



Meva Ayşe Akgiray

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From Science Fiction to Postmodernism in three
novels of American writer Philip K. Dick: *Do
Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, *The Man In
The High Castle*, *Valis*



Abstract: In this paper, the main concern is the new frontiers in popular fiction that have been opened up by the American science fiction writers like Philip K. Dick. My thesis paves the way for an insightful exploration and analysis of science fiction and its ambivalent position in literary circles and pop culture. Once written generally as mere ‘utopianism’, ‘escape’ and ‘wish-fulfillment’, after the fifties the popular SF genre gained a different tincture. The intertextual combination of the popular and the literary in the postmodern age resulted in the culmination of a new kind of science fiction that altered the focus of the novels from the text to the minds of readers and writers. By the novels of Dick we became aware of all kind of narratives, devices and techniques of SF genre, which were formerly disguised to make the reader indulge in the authors’ great imagination. Thus, the one-dimensionality of these former examples has given way to constant transformation, tension and play in the works of Dick. One will witness the metamorphoses in literature, in its quest for more texts ranging from the vast topoi of science fiction to other popular genres, as well as Dick’s successful quest for finding a place in literature.

 **Table of Contents** 

Introduction

Postmodernization of Science Fiction in Philip K. Dick's
works3

Chapter 1

Multiple realities, 'simulacra' and 'entropy' in the novel
Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep.....8

Chapter 2

'Worlds under collision' in the novel *The Man In The
High Castle*.....19

Chapter 3

'Strange Loops' in the novel *Valis*.....30

Conclusion

40

Works Cited

43

Works Consulted

45

 **Introduction** 

Philip K. Dick, one of the most significant post-war science fiction writers of America, constructed and de-constructed a world of fiction in which there is constant breaking up of the dialectics of traditional science fiction genre. SF genre, though generally known to be the outcome of the Industrial Age not in America but in England, has evolved into one of the trademarks of American culture and civilization. It is usually accepted as popular fiction because of its huge book industry and prolific writers. However, it has its literary geniuses as well like Philip K. Dick whom Fredric Jameson calls ‘the Shakespeare of science fiction’ (Criticism and Analysis 1). His novels and many short stories have inspired filmmakers ever since Ridley Scott filmed ‘*Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep?*’ by the name ‘*Blade Runner*’. The film made a great success and became one of the classics of Hollywood movies. One of the reasons why Philip K. Dick’s fiction appeals to directors like Scott and Spielberg is the open-ended nature of his novels and short stories and their richness in metaphors, which lend themselves to multiple interpretations and infinite elaborations.

Many critics claimed that Philip K. Dick comes from a realist background and that even though he has postmodern sensibilities in his works, he makes use of ‘*the familiar science fiction topoi*’, which is actually ‘*drawn from the repertoire of popular fiction*’ (McHale 64). This distinction between the postmodern writers and Philip K. Dick holds a mirror to the biased perception of science fiction in a postmodern world. In fact, many postmodern writers tend to avoid being named as a SF writer even if they are using some significant ontological frameworks of science fiction genre.

The popular topoi of SF include the ‘exotic’ and the ‘alien’ (the alien not only as another life-form but also other worlds, other realities in short the ‘Otherness’ in general), which could easily lend itself to stock characterizations and banalities of mass media. Inevitably,

the great number of books written in this specific genre falls into this category of consumer-friendly fiction. I say consumer-friendly as they give easy pleasure to the reader but end up giving nothing more than a few new possibilities of technology. However, this stigma sticks more onto SF than any other genre; but actually, it is an epidemic of mass media culture, which governs all kinds, and genres of literature.

Nevertheless, through the works of Philip K. Dick we can trace a complex postmodern sensibility reflected especially in the semantics of his fiction such as his characterizations, themes, metaphors and narrative. Accepting Brian McHale's claim that Dick's fiction does not have a self-reflexivity unlike the mainstream postmodernist fiction, I want to argue that there is more to his works which surpasses a mediocre science fiction text and that there is a postmodern *complicitous critique (deconstructing its own construction)*.

Moreover, to define postmodernism with certain terms and specified limits would lead to its' own dissolution. It is impossible to close this term, as it is open in itself. Dick creates a de-centered ambiguity through his novels in the realm of his main characters, which are generally not heroes but common people. Roger Zelazny says in his book *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd* that "*the subjective response, ... when a Philip Dick book has been finished and put aside is that, upon reflection, it does not seem so much that one holds the memory of a story; rather, it is the after effects of a poem rich in metaphor that seem to remain*" (*Criticism and Analysis 2*).

When we read a Philip K. Dick novel, at first, we see the structural and linear world of a SF writer, but as we go on, he consciously makes us loose the linear pace of the story and travels back and forth in many planes. This is not like the modernist use of snapshots from memory, but rather in Borges' terms, it is a forking in 'time', which shows us the diabolic nature of perspectives, worldviews and ideologies.

However, his fiction does lack some functional mechanisms used in postmodern texts like self-reflexivity of the text itself and the drawing of the attention to the process of production and creation directly. On the other hand, he achieves a quite postmodern effect with another constituent of writing. Dick begins his novel having an organization, an ultimate goal in his head and believing in the progressive infrastructure of the narrative. Somewhere in the process of writing and thinking reciprocally, he loses this string and underestimates what he has planned before. Implications of this phenomenon can be traced in the minds of his characters and in the sudden loss of foundations in his future worlds. In his own words, Dick tells us the gist of his writing;

I like to build universes, which do fall apart. I like to see them come unglued, and I like to see how the characters in the novels cope with this problem. I have a secret love of chaos (Dick-Hope 5).

Dick succeeds in disorienting the reader and instead of assuring a firm ground, he constantly shakes us from our established doxa. This postmodern aspect of his style is actually unheeded by many critics who choose to classify a text as postmodern when it has the 'metafictionist' narrative in which the fiction explores the fictionality of itself. Furthermore, when we apply this rule not in a formal but a semantic level, Dick emerges as quite a controversial figure as any postmodern writer like Borges and Pynchon could be.

We should keep in mind that he wrote his major works in the 1960s and 1970s. This period is considered the culmination of postmodern theories in art. Thus, it is quite reasonable to find postmodern influences on his work. However, more than anything the mood of anti-progressivism that hovers throughout his novels is the most significant contemporary sensibility he supplemented the SF genre with.

Science fiction is a genre, which makes use of the political, the historic and the social. This heterogeneous content is a result of its awareness of the progress in every area from technological to ideological transformation or from economic to religious in social life. In this respect, postmodern fiction and science fiction intersect. Both of their stance as speculative and doubtful toward the so-called 'reality' of our world makes the reader aware of the human mentality and its constructive tendency. As a result, we can say that the postmodern awareness of the political, the idealized and the historical have their parallels in the realm of science fiction.

One more significant characteristic both science fiction and postmodern fiction share is the paranoid handling of their subject matter. For example, technology and the materializing of everyday life are put under deep scrutiny in Philip K. Dick's novels as well as in other SF writers such as Asimov. Many science fiction writers, though, fall short of foregrounding the ontological questions that their texts pose except some writers like Dick who incessantly mystify and demystify the reader in the process of reading. It is true that the stance of Dick differs from many of his fellow SF writers. He uses the speculative realm of this genre to explore the nature of humanity and its never-ending questioning of itself. Thus, it is hard to find a writer as postmodern as Philip K. Dick in the general SF corpus. In his own words, Dick tells us the paradox we live through in a postmodern world.

Maybe each human being lives in a unique world, a private world different from those inhabited and experienced by all other humans If reality differs from person to person, can we speak of reality singular, or shouldn't we really be talking about plural realities? And if there are plural realities, are some more true (more real) than others? What about the world of a schizophrenic? Maybe it's as real as our world. Maybe we cannot say that we are in touch with reality and he is not, but should instead say, His reality is so different from ours that he can't explain his to us, and we can't explain ours to

him. The problem, then, is that if subjective worlds are experienced too differently, there occurs a breakdown in communication ... and there is the real illness (Dick-Hope 3).

✧ Chapter 1 ✧

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?

*Well, Rick thought, in real life no such magic bells exist that makes your enemy effortlessly disappear. Too bad. And Mozart, not long after writing *The Magic Flute*, had died in his thirties — of kidney disease (DADOES 39).*

Philip K. Dick plunges us into a gloomy mood in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*. It is widely accepted by contemporary critics that his works are rare when compared to popular SF genre, because of their inexplicable tensions and eccentric usage of the classic science fiction leitmotifs such as cyborgs, androids, colonies, aliens, future worlds etc. The prevailing notion is that his works have the postmodern sensibility, which is an intriguing virtue of our present-day. In fact, when we look at this novel, we are faced with multiple realities having affinities with the rhizome-like universe of the postmodern texts. The first realities that emerge are the human beings and the humanoid robots. Even those dual worlds bifurcate into other realities in themselves. Dick questions the moral foundations of all those individual realities. In the end of the novel, we somehow find ourselves in a more complicated state of affairs than before. He poses us with questions and problems about humanity, whereas the instance he reaches to certain answers and establishes them as valid, he negates them.

The protagonist of the novel, Rick Deckard, has a quasi-heroic place whose nature is not like a SF hero of any other popular novel. He is neither an epitome of courage and morality like in epic novels, nor a transcendental figure that excels in every deed he performs. Deckard has the same ambitions, fears for his job and survival agenda as any human being. We can say that Dick creates not a man who saves the world from evil, but a man who struggles inside his own world and reality and as George Slusser indicated, he creates a **"community among possible worlds"** rather than ideal characters (Slusser 194).

At the beginning of the story, a decaying world, in which every individual and ironically every material have their own established places, is portrayed. Chickenheads like Isadore are left behind and not taken care of by the society; in other words, they are the discardable part of a whole. The realm of human society has a tripartite classification of human beings; chickenheads, people who remain behind like Deckard, and the colonizers who left behind earth for good. Moreover, the commodified androids owned by men and the escapees that are hunted and retired by the San Francisco Police Department are the two projected images of the androids. The dilemma Deckard experiences which opens the postmodern platform in the novel, starts right at the very beginning when Iran, his wife, blames him of killing ‘the poor andies’. This antihero and established society with their taken-for-granted morality are approached and attacked throughout the novel and Dick succeeds in creating an effect of postmodern crisis from a modernist point of view. *‘Reading his texts, one cannot escape the impression that Dick lives in a highly tragic way the entrance of the United States into the post-modern condition’* says one of Dick’s critics (Rossi 402). The novel stands in a no man’s land where the boundaries between the modernist tendencies and the new postmodern imagination blur. The existence of the quintessential science fiction story with its core and structural tapestry, though, does not manipulate the cracking of the narrative levels and turning the main concerns of the novel to ground zero. This is a kind of ‘implosion’ that Baudrillard talks about as he forms the modern theory of media and consumer society on the asset that *‘the boundary between representation and reality implodes’* (Kellner 63).

This novel is based on the duality of organic and artificial intelligence. The world of the human as opposed to the world of the android. Even the long title implies the possible worlds of other life forms apart from us. The ‘Other’ is represented by the so-called androids that are in many ways identical to their human models. A reader might simply interpret these two worlds as binary oppositions and be fascinated by technology and androids. The

expectation of such a story of evil robots and some cool sexy ones, like in Terminator movies, does not find its way in Dick's novel, unlike the popular tendency. Philip K. Dick reader would find himself/herself abashed, if s/he expects to find the high-tech, the good-evil fight and the Schwarzeneger. In delineating the multiple levels of the novel, I found out various terms that Dick himself coined which are the cornerstones of the work.

The idea lying behind the mass production of androids by the Rosen Association is what Jean Baudrillard tells us when he poses his postmodern theory of 'simulacra'. The production and creation process copies 'the real' and then leaves it behind. *'Then the whole system becomes weightless; it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum: not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference'* (Baudrillard-1 404). In a parallel way the Nexus-6 types, advanced androids manufactured by the Rosen Association, are the imitations of real human beings. Their intelligence, their memories and their identities all share the human properties. Yet, they are simulacrum whose relationship with their models is cut out; they can never turn back to their origin, as they are only copies of reality. Furthermore, this simulacrum has a far-reaching effect. Human beings and their behaviors are irreversibly altered by this new technology, because they develop new reactions against their copies. *'If man is haunted by the evil genius of technology, which pushes him to the limits-and even beyond his capabilities-then technology is haunted by man, who identifies with it and projects all his passions into it'* (Baudrillard-2 166) In this manner, humanity metamorphoses while they are being imitated and copied. Therefore, nobody can grasp the real human even in a human as s/he is under constant signification. There is another instance in the novel where we can perceive this dissolving of reality into mere simulation when Isadore, a fake animal vet, tries to find the cables of an *electric cat* that is sick.

Deftly, he ran his fingers along the pseudo bony spine. The cables should be about here. Damn expert workmanship; so absolutely perfect an imitation (DADOES 29).

The cat turns out to be not a fake, though. This confusion of the real with the fake is a circumstance, which cannot be dodged in a world of constant *mimesis*.

Against this bizarre background of pervasive fakery," Philip Strick wrote in Sight and Sound, "the erosion of authentic humanity by undetectable android imitations has all the plausibility of a new and lethal plague whereby evolution would become substitution and nobody would notice the difference. (Criticism and Analysis 4)

Apart from this new world's paranoiac implications, the androids work to another purpose in the novel: to show the human incapability in representing other worlds and realities even when it is the creation of theirs.

In the novel, the androids are produced on earth to accelerate the construction of other colonies in the Solar System. Regardless of any moral consideration, Rosen Association, a typical capitalist entrepreneur, has improved the humanoid robots to such an extent that now it is hard to differentiate between a human and an android. Before and after Dick, many writers used the cliché humanoid robots and wrote stories about the adventures of heroes who fight with them or namely the 'Other'. As I pointed out before, in Dick's novel a different and a more complex aspect of this phenomenon is evident. For example, think of Rachel. We understand that there are many Rachels in the colonies with the same properties the moment we are introduced with a second one, Pris, in Isadore's place. Yet, the idea of mass production and simulacra, her being a copy of copy, does not lead to the conclusion that the androids constitute only a commodity in Dickian world of multiple realities. Although the world that Deckard lives in conceive androids as merely a commodity, there is a secondary level of narrative in which the world of androids is as much real as that of human's. Thus emerges the postmodern mood in the novel by the appearance of an encompassing hyper-reality alternative

to the former distinction of the duality between androids and humans. This new narrative level, opening especially by the reader's unfolding of the novel, makes conscious of the trapped cycle of our systematic world in which "signs gain autonomy" on their own and, "*in interaction with other signs, come to constitute a new type of social order in which it is*" mere "*signs and codes that constitute 'the real'*" (Kellner 63). This intertextuality of the world and all its components are significant in a moral level in Dick's novel as he questions the origin of morals and human behavior. We can conclude that the *fields of difference* that Donna Haraway draws as the transformation from modernist to postmodernist discourse like nature turning into culture, the idea of representation turning into simulation do indeed very effectively explain what happens in Dick's world. He sees the difference of an object and a subject, having both difference and deference at the same time, and portrays a world of metamorphosis.

Dick is vivid in his character portrayal of both the androids and the humans. Androids carry parallel worlds to ours, though, also different from it. They are the endless imitations of humanity, but also a broken universe where we do not belong. An android is prohibited to escape from his/her colony after being sent to a mission. It is interesting that they run away from Mars to search for a 'better life' and to seek their 'origins'. The basic instinct of 'pursuit of happiness' in humans has a vis-à-vis in androids as well. (In fact, this question of 'Who am I?' dominates the represented images of androids in Scott's *Blade Runner* quite like the *Frankenstein* of Mary Shelley.) Paradoxically, on earth there is a reverse migration to colonies because of growing radioactivity. All the ways are paralyzed and we find ourselves in a multiplicity of conflicting worlds.

Kellner, in his book on Baudrillard, explains the simulation process and says that Baudrillard's theory of media and simulations '*offers a new model of social control in which*

codes and programming become the principle of social organization, and individuals are forced to respond to pre-coded messages and models in the realm of economics, politics, culture and everyday life' (Kellner 80-81). The androids can be seen as pre-coded software and nothing more which we can see as Rick Deckard tests Rachel.

"Okay," he said, nodding. "Now consider this. You're reading a novel written in the old days before the war. The characters are visiting Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco. They become hungry and enter a seafood restaurant. One of them orders lobster, and the chef drops the lobster into the tub of boiling water while the characters watch." "Oh god," Rachael said. "That's awful! Did they really do that? It's depraved! You mean a live lobster?" The gauges, however, did not respond. Formally, a correct response. But simulated (DADOES 20).

In the novel, when Rick Deckard applies Voigt –Kampff test that is a kind of empathy test, he is preconditioned that only the human beings can pass the test and get stimulated by his sentences in correct timing. That way, he could find out the run-away androids and ironically retire them. However, the test is messed up as Deckard responds to the test himself while he is testing Rachel. It is a double-edged sword. Deckard is also being tested in the process of testing. He realizes the pre-programmed empathy of Rachel, as she seems sorry for animals in a different and artificial way than that of humans. On the other hand, this simulation is a creation of man. You face with your model and see yourself reflected. Rachel's right answer to the question comes a bit late showing that she has a simulated empathy but not a real one. Yet, after this testing of the android Deckard is not the one who becomes suspicious of himself and his projected image of the androids. It is rather the reader that would glimpse an equivocal implication of Dick's following shifts in attitude concerning the quasi-hero of his novel. Yet, by the fact that in Deckard's society the killing of androids is actually seen as conscientiously right, Dick shows us the pre-programmed ideas and actions that govern humans as well as the androids. Later in the novel though, Deckard also starts to feel empathy

for androids when he goes to kill an opera-singer Luba Luft who can be seen as an aesthetic manifestation of technology. He words his dilemma:

In a way, he realized, I'm part of the form-destroying process of entropy. The Rosen Association creates and I unmake. Or anyhow so it must seem to them (DADOES 39).

The novel is foregrounded by another leitmotif, 'decay'. Kipplerization is the second important coinage of Dick after the Nexus-6 androids. The waste and sterile earth resembles Eliot's Waste Land, but this time it is more intriguing than nihilistic. The process of 'kipplerization' is first defined by a chickenhead, a so-called half-brained paranoiac;

"Kipple is useless objects, like junk mail or match folders after you use the last match or gum wrappers or yesterday's homeopape. When nobody's around, kipple reproduces itself. For instance, if you go to bed leaving any kipple around your apartment, when you wake up the next morning there's twice as much of it. It always gets more and more."

"I see." The girl regarded him uncertainly, not knowing whether to believe him. Not sure if he meant it seriously. "There's the First Law of Kipple," he said. "'Kipple drives out nonkipple.' Like Gresham's law about bad money. And in these apartments there's been nobody there to fight the kipple"(DADOES 26).

The philosophical reading of the novel would lead us to a quaint fictional realm, as in this example of *kipple*. In this kipplerization theory, we find a new bridge to Postmodernity in Dick's novel. One of the key terms of postmodernist worldview is 'entropy' which cannot be defined exactly, but explained in various ways. It connotes 'a measure of the disorder or randomness in a closed system' and 'a measure of the loss of information in a transmitted message' in a scientific context. Its' third meaning is the 'tendency of things to disorder themselves over time into chaos or inert uniformity' (Heritage 460).

As you see *entropy* in itself connotes an ambiguity with its multiple consequences, either that of chaos and infinite mobility or uniformity and stasis. The kipplerization or the tendency of all matter to decay or multiply is a very creative but also nightmarish interpretation of *entropy*. Besides, the theorizing of Isadore about one of the internal elements of the novel is quite ironic. A chickenhead is not thought to be capable of rational thinking. He himself is one of the specimens of entropy, a deterioration of the human faculty, an epitome of schizophrenic or paranoiac individual. It is interesting that these kinds of people are not permitted to migrate to the colonies. They are bound to stay on the radioactive world. Ironically, the human beings who are like Deckard, not yet paralyzed, tend to stay on their own volition even though they know the end, the gradual destruction and loss of human faculties. In the novel, everyone tries to avoid this kipplerization process or postpone it. Even Dick while describing the morning air with dark visions stops his account and evades the entropy.

'The morning air, spilling over with radioactive motes, gray and sun — beclouding, belched about him, haunting his nose; fie sniffed involuntarily the taint of death. Well, that was too strong a description for it,' (DADOES 3).

His sentences and their semantics indicate a kind of entropical universe. If everything is object to kipplerization, so does the foundation he establishes at the beginning and the boundaries between the different worlds Dick represents. Although these transforming referential points in the novel are not as deliberative and functionally explicit as in postmodern novels, we can see the transition from modernist to postmodernist mentality in a more semantic level.

There is yet a third significant trope, that of morality and religion, which brings new insights into the analysis of Dick's novel along with Baudrillard. Mercerism, coined by Dick, is a religious system through which the morality of human society is established in Deckard's San Francisco. It is an interesting phenomenon in that at first it seems to be a computer

simulation as we see Iran, Deckard's wife, holding the handles of a black empathy box, which starts a virtual journey above hills. All kind of people hold these handles and start to ascend together forming a collective mind. This reminds us of Baudrillard, who implies that we are mass-produced children of a media society. In a parallel way, Mercerism is quite mesmerizing. Even its original name suggests it along with mercantilism. Therefore, from the beginning we sense a kind of forgery in this belief in a prophet called Wilbur Mercer. Later, when Deckard learns that Mercer is just another android, he experiences a kind of transformation that the reader goes through gradually from the beginning. All the possibilities of an established and firm order gives way to an ambiguity in which neither the android nor the human is feasible. Dick's quest for moral answers resolves in the final scene in a far-away desert where Deckard finds himself utterly changed and lost.

"It's strange," Rick said. "I had the absolute, utter, completely real illusion that I had become Mercer and people were lobbing rocks at me. But not the way you experience it when you hold the handles of an empathy box. When you use an empathy box you feel you're with Mercer. The difference is I wasn't with anyone; I was alone."

"They're saying now that Mercer is a fake."

"Mercer isn't a fake," he said. "Unless reality is a fake." This hill, he thought. This dust and these many stones, each one different from all the others. "I'm afraid," he said, "that I can't stop being Mercer. Once you start it's too late to back off." Will I have to climb the hill again? he wondered. Forever, as Mercer does . . . trapped by eternity. "Goodbye," he said, and started to ring off (DADOES 93).

Infinity is the only word left behind of this destruction. It is interesting that he finally glimpses the incapability of human mind and human life to grasp even a little part of the world. Nothing holds for real, as you have no potential for knowing every dust particle at the same time.

Baudrillard interprets modernity as a process of explosion of commodification, mechanization, technology and market relations, in contrast to postmodern

society, which is the site of an implosion of all boundaries, regions and distinctions between high and low culture, appearance and reality, and just above every other binary opposition maintained by traditional philosophy and social theory (Kellner 68).

The implosion gains impetus through SF writers like Dick, who uses the methodologies and ontological framing of the speculative fiction in order to parody the present and past in an upcoming world. As a result, reality implodes with the fake leaving us only particles of dust that surrounds everything in this new space-time. Kim Stanley Robinson and Patricia Warrick insist that contradiction is central to the novel's point:

The critical debate over the status of the androids in this novel is an indication of Dick's success, for he clearly means to give us contradictory information regarding them"(Robinson 92); "the reader is spiraled through so many assertions and negations and negations of negations that at the end of the novel he is uncertain of what Dick would have him believe. Dick consistently refuses to provide straightforward answers because language limits (Warrick 129-30).

However, in many critical journals, Dick's success is being confined to SF, because of his usage of the so-called A. E. van Vogt strategy of keeping the reader's interest by introducing new ideas in every 800-words (McNamara 443). Adam Roberts, in his new critical approach to SF, still reminds us the fact that *"Instead of style, SF texts often concentrate on concept, subject and narrative. Instead of the abstract, SF texts prefer the concrete, so, rather than meditate upon 'alienness', a SF novel is more likely to present us with an actual, concretely realized alien, with blue skin and bug eyes"*(Roberts 14).

Nevertheless, the multiple themes used by Dick does not come and go, unlike in a popular fictions defined by Roberts. The questions they pose linger in the reader's mind and Dick accomplishes to elaborate on the void slice of space-time that is usually unheeded and left behind as a huge gap in popular SF (in which usually the boundaries of 'what-if' game are set, narrowing down the text to single narration and interpretation). Dickian transposition of the

dynamics of SF genre, creating his own style and philosophical depth behind all the conceptual SF topoi, is evident in his work *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*.

Baudrillard's theory suggests a radically indeterminate model of simulation society, which contradicts the former determinist theories, and 'conspiracy theories which postulate individuals or groups manipulating the public for certain ends' (Kellner 80). There are usually binary oppositions or two options in a given system, but he sees this fact as the nucleus of the simulation process which tries to neutralize itself through self-challenge. In particular, the binary poles of the android and the human limit us with only two choices of a pre-programmed system and in a way their co-existence indicates a homeostatic balance which evades a third alternative. Nevertheless, Dick's novel gives a sensation of this third alternative through evasion and primary representation of the opposing binaries. Furthermore, we must not forget that the androids in Dick's novel have a wider metaphorical signification than mere machinery or technology. Androids are rather the masks that we put on and they are our imaged selves on our quest to understand 'what we are'. Now, enormous explosion of those binary systems occurs in every realm of thought, which leaves us only with an infinite bulk, or remnant of a supernova. When we look at Dick's world in which at first the duality of a modernist approach is established, we see that later this duality is bound to destruct itself as in the manifestation of the android versus human. Philip K. Dick tries to find his way among this new nebulous (hyper)-reality, like Baudrillard who ironically attempted to map it with his theory.




Chapter 2

 The Man in the High Castle

Our postmodern awareness of the world-making strategies in Nelson Goodman's terminology both in everyday life and in literature is the main reason why we constantly find ourselves deconstructing what we have just constructed. Possibilities, parallel worlds, multiplicity of human experience and our incapacity to grasp the whole picture, leave us and especially writers to speculate upon the feasibility of authority, authorship, power, and world-making strategies that we have so long taken for granted. In this context, I found a very interesting book of Philip K. Dick, though not much referred to in the mainstream literary theory, his Hugo Award Winner *The Man In The High Castle* (1962). Dick's narrative builds a new world in history assuming that the Axis Powers, Germany and Japan, instead of the Allies, won the Second World War. In a way, this is quite like Borges' notion of the 'garden of forking paths'. Dick retakes one of the most momentous events in history and constructs a new order, which is in return object to retake ad infinitum.

In history's "garden of forking paths", one fork will inevitably be chosen in preference to all other forks that might have been chosen instead. But what if things had gone differently, what if one of the other forks had been chosen?
 (McHale 61)

According to the theories of Brian McHale, the parallel worlds created by the SF authors like Dick overlap with the postmodern texts that also exploit the notion of alternate presents in a world where anything is possible. *High Castle* would be categorized as one of the best examples that make use of the narrative devices of postmodern texts in order to incite an awareness of alternatives in the reader. In this novel, apart from the representation of an alternate present, the representation of an alternate history in the text itself enlarges the scope of this awareness. The concept of 'historicity' is shown to be a mere production of individual

situations in worlds' space-time; moreover, they are not fixed but slippery occasions. In the book, this historicity is constantly connected to the recurring term 'inner truth' or 'Chung Fu' through the authors and characters' exploitation of appearance versus intrinsic value, and authenticity versus forgery.

Furthermore, the novel is a meta-fiction, which is one of the main characteristics of postmodern self-reflexivity of texts. It presents us with a world-inside-world like a Chinese-box, by introducing another novel constructing a possible America (which is ironically a reality now) embedded inside the main text. We can say that the writer, quite willingly, utilizes several recursive structures that McHale enunciates as the devices *complicating the ontological horizon* of the postmodern texts, like *mise-en-abyme* (McHale 112).

After giving an idea about the theme and characters in the novel, we will analyze the meta-fiction of Dick, by elaborating on Umberto Rossi's scheme of a four-fold narrative level in Dick's meta-fiction and McHale's discussion of those devices in new literary criticism.

The novel turns around a group of characters instead of a single protagonist, and there are seven equally vital characters. The action of the story, unlike other SF stories, is fragmented into more than fifteen (there are fifteen chapters inside which there are more potential segments) parts, in which unrelated individuals carry the significance of the novel to its culmination. As Aaron Barlow says, *Dick cuts back and forth between characters, interspersing presentations of seven third-person limited narrative foci* (Barlow 2). Although its main theme suggests a political and sociological approach to American history with an omnipresent narrator, Dick instead concentrates on the little lives of his characters and their way of coping with big issues. Again, as Barlow tells us in his dissertation, there are three main sequences in the story, which further the events jumping from one character to the other. The first part of the novel centers on the Japanese obsession with the old American artifacts and how this situation is exploited by fake industry and production of ancient-looking items,

even like an old bottle cap. The second focus is on the German authority and its immediate chaotic position. The risk of a war between Japan and Germany is foreshadowed as the potential delegates who would come to power are discussed with detail and speculated upon by the Japanese officials. It is ironic in this level that former allies, Axis powers, now poses potential enemies to each other. To put it succinctly as Barlow does, the third sequence is the sum of events concerning the enigmatic SF book of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* and its' as much enigmatic author, Abendsen. Actually, this focus becomes the most important one in the novel as the author turns towards his mirror image. He names the novel *The Man In The High Castle* after Abendsen who is known to be living in a high castle to be secure, as his book is banned all over the world by Germany. Abendsen envisions a disastrous end to the Nazis and talks about America as a victor, which puts him under great danger from *the Reich*. Apart from this fact, one sees that this metaphorical castle has other implications as well, concerning the author and his authority over his book.

In each character, Dick portrays the unique psychological realities of human beings and how their aspirations and desires control their little lives. Starting in Childan's shop, the creation of a new American identity appears in which the Americans are now the 'colonized'. The cultural differences of the Japanese and the Americans are emphasized each time Childan comes to the scene. Childan, a typical merchant calculating his every gain, is depicted as an American who has an inferiority complex and he can be seen as the manifestation of the American inferiority in this imagined world of Dick.

*How much I have to learn, Childan thought. They are so graceful and polite.
And I- the white barbarian. It is true. (TMITHC 107)*

Thus, Dick shows us the vulnerability of all human races or nations to domination and their similarities under hegemony. The primary world is this Japanese America where everything seems to be going well, yet the pioneers are different now. However, you can feel the existence of the author in his instances of affirmation like 'It is true'. Dick leads us to a

Japanese America but always making us keep in our minds the ‘real’ history (America winning the war).

Another character, Frank Frink, is a producer of fake American artifacts, copying the old American tools and items from glass bottles to book covers. His role is an integral one in the discussion of forgery and authenticity in the novel as he tries to free himself from the ties of Wyndam-Matson, the incorporation that copies the American artifacts to keep up with the huge demand from the Japanese for everything American, and to set up his own work producing new original jewelries. It is interesting that Frank Frink is a Jew, who had changed his name in order to hide from the Reich and the German customs now situated in every part of America controlling the Continent and that now he is searching for a fresh American identity. Dick’s intermingling of alternate histories finds a dimension in Frink’s case. The identity as a combination of various identities and cultural backgrounds reminds us of the infinite alternatives and choices that a man can choose from throughout his life.

Mr. Nobusuke Tagomi, a high Japanese trade official in San Francisco, is the third and most significant narrative focus in *The Man In The High Castle*. His role involves the only heroic action of the novel. Tagomi kills two German officials who intend to kill Mr. Baynes. Through Tagomi, we get the impression that Japan is a much better world where bloodshed is avoided as long as there are no moral convictions for the act (as in the case of self-defense against the Nazis). However, after killing the two men Tagomi becomes depressed, because of his disillusionment for what he did. He loses the grasp of his life; whereas before he was depicted as a man of authority shaking his inferiors like Childan even on the phone. Mr. Baynes, a German who is against bloodshed, interprets the situation of Tagomi’s disbelief:

But what does it matter? Even if Doctor Goebbels is deposed and Operation Dandelion is canceled? They will still exist, the blackshirts, the Partei, the schemes if not in the Orient then somewhere else. On Mars and Venus.

No wonder Mr. Tagomi could not go on, he thought. The terrible dilemma of our lives. Whatever happens, it is evil beyond compare. Why struggle, then? Why choose? If all alternatives are the same... (TMITHC 245-246)

Tagomi's isolation is understandable in that even though he was right to kill those cruel Nazis, there is no way to erase evil. In the verge of a big world war or a nuclear tension, 'what is the significance of Tagomi and his heroic act?' asks Baynes to himself. There are two hegemonic powers in the first narrative level of the novel, Japan and Germany. However, the power is about to fall more on the side of Germany than Japan, which causes all the crises over the globe due to the loss of balance in power relations. Does not this remind one of the status quo in our modern world? History re-writes itself.

If one goes over the implications of the era of Cold-War (ironically the results are all the same even if the victors switched sides) in which an alternative power-balance is suggested, we can easily delve into a postcolonial consciousness of colonial discourses embedded in this alternate history. Citing Homi Bhabha as a theoretical marker of postcolonial discourse, we can say that colonialism and every concept connected with the notion of holding the power at hand are the products of the colonizers who come up with a system or structure in which there is a fixed Other which is both deprived and attractive for the colonizer group. They appropriate a fetishistic depiction to the newly colonized claiming to have acquired all the possible knowledge about them. From this paradoxical fixity and stability, the colonizers rationalize their invasion, exploitation and oppression. The connection I found with Bhabha's terminology and understanding of the colonial discourse as an ideological construction to exclude the Other, and Dick's novel is the clever demonstration of Orientalism, namely Occidentalism in Japanese lifestyle. Japanese Americans' excessive demand for old American goods (not the new ones though), reminds us of the English antique collectors in India. What any colonizer, no matter from which nationality they come, wants to achieve is to appropriate a fixed reality, a fixed culture out of the colonized, this time the

Americans fall into this category. In fact, this clarifies the reason why Tagomi regards the new jewelry that Frank designed first with great doubt, even though he is the most sympathetic and sensible character in the novel. The originality of a new American art is questionable for him as he belongs to the system appropriated by Japan and Germany. In the preceding soliloquy of Tagomi, things get complicated though, as his empathic nature gives him the need to understand Others' more humanely. He finds himself contemplating under the sun focusing his attention on this tiny little jewelry he bought from Childan.

Then what other sense might apprehend mystery? Hearing of no use, evidently. Mr. Tagomi shut his eyes and began fingering every bit of surface on the item. Not touch; his fingers told him nothing. Smell. He put the silver close to his nose and inhaled. Metallic faint odor, but it conveyed no meaning. Taste. Opening his mouth he sneaked the silver triangle within, popped it in like a cracker, but of course refrained from chewing. No meaning, only bitter hard cold thing What do I see? What is the clue of truth that confronts me in this object? (TMITHC 232-33)

Tagomi's realization or his rise to nirvana in his own words occurs somewhat obscurely, but the reader becomes aware of the all-time structured mentalities of a colonial discourse. Both the 'original' and 'historical' or 'antique' are tags put on the objects to attract consumers obsessed with the so-called truth lying behind the object itself. Dick makes a parody of not only Japanese but also Americans by showing the articulated and produced nature of tags we attribute to things and the nametags one assumes for him/herself. Towards the end of the novel, Dick somewhat escapes from the nihilistic and pessimistic overtones of a postmodern text. Still, hope itself lingers as he explained in his own words:

Some reviewers have found "bitterness" in my writing. I am surprised, because my mood is one of trust. Perhaps they are bothered by the fact that what I trust is so very small. They want something vaster. I have news for them: there is nothing vaster. Nothing more, I should say. But, really, how much do we have to have. Isn't Mr. Tagomi enough? Isn't what he does enough? I know it counts. I am satisfied (Levack 155).

The main story that seems to affect the pace of events in the book is the death of Herr Borrman, German prime minister, and the chaotic speculations both in Germany and America as to who will now be the new leader of the world. Nazi Germany is depicted like a boiling pot in which there are factions and groups who do not want more bloodshed, but also some who sees colonizing Mars and Venus not enough or namely the neo-nazis who still dream of world invasion. Mr. Baynes, one of the dissenters from the Nazi mentality and who comes to America to meet with an important ex-military Japanese general to consult his advice on the new scheme played out in Germany, meditates upon the psychotic Nazi mind in these words:

And, he thought, I know why. They want to be the agents, not the victims of history. They identify with God's power and believe they are godlike. That is their basic madness. They are overcome by some archetype; their egos have expanded psychotically so that they cannot tell where they begin and the godhead leaves off. It is not hubris, not pride; it is inflation of the ego to its ultimate-confusion between him who worships and that which is worshiped. Man has not eaten God, God has eaten man.

What they do not comprehend is man's helplessness. (TMITHC 41-42)

This is a striking monologue in which through the character we see the vision of Dick and his ongoing questioning of power and authority. Dick elaborates on this power-stricken world both in semantic and formal level. At first, it starts like a parody of nations and their zest for hegemony. We see the manifestation of power in the German hands and to some extent in Japanese. However, the actual centerpiece of the novel, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* poses unanswerable questions to the reader as it parodies the authorship and power of the author. Dick presents yet a third world in some ways similar to our day in *Grasshopper Lies Heavy* in *High Castle*. Abendsen, the writer of the book *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* describes an America that had won the war and unfolds a new insight into this questioning of authority and power of human beings. Many critics to this day including Carlo Pagetti and Umberto Rossi

have written about the meta-fictionality of Dick's *High Castle*, whereas they generally opted out the genuine postmodern techniques he made use of even before they identified them slightly. As for the dissection of the text into its various narrative levels, Umberto Rossi made an excellent model of Dick's complex and ambiguous world. He accepts that we as analyzers must inevitably come up with schemes in order to make a point. Therefore, he posits four distinct texts, four worlds, and four possibilities in *High Castle*.

Pagetti's model is interesting, and useful, but it might be perfected. In its 3-level version it does not take into account the process through which the duplication of reality levels inside the literary text can trigger a scission of the zero text (Rossi 7).

According to Rossi, first there is the primary text in which we find ourselves at the beginning where the Axis powers had won the war. This is the fictional reality that Dick establishes which is contrasted by the secondary text, the novel-inside-the-novel in which a hyper-reality that USA won the war appears. When we come to the last two levels, Rossi describes them as reader's realities or zero texts. The first zero text is the naïve belief in the novel *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* that USA brought peace, freedom and tranquility to the world. The second zero text opposes this belief and it is the triggering of doubt in the reader that even if USA had won (ironically like the history in our schoolbooks) there would still be a risk of nuclear war, exploitation of the 3rd World countries etc quite parallel to the German-Japanese world of the primary text. Rossi's explanation focused on the interplay between these fictional worlds and how Dick succeeded in creating a meta-narrative science fiction. To take it further, as Rossi took Pagetti, one should concentrate upon the effect of this meta-fictional device to the signification of the novel. It is not there just to give complexity or artistry, for sure. In any postmodern criticism, the major outcome of self-reflexivity of texts is an alienating effect. It is not a sketching of an alterity or otherness, but becoming more aware of text's internal dynamics, which in return causes the reader to alienate himself/herself from

one established 'reality'. One can see it as the flourishing of manifold realities, histories, and possibilities. In McHale's taxonomy there is a mise-en-abyme in this novel, which is a kind of strategy, especially used by the postmodern texts, that utilizes text-in-text, play-in-play or novel-in-novel self-erasure. In the novel, this works for '*robbing events of their solidarity*' (McHale 125). As a result, the overlapping of our reality and the reality of Abendsen causes a feeling of irrelevancy.

Apart from the influence of Hawthorne Abendsen's novel on the reader, there is yet another book left out both in Pagetti and Rossi. *I Ching*, the Book of Changes, is a one-thousand-year-old Chinese book of oracles. Right from the start, we see that each individual has a kind of belief in this oracle either American or Japan and they ask questions to it, which answers them back in the form of hexagram changing shapes, indicating the current situation and future events that will unfold by its lines. At first, a reader may be misled to believe that it could be just an oriental motif that Dick wanted to make use of, as the characters and the primary text he molded are east-oriented. Yet, in the end comes a very discomfiting declaration by Abendsen, when Juliana Frink who is an American girl in search of Abendsen to ask him 'Why did he write such a novel? To what purpose?' learns that the whole book was actually written by the oracle. Abendsen's wife Carolina answers Juliana:

"I'll tell you, then, Mrs. Frink. One by one Hawth made the choices.

Thousands of them. By means of the lines." (TMITHC 256)

A book written by a book. This mystical phenomenon spurs curiosity in Juliana and Abendsen to test it further. When Juliana, with her fervor to grasp the truth, poses her question to the oracle as to why it wrote such a story, *I Ching* answers with the word 'Chung Fu' meaning 'inner truth'. In the primary level, the characters interpret it as the reality, that Japan and Germany had actually lost the war like in Abendsen's book. This level of understanding would be enough for a popular science fiction consumer (I say not reader). However, a third zero text (inherently connected to the first two zero texts we discussed above I nPagetti's

model) emerges when the reader recognizes the insignificance of truth itself. In this diegetic level the inward implosion of all the hierarchies between the four textual levels occur. Dick elaborates on the fictionality of every reality even if he is the writer of that story. According to Barlow:

Abendsen even gets angry when the significance of his book is "proven" to him by Juliana. He wants nothing to do with that kind of prophecy or significance. These, he believes, as Dick did, should rest in the reader, not in the book or in the author—even when the author has something of importance to say.
(Barlow 4-5)

For Barlow, Dick should have placed the *I Ching* as a kind of mystery, which would make his novel more complex and make it *go beyond a fictive history* in his words. However, there is a possibility left out in his interpretation. Before the revelation that *I Ching* had written all, in the voice of Abendsen Dick makes a confession:

*Everyone has-technical secrets. You have yours; I have mine. You should read my book and accept it on face value, just as what I accept what I see...
...Without inquiring if it's genuine underneath, there, or done with wires and staves and foam-rubber padding. Isn't that part of trusting in the nature of people and what you see in general? (TMITHC 254).*

Therefore, Dick reminds the reader of the techniques that a storyteller uses to make us believe his/her story. Dick's purpose is not to make us believe in his scheme or story but to reveal the dark sides of a historically fixed reality and to show its constructedness by constructing other possibilities always taking us to the beginning. War-War.

By using this old book, Dick shows the inevitability to reach or to delve into individual realities, as everyone has their own way of existence. From this point, his following analysis becomes more valid as he claims that the message of the oracle lies within the interpreter, not in the *I Ching* itself. Barlow also points to the fact that Abendsen does not want to take responsibility of the world, he sees himself as an ordinary writer and that is why

he is frustrated by Juliana's insistent questioning. He could neither solve the problem of existence nor tell which reality they live in. The meta-fiction of Dick here becomes more obvious.

We cannot say that *High Castle* is one of the best science fictions of all times, because it lacks the strong vivid imagination of writers like Asimov. Philip K. Dick's vision of a Japanese reign in America defaults in bringing a more viable picture, as he writes with the American binoculars and preconceptions of an American about the Japanese culture. From this perspective, his novel can as well be deconstructed, and even the postmodern colonial discourse that I found in his novel would find it a bit superficial. Yet there exists another quality that this novel brings to the genre, which is the self-awareness of postmodernism that there is no ending, no closed system or penetrating truth except the little instances through which we can experience the existence of an Inner Truth- Chung Fu.

The Man In The High Castle, with its ambiguities and unresolved tension, makes us forget that we are actually reading a science fiction novel and carry us to a place where impossibilities do not exist. In this new realm, Dick puts fictionality and authorship under arrest when he surrenders to the fact that inner truth lies in every individual and that it is inaccessible for the other. Worlds are under collision; but there remains hope in fragments not for ultimate truth but for individual affirmations of truth.



✧ Chapter 3 ✧

Valis

'We shall not see exploration and the end of our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.' T.S Eliot

Up until this chapter, we have been dealing with the postmodern techniques and unique strategies that Philip K. Dick had employed in his two popular science fiction novels, *Electric Sheep* and *High Castle*. In *Valis*, the first book of the *Valis Trilogy*, this time we find ourselves in a new milieu. Dick surprises the reader with his inventive fiction, in some way departing from the general SF genre to explore the realms of metaphysics, psychology, religion, and morality. The book would drive a sane person mad as it presents a mad person's world livelier and maybe more humanitarian than our mentally whole but spiritually fragmented world. We can still claim that his SF sensibility contributes to the work's atmosphere. Yet, Dick now quests and yearns for salvation in our postmodern world in which unfortunately all that is respected is moral discourses, seeing religion as only one out of many discourses of moral philosophy. The paradox and hardness to invoke belief in a Creator in a post-metaphysical world in Habermas' terminology is the main dilemma that actually afflicts Dick and his characters. A reader of *Valis* recognizes the dialectic nature of the book through the characters. Argumentation for and against the necessity for a Creator goes on through the book, and there is no end to pose more questions to the characters' self-affirmations. Rather than seeing it as a novel in the conventional sense, it should be approached as a compilation of discourses on the specific search and questioning in theology that Dick has chosen. I will mostly focus on how Dick presents a world of a schizophrenic reality and how much this reality overlaps with both fiction and modern day reality. Through its pages, the meditative nature of the book plunges the reader into a self-questioning that is void of linearity and

rational outcomes. That is why I choose to use Douglas Hofstadter's term 'Strange Loops' in the title. It is a term that describes the phenomenon of finding yourself where you have started or in other words making a spiral motion back to the beginning. These kinds of loops can easily be detected in *Valis*. The story is not one that evolves and progresses. The end of each chapter poses new questions and repeats formerly answered ones. This kind of broken narrative represents the fragmented mental state of the protagonist. Above all else, *Valis* is on 'madness'. For this reason, it is really a hard book to follow. The author Philip K. Dick did not try to organize it with its entirety that would have held the attention of the reader in a single strand.

The events that led to the writing of the book were actually experienced by Dick. In the first chapter, there is a third person omniscient narrator Phil Dick (who corresponds actually to Philip K. Dick the original author) and he narrates the story of the protagonist Horselover Fat. The Dick in the novel tries to help his friend Fat, a psychotic, who is lost in a paranoid world obsessed with helping others, whereas he needs more help because of his suicidal tendency. However, right from the start we understand that Fat is actually a projection of Phil's mind, and that he is a part of Dick himself. For this reason, the diegetic levels of the text lose their immediate context and come to be regarded as true and false at the same time. Like in metalepsis, the hierarchies of a narrative world, like the belief in the author representing the real, are destroyed as Dick both establishes his objectivity in the novel as an omniscient writer and shakes his authorship as the madness surrounds him everywhere.

With its setting in the crazy 70s California, *Valis* has certain similarities with Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* which is one of the best examples of postmodern texts.

Aaron Barlow says in his detailed analysis of Dick:

Only a few writers, among them Thomas Pynchon, manage to bring the struggles of their characters into the lives of their readers the way Dick does.

Oedipa Maas, when she counts off the possible solutions to what she sees as the Trystero mystery in The Crying of Lot 49, provides a parallel with questions many of us have asked in regards to our own lives. Am I being hoodwinked? If so, why? And by whom? Am I, alone, the target? (Barlow 7)

Both novels have neurotic characters struggling to find a clue to life and they are parodies of our social and political stance in the modern cosmos. Modernization and progress brings with it its own dissolution and parody. They are best represented through writers like Dick who experienced the shortcomings of modern life to account for the intuitive part of the human soul. The lack of communication and lack of faith cause problems that are to be somehow pacified. Thus, we see drug addicts, suicidal and desperate characters throughout the novel.

Authorship and its strong convenience for the reader are problematized in the book as the narrator Phil gets involved in the texture of the story not as a narrator only but as a second protagonist. In the first chapter, he starts by saying: *'I am Horselover Fat, and I am writing this in the third person to gain much-needed objectivity' (Valis 11)*. Thus, he claims objectivity and puts a distance between himself and his story by using a friend image. Actually, we sense that he is much more involved in this book above anyone else. Through the novel Fat believes in religious revelation from God, and he keeps a kind of journal. However, later Phil adds that this journal is for him a sacred book called Exegesis. In this book, he notes the revelations that come to him as a pink light and he claims to see three-eyed creatures.

Although he tries hard to find *solutions that answer a variety of problems simultaneously*, he also doubts that his mind will ever be able to apply those fake solutions, as they are only a product of his mind.

The exegesis Fat labored on month after month struck me as a Pyrrhic victory if there ever was one-in this case an attempt by a beleaguered mind to make sense out of inscrutable.... and not only that-as if that weren't enough-but you, like Fat, ponder forever over these fluctuations in an effort to order them into

a coherency, when in fact the only sense they make is the sense you impose on them, out of the necessity to restore everything into shapes and processes you can recognize (Valis 24).

In this part, through Fat as a mirror image of himself, Dick makes the reader experience the loss and desperation that he feels because of his awareness of our minds' mechanics. It is not only a beleaguered mind that inquires sense and stability in the universe, but also the normal mind, which imposes its solutions in each circumstance. Dick both mocks himself and us by our Pyrrhic victories that are doubtful and flawed, won at a great cost of dispensing many other equally possible things. Yet, Dick goes on writing his *Valis* as Fat goes on completing his exegesis. In both books, one finds many repetitious sections and events. For instance, both Fat and Phil seem to believe in a universe that is merely an image, thus a simulation of what really exists beyond. On the other hand, in other instances, they end up saying that the good and evil do reign in our world cyclically and that time does not exist. Indeed, the prepositions made cannot be taken for granted in the novel, as there is no time but only space. And Fat quotes from Wagner's "The Victory" that 'Here, time turns into space'. Time stands still. All the endeavors to find truth swing us back to the start.

The tone of the novel changes as Fat thinks that he gets messages from the Divine. All of these are ridiculed and seen as madness by his different friends from the most religious Catholic David and Sheerin to atheists like Kevin. Phil Dick's stance is interesting in that he either sympathizes with Fat or has great doubts as to his explanations of the nature of the Creator and the universe. In their discussions, he always try to rationalize life and all that it brings. As the desperation and attempt to suicide rise, Fat's play on his Mind's translations from languages he had never known starts. He puts forward some prepositions like 'GOD IS NOWHERE and GOD IS NOW HERE' changing the place of spaces in his translation. In each instance, he finds God that he really exists. From time to time, he can be seen as a Sufi

becoming one with God and also feeling the timeless and placeless nature of the Creator. Phil the narrator interprets those revelations as driving him more to an anachronistic life, which inevitably will be deleted, in the universe that favors a smooth timeline and chronology. This skeptic writer believes in Fat and his search, as he is a part of himself.

Phil, Fat and Kevin are the sensitive characters of society who deny accepting everything that are given to them. They represent the cyberpunk culture of rebellion. Through fervent argumentation with each other, they try to find a meaning in life to live, to go on and be happy. Phil and Fat together represents an extreme of this search and quest motif. Their paralyzed situation is best exemplified by Dick's metaphor of the Chinese finger-trap, which gets the more hold of your finger when you try to take it away from its grasp. The real madness is actually not in people, but in the modern and so-called developed world itself. Dick explains the situation clearly in his words, '*This time in America-1960 to 1970-and this place, the Bay Area of Northern California, was totally fucked. I am sorry to tell you this, but that's the truth. The authorities became as psychotic as those they hunted. They wanted to put all persons who were not clones of the establishment away*' (*Valis* 11-12). I said previously that this book is a parody, which is a way to show the rottenness of society and all its faulty ways. In a parody, we never see an alternative future to this one, though. However, Dick tries to find an alternative world in which he and his imagined wife would live together in peace. Being a person of a counterculture in a despotic America, he finds himself more desolated and robbed of any protection that a middle class American life would grant him. He clings to a girlfriend Gloria and tries to persuade her to live. At that point, he himself discovers emptiness in life and he fails in saving Gloria's life, and she commits suicide by overdose.

From that first suicide incidence, we experience a continuous dying both in Dick and his friends. In *Valis* there is a theme of dying girls that is first triggered by Gloria and then Sheerin. Fat, like old heroic characters, runs to the rescue of his girlfriends and he is

emotionally overwhelmed by his endeavors. In the end, he turns to exegesis to delineate the reasons for death and evil in the world. He sees world as merely *a changing information which we experience as World is an unfolding narrative (Valis 37)*. This idea helps him to cope with Gloria, as her memory is just information to remind us of her in the narrative of the universe. He feels himself lonely and isolated as he claims that humanity had forgotten the language of this narrative in primordial times. So, according to Fat we are all deranged in our minds both being a part of an information processing creation whereas not being able to understand its language. Phil the narrator tells us that this is another Chinese finger-trap in which we are like *'Daedalus, who built the labyrinth for the king of Crete and then fell into it and couldn't get out' (Valis 40)*. Thus, even the skeptical side of us finds a meaning in the theory that we are also in that Black Iron Prison, trapped by our own frail and defective minds.

Even though Horselover Fat is an insane man, he becomes one of the most respected figures in the circle of his friends. Kevin who can be seen as an epitome of blasphemy and atheism, is the major criticism directed to the idea of religion. In the novel, his role is that of a messenger, who carries the most important questions and negations to the theology of Fat. I think Dick has put Kevin to the novel, being aware that Phil's account is too intimate with Fat. It is generally accepted that the narrator should establish objectivity. As a result, Dick now puts Kevin as a third narrator whose existence forms a kind of objectivity in the novel. However, this time the objectivity is not like the modernist author in a laboratory and the writer who must be just a catalyst in the process of creation. In Dick's postmodern text, we are talking about shifting objectivities; he always begins with a new subject trying to renew the lost reference points. It can be seen as a controversial statement when I say 'shifting objectivities', but the feeling of being at a loss every time you try to distance yourself from your story, as it will never be possible, is felt on and on by Phil, Fat, Kevin and even the

reader. Therefore, the story becomes a quest for all, and it resembles the maze of world in which there is never unique singularity and objectivity. For this reason, Darko Suvin is critical of *Valis* in the sense that it exploits too much themes and fails to produce a coherent novel.

Yet the interest in the quest bogs down in narrative repetitions and meanders, for the novel abounds in false starts and dead ends; themes and motifs get picked up and dropped for no apparent reason except that another and more dazzling one occurred to Dick as he was writing (Suvin 19).

However, all the themes like the religious, philosophical, psychological and social statements merging into one another create a platform on which there is endless substitution and play. The lack of focusing in Dick's *Valis* that Suvin criticized, in fact becomes a distinct quality of the book on madness. We can never close the novel as Dick can never close his quest. Thus, the virtue does not lie in a Conquest, but perpetual Quest.

We experience a continuous transformation in the narrative voice. For example, Kevin assents to Fat when he discovers the film *Valis* in the 9th chapter. This part is like a turning point in the novel, as everything becomes more complicated when Kevin and Phil think that they have discovered the reality hiding behind fiction. In Dick's novel, there is this hide-and-seek of reality and fiction behind each other. At its utmost Phil says, '*So the rational, like a seed, lies concealed within the irrational bulk*' (*Valis* 72). In this chapter and the following chapters, Dick uses his rich science fiction topoi like time dysfunction, Valis- a mind-controlling satellite, phylogenic memories, laser beams and phosphene activity. The story is now totally messed up like in Pynchon's novel when Oedipa watches the *Courier's Tragedy*. Through a new diegetic level, namely the film-in-novel, the hierarchies of reality, imposed on fiction, are broken. In the film, there is both a social satire, but the most important significance of it comes when Kevin along with the reader realizes the parallelism of VALIS (Vast Active Living Intelligence System) to Fat's theological experiences. For our logic if

there is one mind that experiences those kinds of impossible revelations in the form of laser beams, it is ridiculed as a mere fake. But the trouble is that now Phil and Kevin, former allies in making fun of Fat, see at least one more mind, the screenwriter who wrote the film who must have experienced the same things as Fat, though, both being unconscious of each other. To summarize the main point of this science fiction film; VALIS is a kind of satellite from a far away galaxy which controls the universe through its continuous firing of information and it tries to better things in our world starting with the despotic president of the 1970's USA. During the film there are many disconnected scenes mixing past and future with the present. Like Dick who experiences a time dysfunction, the film makes the characters realize visually that the thread of events goes back and forth from the Early Christian times, as we understand from the fish symbol (which actually was seen in Fat's dreams) to the present. Kevin asks Phil: *'Does the goddam film change everytime you see it? Holy fuck; what a thought! A different film each time. No, that's impossible'* (Valis 155). Kevin sees the film three times, and when they leave the cinema together with Fat and Phil, he is surprised by the new meanings he has extracted from it. In a way, endless metonymic signs or information from VALIS, which can be deciphered differently each time we encounter them, produces the film. I think this idea of our inability to find the purpose behind our world is what the forgotten language of the human kind refers to in Fat's exegesis. Postmodernity of this book lies in its openness to multiple interpretations, as blasphemy, as Gnostic Christianity, as science fiction, as Sufism, as mythology, as pure paranoia and as philosophy.

As Alexander Star elaborates on Valis in *The New Republic*, Dick's concern is not reality but irreality; his character Fat is obsessed with non-being rather than being.

Dick's fiction, in the view of the critic Scott Durham, is nothing less than a full-blown "theology of late capitalism" that "reflects on the psychic strains of the transition to postindustrial capitalism." According to Jean Baudrillard, one of

Dick's many French fans; it is "a total simulation without origin, past or future."(Star 10)

After watching this film, they decide to contact the producer of VALIS via Phil's relations from the film industry. From then on, they discover miraculous things about VALIS, such as its talking to several chosen people like Fat and a 4-year-old girl, Sophia. Believing and disbelieving at the same time they decide to see the girl. They even form a secret society called the Rhipidon Society, which means a fish's fan to impress the so-called *fifth savior*. This symbolic fish is actually the sign used by the early Christians, whose religious beliefs are thought to be purest for some like Fat. That would be why in his exegesis the Roman times appear super-imposed upon the 1970 US California. To put it succinctly, one day Fat sees a dream that he is a fish and he tries to take a gun to his fan-like fins. He fails and drops the gun whence a voice says to him: 'Fish cannot carry guns'. In fact, this becomes the motto of the new society of believers. Through this image of a benevolent God, they find peace and maybe this is the main reason that Fat does not commit suicide in the end that has been a long-expected finale for the novel. However, there are much more connotations of VALIS than a peace giving and almighty creator. It has the bipolar of good and evil in its power. To kill and to restore, go hand-in-hand for the universe. The author switches back and forth between these two possibilities and blurs the threshold.

For this discovery-the measured use of poisonous metals as medications-Paracelsus has entered our history books. There is, however, an unfortunate ending to the great physician's life. He died of metal poisoning (Valis 177-8).

He knows that God exists, he also believes in Him, but could not take himself back from trying to understand the language unknown to him and his friends. Therefore, the loops take him back, and everytime he struggles for an answer, new questions emerge. The only binding power remains in his Faith. Even though this would seem to be a religious didacticism, it is

not in the sense that he does not prove anything to the reader nor to himself. No question is answered. *Valis* is a form of meditation through which he feels the Utmost and the most fearful but does not express and explain the pure experience. It is the erasing of reality versus irreality as we sense that neither we can save the world, nor ourselves. *'In essence, VALIS selectively fires information to us which aids us in escaping from the maze, in finding the way out' (Valis 187).*

A critical analysis of Dick in the hermeneutic sense would result in a little resentment, as we mentioned before.

What is one then to make of this novel, which is to my mind at best a half-success both ideationally and narratively? Ideationally, because it perhaps rightly refuses to present any coherent cosmo-theological system (Suvin 18).

It is a “half-success” if you search for a complete system of belief, a creed of religious truth or any kind of absolutes, because Dick is both aware, like Fat, of our incompetent reasoning and our falling into inevitable fallacies whenever we try to define and interpret the Creator. The problem with Suvin’s interpretation is that it overdoes itself. He presupposes that Dick has a certain message and a goal in mind. However, in reading the novel several times one can see that rather than giving simple messages and forming a philosophical system to define the universe, he mocks us by using different themes, framing devices and techniques. At the beginning of this paper, I said that *Valis* has a dialectical nature, but that of unprogressive. Dialectic is an investigation of truths in philosophy through reasoning. Here, Dick uses dialectics through the argumentations of characters to show us its dead ends and cyclic motion back to the first axiom. These kinds of novels are mood pieces, which make us understand the despair of existence by their disconcerting plurality and multiplicity. Yet they also have a sense of humor, which makes them *comedy noirs*. It is this humor that saves Dick and his characters from destruction. For example, after seeing the film and believing in Fat,

Phil says that even though he cannot explain rationally, he knows that what happened to Fat is real. They know this not through their endless rationalizations, but through intuition. Then he misplaces his own words and says: *'Okay; it mattered what the explanation was. But at least one thing had been proved; Fat might be clinically crazy but he was locked into reality-a reality of some kind, although certainly not the normal one'* (Valis 159). Their comical shifts in mood release the tension of the endless seeking and failings that surround us.

In conclusion, if the reader of Valis is asked to explain what happened in the novel, s/he would say, 'Hmm. I can't tell.'. And if asked why, s/he would probably say 'You must experience it yourself'. It may be parallel to the Aristotelian catharsis in tragedy. The emotional feeling cannot be imposed only experienced by oneself. Like other postmodern texts, *Valis* cannot be summarized because of its evasion of a uniform reality. It is a kind of an intertextual maze in which one finds himself as mad as the neurotic, the psychotic and the schizophrenic is. As Eliot said, there is nothing to explore but the space where now we stand. To give the last word to Philip K. Dick;
'Faith is strange. It has to do by definition with things you can't prove' and the end to all searches for proof is where you have started (Valis 224).



✿ Conclusion ✿

As Philip K. Dick rendered no conclusions in the novels I have discussed so far, to close my thesis with a conclusion is not viable. Nevertheless, if I am to hold a position as far as Dick's work is concerned, I know with clarity that he is one of the most 'authentic' (remarked by Huntington also) and most interesting American writers, whose relation to either the SF genre or the post-modern genre cannot be pinpointed with ease. Huntington says in his essay on the authentic place of Dick among his rivals, that he deals with the *perception of the impossibility of sincerity* and he uses the same strategies as many postmodern writers that came after him. (*Huntington 152*). That is why I trailed the deconstructive moves and tactics in order to corroborate the *Nova Science Fiction* fostered in Dick's imaginative realm. The constant emphasis on the search for objectivity in our modern world itself presents the inevitability of the act of finding it.

As I said before, with his style, Dick challenges the biased preconceptions about SF in the literary arena and he explored the excluded spaces and margins of general SF themes and patterns. The questioning of human condition limited by the great passion of the masses to a whole set of utopianisms, wish-fulfillment and escape, alters in novels like *Electric Sheep* in which we can find neither stereotypes nor a well-wrought urn of the realist tradition. Through the close analysis, one thing especially caught my attention. All the three novels; *Valis*, *Electric Sheep* and *High Castle* share a certain kind of 'awareness'. As a writer and a human, Dick should have been overtly sensitive to the new culminations in science, society, politics and cultural phenomena. He posed us with multiple universes neither of which he sees as the best. Never does he preach rectitude. Still, he elaborated on them successfully, if we can give

a definition of success, of course. The tensions, which are never fully resolved in Dick, though sometimes slackening, create a flexible realm on which discourses and thoughts, which communicate within the novel as well as to the reader, would exist.

Furthermore, I have found various postmodern topics that Dick was concerned like entropy, simulation, forgery, schizophrenia, historicity, authorship, alienation, conspiracy... etc., all of which are embedded with tropes of classical SF such as androids, computer simulations, laser beams, artificial intelligences, alternate futures, and many other fabulata. As Huntington noted;

The dichotomy of rational/irrational, like the one of sane/insane that also dominates this novel, tends to be more polemic than it is analytical (Huntington 154).

Then, it is unfair to do an analytical study of Dick's novels, as the virtue of his texts lie in their details, which trigger a never-ending journey through a 4-dimensional space-time continuum. In an anti-conclusion, I can say that in Dick we find an enveloping nebula of uncertainties and an author who retreats from and reenters in rhythmic motions to the endless questions of humanity.

In addition to all these interpretations, a mood of sorrow casts a shadow over Dick's novels, which is evident in *Valis*. The madness of Fat and all kinds of counter-attacks to his religious belief form a void that cannot be filled easily. In both *High Castle* and *Electric Sheep*, he seems to end them with not necessarily happy but 'mission-accomplished' endings. However, we realize that both Tagomi and Deckard are lost much more than before with fake worlds and their incompatible realities. Nonetheless, hope lingers in the depths of this pessimistic and entropical world when *Valis* ends with those paradise-descriptive words 'Garlands of flowers, singing and dancing, and the recital of myths, tales and poetry' (*Valis* 228). The image of a 'flower' appears only once and it is in the end of *Valis* and strikes as another cipher to be cherished.



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