law is ethically unacceptable: "What are you supposed to do in a society that's corrupt? Are you supposed to obey corrupt laws? Is it a crime to break a law that's a rotten law, or an oath that's rotten?" (147). Moreover, the respect of law is conditioned not on the fear of the punishment impending on the breaking of the law but for its own sake: "I never kept an oath because I was afraid of breaking it. I kept it because I didn't think it should be broken" (148). This is the Kantian categorical imperative: the individual moral transcends responsibility to the law of society.

In this novel, the problem does not seem to rest so much on a fundamental incompatibility between individual and society as on the nature of political representation. Benteley appears to retains a belief that institutions are not "just offices and desks," but represent something: "[An institution] stands above all of us. It's bigger than any man or any group of men. Yet, in a way, it's everybody" (80). In theory, then, heteronomy, that is, the fact of being deprived of the capacity to choose one's own laws and norms, could be overcome provided adequate structural changes are made. In *Solar Lottery*—in contrast with more "postmodern" later works by Dick—the lack of foundation is not felt so strongly as to prevent the attempt of developing a new social imaginary. Benteley's voicing his determination to build another system is a very rare example of utopian moment in Dick's fiction: "I've got to build up the new. It has to be different for other people. I'd like to do something that *really alters* things" (166, my emphasis).

Nevertheless, there are already hints of the impossibility for individual consciousness to serve as a valid foundation for rebellion. Thus, in the following dialogue, Benteley wonders about the possibility to ground knowledge in the subject:

> ‘Who decides when the society is made up of criminals?’ Benteley demanded. ‘How do you know when your society has gone wrong? How do you know when it’s right to stop obeying the law?’
>
> ‘You just know,’ Rita O’Neill said fiercely.
>
> ‘You’ve got a built-in mechanism?’ Benteley asked the woman. ‘That’s great; I wish I had. I wish everybody had…It must be a hell of a handy thing. There’s six billion of us living in this system, and most of us think the system works just fine. Am I supposed to go against everybody around me? They’re all obeying the laws . . . How do I know I’m not a sick misfit? A quasi-psychotic?’ (148)

The problem is not only that there might be no capacity inhering in the subject (called “built-in mechanism” by Benteley who is probably alluding to Kant’s faculty of rationality) that allows it to reach the “objective foundation” of morality, but also that the very integrity of the subject is in question. In *Solar Lottery*, the advent of a new *episteme* and the end of the sovereign subject are prefigured by the figure of Keith Pellig, a robot prone to Rimbaldian introspections: “I’m a strange person. Sometimes I hardly know what I’m going to do or say next. Sometimes I seem a stranger to myself. Sometimes what I do surprises me and I can’t understand why I do it” (95-6).[13] The history of the subject does not, however, unfold in a parallel world. All the signs of the dissolution of the Cartesian self are made visible against the backdrop of the larger context of *systemic* socio-economic instability:

> The disintegration of the social and economic system had been slow, gradual, and profound. *It went so deep that people lost faith in natural law itself.* Nothing seemed stable or fixed; the universe was a sliding flux. Nobody knew

> what came next. Nobody could count on anything. Statistical prediction became popular…the very concept of cause and effect died out. People lost faith in the belief that they could control their environment; all that remained was probable sequence: good odds in a universe of random chance. (20, my emphasis)

In fact, this passage clearly links the metaphysical turmoil experienced by the subject (the profound discontinuity between individual experience and the external network of circumstances) to the disintegration of socio-economic reality, in particular the gradual alienation of social relation.

Solar Lottery is a very class-conscious novel. Witness for example Cartwright's (one of the major characters) ironical denigration of the government: "The checks and balances of this system work to check *us* and balance *them*" (23, my emphasis). Dick's critical approach to the economic structure of his fictional world is, however, quite surprising, for he seems to blend feudalist and capitalist (in the Fordist stage) class structures. The contract between employee and employer of a company is called a fealty oath, but while the standard capitalist contract can be broken, the non-respect of a fealty oath is punished by the death penalty. In fact, workers are neither ordinary wage-earners nor slaves but serfs. Below these serfs, there is an even lower class formed by outcasts (the novel lists the following: Mexican laborers, prostitutes, Japanese optical workmen, agronomy students, cooks, nurses, carpenters, and so on) whose common "sin" is to have "skills in their hands-not their heads" (22).[14] Benteley formulates a quasi-Marxian view (fairly exceptional for Dick, who is an author of a more or less liberal bent) of the worker's dispossession of the fruits of his labor: "For my time, skill, and loyalty I get money . . . I have a clean white lab and the use of equipment that costs more to build than I'll earn in a lifetime. I get status-insurance and total protection. But I wonder

what the end result of my work is. I wonder what it's finally put to. I wonder where it goes (11). Or: "The Hills [the big companies of Benteley's world] are corrupt . . . Instead of existing for the public good, they're parasites on the public" (12-3).

Dick does not seem to believe that consumption could compensate for alienated labor. Benteley voices this outlook on affluent society in the remarkable fourth chapter of the novel. Benteley is invited to a dinner by his wealthy friends the Davis. During the dinner (which takes place in front of the television), Benteley realizes that "his stomach was full of warm well-cooked food, but his mind was thin and empty" (48). Material abundance is clearly not enough: "You [the Davis] have a fine little place here. All the comforts and conveniences. I hope you'll be both very happy. I hope your cooking keeps on convincing you, in spite of me" (48). Alienation and working-class oppression cannot be offset by commodities, for the problem is one of freedom. As Marcuse puts it:

> People dwell in apartment concentrations—and have private automobiles with which they can no longer escape into a different world. They have huge refrigerators filled with frozen foods. They have dozens of newspapers and magazines that espouse the same ideals. They have innumerable choices, innumerable gadgets which are all of the same sort and keep them occupied and divert their attention from the real issue – which is the awareness that they could both work less and determine their own needs and satisfactions. (*Eros and Civilization* 100)

In Dick, the most accurate science fiction trope (or literalized metaphor) that describes the incorporation of the individual into society is that of telepathy. A telepath thus describes her peculiar experience of subjectivity: "You don't really live, not as a separate individual.

You're a sort of collective organism. You can't really love, you can't really hate. All you have is your job. Even that isn't yours" (79). Telepathy is here devoid of all the potential for transcendence it is invested with in so many science fiction works, and stands as the symbol of the reduction of the individual to a component part of a vast and impersonal social totality, a mere cog in the machine.[15] To this forced connection of people in the workplace corresponds the contrary reinforcement of solitude at home: "I want to be *me*! [But] I don't want to be alone. I hate waking up in the morning and finding nobody beside me. I hate coming home to an empty apartment. Dinner alone, cooking and keeping the place fixed up for myself. Turning on the lights at night, pulling down the shades. Watching tv" (79).

Now that we have demonstrated the importance of socio-economic factors in accounting for the attempt of the individual to regain his sense of the self through fantasy, let us turn our attention again to the three short stories that serve as the basis of our analysis. On the face of it, the portrayal of fantasy in "Town" and "Exhibit" elicits doubts as to whether it constitutes a departure from the symbolic order or merely the reinstitution of another law. Indeed, Haskel's new community is a surveillance society, which is "extremely moral" (351), and has efficient police forces and a "fine jail for undesirables" (351). These are all elements that suggest he has internalized repression. Resumption of the symbolic is also obvious in "Exhibit" where the old-fashioned language used by the protagonist to challenge his native society signifies at the same time his integration into the symbolic order of a past society.[16] In "Bubbles," domination is also the rule that governs the characters relationship to the world of their private fantasies. Far from questioning the necessity of a dominant value system, Haskel's, Miller's, and Hull's fantasies appear to substitute one order for another, while both characters continue to be spoken for by the symbolic structure. In these worlds, social determination cannot be evaded so simply. The fantasy impulse first emerges as a reaction against existing social arrangements but the solutions it offers are eventually embodied in

similar structures of domination. Not only does the existing structure of socialization condition the individual's representation of the social world in which he is immersed, but it also determines—or at least strongly shapes—his sedition itself and the very nature of his project of resistance. Dick's abiding suspicion of the manipulation of individual experience and desire in capitalist society accounts for his pessimistic treatment of fantasy.

Moylan characterizes Dick as "one of the more pessimistic explorers of the dystopian imagination in the 1960s and 1970s" (*Scraps of the Untainted Sky* 172) and it is undeniable that his characters do not have much elbow room, leaning either toward nihilistic pessimism ("Bubbles") or escape into fantasy ("Exhibit" and "Town"), or toward a pragmatic pessimism that favors limited, local solutions over global structural social change as in most of his novels.[17] Dickian helplessness arises, perhaps, from the author's awareness that escape hatches are often manufactured by the system and that engaging in apparently subversive fantasies is in fact simply playing another official script. At the same time, helplessness does not necessarily entail resignation. Despite their repeated failures, the characters' irrepressible need to escape may be a testimony to the legitimacy of doing so, and may allow them (and us) to become more aware of the contradictions of their world. As Cohen and Taylor suggests: "The very activity of 'attempting' to escape is an imaginative way to understand more about the limitations of our world" (28).

4. The World as a Picture: The Aesthetics of Power and Closure

The aesthetics of the three fantasy realms is an aesthetic of power which expresses a specific relationship of man to reality in which the latter is seen as a picture:

— Absolute transparency and penetrability. The wish to seize reality down to the subatomic level (the magnifying apparatus of "Bubbles"), the panoptical superegotic gaze of Haskel

hovering above his well-lit town, and the possibility of wandering into the three dimensionality of Miller's diorama: this is the end of secrecy.

— Control. All three fantasies are power fantasies that entail a total objectification of the world. Gabriel McKee points out the significance of Martin Buber's notion of the You and the It for understanding Dick's insistence throughout his works on the moral necessity of recognizing "the subjectivity of another being, rather than viewing it as a mere object" (McKee 18). In "Bubbles," the protest of the protagonist (200) can thus be understood as an urge to go beyond the subject-object relationship.

— Closure. Temporal closure (the eternal return of "Exhibit," the eternal now of "Town," and the time immeasurably dilated by boredom in "Bubbles") is almost always a sign of pathology in Dick. In addition, the dream of an internally cohesive world sealed off from both society and history is condemned to ideological closure. As Rossi observes: "What we have at the end [of 'Town'] is a one-man utopia: Verne's dream of an ideal town comes true. But what is utopia to one person may well be a dystopia to others" (218).[18] The protagonists convey their desire for the totality of a collective state through the creation of an artistic totality. However, although the bubbles, the exhibit, and the small town, all aim at wholeness, they do not follow Adorno's distinction between the desirable totality of the work of art and the "bad" totality of totalitarianism.[19] They—but this is especially true of Haskel's town—integrate the particular into the general and submit all elements to a single dominant logic. Each particular detail of the work is forced to obey a general principle of organization in a process of totalization that is not without evoking the loss of individuality that characterizes social life under the regime of capitalism. In both contents and form, it is as if works of art were not able to evade the influence of extra-aesthetic concerns and were doomed to betray their transformative purposes.

The mimetic representation of the world as a picture, i.e. as an internally coherent, ordered, stable and self-enclosed totality that is entirely knowable through the gaze of the subject, is a defining characteristic of the three fantasies depicted in "Town," "Exhibit" and "Bubbles." It is no coincidence that the sense of sight is viewed as an instrument of both domination and knowledge. As Jackson observes, "Knowledge, comprehension, reason, are established though the power of the *look*, through the '*eye*' and the '*I*' of the human subject whose relation to objects is structured through his field of vision" (45, emphasis in the original). At the same time, Dick's manner of criticizing fantasy in these stories is very similar to how he expresses his hostility towards the notion of absolute reality in other works, in particular, how absolute reality purportedly serves as an ideological foundation for power. David Golumbia strongly emphasizes this anti-realist strand in Dick's works: "It isn't the falsity, or the deceptiveness, of the ideologically-imposed Reality, but the very attempt to *posit* such a reality that is called into question" (93, emphasis in the original). Furthermore, for Dick, univocal understandings of the world are not only morally questionable, but also the sign of rationality gone mad:

> *All* systems—that is, any theoretical, verbal, symbolic, semantic, etc., formulation that attempts to act as an all-encompassing, all-explaining hypothesis of what the universe is about—are the manifestation of paranoia. We should be content with the mysterious, the meaningless, the contradictory, the hostile . . . . ("The Android and the Human" 208, emphasis in the original)

It may be that the central issue in these texts is not the danger of losing one's grip on reality, but rather the wish to force reality to match preconceived notions with the final result being foreclosure of any real possibilities for change. Moreover, by constructing fantasies that

mirror the main characteristics (wholeness, coherence, order and stability) that realists associate with reality, the three stories would seem to gesture toward the idea that it is the ideas of totality and Real themselves which are fantasies.

5. Ambivalence, or How "to Hold Two Opposing Ideas in Mind at the Same Time and Still Retain the Ability to Function"

The psychoanalytic reading of the three stories as illustrating the Freudian notion of images as substitutes for desire is problematized when the realm of fantasy begins to encroach on or even supersede mundane reality, apparently testifying to a revenge of magical thinking against the reality principle. More precisely, on a first (epistemic) level, the authority of psychiatry is completely undermined: the psychiatrist as embodiment of reason and the person "supposed to know" is either ridiculed (the libidinous psychiatrist of "Town") or put in the same position as his presumably psychotic patient ("Exhibit").[20] On a second (metaphysical) level, it is the existence of reality independent of the mind—its solidity and its imperviousness to desire and imagination—that are challenged, sometimes in an almost exulting manner as in "Town" and "Exhibit." At this point, images are no longer viewed only as surrogates but become effectors of a radical transformation. Yet, this can hardly be regarded as a straightforward celebration of the liberatory potential of fantasy, for the refashioning of reality by desire, far from being a utopian breakthrough, reproduces and reinforces the closure of the oppressive societies the protagonists wanted to escape in the first place. It is as if Dick were trying to resist the notion of fantasy as compensation while simultaneously refusing to endorse the emancipatory view.

Several scholars single out ambivalence as a central characteristic of Dick's literary project. Thus, while John Huntington views Dick as "inhabit[ing] two antithetical value systems at once" (157), Palmer sees his works as "the imaginary irresolution of [the] real

contradictions" of his society (60). For Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., ambivalence is not limited to thematic concerns, but is also revealed in the author's relationship with the fictional genre:

> One could argue that Dick gravitated towards SF and wrote his best works within the confine of the genre because SF allowed him to express maximum ambivalence toward the world: toward received ideas about identity, history, necessity, natural laws, social institutions and power, and toward the genre itself.

Dickian ambivalence toward the "reality" of the real is notorious and it will be sufficient here to summarize it briefly. On the one hand, there is the realist, quasi-platonic Dick for whom the world of appearances is a prison to be escaped from so as to enter a transcendent, absolute reality. On the other hand, there is an anti-realist Dick who dismisses as "a vain pursuit [and] a bourgeois folly" (Huntington 157) the quest of the realist. While the latter dreams of liberation in another truer world, the former believes that the very concept of absolute reality is detrimental to freedom and conceives realism as undergirding power. These contradictions are also perceptible in the conflictual attitude of the Dickian protagonist: either a quasi-religious transcendence of the illusory reality, or the rejection of the metaphysical solution followed by a commitment to ordinary life and struggle in the world we live in. Likewise, the narratives' oscillation between indeterminacy and denouement reflects the conflict between the author's desire to find a solution to the reality problem and his hostility towards closure.[21] Inevitably, Philip K. Dick's mixed attitude toward metaphysical realism has consequences for his handling of the literary form. What follows explores the ways in which "Town," "Exhibit," and "Bubbles" may be read as Dick's self-conscious reflection on his literary

activity in connection with his ambivalent appraisal of the subversive potential of fantasy and science fiction.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Rebel

If we agree with Palmer (107) and Rossi (218) that "Exhibit" and "Town" are covert allegories of authorship and represent the transactions between the writer, his creations and reality, it is tempting to read the overthrowing of diegetic realities by fantasy as the expression of Dick's belief in the capacity of the writing activity to challenge not only our assumptions about the real, but also and more surprisingly, the real itself. The penetrability of the object-world by the desiring subject of the stories (Durham 176) would correspond with the author's belief that "words are things [that] can exert force and accomplished desired ends" ("Who Is an SF Writer?" 74) in the world outside the story. Writing would be a sort of magical operation with the same potential to mold reality as technology. This is the consolatory and wish-fulfilling aspect of these texts: in a romantic idealist move, thought seems to be endowed with the capacity to change material circumstances. It is one of Dick's characteristic, however, to refuse containing magical thinking in the mental space, as in a work like Michelangelo Antonioni's movie *Zabriskie Point*. In the famous ending sequence, the heroine's fantasized destruction of household commodities (which of course symbolizes the total destruction of the capitalist world) is cinematically shown in utmost details and presented as an ecstatic revenge of the mind against the commodification of American life. It can be argued, however, that the potency of this scene is undercut by Antonioni's decision of including a final shot revealing the house to be intact and the heroine going away, apparently satisfied with this mere mental compensation. No such thing in Dick, for he is not afraid to allow fantasy to contaminate the real and conversely rarely allows things to go back to their exact original state.

The view of writing as a challenge to reality is supported by the numerous statements in which Dick emphatically advocates science fiction as a protest medium. For instance: "Science fiction is a rebellious art form and it needs writers and readers with bad attitudes—an attitude of, 'Why?' Or, 'How Come?' Or, 'Who Says?' This gets sublimated into such themes as appear in my writing as, 'Is the universe real?'" ("Introduction" 85). But rebelling against the "tyranny of concrete reality" should not end up in a mere dismissal of the world but instead endeavors to change it. Accordingly, he wants to see the science fiction writer as "a literary figure as well as a little of the politician" ("Who Is an SF Writer?" 74) and his activity as a way to explore other possibilities and existential/social arrangements. The outside perspectives provided by fantasy and science fiction are supposed to cast a critical light on the ideas consecrated by a given epoch. We have seen that "Bubbles," "Exhibit," and especially "Town," indirectly illustrate this critical function of fantasy. These texts dispute the legitimacy of accepted reality by showing the deep affinities between the protagonists' power fantasies and the realist conception of the world underpinning the oppressive societies they inhabit.

This belief in the progressive thrust of writing is somehow at odds with Dick's relentless questioning of the autonomy of the self throughout his works, and hence of his ability to adopt a critical position toward the world. In the three stories considered, the individual is so thoroughly determined by material forces either endogenous (the unconscious) or exogenous (society or the symbolic order), that it becomes difficult to imagine how his emancipatory project could not be shaped by the same forces. The Romantic (or liberal) I, sovereign, sole originator of his thoughts and whose imagination is capable of leaping outside the bounds of actual material circumstances to invent new mundane arrangements is strongly distrusted. On another level, while Dick wants to retain a belief in the efficacy of critical imagination, he simultaneously remains uncomfortably aware of the Freudian view of fantasy as

compensation. Following Freud, Marcuse remarks that "as aesthetic phenomenon, the critical function of art is self-defeating" (*Eros and Civilization* 144), for art displaces the experience of liberation to a plane where it can be enjoyed and forgotten. Thus, the writing of such stories as "Town" and "Exhibit" could be simultaneously a political protest as well as a way for the author to create and dwell in a space governed by rules of his own devising.

The Double-Edged Sword of Fantasy: Critique and Compensation

> *The aesthetic quality of enjoyment, even entertainment, has been inseparable from the essence of art, no matter how tragic, how uncompromising the work of art is. Aristotle's proposition on the cathartic effect of art epitomizes the dual function of art: both to oppose and to reconcile; both to indict and to acquit; both to recall the repress and to repress it again—"purified." People can elevate themselves with the classics: they read and see and hear their own archetypes rebel, triumph, give up, or perish. And since all this is aesthetically formed, they can enjoy it—and forget it.*
>
> Herbert Marcuse. *Eros and Civilization*

> *Imaginary transgressions will be seen as situated between the poles of a compensation substituting for versus an exploration preparing for or at least allowing for empirical oppositional action.*
>
> Darko Suvin. "Considering the Sense."

In the same way that there exist tensions in the stories between the portrayals of images both as symptoms of dissatisfaction and effectors of transformation, Dick's dealings with the genres of science fiction and fantasy are conflictual. At times, he attempts to "exorcise" escapism from science fiction by distancing it from fantasy, imbuing the science fiction writer with a nearly scientific frame of mind which "bond[s] him to the possibilities that have validity for us, in contrast to stories about hobbits and looking glasses" ("SF Writer" 75). The "legitimate SF writer would [not] . . . want us to drift away inside our heads and ignore the actual problems around us" ("SF Writer" 75-76). On the contrary, "he is writing about reality with as much fervor and conviction as anyone could muster to get a bad zoning ordinance changed" ("SF Writer" 74). Even though the events of a science fiction story are not possible now, there remains the possibility that they might be realized in the future, whereby not only is the writer entitled to think about them, but the reader has the "feeling that he is reading about reality" ("Vertex Interviews"). All this introduces a sort of rational or scientific guarantee according to which so-called genuine science fiction is firmly anchored in reality by contrast to the genre of fantasy and lower forms of science fiction. However, "cognitive" validity is precisely one of those traits that cannot be accepted by the anti-realist Dick, who elsewhere flatly refuses verisimilitude as an aesthetic criterion for distinguishing science fiction from fantasy:

> Fantasy involves that which general opinion regards as impossible; science fiction involves that which general opinion regards as possible under the right circumstances. This is in essence a judgment call, since what is possible and what is not [cannot be] objectively known but is, rather, a subjective belief on the part of the reader. ("My Definition" 100)

Sometimes, the issue of belief in the fictive world is resolutely put aside, in favor of the pleasure arising from the sheer contestation of reality:

> [The fictional] event has not happened, probably will not, and we are not being asked to believe either that it has or that it will. It is just that the daily tyranny of our immediate world, which we generally succumb to, becoming passive in the hands of and accepting as immutable, this is broken, this tyranny of concrete reality. ("SF Writer" 76)

Writing is as much a matter of social critique as it is of refusing reality:

> I want to write about people I love, and put them into a fictional world spun out of my own mind, not the world we actually have, because the world we actually have does not meet my standards. Okay, so I should revise my standards, I'm out of step. I should yield to reality. I have *never* yielded to reality. That's what science fiction is all about. ("Introduction" 86, emphasis in the original).

We are here very near to the romantic conception (perhaps influenced by Schiller's view of art and freedom) of the work of art as a way to transcend reality and "bring forth another world, one opposed to the empirical world as if this other world too were an autonomous entity" (Adorno [1997] 2).[22]

In all that precedes I have been content to report Dick's position on the distinction between the genres of science fiction and fantasy and have not tried to consider this issue in a more general context. The reason for this is that some of the arguments brought forward by

Dick in his attempt at generic classification are not unrelated to the terms used in the vast and ongoing academic debate about genres, in particular the controversial Suvinian notion of "cognitive estrangement" as a criterion for separating science fiction from the body of fantasy literature. As generic classification remains a vexed issue, it would be utterly immodest to pretend tackling here such a complex question. Rather, the purpose of what follows is to understand the effect on the reader of the relaxation of the reality principle in works of fantasy and science fiction.

Dick already mentions two aspects of the estrangement in fantasy. His insistence that the science fiction writer is bond "to the possibilities that have validity for us" ("SF Writer" 75) relates to the cognitive aspect of estrangement. The science fiction story is like an experimental variation on the empirical universe. The result of cognitive estrangement is the realization that it becomes possible for the reader to conceive that the world could be changed. In this context, fantastic writing has value only if the relaxation of the reality principle does not "offense" cognition: the textual world should retain a rational relationship to the "real" (Suvin) or at least be cognitively organized (Freedman's "cognition effect").[23] It follows that the reader's estrangement when faced with works such as "Town," "Bubbles," and "Exhibit," is not cognitive, but of another sort. The second aspect of fantastic estrangement—perfectly captured in Dick's contention that in fantasy the "tyranny of concrete reality" ("SF Writer" 76) is broken—is psychological and aesthetic. It is the joy and pleasure experienced by the reader freely gliding in a world whose barriers and rules have disappeared. The relaxation of the reality principle achieved in fantasy allows the reader to rediscover something. As Moylan puts it: "The act of reading a fairy tale, or by extension other forms of the fantastic, is an uncanny experience in that it separates the reader from the restrictions of reality and makes the repressed unfamiliar familiar again" (*Demands the Impossible* 34).

It would seem, then, that what matters in the experience of estrangement enabled by fantasy is as much a critical distancing of the mundane world (cognitive estrangement) as an intimate gratifying psychological process by which something repressed under the sway of the reality principle is finally made visible again. From the standpoint of politically inclined critics, the obvious danger of this situation is that the reader of fantastic literature becomes a consumer merely seeking psychological gratification and compensation for the insufficiency of his life in the comfortable space of the text instead of struggling to change the outside world. Dick sometimes shares this customary view of fantasy as an outlet as can be witnessed in a illuminating passage of *The Man Who Japed*. In this novel, the "Other World" is the name of a facility maintained by the institution the Mental Health Resort to provide people "with a place they can escape to when their resentment and anxiety starts destroying them" (123). In a dialogue with a member of the Mental Health Resort, the protagonist Allen remarks of people "helped" by the institution that "they don't smash store windows" (123) before concluding: "the Resort acts as part of the system. Morec [the name of Allen's oppressive society] is one half and you [the Mental Health Resort]'re the other. Two sides of the coin: Morec is all work and you're the badminton and checkers set. Together you form a society; you uphold and support each other" (123). Far from challenging the Morec society, the escape provided by the Mental Health Resort into the "Other World" (an obvious echo of Marx's infamous view of religion as "the opium of the people") contributes to maintaining it. It operates like a safety valve, expelling the anger, which threatens the status quo.

While fantastic texts are all situated between the poles of compensation and critique, it might be impossible, in the end, to disentangle the cognitive from the psychological and aesthetic. As Csicsery-Ronay summarizes it:

> The novum may well inspire readers to view their ideological embeddedness with fresh eyes; but a precondition for this is the ecstatic sense of being freed from predetermined relations, the opening up of a familiar, fully mapped, and hence seemingly enclosed world, out from the authoritarianism of the current version of technoscientifically defined rationality. (*Seven beauties* 55).

In his classical essay "On Fairy-Stories," in addition to the critical function of fantasy he calls recovery, Tolkien identifies what he calls the "Eucatastrophe" or "evangelium"—that is, the annunciation or hopeful glimpse of another world—as the second (and most important) function of fantasy. It is to this last function of images that we now turn our attention.

6. Epiphanic Images: Bridges to Another World

So far, we have seen that both the three stories under investigation and Dick's own comments on his literary activity betray ambiguity in the appraisal of fantasy, especially with regard to the possibility of separating its critical and compensatory functions. Moreover, the commodification of the quest for novelty ("Bubbles") and the reproduction of the conditions of alienation in fantasy ("Town" and "Exhibit") signal Dick's awareness of capitalism's appropriation of these functions for the reproduction and furtherance of its structures. In addition, the transformation of a desire for liberation into a desire for domination is rendered by a peculiar aesthetics of power and closure in which the world, literally brought before the subject, is viewed as a picture while pictures are reciprocally treated as worlds capable of absorbing the subject. All these elements contribute to a rather dark portrayal of fantasy in the fictions, which is somewhat at odds with Dick's romantic belief in the connection of art and freedom.

To conclude this discussion, it is interesting to consider briefly a type of image that is quite different from those examined thus far, one that reintroduces the possibility of critical distancing and transcendence, and adds another layer to Dick's treatment of fantasy. These epiphanic (to borrow Dick's term) images, which seldom appear in the fictions, present unique characteristics that have caught the attention of several commentators. Thus, Lorenzo Ditomasso notices the non-representational character of the Edfrank jewelry in *The Man in the High Castle*, and insists that these objects point to "another world" (DiTommaso 102). Likewise, Fitting views the doorway leading to a different world in *A Scanner Darkly* (184-85) as a utopian "glimpse of the possibility of another world" ("Reality as Ideological" 230). Finally, there is the fish sign in *Valis* (108) which triggers the anamnesis of the protagonist. In contrast with Haskel's model (for instance), epiphanic images are "immune to human attempts to project meaning into [them]" (DiTommaso 102) and therefore preserved from closure (And this not because of their aseity since the Edfrank jewel and the fish sign are man-made). They are mediating images like religious icons: "Not a new world, but *point*[ing] *to* a new world" (DiTommaso 104, emphasis in the original). They substitute mystery, distance, and openness for the transparency, availability and fixity that characterize the three fantastic images we have examined. Their relationship to time is paradoxical, for they discover the future in the truth of the past through anamnesis.[24] They are not only symptoms of a preexisting desire, but in turn generate desire without fulfilling it. Calling to mind both Baudelaire's extolment of novelty and Bloch's Novum, but supposedly neither strictly aesthetic nor religious in nature, this other type of image might constitute one of Dick's realist attempts (and a further sign of ambivalence) to preserve utopian impulses from both the threat of ideological closure and capitalist co-optation: "The name for it is neither art, for it has no form, nor religion . . . It is authentically a new thing on the face of the world" (*High Castle* 171).

III. Gendering the Reality Principle in the Works of Philip K. Dick

My depiction of females has been inadequate and even somewhat vicious.

Philip K. Dick. *Letter to Russell Galen*.

The statement that the works of Philip K. Dick interrogate reality is practically a truism. That being said, studies that discuss this interrogation with an attention to gender are sparse. N. Katherine Hayles's analysis of androidism in Dick shows that the male protagonist's psychosis—and the reality breakdowns that go with it—arises when he is brought into the proximity of a simultaneously attractive and threatening female character. Particularly salient to the present discussion is the convincing connection Hayles establishes between the depiction of female characters in Dick's fiction and his biography. She writes:

> If we look for a psychological explanation for Dick's tropism, its origins are not hard to find . . . Dick perceived his mother as an intellectually gifted but emotionally cold woman who denied him warmth and affection. Yet he was extremely dependent on her and maintained an emotional closeness almost incestuous in its intensity. (*How We Became* 165)

> The male self yearns to expand outward in a moment of union, but when the female android/schizoid woman rejects him, the result is a devastating instability in which it is difficult or impossible for him to establish robust boundaries between himself and the world. (*How We Became* 174)

What Hayles's discussion makes clear is 1) that the dissolution of the psyche of the male protagonist is represented as a problem of defining boundaries between himself and the world, 2) that this dissolution is somehow caused by the male protagonist's reaction to a female character's perceived emotional coldness, and 3) that the diegetic situation might not be unrelated to the author's projection of his own hostility and distrust of women.[25]

There is, however, another, and quite different, sense in which gender issues figure prominently in Dick's relentless questioning of reality. Explaining that for Max Horkheimer, "the family tends to replicate the structure of authority that prevails in society as a whole, and to serve as society's way of imposing its norms on the growing individual" (101), Palmer surveys the respective positions occupied by the husband, his wife, and their children in the collision of the nuclear family with the outside world. His concern is not so much the destabilization of the male's psychological reality at the hands of female characters, as the invasion of the private sphere by an oppressive public definition of the "real," and Dick's (mis)representation of the role played by women in this invasion. Although Palmer largely focuses his discussion of gender bias on the notion of the failure of motherhood, I believe it is possible to go further and understand Dick's preoccupation with the battle of the sexes as a masculine fear of women as guardians and agents of social norms and social repression.

Appropriate conceptual tools useful in analyzing both this collision of public and private spheres, and the reproduction of the social definition of the real in Dick, are the notions of the "reality principle" and the "performance principle" developed by Herbert Marcuse. The reality principle (a term borrowed from Freud and broadened) is defined by Marcuse as "the sum total of the norms and values which govern behavior in an established society, embodied in its institutions, relationships, etc." (*New Left* 165). It constitutes the guiding definition of what is real and meaningful in a given society, and condemns alternative existential arrangements and possibilities to the "no-man's land of utopia" (*Eros* 150) or to child's day-

dreaming. Subsequently, Marcuse calls the "performance principle" the current historical instantiation of the reality principle: "A reality principle based on the efficiency and prowess in the fulfillment of competitive economics and acquisitive function" (*New Left* 165).

The purpose of this section is to shed light on the highly problematic connection Dick establishes between gender and reality by examining a number of works in which women are associated with the task of enforcing the reality principle. Firstly, this discussion looks at the different roles (namely wife, consumer, and mother) through which female characters are tasked with carrying the oppressive rules of the outside world into the bastion of the nuclear family. Then, it focuses on the sexual and economic aspects of the empowerment of the female character and the corresponding loss of manhood of the male protagonist. Finally, it attempts to include the fiction of Dick in a large literary tradition that conceives of the frontier as a domain from which the feminine is excluded.

Novels and short stories that present visions of gender conflicts are too numerous to be all treated, but it will be sufficient to examine a few examples to support my claim.

1. Wives as Mothers and Consumers

It [is] a wife's job to bring her husband down to Earth

"We Can Remember It for You Wholesale"

In the works of Philip K. Dick, the male protagonist's refusal of what he perceives as social repression is usually condemned by his wife as an infantile reaction. While his involvement in hobbies and games is for him a form of protest against everyday life, she merely sees a child at play. Thus, whether it is Madge infantilizing her husband in "Small Town" (1954): "Imagine a grown man playing with trains! It's—it's disgusting" (345), or: "Men are such children" (346), or Janet in "Progeny" (1954) commanding: "Sit down and act

as an adult for a change" (98), the situation is repeated with such frequency as to suggest that most of Dick's male characters share the common stereotype, pointed out by Michael S. Kimmel, that "women represent responsibility" (19). Likewise, in *The Cosmic Puppets*, the wife's attempt to prevent her husband from looking for the town where he was born ("We haven't got time to waste looking up your childhood illusions!" [45]) is in a literal way an attempt to cut short his growing involvement with the past.

One way of denying the validity of criticism is to treat it as a psychological problem. Alternative social behaviors or refusal to conform to a given social order are viewed as inabilities to accept and cope with the world as it is or even as psychotic retreats from reality. In "Sales Pitch" (1954), the male protagonist's revolt against consumerism is viewed as a psychological inadequacy by his wife: "If you feel that bad why don't you take some time off and have a complete inhibition check?" (179). By urging him to seek medical help, she reinforces the psychological normalization carried out by the system and the illegitimacy of his social criticisms.

Mark A. Swiencicki observes that in America "since women were left with the job of shopping and caring for the family, it became increasingly common to view women as consumers" (228), a view that, according to Charles McGovern, was largely manufactured and propagated by the advertising industry (41). McGovern additionally points out that women were supposed to be more easily influenced by advertising than men (37-38).[26] This is another aspect of Dick's fiction where the internalization of social norms is presented as a gendered phenomenon, for it is very often through her role as consumer that a woman is rendered responsible for the invasion of the "sanctuary" of the home by the aggressive world of capitalism. Thus, in "Sales Pitch" while the male protagonist is driven mad (and eventually to suicide) by the intrusion into his house of a robot salesman, his wife Sally sits down "expectantly, her cheeks flushed, eyes bright with wonder and bewilderment" (180) before

dutifully playing along with the sales pitch. In the societies imagined by Dick, the gendered division of labor with the wife as homemaker and shopper and her husband as breadwinner is preponderant. In "The Builder" (1953), the reader sees a throng of exhilarated women immersed in the world of consumer goods through the eye of the discontented male laborer: "The milling women pushing and shoving around the imitation jewelry counters, touching things, picking them up, examining them" (264). To Dick, the household in capitalist society is first and foremost a site of consumption and he does not seem to perceive domestic labor as a type of productive social labor.

While a wife's criticism of her husband might be a private affair, it is more often than not tied to social consideration. The fear of social ostracism can be the main reason for her anger as in "The Builder," or "Foster, You're Dead" (1955) where the wife exhorts her husband (who tries to resist consumer pressure) to acquire the latest commodity because she "can't stand the way they [her neighbors and acquaintances] talk about [them]" (227). Furthermore, the social implications of work are explicitly stated in *Clans of the Alphane Moon* (1964) when Mary says: "If you have to, if someone makes you, you can meet the customary standards applied to grown men with the responsibility of a wife and children" (23). Within the couple, Mary assumes the role of a guardian making sure her husband does not stray from his duty: "Here you are thirty-three years old and already given up trying. Given up wanting to make something of yourself." To which her husband significantly replies: "Are you my mother or just my wife? I mean, is it your job to keep goading me on?" (18-19). The husband's failure to provide the financial means for supporting the household does not, however, fully account for Mary's behavior. Aside from her appeal to the "objective" fact of scarcity (money) there is a social reason that is much less objective: "To Mary the issue had been clear: here was a job possibility . . . [it] would pay well and the job would carry

enormous prestige . . . [Moreover] Mary would—and here was the key phrase—take *pride* in his work" (19, emphasis in the original).

The reasons invoked by the wife in condemning her husband participate in the naturalization of the given social arrangement. Social consent can only be obtained by referring to a shared notion of reality—called the "reality principle" by Marcuse—and in Dick's problematic rendition, women (qua wives and consumers) are seen as its guardians and enforcers. The bleakness of the author's vision could be read as an indictment of patriarchy if the author-sanctioned rebellion by the male protagonist against the system were not so often juxtaposed with his wife's acceptance of the same system.

2. Failure of Motherhood: Women as Bad Mothers

In a patriarchal society, besides her role as a wife, a woman's role as a mother is generally said to be her *raison d'être*. Motherhood is therefore a privileged focal point for exploring the ways the "private" and the "public" intersect. In the context of Dickian studies this is a task pioneered by Palmer, who identifies a recurrent concern with maternal inadequacy in his discussion of several short stories from the fifties. Palmer convincingly argues that Dick "sees the private life as vitiated by the outside world, or poisoned by women's withdrawal from nurture and creation" (86).

It is, however, more difficult to agree with Palmer's claim that "the criticism of society that is expressed [by Dick] is friendly to a . . . feminist reading" (86). Not only, as Palmer himself points out, does Dick's vision often evince "painful and hostile feelings about women" (87), but it is also significant that in his works women (qua mothers) often play a special role in the mechanism by which the private sphere of the family is "contaminated" by the public sphere. This is most clear in "Progeny" where after giving birth (something called "the event" (94) in the story), Janet is shown to abide by the heartless educational rules of her

society. Thus, she prevents her husband from holding their newborn baby: "You know we aren't allowed to touch him" (96), arguing that physical contact is forbidden because it may make the baby "neurotic and emotional" (96). She is emotionally detached, watches her baby "critically, her arms folded" (95), and appraises him in terms of performance ("He comes from the best eugenic stock," his wave pattern is good [97]). In this hyper rational society education, like everything else, is guided by instrumental rationality, and the mother—in contrast with her husband—not only accepts the state of things but goes even further by actively promoting the prevailing institutional discourse. Janet thus beamingly announces that she has been reading all about "new methods, new techniques . . . [the] real methodology for dealing with children" (97). She inaugurates a long series of emotionally cold mothers whose culminating point is perhaps to be found in Norbert Steiner's portrayal of his wife in *Martian Time-Slip* (1964):

> Steiner blamed it all on his wife; when Manfred was a baby, she had never talked to him or shown him any affection. Having been trained as a chemist, she had an intellectual, matter-of-fact attitude, inappropriate in a mother. She had bathed and fed the baby as if he were a laboratory animal like a white rat. She kept him clean and healthy but she had never sung to him, laughed with him . . . so naturally he had become autistic . . . So much for marrying a woman with a master's degree. (29-30)[27]

One may be tempted to agree with Palmer's view that Dick's criticism ultimately falls on "the deformation involved in capitalist social relations and the power of patriarchy" (86), and that for him any given individual, regardless of gender, is liable to reproduce social norms.[28] There is, however, enough evidence that Dick clearly singles out debased motherhood (rather

than debased fatherhood) as responsible for the invasion of the domestic space by normative values to suspect that his fictional representation is gender biased.

"The Pre-Persons" (1974) is a case in point. This text's outrageous portrayal of females could well be captured by the way the wife of the protagonist urges her husband to get rid of their twelve year-old son (abortion is legal until eleven years old in their society): "'Let's have an abortion!' Cynthia declared excitedly . . . 'Wouldn't that be neat? Doesn't that turn you on?'" (285). In some places, the text seems to become self-aware of the unfair and offensive nature of its attack on women and attempts to tone down the misogyny by limiting the blame to a certain "kind" of women (called "castrating female" [286]) and by making society as a whole responsible: "Our competitive society. . . .The survival of the strong. . . . just those who hold the *power*" (289, emphasis in the original), or: "This is a con game by which the established, those who already hold all the key economic and political posts, keep the youngsters out of it" (290). One wonders, however, if all this is not mere rationalization. If society as a whole is responsible, why focus on mothers? Why choose a good father and a bad mother for protagonists? Why all this concern about "castrating females" and no mention of "castrating males"? Why should mothers be held morally more responsible than fathers for protecting their children (289)? In this context, the recourse to biology is especially revealing. "What's a 'boob'?" asks a child to his father, who replies: "Something fast becoming obsolete . . . Except as an ornament to be admired and squeezed. Its function is dying away" (288). In tying the identity of women to their bodies, the text implicitly suggests that their failure at motherhood is a crime against nature, and thus much more objectionable than that of those male characters who also participate in the system. Finally, the attempt to differentiate between good mothers and "castrating females" is made even less convincing when the reader learns that all women are legally entrusted with watching over the reality principle. Thus, when the father plans to immigrate with his son to Canada (a territory where

the abortion law does not apply), he remembers that his wife has the right to prevent their action: “I have to get my wife’s agreement. You can’t go to Canada unless your wife signs a document in writing where she won’t follow you” (295). The fact that men must obtain their wives’ written permission to emigrate quite literally put the latter in the position of legal guardians of reality.

In short, both the attempt to incriminate society as a whole and the distinction between good and bad mothers somehow clash with the double standard applied to men and women. While the line of responsibility may not exactly superimpose onto that of gender, works such as “Progeny,” *Martian Time-Slip*, and “The Pre-Persons,” make it clear that Dick sees mothers as more liable than fathers to follow inhumane and abusive social rules. In direct contrast with Freud’s view of the father as the representative of the reality principle within the family, in Dick, this role is often performed by the mother.[29]

3. Loss of Manhood and Empowerment of the Female

Both Hayles (166) and Palmer (70-72) observe in the Dickian fiction the inversion of the qualities commonly assigned to men and women in a patriarchy. Whereas rationality, intelligence, and emotional coldness become feminine traits, the male is viewed as “hysteric, [and] ‘feminized’” (Palmer 72). However, Dick’s anxiety that “women are adept, competent, ruthless, unnurturing and threatening, while men are fumbling, inept and resentful” (Palmer 70) may have an economic basis in addition to the familial origin already mentioned. Kimmel identifies three competing models of manhood in America. The first (“Genteel Patriarch”) is not relevant to this discussion, so I will focus on the other two models, that of the “Heroic Artisan” and its more recent rival the “Marketplace Manhood.” Kimmel describes the “Heroic Artisan” thus:

> Urban craftsmen and shopkeepers subscribed to a model of "Heroic Artisan," who embodied the physical strength and Republican virtue of the Jeffersonian yeoman farmer and independent artisan . . . An economic liberal who cherished his workplace autonomy, he was also a democrat, delighting in the participatory democracy of the town meeting. (38)

This model of manhood is threatened and progressively replaced in the 1830s by the new "Marketplace Manhood" where a man "derived his identity entirely from success in the capitalist marketplace, from his accumulated wealth, power, and capital" (38). Although it belongs to the nineteenth century, the "Heroic Artisan" model aptly describes the profile of the typical Dickian male protagonist, who is usually a laborer with manual skills, of liberal political orientation (like the author himself), and who values his autonomy against instrumental rationality.[30] Even more crucial to our discussion of gender conflicts is Kimmel's remark that "the triumph of marketplace masculinity pushed [the Heroic Artisan] into the realm of the non-men" (38). Thus, in "Foster, You're Dead," when the husband—the owner of a small retail shop—refuses to buy a bomb shelter, preferring instead to invest in his shop, his wife makes it clear that his choice for a livelihood is anachronistic: "You've put everything in that store and it's failing anyhow. You're just like a pack-rat, hoarding everything down at that ratty little hole-in-the-wall. Nobody wants wood furniture anymore. You're a relic – a curiosity" (227-28). For Dick this is not simply to say that the protagonist, as an individual, is pushed away by a questionable evolution in the structure of society, but the fact that it is a woman who points this out also signifies his exclusion from manhood, for his professional success is something that very much defines both his sexual identity and his position in the couple.

This is most clearly found in what is perhaps the richest presentation of the conflict among spouses in Dick's fiction. In *Now Wait for Last Year* (1966), we have the now-familiar situation where the male protagonist Eric Sweetscent resents his wife Katherine for her excessive spending (again the wife as consumer!) and for infantilizing him (90, 132, and 206). This time, however, masculine anxiety is made more acute when Eric remembers that his wife—who has a job and is successful at it—"had made it possible for him to take a notable leap in the hierarchy of econ and sose – economic and social – life" (46) and expresses his regrets at being "married to a woman who is economically, intellectually, and even this, too, even erotically [his] superior" (23). A cathartic flashback reveals to the reader that after an (untold) act of lovemaking, Katherine had accused her husband of having married her to get his job, before concluding "and you're terrible in bed" (46). The entanglement of professional failure with sexual "incompetence" testifies to the author's (unconscious?) belief in the determining influence the performance of (extra-familial) socio-economic roles has on the sexual economy of the couple.

The way Katherine condemns Eric's involvement in his hobby (collecting Jonathan Winters's tapes) provides further proof for this interpretation. In Dickian fiction, a hobby usually functions as both a psychological compensation and a protest by which the heroic artisan, who is no longer able to find meaning in his daily drudgery, can engage in a substitute for work that remains creative and autonomous. Katherine immediately understands that the hobby is an expression of her husband's refusal of the reality principle: "It means you resist life, the role that you play out . . . some childish, unconscious part of you won't enter human society" (45). Her contempt is expressed in sexual terms: "You're a repressed homosexual . . . Look at me; look. Here I am; a perfectly attractive woman, available to you any time you want me . . . and yet you're in with these tapes and not in the bedroom screwbling [sic] with me . . . Have fun playing with yourself" (48). Katherine

inextricably binds Eric's professional failure (the hobby or the heroic artisan model versus marketplace work) with sexual failure (impotency, onanism, or homosexuality versus heterosexual normativity). In the novel, the rehabilitation of the reality principle is carried out in two ways. First, Katherine's destruction of a musical tape from Eric's collection is literally the destruction of his fantasy. Second, Katherine pushes him back on the road of economic performance by exhorting: "I want you to start looking for a higher paying job" (49).

The pervasive concern about the dehumanizing effects of instrumental rationality is a major focus of Dickian criticism. However, the preceding discussion also brings to light the fear that man is threatened by the advent of the performance principle not only in his humanity but also in his masculinity. With the historical evolution of the models of manhood sanctioned by the reality principle, the "Heroic Artisan" model cherished by Dick is pushed aside. Later, the gradual feminization of the American workplace following the Second World War further destabilizes the male representation of his position inside and outside the family. The combined effect of these changes on the male character results in anxiety about the loss of his manhood. In Dick, aggressive female empowerment and seeming alliance with the "real" on the one hand, and male sexual inadequacy on the other, can both be read as the projection of this masculine anxiety.

4. Women and the Frontier

In the hopelessly repressive societies imagined by Philip K. Dick, the frontier is often dreamed of as the last way out.[31] If Dick does indeed often associate women with the reality principle, then one should be able to discover hints of a gendered perspective on the motif of the frontier in his works. Therefore, in the rest of this section, I would like to consider very briefly the extent to which the frontier could be viewed as a geographical and imaginary site of masculinity in the fiction of Dick.

To be sure, a linking of masculinity and the frontier myth is by no means a new phenomenon in the history of American literature. While Kimmel observes that "the West—both reality and idea—was the epitome of masculinist resistance" (22), Jonathan Culler evokes Dawn Lander's reading of the myth of women's hatred of the frontier as "an attempt by men to make the frontier an escape from everything women represent to them" (45). Likewise, Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson provides numerous examples of the linking of women with the civilized world that can be found in male escape narratives. To quote just one example among many, in James Dickey's *Deliverance*, Ed blames his wife for his own dissatisfaction with everyday life: "It partly was [her fault], just as it's any woman's fault who represents normalcy" (qtd. in Macpherson 50).

In Dick's "Progeny," while the female protagonist embodies all the values of civilization, the man is comparatively uncouth: he yearns for physical contact and he sweats. He sees the frontier as the only place where he can retrieve his manhood, which is negated in its physicality by socially enforced standards of hygiene. Similarly, in "Sales Pitch," the wife objects to her husband's suggestion to live on the frontier by pointing out its lack of development: "Isn't it sort of under-developed? They say it's like living back in the twentieth century" (178). She does not want to renounce material comfort even if it is the only way to live what the male character sees as a genuine life. When her husband attempts again to convince her to emigrate, he is interrupted by a salesman ringing at his door:

> He [Morris] was going to talk to her about the frontier. About Proxima Centauri. Going away and never coming back. But he never had a chance.
>
> The doorchimes sounded.
>
> "Somebody's at the door!" Sally cried excitedly. "Hurry up and see who it is!" (179)

Morris's fantasizing of a new life on the frontier can take place only in the privacy of the domestic space, which is so far the only space more or less spared by the reality principle of his society. The fateful sound of the doorbell portends that this temporary shelter is about to be breached and Morris's wife is made the accomplice of the oncoming destruction of her husband's frontier dream. In "The Pre-Persons," Canada is a dream territory which serves as a counterpart to and an escape from those domains under the sway of the reality principle. It has all the characteristics of the frontier land, that in the words of Frederick Jackson Turner is a "gate of escape to the free conditions of the frontier" (259), and, as we have already seen, the male protagonists wish to go there to escape from women. In *Lies, Inc*, the advertisement for emigration, cast into an old-fashioned rhetoric that evokes military recruiting slogans, emphasizes virtues such as determination and strength commonly associated with men:

> 'We need *men*,' President Omar Jones was declaring. 'Good strong men who can do any kind of work. Are you that man? Able, willing, and get-up-and-go, over eighteen years of age? Willing to start a new life, using your mind and your hands, the skills God gave you?' (51, emphasis in the original)

In this novel also, the yearning of the husband (Jack McElhatten) for another life is contrasted to his wife Ruth's fear.

Even though Dick's treatment of the frontier myth in science fiction can profitably be compared with nineteenth-century American literature, it is worth noticing that the masculine repudiation of the feminine in his works differs significantly from that of most earlier misogynistic reactions to historical change. For example, while Basil Ransom in Henry James's *The Bostonians* extols so-called masculine virtues (in particular, courage and

realism: “To look the world in the face and take it for what it is” [qtd. in Kimmel 20]) and fulminates against the “womanization” of society, we have seen above that the Dickian male characters often channel all those “hysterical” qualities that Ransom associates with women. Conversely, in Dick it is the woman who becomes self-assertive and is blamed for introducing the aggressive behaviors associated with the outside world of capitalism into the household. In fact, the behaviors associated with the search for masculinity in the frontier land found in American literature rarely stand as models for the Dickian male character, for they are what he often identifies as the guiding principles of his society and what he wishes to escape from.[32] All this is to say that, while several male characters view the frontier as an escape from women, it is less clear how they retrieve their manhood there.

Kimmel (25) evokes the two dominant themes in nineteenth-century American literature—namely 1) male bonding in the escape from women, and 2) discomfort and resistance to the market place—respectively singled out by Leslie Fiedler and David Leverenz. To Fiedler, the classic American novel’s neglect of women makes it a very different literary product from its European counterpart with its focus on the relationship within the heterosexual couple. With its painful staging of the sex wars and its sustained concern for domestic matters, Dick’s science fiction surprisingly shares the preoccupations of the classical European novel. At the same time, it is haunted by the American theme of escape from both the family and the iron cage of the capitalist order. What is more, a science fictional twist of the male homosocial wilderness bond by Fiedler can also be located in Dick. For example, the bleekmen in *Martian Time-Slip*, Lord Running Clam in *Clans of the Alphane Moon*, and the Glimmung in *Galactic Pot-Healer*, all perform the Fiedlerian function of guide and companion on the frontier. Although they are not human and often ambiguously gendered, they nonetheless offer the escaping protagonist a meaningful asexual alliance in the lands beyond the confines of the reality principle.

In conclusion, it does not seem inappropriate to suggest that in Dick's fiction female characters are not infrequently treated as allies of their society's reality principle. As a consequence, they usually reassert the primacy of everyday life, the necessity of accepting reality as it is, and thus often oppose those male characters who engage in distancing activities (games, hobbies, and daydreaming for example) that can more or less be viewed as belonging to the mental activity known as fantasy.

Notes

1. To avoid any misunderstanding on the use of the term escapism, I would like to emphasize that, in no way, do I use it to disparage or condemn the behavior of Dick's characters. Despite the fact that this term is generally used in a pejorative manner, I believe that it is useful in that it points from the very beginning the ambivalence of the author toward escape attempts. On the one hand, these escapes are described as legitimate reactions to the awfulness of the system. On the other hand, the behavior of the characters is sometimes explicitly viewed as escapist by the author himself. It seems that Dick wants both to endorse escape and to blame escapism.
2. See *Escape Attempts* 188-210.
3. For instance, Baudrillard (*Simulacra and Simulation* 12-14), Tom Moylan (*Demand the Impossible* 8), Timothy Luke (94), among many others, are all interested in commodified utopias, sometimes in order to contrast them from "genuine" utopias (Moylan and Luke), and sometimes to challenge the possibility of such a distinction (Baudrillard).
4. See *Virgin Land* 174-83.

5. In Dick, besides being an American symbolic landscape, the motif of the garden also often relates back to the archetypal Garden of Eden and is, as such, rather ambiguous. It can be either a sign of retreat from the world (the *hortus conclusus*, the *locus amoenus*) or an indication of human will and determination (the untrammeled wilderness of the frontier tamed into a garden by pioneers).
6. Similar statements can be found earlier in the novel (151) and especially in association with Gumm's deriding the Freudian interpretation of travel as a surrogate for repressed sexual needs and the idea that the need for motion reveals a psychological imbalance: "*Normal people don't need to* [travel]. *Normal people would be satisfied with life as it is*" (194, italics in the original). Other positive appraisals of motion and novelty can be found in *Solar Lottery*:

> It isn't a brute instinct that keeps us restless and dissatisfied. I'll tell you what it is: it's the highest goal of man—the need to grow and advance . . . to find new things. To spread out, reach areas, experiences, comprehend and live in an evolving fashion. To push aside routine and repetition, to break out of mindless monotony and thrust forward. To keep moving on . . . (188)

in *Lies, Inc*:

> Within [Jack McElhatten], the yearning grew. The frontier, he thought . . . god, [the media] had raved about conditions across on the other side . . . The beauty—and the opportunity . . . The history of man has been one vast migration . . . First it had been New England, then Australia, Alaska. . . then on Mars and Venus . . . (51-53)

In addition, in a non-fictional statement Dick the writer claims that "exploration is natural to man; it is virtually an instinct" and that "Sometimes the presence of grave social problems is a stimulus for exploration; man searches relentlessly for a way out of his problems, and in doing so he presses at every door, hoping to find one that will lead him somewhere that is new and different" ("That Moon Plaque" 68).

7. On contrived experiences, see Boorstin 77-117, especially 79, and 115-16; Cohen and Taylor 131-38.
8. *Solar Lottery*'s protagonist Ted Benteley voices his distress in similar terms: "I'd like to pull this whole thing down with a big loud crash" (81).
9. In Shinji Kajio's "Reiko's Universe Box," we have exactly the same phenomenon. The female protagonist's death drive is materialized in the eponymous universe box that devours the diegetic reality. Here also, rather nothingness than dissatisfying reality. The moment of annihilation is a moment of ecstasy, a *fuite en avant* (headlong flight). As China Mieville rightly observes, there is generally no melancholy (or it is "disingenuous") in the visions of contemporary apocalypses, but rather enthusiasm. See my "Swallowing Simulacra: The Cases of Philip K. Dick and Shinji Kajio" for a discussion of Kajio's short story and a comparison with Dick's "Small Town."
10. The spatialization of the realm of fantasy is depicted in several cinematic works that share commonalities with Dick's stories.

    —Alfred Hitchcock's masterpiece *Vertigo* (1958) is set in San Francisco, which is a frontier-city located on the shores of the Pacific Ocean (i.e. on the edge of the world) and the final outpost of the Westward expansion of America. Narrative consequences of this peculiar location are the entrapment of the characters in the closed space of the city. Deprived of a meaningful geographic imaginary or a symbolic direction, they can only go round in circles (like the protagonist Scottie Ferguson endlessly

wandering the labyrinth of streets) or succumb to their obsession with the past. While the capitalist rogue Gavin Elster longs for the "color, excitement, power, freedom" of the old San Francisco (Compare with Miller in "Exhibit" regretting "the exciting age of virility and individuality, when men were men…" (157), Scottie's nostalgia for the simulacrum of Madeleine is viewed as a morbid compulsion repetition.

—In John Carpenter's *Escape from New York 1997*, the island of Manhattan has been converted into a giant prison where undesirable members of society are banished (= psychological repression). Inmates left to themselves have created an anarchist society of some sort (= the Id), that is ambiguously represented as both a fallen space of violence and the last sanctuary of freedom in the whole country. This realm of fantasy does not constitute a threat to the rest of a harshly conservative America (= the Subject) until the day it eventually seeps out of its boundaries (= return of the repressed). The analogy between politics and psychology is made complete with the kidnapping of the president of the USA [= the Ego] and his disappearance into the prison's limbo.

—Finally, M. Night Shyamalan's *The Village* (2004) is an almost literal illustration of Freud's notion of psychic reserve as a sort of conservation project. The eponymous village is a self-sufficient and secluded town established in the middle of a wildlife preserve by several individuals who decided to withdraw from the outside world after having experienced trauma in everyday life.

11. It is fascinating, however, to juxtapose Herbert Marcuse's psychoanalytic theory of memory with Dick's numerous references to anamnesis (the loss of forgetfulness). In Marcuse's account, memory is subversive because it "preserve[s] promises and potentialities which are betrayed and even outlawed by the mature, civilized individual, but which had once been fulfilled in his dim past and which are never

entirely forgotten" (*Eros and Civilization* 19). While for Marcuse remembering past psychic gratifications has the potential to challenge the reality principle, Dick understands anamnesis as a form of liberatory remembering of a past condition of freedom and insists on a gnostic-like mystical knowledge of the real conditions of existence. In a scene (149-50) of *Time Out of Joint*, the miniature model triggers something in the memory of the protagonist. The object recalls the memory of the other world and indicates that what appears as reality is in fact not real. Later, memory is seen as a seat for enlightenment and liberation: "I almost get over the edge and saw things the way they are" (154). For discussions of anamnesis in Dick, see McKee 2-3; Easterbrook 36-38.

12. An illuminating passage on the death drive can be found in Hermann Hesse's novel *Steppenwolf* where he discusses the death drive in relation to what he calls the "bourgeois world." He calls "suicide," people who find the aim of life "not in the perfecting and molding of the self, but in liberating themselves by going back to the mother, back to God, back to the All" (59). The "suicide" "are ready to cast themselves away in surrender, to be extinguished and to go back to the beginning" (60) but they find "consolation and support . . . in the idea that the way to death [is] open to [them] at any moment" (60). The "suicide" is like the bourgeois in that he "treasures nothing more highly than the self" (64), but unlike the bourgeois who is (in theory) able to achieve a sense of "balance" (63) and feels at home in the world, the "suicide" embarks on a desperate resistance to what he views as the colonization of his subjectivity and the destruction of his individuality.
13. In contrast with postmodern narratives' ludic treatment of the fashioning of the self, the death of the subject in Dick generally remains a tragedy of identity.

14. We will see in the final section of this chapter (see below "III. Gendering the Reality Principle in the Works of Philip K. Dick") that this type of professional category, which will be identified as the "Heroic Artisan," subsumes most of Dick's protagonists.
15. See Fitting's "The Modern Anglo-American SF Novel: Utopian Longing and Capitalist Cooptation" for a discussion of the representation of telepathy as a solution to the "breakdown of communication" and a path toward transcendence in science fiction.
16. In contrast, Palmer regards Manfred's idiosyncratic use of language in *Martian Time-Slip* as an echo from the imaginary realm and a threat to the symbolic order (173).
17. For instance, the ending of *Palmer Eldritch*, *The Man Who Japed*, *Galactic Pot-Healer*, *Now Wait for Last Year*, *Eye in the Sky*, and so one. For a discussion of the ending of Dick's novels, see Fitting's "Reality as Ideological" 222-23.
18. It seems important to me to bear in mind that Haskel's town illustrates the traditional form of utopia (the blueprint for a better world, the spatial utopia à la Thomas More or Tommaso Campanella) as a place of (achieved) perfection freed from history, and is therefore predisposed to the same evils as its illustrious predecessors: harsh rigorism, oppression and terror, negation of differences and anti-pluralism, and so on. "Town" does certainly not imply Dick's opposition to the utopian project as a whole, but rather to the specific type of fascistic utopia embodied in Haskel's town. What we have here somehow evokes Wilhelm Reich's linking of sexual repression and fascism in *Mass Psychology of Fascism*, especially his view of power fantasies as sexual surrogates. Jameson further observes that interpretations based on Reich account for fascism's "success" in terms of mass libidinal investment and rechanneling of utopian longings (*Political Unconscious* 291 note 10).

19. See Adorno's "On the Fetish-Character in Music."
20. See also *Martian Time-Slip*, *Clans of the Alphane Moons*, "The Chromium Fence," "Recall Mechanism" for punctual or extensive disparagements of psychoanalysis as a controlling institution and a mechanism of standardization. For instance: the function of psychoanalysis is "to equate people . . . with the world as it [is]" ("The Chromium Fence" 297).
21. On the attitude of the Dickian protagonist, see Palmer 107. On indeterminacy and denouement, see Fitting's "*Ubik*" 155-56.
22. Dick: "The German *Aufklarung* influenced me, especially Schiller and his ideas of freedom" ("Philip K. Dick on Philosophy" 46-47). To this romantic heritage, one can add the well-documented influence of existentialism on Dick. Compare Dick's repudiation with Camus's: "[Art] rejects the world on account of what it lacks and in the name of what it sometimes is" (253). On art and history, see Camus 254. On aesthetic unity and revolt, see Camus 255.
23. Suvin nonetheless remarks later in his career that the paradigmatic fantasy writer Tolkien "presents one of the first and still one of the best arguments in favor of fantasy, with a family resemblance to Brecht's simultaneous plea for an 'estrangement effect'" (8). While Tolkien's concept of "recovery" may not be cognitive it somehow manages to raise the reader's awareness that there might be something wrong with his world. On the "cognition effect," see Freedman 18.
24. On anamnesis, see note 9; see *A Scanner Darkly* 185; *Valis* 108.
25. Another direction that is not explored in this section would be a psychoanalytical reading of the gendering of the reality principle by focusing on the replacement of the Law of the Father by an invasive and threatening maternal superego. Interestingly, in the case of William S. Burroughs, Robin Lydenberg thus argues that the figure of the

mother is abhorrent because the author perceives that the mother, "as defined by conventional notions of sexual difference and family structure, is a necessary instrument in a larger system of patriarchal power which seeks to dominate the individual from his earliest moment of life" (168).

26. Swiencicki remarks however that "American men consumed twice as many recreational goods as women . . .[and] male consumption and consumerism were neither marginal nor dependent upon women" (*Consumer Society in American History* 233).
27. Again, the biographical connection is obvious. Gregg Rickman points out the influence of behaviorist psychology in education on Dick's mother:

> The idea was that the infant was a healthy animal that should be cared for physically and left alone . . . cuddling, rocking, kissing were frown on; the baby must wait a rigid four hours for his feeding. You never picked him up when he cried. Babies between three and twelve months who are not fondled, held, loved, fail to develop normally. The effects include detachment, insulation, and an incapacity to form deep and lasting ties. (17)

28. To illustrate this point, Palmer juxtaposes a short story ("Human Is") in which it is the husband who embodies inhumane social and economic requirements, with perhaps the most misogynic Dickian text ("The Pre-Persons").
29. As I mentioned earlier in the introduction—and with all the reservations we owe to New Criticism—the prevalence of this representation of women might be accounted

for by a reference to biographical elements, especially with Dick's perception of his mother and the absence of his father.

30. Examples of heroic artisans are innumerable: Thomas Cole in "The Variable Man" (1955), Leon Cartwright in *Solar Lottery* (1955), Pete Freid in *The Zap Gun* (1967), Joe Fernwright in *Galactic Pot-Healer* (1969), and so on.
31. The term "dream" is important, for, as we have already seen, escape to the frontier is very seldom achieved in the fiction.
32. Examples of such behaviors quoted by Kimmel include physical exertion in the wilderness (James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*), military exploits (Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*), extolment of the primitive instincts (Jack London's *Call of the Wild*), and obsession with domination (Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*).

Conclusion and Opening

A few conclusions can be drawn about Dick's treatment of images. Firstly, his works revive the immemorial issues associated with representation in the western tradition since the time of Plato and the patristic era, especially the notion of the simulacrum and its calling into question of the ability to distinguish between what is real and what is represented. Yet, while the simulacrum is "domesticated" and becomes a mere degraded copy in the realist framework of Plato and Christian thinkers, Dick seems to take a perverse pleasure in allowing it to go beyond its frontiers and invade the diegetic space. The means by which this is realized are manifold, ranging from magical rituals and hallucinogenic sacraments to mass-produced techno-industrial devices and artistic practices, but they all contribute, in some way or other, to challenge the precedence and authority of the "real" over the image. Such a move allows Dick to create in some of his fictions (as we have seen in our reading of *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*) a literary experience that is, both in form and content, not unlike the condition of the subject in postmodernity: the terror and confusion that results from over-proximity and overexposure, the dislocation of temporality, the relentless invasion of the self by stimuli and messages whizzing from every direction, and the transformation of the subject himself into an image.

The works of Dick do not only address images with regard to their ontology but also emphasize their social mode of existence. In addition to the by now classic reading of images as vehicles of ideological content, the contribution of this dissertation was to suggest another approach by emphasizing their formal aspect. We thus saw that in a number of works, images had a profound influence on personal and social relationships, serving in turn such various purposes as social differentiation and social control. Debord's theory of the spectacle (indeed, a reformulation of Marx's commodity fetishism with an emphasis on images) was used to understand the isolation induced by electronic media in the story "Chains of Air, Web of

Aether." At the same time, the relevance of the categories of passivity, alienation, and reification for describing the position of the characters in this story signaled another facet of Dick's meditation on the self, which corresponds to a historically older critical framework and is somewhat at odds with his more postmodern sensibility. While it was suggested that reification operates an inversion of subject and image (Rybus is exchanged for Linda Fox), the emphasis remained on social separation, and the demise of the centered self was not so strongly felt as in the aforementioned *Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*.

The coexistence of these incompatible stances is a central feature of Dick's fiction and may be related to a more fundamental double-bind: the recognition of postmodernism and the contradictory attempt to salvage humanism. As Palmer explains, "the two aspects of Dick's writings, the humanist and the postmodernist, are wrapped in a kind of spiral in which they mutually inspire, threaten, exacerbate and (as it were) up the ante on each other" (34). Another consequence of this double-bind has been explored in the third chapter of this dissertation, where, following Palmer, we pondered about the irreducible ambivalence between the conception of images as psychological compensation and as critique of reality. While Dick's desire to retain a socially useful function for fantasizing may be inspired by a humanist ethic, both his awareness of the ease with which capitalism can absorb and co-opt liberatory impulses and his pessimistic account of the death of the subject seem to make him skeptical about the possibility of emancipatory political action and social change. Likewise, fantasy as a literary project is faced with a similar threat, for its critical aspiration is seen as inseparable from the sheer psychological comfort and aesthetic joy it brings. Does it mean that for Dick (as for Adorno before him) the contemporary world is a place so thoroughly corrupted that any attempt to imagine—not to mention represent—a different state of things from within it is condemned from the start to play right into the hands of the system in the

same way that Leo Bulero's desperate efforts to evade the Chew-Z world in *Stigmata* only seem to lead him further into its gleaming labyrinths?

At the same time, Dick's preference for ideological demystification and negative portrayals of the world—all moves that belong to a negative hermeneutic and are supported by his general uneasiness about the process of representation—does not in itself mark his works as anti-utopian. Quite the contrary, if we are to follow Jameson's claim that "[t]he utopian idea . . . takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is" (*Marxism and Form* 111), then works such as "Small Town," "Exhibit Piece," and "The Trouble with Bubbles" could be understood as utopian condemnations of the actual. In fact, Dick's recourse to anamnesis (Marcuse's subversive power of memory) strongly suggests that his works could be submitted to a positive hermeneutic (something I tried when I discussed the aforementioned three short stories) in which apparently reactionary moves such as nostalgia (but in Dick, it is often a nostalgia for our present!), conservatism, and escape (into fantasy or religion) are understood as utopian impulses.

A propos Romanticism, Jameson controversially sees it as a reaction to the transformation of the world into

> the henceforth barren and materialistic environment of middle-class capitalism. All the feudal postures and political daydreams, all the atmosphere of religious and medieval objects, the return for renewal to older, more hierarchical or primitive societies are therefore to be understood first and foremost as defense mechanisms. (*Marxism and Form* 94-95)

While Dick's by and large progressive romanticism significantly differs from Jameson's characterization in details (which applies more to writers like John Coleridge or Edmund

Burke), his general contention that it is a reaction and defense mechanism against capitalism seems valid to me and suggests an interesting research path. It may, thus, be fruitful to investigate more carefully whether some aspects of Dick's oeuvre belong to that cultural current called "anticapitalist Romanticism" by Georg Lukacs and extensively studied by Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre in their stimulating work *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*. For instance, the concept of empathy, a Dickian concept *par excellence*, might be read as the author's attempt to imagine a category of human psychology capable of counterbalancing both the threat on the centered self and the erosion of social bounds. Making empathy pivotal to his epistemology and ethics may be Dick's unconscious response to liberalism's vehement claims about the "natural" selfishness or individualism of human beings (see for example John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*). In addition, Dick's ubiquitous critique of automation and mechanization (of the human mind and behavior, of society, and of the state), instrumental rationality, bureaucratization, and the disenchantment of the world are also in line with the Romantic critique of modernity. Finally, in this context, the psychological effects of the disappearance of nature on man that were briefly mentioned in the third chapter of this dissertation, and in general the role of nature in Dick's fiction are worth examining in more details (David W. Kidner's *Nature and Psyche* may be helpful to achieve that goal).

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