
SCIENCE FICTION AS AN EXCUSE FOR POLITICAL CRITICISM: DICK'S VISION OF POLITICAL SIMULACRUM

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Resumen

Este artículo revisa la función de Philip K. Dick, famoso escritor norteamericano de ciencia ficción. Su producción literaria recibió la atención merecida por parte de la crítica literaria más reputada, que ofreció un análisis de su novelística situándola mucho más allá de los cánones de la ciencia ficción. El autor del presente artículo asume el modo metafórico de estos textos identificándolos con un oxímoron o una metáfora materializada (Warrick, 1987) como punto de partida para un análisis posterior. Esta perspectiva permite analizar la narrativa de Dick desde un punto de vista más amplio de ficción política. Así, es posible percibir sus textos como una sátira mordaz del régimen capitalista y de sus elementos intrínsecos de control. Se dedica atención especial a *The Simulacra*, novela que refleja el concepto de *simulacrum* de Baudrillard para indicar la manipulación de las autoridades a través de los medios de comunicación y de la situación actual del mundo existencial.

Palabras clave: ciencia ficción, metáfora, ficción, política, *The Simulacra*.

Abstract

The article takes under scrutiny the fiction of Philip K. Dick, a renowned American science fiction writer. His literary output received due attention from recognized literary critics offering insightful analyses seeing his fiction far beyond the canon of science fiction writing. The author of the present article assumes the metaphorical mode of his fiction identified as an oxymoron, or a metaphor made literal (Warrick, 1987) as a starting point for further consideration. This presumption allows us to perceive Dick's writing in a broader frame of political fiction. This platform makes it possible to construe his writing as a mordant satire of capitalist regime and its constitutive elements of control. Particular attention is given to *The Simulacra*, a novel epitomizing Baudrillard's concept of *simulacrum* to skewer the manipulation of the authorities through media and present the condition of the existential world.

Keywords: science fiction, metaphor, fiction, politics, *The Simulacra*.

Artículo

The history of politically engaged literature reaches ancient times. Most often political fiction is presented as a literary subgenre, however “the boundaries of this genre are very difficult to delimit” (Dickstein, 2008) with some critics reserving the label to the writers like Vidal and his *Washington, D.C.* (1967), Burr (1973) or *1876* (1976) novels exhibiting machination of the political class, or postmodern theorists who totally deny the existence of this genre such as Jameson (1981, cited in Dickstein, 2008). One may also take an approach after Eliot in *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866) that “there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life” (cited in Dickstein, 2008) and make the genre very ample.

Classical examples featuring politics as an important plot element might be Plato’s *Republic* (ca. 360 BC) or Moore’s *Utopia* (1516). Contemporary literature offers a wide array of publications falling into this category. Some authors communicate political content in a very straightforward way in their titles e.g. *When the White House Was Ours* by Porter Shreve (2008) others, like Pynchon in *Vineland* (1990) or Doctorow in *The Book of Daniel* (1971) in writing in the post-modern convention make political allusions more camouflaged. Some use Kafka’s, or more precisely Kafkaesque style, to skewer threatening and pointless bureaucracy or, as defined by his biographer Adler (2001: 4), to present “nightmarish situations, and all pervasive bureaucracy, looming totalitarianism, infinite hierarchies, and a deep existential angst” *Catch-22* (1961) by Heller elaborates on the motif of bureaucratic absurdity, or *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) by Vonnegut “depicts history as a murderous blight, a maw that consumes individual lives, a bit of meaningless madness” (Dickstein, 2008).

American literature, because of its practicality and possibly historical background took a political stance from its beginnings. Even if, as Dickstein notices, it was not that successful in this regard as the literature of some other countries in which “politics is part of the air” they breath, he mentions a great deal of exceptions in American twentieth century literature of political concern (Dickstein, 2008).

The literary genre of science fiction offers additional possibilities in this regard. Normally, it presents either utopian or dystopian fiction exploring social and political structures. While utopias pursuing a political satire offer a version of an ideal image of the world contemporary to the writer, dystopias create nightmare images extrapolating future developments from current trends. As the number of utopias and dystopias in science fiction is really overwhelming, the author of the present paper mentions only some illustrative examples. Somewhat British classics in this regard are *Brave New World* (1932) by Huxley, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) by Orwell. American contribution is represented by *Starship Troopers* (1959) by Heinlein, *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (1974) by Le Guin, *The Mars Trilogy* (1990s) by Robinson, or *The Dune* (1965) by Herbert. The last mentioned book represents a trend in sci-fi development associated with the New Wave breaking the canonical science and technology based constrains established in the Campbellian era. Identified as soft science fiction

by exhibiting a greater concern for style this new trend finally brought science fiction to the doorstep of the literary mainstream. Primarily concerned with social or psychological issues the New Wave science fiction became also a platform for discussing political issues. The writer in focus, Philip K. Dick, is undoubtedly one of its representatives (Jasiński, 1986: 50).

1. A PARTICULAR CASE OF PHILIP K. DICK'S FICTION

Philip K. Dick, one of the most American science fiction writers was praised for his originality and novelty by renowned critics (cf. Heer, 2001) and other writers (cf. Lem, 1973, 1975). Literary authorities eulogized him as the American Borges or Dostoyevsky of the twentieth century or even the Shakespeare of science fiction (cf. Lankiewicz, 2008: 11; Freedman, 1988). Themes raised in his writing oscillate around social, political and metaphysical issues. His political satires aim at unmasking the monopolistic corporations, authoritarian governments or more generally any machination – the control system (matrix) while making astute comments pertaining to the existential condition of the modern world. His writing is ostensibly canonical science fiction. He uses the gadgets of sci-fi to extrapolate from his contemporary situation and present dystopian vision of the future as a comment on his contemporary times. He achieves his literary ends envisaging strange worlds dominated by entropy and chaos while baffling the reader with unexpected plot twists, whimsical humor and logics known only to him. Critics frequently raised the problem of classification of Dick's literary output. Fekete (1984: 80) epitomized this discussion in a question "... of whether the Dick canon is a canon of writing or of particularly SF writing". Warrick (1987: 200) chose to term Dick's writing as *quantum-reality fiction* to underscore its adequacy to the quantum physics reality presented in his worlds and heavy metaphorical nature of his style with oxymoron as a dominant mode (ibid., 2). The metaphorical, many a time, is realized through the intended humorous effect, as it is emphasized by some interpreters of Dick's literary output (Lankiewicz, 2008).

2. POLITICAL BACKGROUND TO P.K. DICK'S FICTION

Politically engaged fiction as Dickstein (2008) articulates is triggered by nation calamities or cataclysm in history, or assuming a more moderate approach, moments manifested by social or political upheavals, or simply interesting times. Dick surely happened to write in very turbulent times in American history of the 50's, 60's and 70's dominated by the terror of the Cold War and the fight between left and right ideologies, capitalistic expansionism etc. Overlooking social and political events in Dick's literary output would be, as Robinson claims, neglecting one of possible metaphors for his novels (1984: 11). Warrick in her analysis of Dick's works (1987: 88) made it clear that in his prose "everything that exists has contemporary aspects" or that "The fabric of his fiction is a patchwork quilt stitched together from the people, places, and events of his personal life, transformed just as he transformed the events of our national life with his wildly inventive and distorting imagination"

(*ibid.*, 4). Heer (2001) presents a controversial image of Dick overwhelmed with leftist ideology:

Dick's fiction of the 1960s resonated not only with the counterculture but also with the New Left. Dick, who came of age in Bohemian Berkeley, infused his novels with a satiric radicalism. As he noted in his diary, "I may not have been/am CP [Communist Party], but the basic Marxist sociological view of capitalism—negative—is there. Good." Dick's political imagination is evident in his recurring focus on the world of work.

Writer's discontent with fighting capitalism is surely the dominant theme also in Robinson's (1984) analysis of the selected novels by Dick. Nonetheless, it would be unfair to perceive his writing only through the dimension of Marxist ideology. No doubt, Dick's fiction wears undeniable traces of political discourse (cf. Durham 1988, Fitting 1974) and is clearly engaged in contesting the system. The controversial question remains which system is under criticism. The most probable answer is any matrix plotting against his "little" men. The author of the present paper calls it elsewhere machination of the universe (Lankiewicz, 2008). Postmodernist criticism of Palmer (1991), referring Dick's writing to the concept of simulacrum and hyperreality, offers an additional perspective to the alleged machination.

3. METAPHOR AS A LITERARY CHOICE

Dick's writing is surely very controversial. Even those who appreciate his writing occasionally blame his oeuvre for artistic sopiness and lack of commonsensical logic. Artistic blunders, most common in the books of the 60s, are ascribed to his speedy creations (Gillespie, 1975: 20). There are, however, as Le Guin or Silverberg, who find a method in stylistic inconsistencies perceiving them as a way of expression matching the pursued goals (Robinson, 1984: 76). Fitting (1983: 234), for example, conceptualizes an opinion that Dick's narration constitutes a challenge to the idealistic delusion of reality as inherently unchangeable, natural and objective. Thus, what some construe as the imperfection of the form, others perceive as a means of expression.

Dick's prose, particularly the one of the 60s, largely breaks with the conventions of the science fiction genre of the technically oriented Golden Age. His fictitious worlds are designed to represent a metaphor for present-day society of his time. The expanded metaphor possesses the quality of a disfiguring mirror intensifying the final satirical effect. The caricature is so much exaggerated that the reader may have difficulties in recognizing it at the first glance. Quantum physics fiction, as proposed above, puts a burden on the reader of joining apparently disconnected elements into the bigger picture, and this sometimes requires several careful readings. Only then, the metaphorical image crystallizes in the mind of the reader.

Robinson (1981: 69), using Barthes's notion of "the effect of the real", demonstrates the functioning of metaphorical meanings in Dick's prose. In his opinion, Dick's literary metaphor seems to be the elaboration of an everyday saying, e.g. the

President is a robot controlled by hidden forces. In real life this sort of statement does have a big effect on anybody, but in the world of a novel it becomes reified, manifesting itself with a particular image of fictitious reality. With recourse to the fantastic vision of the future, the problem obtains its gravity. Then, the novel may be interpreted as the embodiment of futuristic technological possibilities which is the part of our history and our existence (ibid.). The metaphor of this type shapes people's political reasoning and it may be used as a conceptual matrix for better understanding of any political reality.

The use of a metaphor in the futuristic world of science fiction seems to be compatible with the function of memory in the political theory of Fanon evoked in literary criticism of the sci-fi genre by Taylor (1975: 34). Memory in this theory constitutes an instrumental function of the mind shaping the past according to its own needs. This, in turn, resembles a creative activity of an artist who selectively describes and immortalizes a thing or phenomenon. This selective activity makes the present overlap with the past. Taylor (ibid.) relates the present to the other temporal direction:

But the present encompasses not only the past, but the future as well, albeit in a different form. The possibilities of the future lie latent in the present, awaiting the selections that determine reality. Alternate worlds can be the key to the reaction of the present: through the process of fictional dreaming, present events may reappear in new lights and the world takes on new form. The future and the past meet in the present, where they are interpreted and given meaning and thereby interact to influence each other.

One of the objectives of the New Wave science fiction was to leave the constraints of the "ghetto" conventions of science fiction. In the example of Dick this new platform allowed him to join two passions: one for realistic literature and the other for futuristic speculative fiction. An extended metaphor incorporating science fiction discourse gained momentum and a new interpretative potential.

4. SIMULATED WORLD OF LATE CAPITALISM

A possible metaphor for Dick's fiction might be lifting the veil of the capitalist regime, the way it holds control over people. A satire has, as its constitutive elements, the magnifying grotesque apparently rendering the object of criticism invincible to intensify the comical hence capitalism in Dick's novels remains unalterable. Robinson (1984: 78) mentions three novels of triumphant capitalism. They include: *The Penultimate Truth* (1964), *The Simulacra* (1964), *Clans of the Alphan Moon* (1964), and *Now Wait for the Last Year* (1966). Warrick (1987: 87) adds to the list *Dr. Bloodmoney* (1965), in which capitalism does seem to be as victorious as in all aforementioned books of the period.

The novel epitomizing the problem under scrutiny directly in its title is *The Simulacra* exposing American "democracy noir" with a central metaphor pertaining to the manipulation of media information by the political establishment

(Piaget, 1975: 28). Dick excels in this novel commenting on misuse of power in his technique of making the metaphorical literal (Warrick, 1987: 29). In this book Dick “turns to biting political satire rather than the straight political criticism he wrote in his earlier novels” (Warrick, 1987: 89). The distorted vision of the world is funny and cynical at the same time. The world is controlled by Baudrillard’s *simulacrum* incapacitating people’s perception of reality. The matrix, standing for power and control, generates illusionary worlds in which ubiquitous merchandize is to supplement reality and saturate the world with meaning, even the President turns out to be an android with a public image of a human being. Ironically, citizens, uncritically consuming media broadcasts, taken in by the fake image, resemble the mechanical of the android itself, who in turn is positive about its own humanity. Dicks’ androids are not to demonstrate that “the robots are just like us”, they rather communicate the sad truth that “we are just like the robots” (Robinson, 1984: 29).

In Baudrillard’s theory *simulacrum* is the result of the evolution of the sign and its gradual disconnecting from its meaning in the process of human perception. In the modern world there is no connection between the sign and reality or any transcendental truth, and the sign “bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum” (Baudrillard, 2000: 405). Thus simulacrum is the only truth: “transition from signs which dissimulate something to sign which dissimulate that there is nothing, marks the decisive turning point”(ibid.).When reality has been erased, the sign represents merely a nostalgia for this reality which boils down to “a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality” (ibid.). Any truth, objectivity or authenticity seems to be second handed. The referential function of the sign constitutes a utopian claim, which Lacan (2000: 62) perceives as the inability of “getting outside language, and that language is innately figurative, not transparently referential”. This stance makes the sign devoid of transcendental meaning and instead referring only to other signs.

Modern world is full of second hand references of the sign. Counterfeited brand merchandise is a good example of a figurative vision of life. Other instances are offered by technological achievements such as an e-mail, virtual reality, flight simulators, or hyperreal inventions in the culinary art, e.g. sweeteners containing no sugar and decaf containing no caffeine. Life in the present world seems to be a great metaphor of reality. Fiction has entered reality or reality has become fiction rendering life to be a literal (verbatim) metaphor.

The Simulacra (1963) presents a metaphorical vision of the world contemporary to the writer. With the making of metaphorical literal the reader gets a tangible reification of ideas standing for the basic emptiness of the sign translating into the criticism of American society dominated with ubiquitous capitalism. Taking into account the publication year of the novel it is certain that the crucial theory of *simulacrum* was surely unknown to the writer since it became disseminated about twenty years later, however, the eponymous heroes (the President and the First Lady) embody the basic concept which adds an additional dimension to Dick’s satirical picture of the world controlled by money and merchandize. He makes this

control verbatim, it is merchandise – the simulacrum of the beloved president – that motivates citizens' actions.

Presenting the whole government as a fraud, Dick depicts the fate of his typical “little” working men – one can hardly find heroes in his novel (Le Guin cited in “Criticism and Analysis” (1996) – whose life is an illusion constructed by political conspiracies. They count for the establishment as much as pawns on the chessboard. Using German terminology (justified by the political situation of the book), Dick stratified the novel's society into ‘Ges’ (*Geheimnisträger*, “bearers of the secret” constituting the elite and ‘Bes’ (*Befehlsträger*, “implementers of instruction”, working people). The secret in question, for the political elite consisting of high rank government, military, police officials, and business people representing big cartels, is that the President is an android (simulacrum) and the First Lady Nicole Thibodeaux a consummate actress acting a part. The novel presents the world of the twenty-first century divided into a number of superpowers. One of them is a trans-Atlantic political entity of The United States of Europe and America.

The main plot oscillates around the White House and the ‘Ges’ political elite which tries to maintain power with recourse to all possible means. ‘Der Alte’ – the fake President embodies, in Warrick's (1989: 90-91) words, the literal realization of a metaphorical saying in which the US President is charged of “being a mere robot programmed by people behind the scene”. Directly related with this making metaphorical literal is the other one that it is the First Lady who keeps the helm of the countries' politics. In fact, beautiful Nicole is the one who governs but even her power seems to be apparent when the reader learns that she is also fake, representing a second simulacrum of the novel. Real political decisions are far beyond her capacity, and are made by a secret council consisting of enigmatic members, communicating their decisions to the First Lady thorough the telecoms. At the end of the novel, where another layer of machination is revealed, the reader discovers that the chairman on the secret council is Bertold Goltz, an alleged neo-fascist, an intrepid adversary of the government.

Metaphorical references embodied in the power scheme reach far beyond the two presented above. The influence of German cartels on political decisions and the multiplication of scheming results in an image of power lost in political simulacrum according to the principle that “the specific character of every relation of force is to dissimulate itself as such, and to acquire its force only because it is so dissimulated” (Bourdieu cited in Baudrillard 2000: 407). Nicole wants to make a practical use of this principle to head off the danger triggered by disclosing the truth to the masses. She believes that a sign (her appearance on the TV screen) is a sufficient factor corroborating her reality. Her wish to be back on TV encapsulates the claim that simulacrum is the only truth: reality cannot exist without a sign. Hence characteristic words of Kongrosian (an extremely talented pianist, a psychokinetic playing with his mind without touching the piano keys, heavily afflicted with schizophrenia), directed at Nicole “If you don't exist I'm to become invisible again – or even worse!” (*Simulacra*: 202). Her image, associated with the archetypal mother, the foundation of existence, is vital for his own survival.

Ironically, he is looking for a tangible constant established by media (as everybody else) in the world dominated by commercials which, as he claims, are taken by him literally. He claims this illness to be exogenous which additionally accentuates the function of media in shaping human illusions.

Kongrossian's schizophrenic obsession, nourished with his inability to communicate above the metaphor level, ends with his phobias of offending body odor and the fear of vanishing. His literal turning inside out (parts of his body are exchanged for object around him) communicates a more universal truth pertaining to human existence, namely that everyone creates his own reality, which is compatible with Baudrillard's theory of sign. Warrick perceives it as a growing obsession in Dick's writing. "We become what we think and one of the most important elements of thinking is metaphor thinking. The metaphors the mind uses to model reality become the reality where the individual lives" (1989: 92). However, the solipsistic perception is most often invaded by more powerful minds which "drag weaker ones into their reality" (ibid.). The function of political and commercial propaganda (of a stronger mind) is to build the desired illusion of reality.

In the perspective of Baudrillard's simulacrum the weak points of the novel appear to be the intended ones. The verisimilitude of the social novel's stratification is none. Sometimes, the reader finds it difficult to make the difference between a 'Ges' and a 'Bes', even members of the closed family belong to a different social class. Thus the definition of the secret finds no explanation of its maintenance and consequences of treason. Not caring for the cohesiveness of the plot Dick seems to make an eye to the reader suggesting a metaphorical mode of reading. The world in which God is dead and the sign is a pure simulation, both the political elites and little people are engaged in the game of building personal illusions. The magnitude of subplots, perceived by some as flaws, in fact underscores the semiotic game, the very foundation of human existence. The more it is true about political power based on simulacrum which mutates and gets out of control. Goltz's discussion with Nicole manifests this aspect of the sign (*Simulacra*: 161).

"Little", dispossessed Dickian protagonist, unaware of the condition of reality controlled by the semiotic processes of politics and business is left perplexed, schizophrenic, unable to make the whole picture of fragmentary reality. This is how Jameson interprets the cultural logic of capitalism "schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, discontinuous material, signifiers which fail to link up to a coherent sequence" (1984: 119). As a matter of fact, many protagonists of *The Simulacra* would use psychotherapists' services if it were not for the 'MacPhearson Act' putting a ban on psychotherapy to build an outlet market for the psycho-pharmaceutical cartel launching a new drug substituting the therapy.

Uninitiated in the semiotic game, 'Beses' mistakenly take the hyperreal for reality. The adored First Lady is too beautiful to real even if they admit that no one so idealistic can be found in their world (*Simulacra*: 94). The White House reality is so remote to normal people that they take the media image presented on a TV screen for real. The inherent desire to live a different life renders the information presented by the elite to be uncritically absorbed by masses. Significant is the

scene in which Ian Duncan, one of Dickian little protagonists coming home after brainwashing watches the First Lady on TV. His reaction to apparently commercial information featuring his ideal Nicole is frighteningly childish, he even raises his hand in response to the question posed by the image of his adoration (*Simulacra*: 174).

The Simulacra realizes Dick's anathema to any institutional misuse of power making metaphorical literal to visualize the constitutive element of the capitalistic regime. The future vision of the world, in fact, presents a comment to Dick's contemporary times when controlled media and secretly guarded technology are used for manipulation, a feature characteristic for consumer societies. Capitalism as a system is immoral and unscrupulous in the opinion of Bourdieu, a French sociologist (cited in Baudrillard, 2000: 407), and it is able to function only because of a superstructure which is imposed on it by its critics. "Capital in fact has never been linked by any contract to the society it dominates. It is a saucer of the social relation, it is a *challenge to society* and should be responded to as such" (ibid.). By taking the example of *Watergate* Baudrillard expounds how this scandal was used "to regenerate a moral and political principle" or "to regenerate a reality principle in distress" (ibid.). In the light of this theory, capitalist society as such represents one big simulation presenting itself as reality.

Total simulation awakes in Dick's protagonists, particularly his "little" men, the desire for reality and this is how the system of control, matrix, gains its momentum: "The only weapon of power, its only strategy against... defection, is to reinject realness and referentiality everywhere, in order to convince us of the reality of the social, of the gravity of the economy and the finalities of production" (Baudrillard, 2000: 409). In this light any scandal contributes to the strengthening of the system in the name of symbolic law.

The novel realizes the above mentioned comment in the verbatim fashion. Nicole Thibodeaux is not afraid of withdrawing the contract for producing a new android President (when the 'die Alte' has expired) from the politically influential German cartel "Karp and Sohnen". Instead she seeks to make them weaker by commissioning a small American firm belonging to Maury Frauenzimmer to do the task. She is convinced that the German cartel will not disclose the secret to the public because it would be a direct violation of law. This is what one of the officials says:

"This is a clear violation of basic law, of course. Such knowledge constitutes a state secret and cannot be brought before the Bes. Both Anton Karp and his father Felix Karp are perfectly ware of that: they discussed these legal aspects at their conference. They know that they – and anyone else at policy level at the Werke – would be instantly liable to persecution." (*Simulacra*: 86).

Law is identical to morality even if it firmly rests on imposture. The government is legal by all means to the benefit of the public good as a government official retorts to the doubts of the First Lady:

“May I say,” Nicole said drily, “that all of us are de facto criminal. Because this government – as you pointed out – is based on a fraud. And of the most primary magnitude.”

“But it’s the *legal* government,” Gareth said. “Fraud or not. And the so-called ‘fraud’ is in the best interests of the people. We’re not doing it to exploit anyone – as the cartel system does! We’re not out to engorge ourselves at somebody else’s expense.” (*Simulacra*: 89-90).

Nicole responds to this with an unspoken reflection ‘that’s what we tell ourselves’. A repeated lie becomes the truth in the name of a general conviction that the true basis of political power is “Not guns or troops but the ability to get others to do what you want them to do. By whatever means are appropriate” (*Simulacra*: 90). Political power is beyond morality, it can be perceived only in the terms of being legal or illegal. The White House scandal exhibiting the foundation of capitalist domination will probably exert a small impact on social relations. The last scene of the novel presents choppers. Neanderthal-like humans affected by radioactive fallout are dancing, possibly their war dance, waiting for a chance in history of mankind as some observers comment their efforts. This does not seem to be a revolution (as it might seem) but just another war interspersed with local folklore. Only the fittest can survive. Choppers obviously lack this feature, they are not equipped for that task being “Meek, small and hunched, apologetic, shuffling and mumbling, they lurched along their meager life-track, getting nearer each moment to the end.” (*Simulacra*: 220).

In the world dominated by ubiquities capital even the social safety valve performed by the humorous, including the political satire contained in the novel, is the subject of simulation. It performs the function similar to the one Disneyland serves for America – “presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real” (Baudrillard: 406) – that there is serious behind the humorous. In fact both notions are completely lost in the never-ending semiotic process marked by the logics of individual perception.

In the novel the humorous functions as an apparent safety valve both for the protagonists and the writers, as the social critic. Ironic laughter ostensibly frees from the shackles of the omnipresent controlling matrix of capitalist domination. It offers itself as a moment of freedom but actually it communicates the sad truth of the condition of a little man in this world. Thus Martian papoola, seemingly funny Martian creature but totally controlled, used as a commercial hook to get potential clientele to move to arid Mars, as well as Loony Luke’s jalopies, cheap rusty vehicles “that just barely manage to get you to Mars” (*Simulacra*: 77) constitute a gap in the solid wall of authority but they function due to the unspoken permission to do so (*Simulacra*: 144). It resembles a situation in communist countries when the establishment allowed the existence of cabarets and skits overtly criticizing the dominant regime to simulate an illusion of freedom. Analogically to how Fitting construed *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* one may state that Loony Luke’s work “serves not to free but to enslave: to maintain and secure an exploitative and unjust system” (1983: 228). His “jalopy jungles” are a part of a bigger scheme of

simulated reality to generate the feeling of illusory freedom in the world dominated by fraud.

The Simulacra offers a conspicuous metaphorical image of capitalist expansionism in the humorous comment of one protagonist on the newspaper information about the discovery of single-cell organisms on Ganymede used as a testimony of life on this satellite of Jupiter. Presupposing the existence of scandal as a prerequisite of power, his vivid imagination generates images of additional layers of excavations in which one can find contraceptives, comic books and even empty Coca-Cola bottles. If so, the information would be kept secret by the authorities because “Who wants to find out that the entire solar system has been exposed to Coca-Cola over a period of two million years?” (*Simulacra*: 41). The third person narrator informs us that Chic Strikerock was not able to think of civilization without Coca-Cola, its sign authenticated its existence. This cynical humor does not last with him for a long time, he shakes the cynicism off, as it is “bad for business. And we must have business as usual. That’s the watchword of the day – of not of the century.” (*Simulacra*: 41). His perception of the world is dominated by the production of goods. The effect of the presupposed government fraud in his humorous vision is of no effect as in his own perception business is identified with morality and is of paramount importance.

The media role in distorting the perception of the world to maintain the system is embodied in another metaphor made literal in the novel of an common saying in America “those commercials really bug me” (Warrick, 1987: 91). Parenthetically, the idea of a metaphor made literal in Dick’s writing was originally raised by Robinson (1984: 67). In the novel commercials are disseminated via mechanical, notorious bug-like creatures which enter the cars and houses like pests. Kongrosian’s mind afflicted with schizophrenia takes all the commercials literally, but he is not the only one to give in to them. Whether it is the ‘Beses’ from the novel or contemporary citizen, most of them are the victims of media manipulation who uncritically or literary absorb the commercial “crap”. If one assumes that schizophrenia is a general condition of modern societies, advertising makes a good use of it shaping people’s perception according to its needs. One might say that the illness is transferred through media. Dick applying his mode based on an oxymoron presents these ideas seriously and humorously at the same time. Kongrosian convinced that his body gives off the most hideous odor, which is the result of his neurotic reaction to the commercial that begins “In moments of great intimacy with ones we love, especially *then* does the danger of offending become acute” (*Simulacra*: 68), decides to “contaminate” the “psych-chemist” of a German cartel by whisking the towel from the video phone.

Humor contained in the political satire of Dick gives his “little” protagonist an illusory feeling of short-lived victory. The reader knows that he is not able to defeat the political matrix lost in the multilayered labyrinth of simulation. In the context of omnipresent *simulacrum* the authorities who try to hide the truth from masses are the subject of simulation themselves. Baudrillard’s concept makes the charges against the book’s as over-laden with too many ideas without meaningful vision of

transcendence seem ungrounded. In the world where the sign is lost in referential quality transcendence is a fixation of one's mind which may offer a tentative theory. This makes reality a personal or common illusion which Dick translates into *idioskosmos* (sheltered individual) or *koinoskosmos* (shared social consciousness) (Sutin, 2005: 48). Lonny Luke luring his potential clients with a cheap and rusty jalopy to challenge the life on Mars offers a substitution of one simulation for another. The promise of a better life appears to be the product of government controlled media plotting to solve the problem of the overpopulated Earth, the fraud, in its turn, increases the market demand for his second hand vehicles.

5. SUMMARY

The humorous and serious meet frequently in Dick's novel to intensify the satirical effect. The existential condition and the place of a human being in the ubiquitous simulation is well illustrated in the novel. The last example to be called here rests on a metaphor resting on comparing the mechanical and the humane (one of other important themes in his writing). Dick presents the protest of androids learning that their constructor will leave the Maury Fraunzimmer's company: "If Mr. Strikerock goes," the adult male simulacrum stated, "we go with him" (*Simulacra*: 58). But the bunch of artifacts is basically impotent as the owner of the factory concludes. Dick's metaphor made literal as the dominant mode in this novel renders every man an android gradually hardening in a vat of chocolate to evoke the accident which ironically happened to a maintenance man in one of the factories and made its way to the newspapers (*Simulacra*: 59). The mechanical job of maintaining, possibly safe and lucrative, achieved its transposition into the amount of sweetness that kills. "It's just too damn dreadful. It unhinges you. And the worst part is that it's so dreadful it's almost funny" (ibid.). "How are you going to work an event like that into your Weltanschauung?" (ibid.). Dick's "little" protagonist tries to find a way out of the maledictory web (cf. Aldiss, 1983) through humor, madness, drugs, etc., but all of the search for the way out is like as a Chinese finger-trap, the more he tries the stronger its grip (Feehan, 1995).

All in all, considering the world dominated by simulacrum it might worth mentioning Heer's comment as a summary to the above analysis: "Dick's portrayal of a media-saturated world where reality is lost among simulacra is just as timely as ever, so perhaps we should heed Disch's advice to return to Dick's splendid fiction and leave the sad life behind".

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