Posthumanism and the Science Fiction of Philip K. Dick
Has the Future he Prophesied Arrived?

Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the human condition transmuted by science and technology as depicted in the works of the American science-fiction writer Philip K. Dick and its relevance to the contemporary state of humanity and the concept of posthumanism. The paper explores first the notion of posthumanism as a cultural and philosophical framework for the 21st century that describes the advent of a new epoch of transformed humanity by the excessive dependence on technology. Then Philip K. Dick, whose most acclaimed works were written during the 1960s and 1970s, is introduced as the visionary writer who had an unusual discernment of the future of the world and the cost humans have paid for the unlimited uses of technology in every area of human life and activity. Through the analysis of two of his major novels, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Ubik*, I intend to answer the pertinent question as to whether the state of humanity Philip Dick portrays in his works corresponds with the reality of today's world and the notion of posthumanity; in other words, has the future of humanity Philip Dick predicted in his fiction arrived?

Keywords: Posthumanism, Philip K. Dick, Science Fiction, Technology, Virtual Reality, Do Androids Dream, Ubik

BELKHARCHOUCHE Malika*

Department of Letters and English Language, Frères Mentouri University Constantine 1, Algeria.

Résumé

L'objectif de cette étude est d'examiner la condition humaine transmutée par la science et la technologie telle qu'elle est dépeinte dans les œuvres de l'écrivain américain de science-fiction Philip K. Dick et sa pertinence par rapport à l'état contemporain de l'humanité et au concept de posthumanisme. L'article explore d'abord la notion de posthumanisme en tant que cadre culturel et philosophique pour le 21ème siècle qui décrit l'avènement d'une nouvelle ère d'humanité transformée par la dépendance excessive à la technologie. Puis Philip K. Dick, dont les œuvres les plus acclamées ont été écrites dans les années 1960 et 1970, est présenté comme l'écrivain visionnaire qui a eu un discernement inhabituel de l'avenir du monde et du coût que les humains ont payé pour l'utilisation illimitée de la technologie dans tous les domaines de la vie et de l'activité humaines. A travers l'analyse de deux de ses romans majeurs, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? et Ubik, j'ai l'intention de répondre à la question pertinente de savoir si l'état de l'humanité que Philip Dick dépeint dans ses œuvres correspond à la réalité du monde d'aujourd'hui et à la notion de posthumanité; en d'autres termes, l'avenir de l'humanité que Philip Dick a prédit dans ses romans est-il arrivé?

Mots clés: Posthumanisme, Philip K. Dick, Science fiction, Technologie, Réalité virtuelle, Les androïdes rêvent-ils, Ubik.

ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى التحقيق في الحالة الإنسانية المتحولة بسبب الاعتماد على العلم والتكنولوجيا كما تم وصفها في أعمال كاتب الخيال العلمي الأمريكي فيليب ك. ديك وصلتها بالحالة المعاصرة للبشرية ومفهوم ما بعد الإنسانية. يستكشف المقال أولا مفهوم ما بعد الإنسانية كإطار ثقافي وفلسفي للقرن ال 21 الذي يصف ظهور عصر جديد من الإنسانية المتحولة من خلال الاعتماد المفرط على التكنولوجيا. بعد ذلك يتم تقديم فيليب ك. ديك، الذي كتب أعماله الأكثر شهرة خلال الستينيات والسبعينيات من القرن الماضي، باعتباره الكاتب صاحب الرؤية الذي كان لديه تمييز غير عادي لمستقبل العالم والتكلفة التي دفعها البشر مقابل الاستخدامات غير المحدودة للتكنولوجيا في كل مجالات حياة الإنسان ونشاطه. من خلال تحليل اثنتين من رواياته الرئيسية، هل يحلم الروبوت بالأغنام الكهربائية؟ وأوبيك، أهدف في هذه الدراسة الى الإجابة على السؤال ذي الصلة حول ما إذا كانت حالة الإنسانية التي يصورها فيليب ديك في أعماله تتوافق مع واقع عالم اليوم ومفهوم ما بعد الإنسانية؛ وبعبارة أخرى، هل مستقبل الإنسانية الذي تنبأ به فيليب ديك في رواياته أصبح حقيقة؟

الكلمات المفتاحية: ما بعد الانسانية، فيليب ك. ديك، الخيال العلمي، التكنولوجيا، الواقع الافتراضي، هل يحلم الروبوت، يوبيك.

* Corresponding author, e-mail: belkharchouche.malika@umc.edu.dz

Introduction

Since its early times of existence, science fiction has always speculated on the posthuman condition, making of the world of fiction the ground for all imaginable scenarios that go beyond the "human" and the notion of humanism. The genre has long anticipated a future that challenges Anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism through scientific and technological achievements that involve such fields as biotechnologies, cybernetics, artificial intelligence, and technologically enhanced people and new species. The collision with these new technologies has irrevocably altered the very nature of human beings and what we consider human characteristics such as consciousness, emotion, morality, free will, and mortality. Additionally, the impact of technology has reached even the Earth's ecosystems and the possibilities of human survival as "nature turns out to be nothing natural—or rather, something much more than natural" (Milburn, 4). In fact, the present time has become open to a different order of things that seems even stranger than fiction, and, in this posthuman era, "there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals" (Hayles 3). In this respect, the concept of posthumanism has gained prominence within academia along the last three decades with productive scholarship, not only in literary studies, but also in fields as various as cultural studies, philosophy, evolutionary psychology, political theory, ethical issues and scientific studies. Because of the growing divergencies and the complex discussions surrounding the concept of posthumanism and posthuman condition, it is necessary to explore the different views exposed by scholars and theorists in their definitions of the notion. Debates in different disciplines and branches of knowledge are still going on in the treatment of the issue with the rapid advances of science and technology and the transformations they continuously bring to human life condition. Then the notion of posthumanism will be examined in the two most acclaimed works of Philip K. Dick to answer the question of this research.

1. We Were Humans

Prior to delving into the various implications of the concept of posthumanism, it is worth highlighting the basic premises of humanism as set by the modern Western culture and civilization. The notion of human nature has changed over time and the attempts to comprehend the concept of humanness have witnessed intense interrogation in various fields of knowledge, including philosophy, anthropology, and even scientific studies. Deeply rooted in classical philosophy, namely that of Aristotle, the notion of what it means to be human was developed in the seventeenth century by René Descartes, one of the founders of humanism in modern Western philosophy. Descartes asserts that "Because reason… is the only thing that makes us men, and distinguishes us from the beasts, I would prefer to believe that it exists, in its entirety, in each of us" (21), and that this "power of judging well and distinguishing the true from the false ... is naturally equal in all men" (20). Accordingly, in Cartesian thought, the rational mind, which is entirely distinct from the corporeal body, and its ability to determine the truth is the essential attribute of human essence that made Descartes affirm "I think, therefore I am" (36). The distinction between the human and the inhuman is historically rooted in the concept of anthropocentrism that Descartes adopted and that refers to the most recent geologic age of human impact on his environment and the planet and his status of supremacy over the natural world.

With the overwhelming developments in technology and the ensuing transformation in human everyday lives accompanied by countless science fiction narratives that question human uniqueness and supremacy, Descartes's dualistic thought and his definition of human exceptionalism based on reflexive consciousness provoked perpetual debates among intellectuals to comprehend the nature of humanness. Contemporary scholarly production critiquing Cartesian humanism tend to expose historical parameters and political implications in defining the human subject and its early pretended universal status of supremacy. Contemporary scholars insist on the fact that the notion of humanism or human nature is a multifaceted concept that is specific to particular historical periods and points of view that developed in the 19th

century and beyond. Citing Raymond Williams, Tony Davies, and Kate Soper's views, the renowned academic Couze Venn explains:

> Two 'humanisms' developed – interacting with each other to produce the polyvalence of humanisms we encounter today. One, French in origin and political in purpose, consisted of a view of the human as the 'hero of liberty'. The other, philosophical in direction and German in origin, was a view that embraced education and knowledge as the key to human freedom and cooperation. (491-92)

This scientific and liberal way of thinking about the human means essentially "a belief in progress, the technological mastery over nature, the separation of the human and the animal, a therapeutic approach to human behaviour and a secular approach to scientific inquiry" (Campbell et al. 88). Therefore, the inherently progressive nature of human society and man's mastery of the natural world convey the supposed universality of humanism's tenets associated with technological and instrumental progress. Katherine Hayles characterizes humans as "autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice" (286). Hayles, however, specifies that this version of humanism is the product of "that fraction of humanity who had the wealth, power, and leisure to conceptualize themselves as such" (ibid.). Hence, the notion of universal humanism does not emanate from the universal "Man" and the rights of man everywhere in the world; it is rather recently conceptualized as "narrowly Western version of liberal-humanist individualism, sanctioning through its human exceptionalism a relation of domination and subjugation to its externalized others – animals, machines, nature, the environment, non-individualistic cultures and – In the case of the ambiguously generic 'man' – women" (Wallace 693). Indeed, the rational progress through scientific and cultural development manifested in European history led to the political investment of Europe-centred paradigms and European specific character as the universal attributes of humanity. These attributes have become a profit-oriented civilizational model that Rosi Braidotti and Paul Gilroy designate as "imperial humanism" (2).

While progress is extolled as a central tenet of humanism with technological achievements that would allow humans to exercise their mastery over the natural world and achieve perfection in their social existence, it has posed another problematic in the distinction between the human and the inhuman. In our contemporary world swamped with technological stuff and ruled by machines, the longstanding assumptions about humanness, namely the universal powers of reason, free will and individualism, have come under scrutiny and pushed intellectuals to reconsider their definitions of what it means to be human that need to be deconstructed. It had long been assumed that a machine constructed by "Man" would never possess the inherently human faculties and powers that might lead to overthrowing man's control of his environment and of his own destiny. Neil Badmington earnestly argues:

> if a machine … were constructed in such a way that it had what might be called an organ for every occasion, it would … no longer be possible to maintain a clear distinction between the human and the inhuman. Given enough organs, a machine would be capable of responding in a manner utterly indistinguishable from that of a human being. Reason, no longer capable of "distinguish[ing] us from the beasts," would meet its match, its fatal and flawless double. (18)

From this perspective, it has become certain that the boundaries that have distinguished us "humans" from the inhuman, whether technological or other species, have dropped off, and a new age of human existence has already begun to manifest. Humanism has slipped into posthumanism.

2. What is Posthumanism?

A good deal of recent critical work on both science fiction and technoculture, which is in full expansion, implies that we are living a posthuman condition in a digital age. Like any other term with the prefix "post" such as post-Christian and postmodernism, posthumanism is still a debatable concept with multidisciplinary concerns and at the crossroads of science and technology, politics, philosophy, and cultural and literary studies. Since the time the term was coined by the postmodern

literary theorist Ihab Hassan in his article "Prometheus as Performer: Towards a Posthumanist Culture?" (1977), it has come essentially to mean a break with the foundational values and assumptions of modern Western humanism and to redefine the status and role of the human in relation to other species, to technology, and to nature. The figure of Prometheus (the Greek god of fire that defied the gods and gave fire to humanity as a symbol of progress and civilization) in Hassan's work offers the paradigm for the ensuing development of Posthumanist theories as it reveals both the attitudes of optimism towards all that technology can bring as positive and the attitudes of critical reflection on the underlying transformation in human condition and culture (Jansen et al., 218-19).

In our post-industrial world of advanced capitalism and of spectacular developments in the life and neural sciences and digital information technologies, we are permanently inundated with new scientific terms like postbiological, postcorporeal, cyborgs and bodies-without-organs, and even with new sciences of complexity, such as nanotechnology and genomics, synthetic biology, neurobotics and DNA computation. In this context, technology has become at the centre of critical thinking about human nature, culture, and natural environment, and has replaced other modes of perception and thinking like religion and psychology. As a result, the authority of science and of scientific reason compelled a change of paradigm about the human and his position and pushed to raising the fundamental questions about the borders between science and fiction, between the natural and the artificial, and between the human and the inhuman. With these new insights, the notion of posthumanism emerged from the late 20th century and has been used to designate a highly technological existence where the privileging of man as the centre of everything has been destabilized.

In spite of the undisputable general meaning of the term that refers to a state of humanity dominated by technology and an urge to reconsider the earlier foundational assumptions about humanness and humanism, scholarly debates about the concept have taken much more complex avenues and they are still under way in different fields of knowledge. These debates have brought about an array of different perspectives and points of view about the implications of the concept and its standing for the current era of human existence. For Rosi Braidotti, posthumanism "marks the emergence of a new type of discourse that is not merely the effect of the convergence of posthumanism and postanthropocentrism and a culmination of these two strands of thought, but rather a qualitative leap in a new and more complex direction" (10). Alongside, Braidotti and Gilroy affirm that "the humanist image of Man as a self-regulating rational animal endowed with the universal powers of reason and language no longer benefits from scientific consensus" (2). Norah Campbell et al., on the other hand, assert that "posthumanism might be more usefully seen as a concept that draws attention to the cracks that have always existed in the water-tight descriptions of the human – how the 'human' has changed radically and continues to change radically over time." They add in a philosophical tone that the notion refers to "liberatory ethics which radically displaces the human as the centre of meaning-making … [and] the posthuman is the ethical and radical realisation that the human only comes into existence by the work of nonhuman Others, both organic and technological" (91).

The philosophical, social and cultural debates about posthumanism have gone further, exposing conflicting viewpoints and sometimes sharing common fears and anxieties concerning the future of humans and human survival. In his essay "Toward a Critique of Posthuman Futures," Bart Simon refers to two distinguishable forms of posthumanism circulating in the current time: popular posthumanism and critical posthumanism. The former is represented by the reactionary position of Francis Fukuyama whose work *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (2002) conveys the idea that the posthuman condition with the reliance on reproductive technologies, artificial intelligence, biometrics, genetically modified organisms, gene therapy, cloning, and stem cell research is a threat to the integrity of human nature with terrible social costs (Simon 7). Fukuyama provides a description of Aldous Huxley's dystopian narrative *Brave New World* (1932) and he wrote: "Huxley was right … the most significant threat posed by contemporary biotechnology is the possibility that it will alter human nature and thereby move us into a 'posthuman' stage of history" (7). Citing Christopher Dewdney's *Last Flesh: Life in the Transhuman Era*

(1998), Bart Simon summarizes popular posthumanism: "We are on the verge of the next stage in life's evolution, the stage where, by human agency, life takes control of itself and guides its own destiny. Never before has human life been able to change itself, to reach into its own genetic structure and rearrange its molecular basis; now it can" (qtd. in Simon 2). Then Simon clarifies,

> This popular posthumanist (sometimes transhumanist) discourse structures the research agendas of much of corporate biotechnology and informatics as well as serving as a legitimating narrative for new social entities (cyborgs, artificial intelligence, and virtual societies) composed of fundamentally fluid, flexible, and changeable identities. (2)

Critical posthumanism, on the other hand, can be viewed as equivalent to posthuman critical theory, and it refers to the sum of theoretical approaches and perspectives informed by academic postmodern theories that are "implicated in the ongoing critique of what it means to be human" (Simon 8). It is, in fact, a way of thinking the human in the different life situations that define his status in relation to technology, to other species, and to reality. Jeff Wallace clarifies that critical posthumanism

> is here defined as a critique, both of an essentializing conception of human nature, and of human exceptionalism, and is generally characterized by discourses of the dissolution or blurring of the boundaries of the human, whether conceptual and philosophical (as in the 'decentring' of the human in 20th-century structuralist and poststructuralist thought) or scientific and technological (as in biotechnologies, genetics and cybernetics). (692-93)

Belonging to both trends of thought, various points of view and perspectives have come to enrich the scholarly debate about what posthumanism implies, ranging from the apocalyptic and most pessimistic view to the optimistic and celebrating one. The major questions that haunt every human living in this age of advanced technology and "Biotechnology Revolution" are posed by Katherine Hayles: "Is the change from human to posthuman an evolutionary advance or a catastrophe of unprecedented scope? Does this change represent the next logical development, in which *Homo sapiens* joins with the intelligent machine to create *Homo silicon*, or does it signal the long twilight and decline of the human race?" (280). According to Hayles, the implications of posthumanism both evoke terror and instigate pleasure (283). Among those who expressed the apocalyptic tone, Neil Badmington admits that "All that was solid has melted into air. Posthumanism has finally arrived, and . . . 'Man' 'himself,' no longer has a place" (10), Steve Beard confidently states, "'Man' does not have to be theorized away; the intersection of consumerism and techno-culture has already done the job" (114), and it is a similar tone shared by Jacques Derrida in his essays "The Ends of Man" (1968) and "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy" (1984). Derrida expressed his deep concern about the future of the human and discussed his contemporaries' way of approaching the nature of "Man" and humanism by "affirming an absolute break and absolute difference" from established anthropocentric thought and blaming advanced technologies for this break (The Ends of Man 135).

The sources of terror can be best understood when we examine certain pessimistic perspectives of thinkers like Michael Dyer and many others who believe that "post" hints to a nightmarish scenario "that the days of 'the human' may be numbered," and "in a more disturbingly literal sense that envisions humans displaced as the dominant form of life on the planet by intelligent machines. Humans can either go gently into that good night, joining the dinosaurs as a species that once ruled the earth but is now obsolete, or hang on for a while longer by becoming machines themselves" (stated in Hayles 283). This apocalyptic vision emanates even from scientists themselves like Warren Sturgis McCulloch who is known for his contribution to the cybernetics movement and his research in the application of neural networks to artificial intelligence. Late in his life, he starkly said, "Man to my mind is about the nastiest, most destructive of all the animals. I don't see any reason, if he can evolve machines that can have more fun than he himself can, why they shouldn't take over, enslave us, quite happily" (qtd. in Ramage and Karen 29).

In this technological age and as a result of new multidisciplinary fields of scientific enquiry and of the scientists' attempts to maximize human potential, cybernetics was

born with the American mathematician Norbert Wiener, whose work in systems control, computer science, biology, and neuroscience opened the door for the modern development of artificial intelligence. According to Hayles, "Wiener helped to initiate a journey that would prove to have consequences more far-reaching and subversive than even his formidable powers of imagination could conceive" (291). We hear today terms like cyberspace, cyborg, and virtual technologies which have starkly changed our social lives and interactions in an unprecedented ways. So, cyberspace has become the new world for the posthuman or, as Kevin Robins puts it, "in Cyberspace … we are provided with a virtual laboratory for analysing ... post-human condition ... including the relation between mental space and the bodily other" (140). The cybernetic transcendence of the human actually offers limitless access to information and allows the exploration of new unimagined prospects and vistas of physical and mental possibilities. Yet with this sophisticated development of neural networks and expert programs, humans are no longer seen as autonomous independent beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice and they can no longer be the source of dominance and control of their environment. Sacrificing our "conscious agency [which] is the essence of human identity … we humans are hopelessly compromised, contaminated with mechanic alienness in the very heart of our humanity" (Hayles 288).

In this world of complex cybernetics, the question of kinship or liaison between the organic and the artificial/the machine has become of primary concern for determining the effects it engenders for the integrity of humans. The old dream of achieving perfection and enhancing human physical and mental capabilities through technological means resulted in what has come to be called the "augmented human" or the widely used term "cyborg." The term cyborg -from merging cybernetic and organism- was coined by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline in 1960, but it was appropriated and used by Donna Haraway in the field of cultural studies through her influential essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" in 1985, signalling definitely the rejection of the boundaries between humans and machines and even between humans and animals. Haraway's work paved the way for productive studies in the humanities and for the emergence of cyborg theory, bringing to the terminology such concepts as "distributed cognition" which suggests "the possibility that human consciousness might be uploaded into a computer, and that humans might thenceforth be able to opt either to retain the material substrate of the body or to become fully postbiological, incorporeal" (Wallace 694). Anthropologist and early systems theorist Gregory Bateson defines consciousness as "not 'bounded by the skin' but composed of 'ensembles' of events and objects in a total cognitive environment" (stated by Wallace 693). In this sense, Katherine Hayles confirms, "the distributed cognition of the emergent human subject correlates with the distributed cognitive system as a whole, in which 'thinking' is done by both human and nonhuman actors" (290).

This dizzying progress in cybernetics and network systems represented by the human-computer interface –as the success of Facebook and media information about individuals demonstrate at a more banal level– has challenged the autonomous self-independent human being and has thrown him into virtual realities. The division between the real objective life and the illusion of virtual reality has come again to obscure the borderline between the natural and the artificial and between the human and nonhuman. As Hayles puts it, virtuality is "a division between an inert body that is left behind and a disembodied subjectivity that inhabits a virtual realm," and this vision of the self approves "the fear that if the boundaries are breached at all, there will be nothing to stop the self's complete dissolution (290). We can observe this version of the posthuman in some scientists' works that disseminate panic, and the most alarming are roboticist Hans Moravec's ideas in his book *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (1988). The point of departure can be traced to the enlightenment thinking that led philosophers to set forth that "human beings, like animals and machines, had no bounds ... fixed to the improvement of their faculties, and thus the perfectibility of man is unlimited" (Yaszek and Ellis 72). By attempting to obtain through technological mastery the ultimate privilege of immortality, Moravec imagines "Man" downloading himself into a computer. He argues,

> Today, our machines are still simple creations, requiring the parental care and hovering attention of any newborn, hardly worthy of the word

"intelligent." But within the next century they will mature into entities as complex as ourselves, and eventually into something transcending everything we know—in whom we can take pride when they refer to themselves as our descendants. (1)

Katherine Hayles reveals the dangers and horrors of such apocalyptic future for humanity and she outrageously responds:

A roboticist's dream … struck me as a nightmare … I happened upon the passage where he argues it will soon be possible to download human consciousness into a computer … he invents a fantasy scenario in which a robot surgeon purees the human brain in a kind of cranial liposuction ... At the end of the operation, the patient, now inhabiting the metallic body of the computer, wakens to find his consciousness exactly the same as it was before. How, I asked myself, was it possible for someone of Moravec's obvious intelligence to believe that mind could be separated from body? … how could anyone think that consciousness in an entirely different medium would remain unchanged, as if it had no connection with embodiment? Shocked into awareness, I began to notice he was far from alone. (1)

Moravec is obviously not the only fantasist; American computer scientist Marvin Minsky shared his view about consciousness and the human brain; he suggested, "it will soon be possible to extract human memories from the brain and import them, intact and unchanged, to computer disks" (qtd. in Hayles 13). He even believes that "the most important thing about each person is the data, and the programs in the data that are in the brain. And some day you will be able to take all that data, and put it on a little disk, and store it for a thousand years, and then turn it on again and you will be alive in the fourth millennium" (qtd. in Hayles 244-45).

Additionally, in one of the most shocking and even horrifying accounts of the posthuman condition, *Time* magazine published the issue of January 1983 with a cover displaying the image of a computer and a man sitting in front of it. The magazine's tradition of announcing "Man of the Year" unexpectedly came out with the cover's headlines that read "Machine of the Year" and "The Computer Moves In." The magazine's publisher John A. Meyers explained to his readers, "Several human candidates might have represented 1982, but none symbolized the past year more richly, or will be viewed by history as more significant, than a machine: the computer" (Meyers 3). In spite of the positive reception expressed by a handful of the readers, the strange award rushed immediate hostile responses. Neil Badmington later wrote, "this time something far more dramatic had occurred. Humans had failed to leave their mark. 'Man of the Year' had given way to 'Machine of the Year'" (12). And he added, "In my haste … I had overlooked the significance of the somewhat pathetic anthropomorphic figure that sat to the left, looking on. Here, in the margins of the image, another side of the story began to emerge. Why, if the computer has "moved in," should there be a human witness?" (13).

This new vision of the human has urged to rethink subjectivity and to reconsider the old definitions of the self in a world of wholesale technological change and of global market. Indeed, the atomized vision of the individual human as free and self-independent of the environment has been replaced by new approaches to subjectivity that take into account "technological mediation" and political economy as determining factors. According to Braidotti, subjectivity is "a collective assemblage that encompasses human and nonhuman actors, technological mediation, animals, plants, and the planet as a whole" (9). The human subject does not act in isolation from his environment and even from his own creation that might exceed his potential and his natural abilities. So, it follows that "the proper study for the posthuman condition is the complex human interaction with non-human agents" (23). In addition to intelligent machines and network systems that have allowed such new concepts as "distributed agency" and "extended minds" (Braidotti 2) to be part of the definition of the posthuman, technology has also undeniable social and environmental impact with social and ecological organizing systems. In fact, man-induced climate change through excessive industrialization and blind exploitation of the planet's resources, genetic engineering techniques in modifying plants and animals (known as GMO), global

economy, and hegemonic transnational corporations contribute all to the human, social and environmental devastations in the contemporary world. What Braidotti and Gilroy refer to as "economic disparities and structural injustices in the access to the benefits of the global economy and its advanced technologies" (2) make of the individual human a physical entity devoid of free will and choice and subject to psychological complexities inherent to the late capitalist social structure. Hayles asserts that "Acting in secret while maintaining a democratic facade, the corporations tend toward conspiracy, and those who suspect this and resist are viewed as paranoiac" (167). She declares that "the ultimate horror for the individual is to remain trapped 'inside' a world constructed by another being for the other's own profit … the struggle for freedom often expresses itself as an attempt to get 'outside' this corporate encapsulation" (162).

The questions about the posthuman and the conditions that launched the debate on its relevance are nowhere expressed more passionately than in speculative fiction for its ability to address technological, cultural, and social change and for its discussion of anticipated technological realities. In much of the genre's writing, the focus has been on dystopian transformations and on shared anxiety about the future of humanity and humanist legacy. In spite of Man's incessant desire for perfection and creation of a superhuman being who should overcome nature through enhancements to his own body and to his physical environment, many SF works extrapolate from the "threatening present into a nightmarish future of economic decline and unlimited data mining, biotechnology and cloning, or evolutionary retrogression" (Pordzik 143-4). Throughout the history of science fiction from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) to the recent cyberpunk fiction, writers have offered various insights on the correspondence between the self and the technological other and how the directed transformation of both brains and bodies and the creation of cyborgs challenge our understanding of what it means to be human. These insights represent what the mathematician and SF writer Vernor Vinge calls the "technological singularity," which is "a point in the future when the rate of technological change will rise exponentially, outstripping our capacities of foresight and thrusting us into the posthuman era" (Stated in Milburn 11). One of the leading figures of cyberpunk fiction is the American writer Philip K. Dick whose most outstanding works have announced the state of poshumanism and posthuman condition through the merging of the biological and the artificial, the real and the virtual with deep social, psychological, and political insights. So, do Dick's fictional future worlds correspond to our present state of being?

3. Philip K. Dick and the Posthuman

If William Gibson invented cyberpunk fiction, it is Philip K. Dick who wrote it first with prophetic visions concerning the fate of humans in the chaotic postmodern world dominated by technoscience and a military-industrial complex. With more than 100 stories and 44 SF novels to his credit and many of his works adapted into feature films, Philip K. Dick is one of the most inventive, visionary and influential writers of the twentieth century whose fiction explored multiple philosophical and social themes and featured recurrent SF elements such as simulacra, virtual reality, totalitarian governments, monopolistic corporations, drug abuse, and altered states of consciousness. Through this bulk of work mostly labelled dystopian, his major concern was centred on questions related to the nature of reality and human nature and identity. As a witness of the Cold War years with the widespread anxieties and fears of nuclear annihilation and the mounting pressure of governments and techno-capitalism on individual subjects, Dick became deeply concerned about political freedom, humanistic values, and about the future of humanity lying on the far side of a nuclear holocaust. Besides, extrapolating from the period's conditions of life and reflecting on the psychic strains of the transition to post-industrialism and technoculture, Dick managed to demonstrate the ideological forces that determine the applications of what was often thought to be the neutral realm of science and scientific research. Thus, the fundamental issues that haunted Dick throughout his career are "the collapse of humans and technology and a posthuman threat to individuals in techno-capitalism" (Best and Kellner 190). After the period of apprenticeship as a professional writer in the 1950s, the great period of Dick's mature and farsighted novels followed in the 1960s and 1970s with a prodigious output that constitutes a critique of the postmodern society as a

threat to the liberal humanist legacy and through which the different implications of the posthuman can be explored.

For the sake of approaching the selected works of Dick that demonstrate "the collapse of humans" and the changing conditions of life in the posthuman world, it is worth establishing the theoretical framework that will assist our analysis. In fact, following Marx's assertion that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness" (Political Economy, 43) and his writing of "the intellectual desolation, artificially produced by converting...human beings into mere machines" (*Capital*, 3), many versions of Marxist theory are found most suitable for the interpretation of the consequences of the social and economic changes on the humans' state of being. Drawing basically on Frederic Jameson and his Marxist critique of the current historical situation, especially in his work *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1989), this study will employ his basic concepts and thoughts to investigate Philip K. Dick's selected works that depict the human subject and human condition in the contemporary world. Jameson identifies multiple features that are associated with the postmodern condition and he stresses such notions as commodification, conspiracy, simulacrum or the culture of the image and the fake (which he adopts from Jean Baudrillard), and "a new depthlessness" (*Postmodernism* 6) that manifests in the belief that one can never move beyond the surface appearance of ideology or "false consciousness" to deeper truth. And as a result, "our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time" (16) since we are faced only with "multiple surfaces" (12). In addition, Jameson addresses certain symptoms that qualify the post-industrial society, including "new forms of business organization (multinationals, transnationals)" (xviii-xix), an "internationalization" of business and market that represent a form of power and influence greater than any one nation with the exploitation of workers in support of multinational capital, "new forms of media interrelationship" (xix) that represents the new means for the capitalist take-over of individual lives and that makes humans rely more on the media's versions of reality, a whole new technology that is "itself a figure for a whole new economic world system" (6), and the American military and economic domination that has produced a culture whose underside is "blood, torture, death, and terror" (5).

In this global context of "late capitalism," Jameson refers to the psychic strains that accompany the extravagant transformations in the social and cultural fabric of the postmodern world and he adopts the Lacanian theories of paranoia and schizophrenia which are considered as crucial to the normal human psyche as they are normal responses "of human subjects caught in the web of commodities and conspiracies" (Freedman 20). Although there is a clinical difference between the two psychotic phenomena, the paranoiac and schizophrenic experiences are both related to the de-centering of the subject who suffers from a "breakdown of the signifying chain" that "[s/he] is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 27). Jameson relates these psychotic phenomena to the "waning of affect" (10) and a culture of drug addiction produced by the postmodern culture that lead the human subject to experience the present "in the negative terms of anxiety and loss of reality, but which one could just as well imagine in the positive terms of euphoria, a high, an intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity" (28-29). Within this framework, the study concerns Philip K. Dick's most representative works of his mature period: *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and *Ubik* (1969).

3.1. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and Human/Inhuman Dichotomy

In a twenty-first century post-apocalyptic world devastated by World War Terminus (WWT) that has left the planet barren and has decimated both the world's human and animal population, Earth's residents must adapt to the new conditions of life of psychological alienation and the threats of biological degeneration because of the nuclear fallout that covers Earth in radioactive dust. Many people emigrate to off-

world colonies where they are offered human-like androids as servants to help them in their new life. The story of *Do Androids* is set within the political economy of an interplanetary global capitalism that relies on highly advanced technology through which capitalist corporations and political authorities control and rule the people who choose not to emigrate to other planets. In a competitive race, the two corporate giants, the Rosen Association and the Grozzi Corporation, produce increasingly complex androids that are seemingly undistinguishable from humans and that have the human capacities of memory, desire, fear of death, and more importantly self-reflexivity and consciousness that lead them to rebel against their masters in the outer-space colonies. After killing their masters, the most advanced androids in the form of the Nexus-6 model produced by the Rosen Corporation have escaped to Earth where the authorities have assigned bounty hunters to track and kill them for the threat they constitute for human safety and integrity. On the other hand, and after the extinction of most animal species on Earth, owning a live animal, which is extremely expensive, or alternatively an artificial one is considered a symbol of social status and a demonstration of human empathy towards other life forms. In this desolate landscape where "the morning air, spilling over with radioactive motes, gray and sun-beclouding" (*Do Androids* 4), the protagonist bounty hunter Rick Deckard is assigned to track and retire (kill) the fugitive androids with the hope of gathering enough bounty money to purchase a real animal instead of his electric sheep to assure a better social status and to help his wife Iran who suffers from a severe depression. However, through Deckard's experiences with the androids and the new environment crammed with technological devices and conspiracies of all sorts, the narrative looks at what it means to be human, questions reality, and blurs the lines between real and simulacral, authentic and fake.

According to the juridical system on Earth, empathy or the ability to feel compassion towards fellow humans and animals is considered the key attribute that distinguishes humans from androids, and for making this distinction, a machine named the Voigt-Kampff scale is designed with a test that consists of questions which elicit an emotional response. Although the replicants have supposedly no capacity for empathy and their lack of emotional reaction to the Voigt-Kampff test divulges their artificial nature, Philip Dick problematizes the human/inhuman dichotomy by revealing the androids to be nearly indistinguishable from human beings and sometimes more empathic than their human creators. By masquerading as humans and melding in with human society and by declaring their right to live autonomously, the "andys" challenge the essentialized vision of the human selfhood and "authentic" human subjectivity. Additionally, the buyers of live animals are distinguished as zealous adherents of the theology of Mercerism, which is a widespread media-transmitted secular cult based on empathy with animals and encouraging animal ownership as a sign of moral solidarity. In gripping the handles of the empathy box and telepathically fusing with the figure of Wilbur Mercer whose Sisyphean screen image is featured climbing incessantly a desert mountain and struggling to get out of the "tomb world" -a state of depression caused by the mass extinction of animals- the adherents experience the pain of Mercer and endure the utmost in human empathy.

In this era wherein humans conflate with machines, biology with technology, Rick Deckard is confronted with the haunting question of what it means to be human, or more precisely of what remains of human essence and identity when androids are posing as identical to humans. In fact, what Umberto Rossi calls the "android cogito" (1), following the Cartesian philosophy, establishes the ontological uncertainty about the identity of each character in the story: who is human and who is not? While relying on the Voigt-Kampff empathy test, Deckard realizes its ineffectiveness as androids are intelligent enough to elude the questions and make the test's outcome unreliable. The confusion then lies in the fact that while some humans are cruel and lack in emotions, some androids display emotional responses and compassion toward their fellow creatures in contrast to Deckard's belief that "an android doesn't care what happens to another android" (101). The sexually attractive Nexus 6 android Rachael Rosen, presented by the head of the Rosen Association Eldon Rosen as his daughter, shows her concern for the other androids and her affection for a human when she seduces Rick Deckard, and after they have sex in a motel, she offers to help him in hunting the remaining fugitive androids. Rick considers the act of offering assistance and

cooperation as humane and he wonders, "what kind of world is it ... when an android phones up a bounty hunter and offers him assistance?" (71). After Rick retires the last three andys, Rachael pushes his newly bought goat off the roof, "an act that conflates her jealousy of the goat with revenge for Deckard's killing her friends" (Hayles 173). This demonstrates her ability to feel compassion and loyalty beside her intelligence in tricking Rick and passing as human.

In a similar experience, Rick is deluded by the opera singer Luba Luft who has a fascinating artistic talent -she sings Mozart's *The Magic Flute*- and who contemplates and identifies with Edvard Munch's painting in the art museum. Rick judges her as humane and warm, yet while tracking her, she causes his arrest by the police officer from the fake Hall of Justice and later tries to set him against his colleague Phil Resch by declaring that the latter is an android. After Luba has been retired by Phil Resch, Rick is devastated because of the feeling of empathy he has towards her, and this leads him to more confusion and uncertainty about what makes the difference between the human and the inhuman, between the natural and the artificial. Therefore, this interaction between the human and the android "can be read allegorically as one way of negotiating new relations with technology in a posthuman world" (Best and Kellner 195).

In this respect, the feeling of empathy shifts from humans to androids and even to artificial animals; and in a reciprocal manner, humans have become cold, selfish, and cruel like the androids that killed their masters and that are more concerned with their self-preservation and integration into the mainstream society. Rick Deckard's partner Phil Resch represents this category of humans who behave like androids and lack in emotions. Unlike Rick who is emotionally attracted by Rachael, Resch's cynical and cold approach to the female android is displayed after he notices Rick's confusion and thus he suggests, "[g]et to bed with her first ... and then kill her" (111). In the case of Luba Luft, Rick shows an admiration for her talent and her humane warmth while Resch pulls his gun and kills her, making Rick suspect his human nature and believe Luba's declaration that he is an android. It is only after testing him that Rick discovers Resch is indeed human, but Resch is similar to many humans who have become emotionless beings depending on technological devices such as the "Penfield mood organ" -a device for artificial brain stimulation- to adapt to the new desolate and depressing life. The episode of Rick's wife Iran in the beginning of the novel when she considers dialling different moods for the day demonstrates the artificial and unnatural world humans inhabit. She tells her husband about the Penfield mood organ,

> I read how unhealthy it was, sensing the absence of life, not just in this building but everywhere, and not reacting … I guess you don't. But that used to be considered a sign of mental illness; they called it 'absence of appropriate affect.' So I left the TV sound off and I sat down at my mood organ and I experimented. And I finally found a setting for despair. So I put it on my schedule for twice a month; I think that's a reasonable amount of time to feel hopeless about everything, about staying here on Earth. (2)

After his experience with the androids, Rick is ever more troubled by the killing of the humanoid robots that his job requires although he affirms to his wife that "I've never killed a human being in my life" when she accuses him, "You're a murderer hired by the cops" for killing "those poor andys" (1). After Rick retires the last three andys that have taken refuge in the apartment of a human "special" named John Isidore, he reflects, "But what I've done … that's become alien to me. In fact, everything about me has become unnatural; I've become an unnatural self" (230). He even comes to realize that he is "defeated in some obscure way" (230) and to accept that an exclusive and empathic human species is an illusion. Near the end of the novel, Rick finds a toad in the wasteland desert and brings it home thinking it is a live animal only to be revealed by his wife that it is artificial. His reaction that "[t]he electric things have their lives, too" (241) attests his being "open to the radical ethics of posthuman trans-subjectivity...to the traumatic realities he has been evading through his anthropocentric humanism as well as the ability to experience empathy for the radical, nonhuman, perhaps non-living other" (Vinci 106, 108). Philip Dick was quite aware of the progressive transformation of our world by continuous innovations in technology, and in his essay "The Android and the Human" (1972), he vehemently declares:

Our environment, and I mean our man-made world of machines, artificial constructs, computers, electronic systems, interlinking homeostatic components -all of this is in fact beginning more and more to possess what the earnest psychologists fear the primitive sees in his environment: animation. In a very real sense our environment is becoming alive, or at least quasi-alive, and in ways specifically and fundamentally analogous to ourselves. (183)

In addition to the fact that artificial constructs become alive and analogous to humans, Dick depicts technology as a threat to human survival and existence. When Mercer appears to Rick by the end of the novel, he urges him to "do wrong" (226) and kill the androids because of their threat to human safety and subjectivity. However, the empathic human who feels empathy for androids and can still kill them is the one who violates himself and becomes "an unnatural self" (230) like the androids, and "[h]ere it is not clear anymore who is human and who is not: just anybody could be a runaway Frankenstein's monster without revealing electrodes and scars, ready to laser us to death, and decent men like Rick must turn into stoic killers to survive" (Rossi 172).

Through this high-tech world of the twenty-first century, Dick offers a sound depiction of how technology has become an integral part of human environment, and in the hands of the totalitarian and capitalist powers, it has transformed the human subject into "humans of mere use -men made into machines" (Dick, The Android and the Human 187). It is through television and other technological devices that the government manipulates the population, controls the behaviour of individuals, and determines their consciousness. Indeed, the human quality of empathy has become an ideology made popular by Mercerist doctrine wherein the fusion with Wilbur Mercer through empathy boxes represents a telepathic and spiritual experience defined by Anthony Enns as "escapist fantasies that have been sanctioned or even developed by the government in order to ensure that the population remains passive" (82). Unsurprisingly, it is revealed by Buster Friendly, a host of a popular non-stop radio and TV talk-show who appears to be an undercover android, that Mercer is a fake and that "Mercerism is a swindle" (210). Buster informs the audience that Mercer is an alcoholic and hack player hired to lend his image to the screen: "Wilbur Mercer is not human, does not in fact exist. The world in which he climbs is a cheap Hollywood, commonplace sound stage which vanished into kipple years ago. And who, then has spawned this hoax on the Sol System? Think about that for a time, folks" (209). Then he goes on to incriminate the television cult of Mercerism, "Ask yourselves what it is that Mercerism does. Well, if we're to believe its many practitioners, the experience fuses... men and women throughout the Sol System into a single entity. But an entity which is manageable by the so-called telepathic voice of 'Mercer.' Mark that. An ambitious politically minded would-be Hitler could-" (209). Therefore, this fusion or merging of individual consciousness and media technology highlights the loss of the authentic self and proves that the concept of human subjectivity is an illusion in the face of "a mass conspiracy" organized through the cult of Mercerism and the ideology of empathy.

Rick Deckard's wife Iran is one of the most fervent followers of Mercer's media theology; she enthusiastically relates to Rick, "I remember thinking how much better we are, how much better off, when we're with Mercer. Despite the pain. Physical pain but spiritually together; I felt everyone else, all over the world, all who had fused at the same time" (173). Meanwhile, Rick expresses his sadness and dissatisfaction of the separation between individual humans and the feeling of alienation produced by such communal engagement: "Going over to the empathy box, she quickly seated herself and once more gripped the twin handles. She became involved almost at once. Rick stood holding the phone receiver, conscious of her mental departure. Conscious of his own aloneness" (176). This feeling of aloneness is the fundamental purpose of the doctrine that "operates as the state's optimal homeopathic remedy: it recuperates the citizen's transgression into bounds where it can have no consequences," and in fusing with Mercer, "the political subject is encouraged to empathize with a noble criminal, to vent lurking feelings of rebellion, *but only in the controlled space of [his] own living room*" (Galvan 417).

Similarly, John Isidore, the brain-damaged victim of radiation and thus excluded from migration to other planets, is an ardent follower of Mercerism in which he finds solace from the anguish of social dislocation and the feeling of alienation. In his isolated apartment, he has no choice but to cling to his TV set that broadcasts only the government's channel featuring repetitive advertisements for consumer goods and for emigration. After Buster Friendly announces the fraud of Mercerism, Isidore seems unconvinced by stating, "No one else seemed bothered by it; even the U.N. approved. And the American and Soviet police had publicly stated that Mercerism reduced crime by making citizens more concerned about the plight of their neighbors. Mankind needs more empathy" (74). However, and despite his "special" status, Isidore deduces from Buster's creation of a rival media programme and his contempt for Mercerism that the two screen figures compete and battle for "[their] minds … They're fighting for control of our psychic selves; the empathy box on the one hand, Buster's guffaws and off-the-cuff jibes on the other" (75).

From these experiences of the novel's characters with the humanoids and media technologies, it becomes evident that machines have infiltrated human life and made humans wholly dependent upon technological devices and addicted to the artificial world created by such devices. More compromising, technology acts "as the long arm of the government, furtively breaching the bounds between public and private" (Galvan 418). In spite of his earlier apprehension and his belief in the authentic and autonomous human self, Rick's experience of this technological landscape leads to his awareness that human subjects are compelled to live in conjunction with the technologies they created in "a community of the *post*human, in which human and machine commiserate and comaterialize, vitally shaping one another's existence" (Galvan 414). In the final stage when Rick discovers the artificial nature of the toad and accepts his posthuman identity, he comes to form a new conception of reality by responding to Buster Friendly's attack on Mercerism: "Mercer isn't a fake … Unless reality is a fake" (234). Actually, the reality constructed by media technologies and manipulated by the powers that be is fake, yet it is a posthuman reality that Rick accepts even though he qualifies as "meager and barely significant" (Vinci 109). It is, in effect, "the ultimate dynamic of acceptance of posthuman vulnerability that lets in the environment-worlds of others through a violation of the central, unifying conception of the self" (ibid. 110).

Analogically, in our world of the twenty-first century, the time setting of the novel, technologies in various fields have become dominant in human life from smartphones, electronic media, TV sets, computers and the internet to the most complex scientific achievements in neuroscience and biotechnology that have led to manipulations in the human body and brain and the creation of cyborgs and simulated human intelligence. In addition to global capitalism and hegemonic corporations, the military-industrial and technological complex shifted classical warfare to more sophisticated wars involving cybernetics and threatening humanity with a new devastating holocaust as Dick foresees in his novel. It hence appears to every human living in this cybernetic age that science and technology have become instruments of domination and destruction as Dick depicted in his fiction five decades earlier. Best and Kellner summarise Dick's fears that define our posthuman condition and that have mostly come true:

> His writings reveal deep fears of war, social breakdown, nuclear Armageddon, and military technology and political tensions escalating out of control. He portrays a future in which demagogues use media culture to manipulate and dominate underlying masses of people, and where the development of cybernetic systems results in a society in which humans are mastered by machines, technology, and in some cases superior species. (190)

3.2. *Ubik*: Virtual Reality and Posthumanism in the Technocapitalist World

Ubik, one of Philip Dick's masterpieces, is set in 1992 in a world full of technological innovations, sophisticated inventions and newly mastered human psychic capabilities that are commercialised in the capitalist society like any other commodity. The protagonist Glen Runciter is the proprietor of a prudence organization named

Runciter Associates in New York City, a firm that employs anti-psy technicians called "inertials" who are hired by businessmen to secure their businesses against the competitors who use telepaths -PSIs- to spy on their trade. The company's major rival is an organisation of powerful telepaths led by Ray Hollis who has managed to set a trap for Runciter and his team in a fictitious mission to rid his company of psychics on the planet Luna. Joe Chip is the major tester in Runciter's firm and he has discovered a powerful anti-psychic talent named Pat Conley who has the ability to revert any object and even people to earlier states, and thus changing the present. Joe allows Pat to join Runciter's team, but he warns his boss that she may be dangerous. Before their departure for Luna, Runciter visits his dead wife Ella at the Beloved Brethren Moratorium in Zurich where she lies in "cold-pac" in a state of "half-life" through a technique that maintains the "cephalic activity" of dead people. The world the half-lifers experience in their frozen state is a dream-like reality and their cold-sleep caskets are equipped with media outlets that allow normal people to have contact with them through a microphone.

In their mission on behalf of Ray Hollis, Runciter's team of inertials arrive on Luna and while Joe Chip starts to test the field, a bomb explodes and the blast seemingly kills Glen Runciter. Joe and the other surviving members put Runciter into a cold-pac on the ship and they rush back to Earth to put him in cryogenic suspension in a Moratorium in Zurich. Immediately the story turns into a thriller with mysterious and strange phenomena that happen to the surviving members such as Runciter's face appearing on coins, the world seeming to move backward in time with technology getting primitive, and decay and regression soon attacking people as well as objects. These shifts in the inertials' realities lead them to haunting questions about the nature and the cause of the conspiracy and the relation of the mysterious product called Ubik with these occurrences. In fact, regarding the repeated twists and reversals in the narrative without a clear explanation, the reader is left with the same questions that the novel leaves in suspense: Is Runciter really dead? Are the other characters dead, or are they alive? If they are dead, how does it come that they are dying one by one in horrifying ways? What is real and what is not? What is Ubik? In fact, the interpretations that can be provided are merely based on the fruitless attempts of Joe Chip and his colleagues to understand what is actually happening to them and in their world.

The disruptive transformations in the novel and the disintegration that is repeated in each scene indicate that there is something wrong in this universe. Therefore, the problem that faces the characters is whether the world they are cast in is real or delusory. In the first half of the novel, Joe Chip and his colleagues think their boss Glen Runciter is the only victim of the explosion; however, after a series of obscure and strange events, a message from Runciter marks the first reversal in the plot and throws the group into confusion: "LEAN OVER THE BOWL AND THEN TAKE A DIVE. ALL OF YOU ARE DEAD. I AM ALIVE" (111). So, in their supposedly cryogenic suspension, Runciter tries to keep in touch with them and give them advice and directions through messages that appear in the various places they go to. Stunningly, in the final chapter of the book, Runciter discovers Joe's profile on the coins he has in his pocket, and with this depressing reversal, it can be concluded that Runciter is also dead and he is placed with the other members in half-life. The concluding statement of Runciter "[t]his was just the beginning" (219) does not actually bring any resolution or unfold the mystery; it rather affirms what Salvatore Proietti considers as revealing all the characters are "on the same ontological plan" (qtd in Rossi 189). In *Ubik*, half-life can be seen as Dick's metaphoric representation of the transformations in the objective world; it represents the virtual reality in which individuals live dreamlike experiences and struggle against the opposing forces of "evil, the capital, and entropy" (Proietti, in ibid.).

In this in-between space, the individuals experience a time-slip with symptoms of decay and degeneration in their environment as well as in themselves as they crumble into debris one by one. The regressive force transports them to earlier times and transforms the modern airplanes into old biplanes, television sets into thermoionic tube radios, and "the hydraulic-powered, closed, self-operated, absolutely silent" elevator turns into "an open cage with polished brass fittings, suspended from a cable … [that]

must have been a century old" (112). In addition to the "fresh-looking newspaper" that dates back to 1939, Joe Chips discovers when getting into his kitchen that

> [h]is stove had reverted. Back to an ancient Buck natural-gas model with clogged burners and encrusted oven door which did not close entirely…the other kitchen appliances had undergone similar metamorphoses…The refrigerator that greeted him was an enormous belt-driven model, a relic that had floated into being from god knew what distant past … This aspect was true of all the appliances." (116)

More horrifying in this process are the mysterious deaths of the team's members that start with Wendy Wright who is discovered "on the floor of the closet a huddled heap, dehydrated, almost mummified" (96). In trying to figure out what has happened to Wendy, Joe thinks "she died because of the blast. The explosion that killed Runciter." Then he reflects, "we're all going to die this way; it must have settled on all of us … the explosion consisted of a micronic nuclear reaction" (96). However, the situation becomes hysterically absurd when Joe considers that radiation "explained Wendy's death and it explained the dried-out cigarettes. But not the phone book, not the coins, not the corruption of the cream and coffee. Nor did it explain Runciter's voice, the yammering monologue on the hotel room's vidphone" (97).

In addition to his portrait on the coins, the manifestations of Runciter in the world of the inertials expose the most intricate and confusing episodes in the narrative. News broadcast on Joe Chip's TV set announces Runciter's funeral in his birth place in Des Moines after the failure of all efforts to revive him to half-life. Joe thinks "Maybe Runciter is dead, after all. The TV people think so," then suddenly Runciter appears in person on a TV channel advertising Ubik: "One invisible puff-puff whisk of economically priced Ubik banishes compulsive obsessive fears that the entire world is turning into clotted milk, worn-out tape recorders and obsolete iron-cage elevators, plus other, further, as-yet-unglimpsed manifestations of decay" (126). Runciter addresses Joe by name in the commercial and urges him to look for and buy a can of Ukik which "is sold by leading home-art stores throughout Earth" (ibid.). Dazed, Joe is forced to hypothesise the pattern that must be behind all these strange events; the narrator tells us, "Runciter was playing a sardonic game with them, trifling with them, first leading them in one direction, then the other. An unnatural and gigantic force, haunting their lives …Very confusing, Joe Chip said to himself" (128).

In the face of this confusion and in their attempts to decipher the terrifying conspiracy that traps them, the Runciter operators determine first that the explosion on the moon is responsible, then they think it is a weird joke or game of Runciter, and later they blame Pat Conley who has already demonstrated her powerful psionic abilities in changing the present. Finally, it appears that the adolescent half-life dweller named Jory is the perpetrator. Jory appears first in the beginning of the novel when Runciter visits his wife in the Zurich moratorium. He invades Ella's mind and communicates with Runciter because, as the head of the institution explains, his wife's cephalic energy is weaker than Jory's. Jory is the villain force that controls the "pseudo world" of half-life, and by "eating" the other half-lifers, he obtains more energy to create and maintain this virtual reality and push back his own degeneration. He clearly acknowledges in his encounter with Joe Chip that he is the one who killed his comrades and that "every other fixture in this pseudo world … is a product of [his] mind" (186). This leads to the conviction that all the characters in the story inhabit a world of virtual reality and experience nightmarish events perpetrated by the destructive force of Jory. In this world, Ella Runciter plays the antithetical role to Jory's by being the source of advice and directions for her husband and Joe to counter the force of death and decay. In fact, she is the inventor of Ubik, the mysterious product that has the ability to reverse the processes of regression and death, and she provides Joe with a certificate to buy "a lifetime supply" of it to be able to destroy Jory, "-in other words consume him- as he does to half-lifers placed near him at the moratorium" (206).

The depiction of half-life as a version of reality in *Ubik* demonstrates Dick's recurring fascination with the nature of reality and its construction in a post-industrial world saturated with technology. Dick's manipulation of reality and his description of reality breakdowns cannot be viewed as separate from the social and political context that determines the subjective perception of existence and defines one's self and one's

place in the world. According to Peter Fitting's Marxist view, "reality is not lived directly," but apprehended "by means of various signifying practices which 'construct' both a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence and the 'subjects' or identities necessary to those "representations … these signifying practices are determined by the historical context in which they develop" (220, 233). In this respect, it is important to draw attention to the underlying historical context of the Cold War in the novel and the threat of a nuclear apocalypse that casts its shadow on the world after the experience of the Hiroshima bomb.

In *Ubik*, the event of the bomb explosion on Luna is a phenomenal catastrophe that Dick uses as a symbol of the deathly spectre of the atom bomb and its effect on human condition and perception of reality. Indeed, the scenes of entropy and of decay and disintegration in the novel correspond to a post-apocalyptic world transformed into "kipple" and devastated by "the layers of dust, the rotting of all that's solid, a destruction of form itself that is worse than death" (Jameson, *Archaeologies* 82). Fabienne Collignon draws a parallel between "the book's cold insides and Cold War outside" (49). While the Cold War is "precisely that – cold – and occurs as a result of an engagement with death" (ibid.), coldness in *Ubik* invades everything from the cryogenic suspension of half-lifers in "cold-pac" to the chilling description and perception of the world by the characters as in the case of Joe Chip:

> Now he became aware of an insidious, seeping, cooling-off which at some earlier and unremembered time had begun to explore him - investigating him as well as the world around him. … Into the manifold open wounds the cold drifted, all the way down into the heart of things, … What he saw now seemed to be a desert of ice from which stark boulders jutted. (125)

Under such conditions, life becomes undistinguishable from death and human subjects are no longer able to decide who is living and who is dead. And thus, Dick's concept of half-life refers to this in-between state characterised by "nightmarish uncertainty" and "reality fluctuation" (Jameson, *Archaeologies* 350) that blur the line between the objective outside world and the subjective virtual reality. Joe reflects on his uncertainty about the boundaries between inside and outside, "this is projection on my part. It isn't the universe which is being entombed by layers of wind, cold, darkness and ice; all this is going on within me, and yet I seem to see it outside. Strange, … Is the whole world inside me? Engulfed by my body? … The uncertainty which I feel, the slowing down into entropy - that's the process" (125).

In addition to the deathly spectre of a nuclear war and its effects on humanity, the destructive evil power represented in the novel by the figure of Jory works as a conspirational force that controls and maintains the virtual reality that contemporary humans inhabit. Ella Runciter tells Joe, "there are Jorys in every moratorium. This battle goes on wherever you have half-lifers; it's a verity, a rule, of our kind of existence" (206). By exploiting technology and scientific methods in the form of cold-sleep technique to deliver an eternal or a prolonged life, the controlling political and capitalist powers operate to maintain their control over the weakened people whose minds are "eaten" by the most powerful. Ella Runciter makes it clear that the fight against this insidious power is futile: "It'll be hard. Jory will be sapping your strength always, putting a burden on you … Because in half-life we diminish constantly anyhow. Jory only speeds it up. The weariness and cooling-off come anyhow" (207). Recognizing the dark conspiracy of technology and capitalism, it is revealed that the moratorium's manager Herbert "is paid a great deal of money annually, by Jory's family, to keep him with the others and to think up plausible reasons for doing so" (ibid.). In this sense, Carl Freedman considers that "In a monopoly-capitalist state like modern America … conspiracy is a structural necessity for ruling-class politics" (19).

This world of conspiracy is also a world dominated by commodities and technological devices that "foreground their status as quasi-living, mystifying signifiers" (Freedman 20) that contribute to the characters' alienating experience and to the loss of their autonomous human status. In Joe Chip's apartment, the coffee-pot, the shower, the refrigerator and other appliances demand money for rendered services before each use; animate "homeopapes" read the news for a specified fee; and even the

"homeostatic" apartment door refuses to open until fed with the appropriate credit. When Joe tries "to unscrew the bolt assembly of his apt's money-gulping door" because he has no more coins, it threatens to sue him (26). Hence, commodification and mass-marketing become dominant in this universe where the commodity structure invades every aspect of human existence. On a strictly commercial basis, moratoriums use technology and charge huge sums of money to maintain the dead in a state of half-life and similarly prudence organizations like Ray Hollis's firm and Runciter Associates offer services in the field of psionic powers by hiring telepaths and anti-psys at very high prices.

Furthermore, Dick's depiction of human subjects as powerless consumers caught in the web of global capitalism is made more complex with the mysterious product called Ubik that figures as the title of the book and is introduced in the commercials that serve as epigraphs to each chapter. The strange canned aerosol presented in the narrative as the most powerful product capable of reversing the processes of regression and death is advertised in the epigraphs as various commodities from used cars and foods to a hair conditioner and a deodorant spray. In the last chapter's epigraph, however, the mysterious product transforms into an unidentified entity that many critics associate with theological mystery: "I am Ubik. Before the universe was, I am … I created the lives and the places they inhabit; I move them here, I put them there. They go as I say, they do as I tell them. I am the word and my name is never spoken, the name which no one knows. I am called Ubik, but that is not my name. I am. I shall always be" (215). Christopher Palmer suggests that Ubik is "both a commodity, like Harpic, and a deity" (18), and he argues that "commodities and deities both promise everything, but deliver a lot less than that" (ibid.). Henceforth, whether displayed in an abstract form or presented in the guise of concrete objects, Ubik symbolizes "the struggle of man against Chaos [capital in original], at the end of which, after temporary successes, defeat inexorably awaits him" (Lem 66). This actually explains the failure of the characters in stopping the processes of regression and decay and clarifies Runciter's final statement "[t]his was just the beginning" (219) as "the sign of a closed loop or a recycling" (Palmer 26). In spite of the ambiguity surrounding the nature of Ubik, interpretative readings share a common idea that, whatever form it takes, it is "a product of the conveyer-belt technology of the consumer society" (Lem 66), "the symbol of the ubiquity of the commodity structure" (Freedman 21), and it "signifies all manner of capitalist predation" (Hayles 187).

It is this world of multi-dimensional conspiracies involving the political military complex, technology, and global capitalism that has created the virtual reality of hallucinatory visions and perceptions that the characters inhabit. Half-life in *Ubik* is this alternate reality through which Dick explores the ideology of paranoia and depicts the paranoid individuals as living dreamlike disjointed experiences where everything seems true and then in a while everything turns into a hoax. Paranoia as an ideology of the postmodern world is defined by Frederic Jameson as "nightmarish representations of the sealing off of consciousness from the external world" (*Archaeologies* 270) and is identified by Althusser as a "representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (162), and certainly no other writer "since Kafka-has fictionally produced the ideology of paranoia more rigorously than Philip K. Dick" (Freedman 22). In *Ubik*, Joe Chip is the most paranoid character who is entrapped within the workings of capitalism and the conspiracies inherent in the contemporary technological society and who illustrates the collapse of the autonomous human subject or, as Scott Durham identifies, "the death of the subject" (qtd. in Enns 68). The following description illustrates Joe's psychic unbalance and his inability to distinguish between the authentic and the illusionary:

> An unnatural and gigantic force, haunting their lives. Emanating either within the living world or the half-life world; or, he thought suddenly, *perhaps both*. In any case, controlling what they experienced, or at least a major part of it. Perhaps not the decay, he decided. Not that. But why not? *Maybe*, he thought, *that, too*. But Runciter wouldn't admit it. Runciter and Ubik. Ubiquity, he realized all at once; that's the derivation of the made-up word, the name of Runciter's alleged spray-can product.

Which probably did not even exist. It was probably a further hoax, to
bewilder them that much more. (128)

This state of crisis that characterizes the individual human in the postmodern world is
explained by Palmer in psychological terms: "feeling (emotion, affect) has become
hollow, banal, without individuality, but meanwhile there comes to the surface
undirected psychic material—neurosis, psychosis, violent mood swings, rejections,
delusions, suspicions," and these psychic manifestations, "which involve the reduction
of behaviour to symptoms, are linked to a social condition, the unreality of things in a
particular regime of production and consumption" (20).

Eventually the outcomes of all these transformations in the contemporary world
call into question the human identity, the mapping of reality, and the boundaries
between what is natural and authentic on one side and what is artificial and delusory on
the other. Indeed, the highly commercialized world saturated with technological
inventions and ruled by insidious corporate structure and political bureaucracies has
threatening effects on the social and cultural fronts and on the liberal humanist legacy
as expressed in the novels studied in this paper. In *Ubik*, Joe Chip fantasizes about an
earlier natural state of human condition free from artificial objects and fake realities:
"One of these days, … people like me will rise up and overthrow you, and the end of
tyranny by the homeostatic machine will have arrived. The day of human values and
compassion and simple warmth will return" (84). Accordingly, we can understand the
implied significance of the time-slip in the novel that takes the characters in their
reveries to the earlier decades in the twentieth century when technology was relatively
primitive. Yet this process is accompanied by other processes of decay, disintegration,
and death that the characters fail to stop or revert, and this can be perceived as an alarm
at the impetus of modern technological civilization with its irreversible negative effects
on human life. Stanislaw Lem argues in this sense, "there can no longer be any talk of
return to nature or of turning away from the artificial, i.e., science and technology,
since the fusion of the 'natural' with the 'artificial' has long since become an
accomplished fact" (63). His argument is more alarming when he refers to transformed
humans in this artificial world: "When people become ants in the labyrinths of the
technosphere which they themselves have built, the idea of a return to Nature not only
becomes utopian but cannot even be meaningfully articulated, because no such thing as
a Nature that has not been artificially transformed has existed for ages" (64). Although
the concepts of posthumanism and posthuman condition were not theorized during
Dick's lifetime, especially during the decades of the writing of his masterpieces, his
works are perceived today as visionary articulations of the posthuman and as valuable
sources for the study of the transformed human in the technological age, or more
accurately the cyberage which he helped to identify through his cyberpunk fiction.

Conclusion

In the light of the analysis of Dick's selected novels in this paper, we are driven
to transpose the fictional facts depicted in these works to the present time world to
answer the question as to whether the future Dick predicted in his fiction has arrived. In
fact, as we accelerate into the new millennium half a century away from Dick's time,
our reality seems to be a resemblance of his cyberpunk settings with deep
transformations in our social lives and individual conscience. Indeed, uncontrolled
scientific and technological overdevelopment, highly destructive military technology,
authoritarian governments and global capitalism organized around media and
information technologies, destructive ideologies, and societies of bureaucratic
manipulation constitute all the complex that define our posthuman condition. In our
post-September 11 world, which is strikingly similar to the Cold War setting in Dick's
time, humanity is experiencing explosive crises and is moving "toward an increasingly
unstable world of deadly military conflicts, terrorist attacks, social unrest, and
environmental breakdown" (Best and Kellner 187). Misled and manipulated by the
surge of propagandas and misinformation, fake news and simulacra, which
spread through handheld technology, huge parts of human society are haunted by fears,
confusions, and uncertainties and are led to the spirals of anarchy, drug addiction,
violence, and psychic disorders. Dick captured this amalgamation in his farsighted

writings through science-fictional scenarios and even in his non-fiction works where he declares, "I ask, in my writing, What is real? Because unceasingly we are bombarded with pseudo-realities manufactured by very sophisticated people using very sophisticated electronic mechanisms. I do not distrust their motives; I distrust their power. They have a lot of it. And it is an astonishing power: that of creating whole universes, universes of the mind." (How to Build 183-84). So, the posthuman future Philip Dick depicted in his fiction has not only arrived, but it is also still to arrive, affirming Alexander Dunst's claim that "[to]day, recognition of his centrality to contemporary culture arrives with increasing frequency, sometimes in unexpected and even sinister ways" (9).

Works Cited

1. Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster. Monthly Review Press, 2001.

2. Badmington, Neil. "Theorizing Posthumanism." *Cultural Critique*, No. 53, Winter, 2003, pp. 10-27.

3. Beard, Steve. *Logic Bomb: Transmissions from the Edge of Style Culture*. New York: Serpent's Tail, 1998.

4. Best, Steven and Douglas Kellner. "The Apocalyptic Vision of Philip K. Dick." *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies*, Volume 3 Number 2, 2003: 186-202. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708603003002005

5. Braidotti, Rosi and Paul Gilroy, eds. *Conflicting Humanities*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.

6. Braidotti, Rosi. "Posthuman Critical Theory." *Journal of Posthuman Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2017: 9-25.

7. Campbell, Norah, Aidan O'Driscoll and Michael Saren "The Posthuman: the End and the beginning of the human." *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*. 9:2010: 86–101. https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.306

8. Descartes, René. *"Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking the Truth in the Sciences.*" In René Descartes. *Selected Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge University Press, 1988.

9. Derrida, Jacques. "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy." Trans. John P. Leavey Jr. *Oxford Literary Review*, volume 6, no. 2, 1984: 3-37.

10. --------------------. "The Ends of Man." *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass. Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982: 109-36.

11. Dick, Philip K. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* NY: Ballantine Books, 1968.

12. ----------------- . *Ubik*. Vintage Books, 1991.

13. ----------------- . "How to Build a Universe That Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later." In *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick: Selected Literary and Philosophical Writings*. Ed. Lawrence Sutin. Vintage Books, 1995.

14. ----------------- . "The Android and the Human." In *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick: Selected Literary and Philosophical Writings*. Ed. Lawrence Sutin. Vintage Books, 1995.

15. Dunst, Alexander. "Introduction: Third Reality – On the Persistence of Philip K. Dick." In *The World According to Philip K. Dick*, Eds. Alexander Dunst and Stefan Schlensag. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

16. Enns, Anthony. "Media, Drugs, and Schizophrenia in the Works of Philip K. Dick*." Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Mar., 2006: 68-88.
http://www.jstor.org/stable/4241409.

17. Fitting, Peter. "Reality as Ideological Construct: A Reading of Five Novels by Philip K. Dick." *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Jul., 1983: 219-36.   http://www.jstor.org/stable/4239550

18. Freedman, Carl. "Towards a Theory of Paranoia: The Science Fiction of Philip K. Dick." *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Mar., 1984: 15-24. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4239584

19. Fukuyama, Francis. *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution.* Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2002.

20. Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. The University of Chicago Press, 1999.

21.   Jameson, Frederic. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. Verso, 2005.

22. -------------------. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.* Duke University Press, 1991.

23. Jansen, Yolande, Jasmijn Leeuwenkamp, and Leire Urricelqui. "Posthumanism and the 'posterizing impulse'." Online publication 17 July 2021. manchesteropenhive.com.
https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526148179.00020

24. Lem, Stanislaw and Robert Abernathy. "Philip K. Dick: A Visionary Among the Charlatans." Translated by Robert Abernathy. *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Mar., 1975: 54-67.
http://www.jstor.org/stable/4238911

25. Marx, Karl. "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" (1859). In Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels: *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosoph*y, ed. Lewis S. Feuer. Anchor, 1959.

26. -------------. *Capital*. *Vol. I*. Trans. Ben Fowkes. International Publishers, 1979.

27. Meyers, John A. "A Letter From the Publisher." *Time*. Vol. 121, No. 1, January 3, 1983.
https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,953629,00.html

28. Milburn, Colin. "Posthumanism." *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction*. Ed. Rob Latham. 2014.
https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199838844.013.0041

29. Moravec, Hans. *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence*. Harvard University Press, 1988.

30. Palmer, Christopher. *Philip K. Dick: Exhilaration and Terror of the Postmodern*. Liverpool University Press, 2003.

31. Pordzik, Ralph. "The Posthuman Future of Man: Anthropocentrism and the Other of Technology in Anglo-American Science Fiction." *Utopian*

Studies, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2012: 142-161. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/utopianstudies.23.1.0142.

32. Ramage, Magnus and Karen Shipp. *Systems Thinkers*. Springer, 2009.

33. Robins, Kevin. "Cyberspace and the World We Live In." In *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/ Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, eds. Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows. SAGE, 1995. 135-55.

34. Rossi, Umberto. *The Twisted Worlds of Philip K. Dick: A Reading of Twenty Ontologically Uncertain Novels*. McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2011.

35. Simon, Bart. "Introduction: Toward a Critique of Posthuman Futures." *Cultural Critique.* Volume 53, No. 1, December 2003: 1–9. doi:10.1353/cul.2003.0028.

36. Venn, Couze. "The Enlightenment." *Theory, Culture and Society.* Vol. 23, Issue 2–3, May 2006: 477–498. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276406062701

37. Vinci, Tony M. "Posthuman Wounds: Trauma, Non-Anthropocentric Vulnerability, and the Human/Android/Animal Dynamic in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*" *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 47, No. 2, Fall 2014: 91-112. https://doi.org/10.1353/mml.2014.0004.

38. Wallace, Jeff. "Literature and Posthumanism." *Literature Compass*. 7/8, 2010: 692–701. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2010.00723.x

39. Yaszek, Lisa and Jason W. Ellis "Science Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*. Eds. Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini. Cambridge University Press, 2016.