



Cristian Pașcalău
Universes Colliding
The Nature of Reality
in Philip K. Dick's Writings

ABSTRACT

This article studies the problem of reality in science-fiction texts. We focus mainly on Philip K. Dick's writings, both fictional and non-fictional ones. As a cult author in the field, K. Dick goes beyond the usual literary patterns and develops a personal philosophy of science-fiction. Posing the problem of time and reality, he tries to convey a reflexive justification for his peculiar mode of writing and for the social issues developed in his works. We provide an inquiry of his prospects within a philosophic, semiotic and, at a larger extent, modal semantic framework, and also briefly refer to some of his novels.

KEYWORDS

Philip K. Dick; Science-Fiction; Reality; Fiction; Universe of Discourse; Possible Worlds; Narrative Strategies.

CRISTIAN PAȘCALĂU

Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
babelrealm@yahoo.com

Preliminary remarks

This article studies the nature of reality in some "cross/ border" textual worlds. Fictional worlds, created on the intentional account of fictionality, develop some sort of a special ontological status. The aim of our inquiry is to determine, in a qualitative way, how these fictional worlds are undermined at the interface between general cognitive experiences and their intrinsic value (i.e. the sense they project), and, at a subsequent level of approach, how exactly are they distorting/ recreating the sense of reality perceived as a unified field of human knowledge. We stress K. Dick's reflexive contribution to this problem. Even if the author makes only few straight references to some formal theories, his constant debate relates to some philosophers work, namely Carl Gustav Jung or David Hume. We, however, will follow a different path, underlying some semiotic and semantic theoretical aspects, which we often use as a starting point for explaining the author's choices.



Two philosophical issues

Philip K. Dick, as a very influential science-fiction author, left a great heritage for the present-day fiction making.¹ All his writings deal mainly with two philosophical issues that are closely related to one another and to the basic concept of human (inter)subjectivity. The first issue poses the problem of reality in terms of how one can define reality, and what criteria are necessary to give a valid explanation of its significance, as Wittgenstein states in his semantic theory. The second issue delineates the role of space and time as main coordinates in the warp of physical and psychological reality, or, in other words, the quality of space-time continuum and its inner meanings. The second problem is in fact a subsequent issue of the first problem, which is the nature or the essence of reality. Philip K. Dick raises these two questions in a speech he delivered in 1978. He confesses that, when asked to give a definition of reality as a basic philosophical concept, sometime back in 1972, he was confronted with a striking difficulty. The explanation of the concept stimulated Dick's imagination towards more efforts in the act of describing the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity:

Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away.²

This attempt to define the indefinable gives a throwback against the empiricists' viewpoint on human experience. But it is a tricky statement, as for K. Dick reality cannot actually be defined, as every time one tries to define it, reality changes the very moment of its grasping. Its slippery, protean nature can mislead observers. It's quite obvious that when any observer looks through a half-open door and sees only partially a

piece of furniture, he will not believe that the reality he perceives may be reduced to that particular segment. The observer simply knows there is more to perceive than he saw at a first glance. That is the reason why humans cannot rely exclusively on their five senses, as they are deceiving³. But, is reality in itself objective or subjective? The whole Dick's writings show that humans deal primarily with a subjective concept of reality, which then objectify in their effort to give a reasonable explanation to the configuration of the entire empirical world. Most certainly, Cosmos (as in Greek philosophy) encompasses, in a linguistic-cultural environment, the whole subjective structure of reality. All things exist only by virtue of their essence, which occurs in our consciousness through language, in a process of semantic creation and intuitive knowledge. The essence of an object can be defined as the class of objects that comes up virtually within our consciousness. When we refer to a specific object, whether ideal (an object created in the mind, an "intelligible thing") or physical (an object that may be sensorially perceived – case in which one cannot argue that even physical objects are, primarily, intelligible ones, as they are also primarily created in the mind, their physical nature being a matter of "accident"), we select the object from the virtual class of objects previously established.

Our reality is, mainly, an inner spiritual one, and, roughly, a physical, extra-linguistic one. C. S. Peirce states *we live in a virtual reality as our daily experience is shaped by iconic figures*. According to his theory, we live in a symbolic world and deal with signs as simulacra (replicas) of our thoughts⁴. Any attempt to reach a "final stage" of knowledge is always meant to fail. Reality manifests as a constant project in development, towards an indefinite future. Peirce, Heidegger, Ortega y Gasset, among other



philosophers, argued that human being is a matter of projection, a mere construction interfering with social reality. However, there are in stake fake realities, which are prefabricated and delivered to the people through various channels, such as mass-media. And the counterfeit reality mixes with the individual/ social reality and becomes a genuine fact of consciousness. Philip K. Dick is aware of the mass-media capacity to design and present counterfeit realities to the public, and that is why he assigns media a great role in the shifting scenarios of his writings. The Matrix plays a great role in the construction of social and individual identity. The Matrix is a network of corporative institutions that transforms individuals into Kafkian or Orwellian subjects.

The status of science-fiction

In our attempt to delineate the status of science-fiction as an autonomous genre, we resort to the Coserian concept of “universe of discourse”. The concept was defined at first, in 1966, as a universal system of meanings according to which one can determine the validity and the sense of any particular utterance or discourse⁵. Therefore, the empirical universe, mathematics, science, literature, mythology were considered to be universes of discourse, as they act like themes or domains of reference for any speech acts. For instance, an expression like: “reducing objects to subject” makes sense in philosophy, but makes no sense at all in grammar. In his last study, Coseriu revisits the concept and gives a new definition to the “universe of discourse”⁶. The linguist states only four universes of discourse, which act as four cognitive modalities of generating knowledge. The first one, *the universe of empirical experience*, generates an intuitive type of knowledge by means of common sense

and (inter)subjectivity. The second, *the universe of science*, generates a logical type of knowledge, which is based on extra-subjective objectivity. The third one, *the universe of fantasy*, is ruled by an absolute subjectivity (any artist’s subjectivity) and generates a creative type of knowledge in literature and other art forms. The last one, *the universe of faith*, is ruled by a two-dimensional (inter)subjectivity: a social one (by virtue of which all humans are brethren) and a cosmic-transcendental one (the relationship each individual and society develop with God in prayers and hymns). The modes of knowledge associated to this universe acquire the unifying experience of the sacred, relying on human faith. The concept of God, as the meaningful core of this last universe, grasps, in an intuitive way, the Supreme Being. The religious sense implies a self-completeness of the human who gain the experience of the sacred. Philip K. Dick senses this inner truth when designs God with the name *Ubik*.

Taking into consideration the above mentioned theoretical aspects, we can easily answer the question what particular universe of discourse science-fiction fits in. Although we would be tempted to consider science-fiction as a hybrid genre, mixing the universe of science and the universe of fantasy, however, from a genuine stand-point, we can only state it fits in the universe of fantasy, due to specific textual parameters, such as intentionality, finality, type of knowledge associated to the world of text, narrative strategies etc. There are, of course, elements brought forth from the other universes of discourses. For instance, the empirical universe is implicitly evoked in science-fiction, as the characters use *their* intuitive basic knowledge and *their* common sense (that underlie *their* empirical universe) in order to perceive and shape *their* understanding of the world they are living in.



Nevertheless, the basic universe of discourse implied in science-fiction texts is, naturally, the universe of fantasy. The matter is of great significance when readers are put to cope with the events and the characters that populate SF worlds. They have to ratify a kind of fictional pact with the author, as Eco states in one of his conferences regarding fiction⁷. They have to merge with the world of text, to accept the reality that the text presents as the only valid reality. They get caught in the narrative as well as the characters do, at a different level however (not as mere devices, but as resonators). They are absorbed into the process of fantasy recreation. In other words, readers must develop a special state of mind, in order to become aware of the new world inserted into their consciousness.

Fictional worlds in K. Dick's writings

Science-fiction becomes a music of ideas, which transports readers into special worlds. The peculiarity of Philip K. Dick's stories and novels resides in the dreamlike projection of all his fictional worlds. The impossible becomes possible, and visions of the future emerge into the frame of our faded empirical reality, defying the limits of reason. Each fictional world reinvents past or future times, creating paradoxes, space-time disorders, fractal dimensions. The characters experience several rings of perception, founding themselves to the cutting edge between their known (or presented as it would be their) identity and the unknown nature of their existence. In Dick's writings, we encounter fantastic realms populated with strange creatures, but we also meet individuals who recall the better and the worse in human nature. Almost at every step his works raise fundamental questions about existence, Cosmos, God, consciousness, split personalities, dream states,

psychedelic trips. Many of his characters do not differ in essence from empirical individuals. Dick is concerned with dualities, among which good/ evil, right/ wrong are first to be taken into consideration. Where is to be settled a line between right and wrong? Just how difficult to maintain a cross-border between good and evil is? There is a contextual ethics that rules the Dickean fictional worlds, which make us more aware of our own reality, emphasizing problems that our society and our planet are confronted with. They drive readers to meditate about issues that point out directly to themselves. All these interpretations open the door for infinite associations, preserving intact, at the same time, the mystery of creation, the metaphor of human destiny. Science-fiction synthesizes a great deal of meanings, religious, mythological, magical, scientific perspectives upon reality. The novelist rewrites the program of social reality in terms of ethical dilemmas and mental disorientation. Some of the characters delve into madness as a consequence of displacing strong values to fake stimuli.

There are many realities at stake in Dick's visionary writings. These realities unfold the whole program of modern brainwashing techniques. K. Dick senses the mass brain dystopia of our times. He feels there is a collective subconscious database, which can be influenced or altered by powerful corporations in order to maintain humans under surreal, hypnotic states of mind. Dick's writings unfold the existence of space-time discontinuities, parallel universes and hidden messages into the fabric of immediate reality. Their own mental structure makes individuals incapable to be aware of and to understand some levels of existence, or to recover, by a simple act of concentration, all the past knowledge accumulated by human race. Nevertheless, the author places his works at the realm of the hyper-



real experiences, as a complex vertigo burning the frame of our daily reality.

The unfolding is made gradually, without a previous awareness of the *colliding universes*. K. Dick uses specific narrative strategies in order to provide the necessary suspense. The surface of reality is only the tip of the iceberg. The ocean of narrative is governed by uncertainty, a state of affairs according to which fictional worlds are brought into a paradoxical (non)existence:

I may be talking about something that does not exist. Therefore I'm free to say everything and nothing. I in my stories and novels sometimes write about counterfeit worlds. Semi-real worlds as well as deranged private worlds, inhabited often by just one person... At no time did I have a theoretical or conscious explanation for my preoccupation with these pluriform pseudo-worlds, but now I think I understand. What I was sensing was the manifold of partially actualized realities lying tangent to what evidently is the most actualized one—the one that the majority of us, by *consensus gentium*, agree on.⁸

This conception points access to deeper meanings. Daily life reveals preexistent states of possibilities. The characters, the places, the medium resemble our world, only their symbolic nature transforms them into aggressive tokens. It is well known that K. Dick relates his writings to the manifestation of a higher intelligence. The synchronicities and the epiphanies that he experiences led him to declare a strong connection with Divinity. So, if we take it literally, not only that drives his writings as a higher intelligence behind the curtain of the text (he is the author, after all), but also the factual events of the author's physical reality are

staged by a higher intelligence (Divinity as a ubiquitous force of creativity). This stage-in-stage framing illustrates the perfect osmosis between floating realities in a conscious multiverse. There is also a mythological code embracing characters, events, and places in K. Dick's writings. Myths are reactivated under new forms, providing similarities within textual reality. Strange interferences make shifting realities interact to each other, develop a progressively recollection of memories of times past or future. These memories are esthetically reorganized, and the past/ future can be rebuilt in order to serve the interests of the narrative, a process which reflects the mutations in understanding how narrative strategies project meanings.

Language and fiction making

The problem of language in K. Dick's writings has three fundamental aspects. The first one deals with the creation of absolute conceptual visions that encompass a whole mode of existence. A kind of resonance is carried out as a consequence to this conceptual frame, in such a manner that the field of reality unveils its secret meanings. It is as if the entire personal experience of the author had been transmuted into textual forms, creating new contents on the bases of a higher semiotic order of signification. There are, of course, ambiguous utterances, which give birth to paradoxes, false truth or true fake statements. This process suggests the coexistence of virtual antinomies that are combined at the very heart of content creation. These antinomies will eventually mark dissociative patterns throughout all K. Dick's fictions: splitting personalities, superposed worlds, shifting realities. The horror and the beauty of these universes emerge from the constant mix between reality and fiction in the same narrative frame. Often a



reality *is presented as is*, only to find out, later on, it was a dreamy state of mind. Dreams have their own realities, which contradict the conscious daily experience only partially. Dreams come up with a whole new vision and experience for the mind. Readers are compelled to process these new contents and to cope with the new realities presented as non-fictional fictions. Dreams act like viruses in the body of reality. They implement different narrative patterns, parasite digressions which transform the epics in such a manner that characters act like ghosts⁹, like shadows swallowed by the textual frame, drowned in fiction, but who try to escape.

K. Dick also creates new concepts, in order to grasp fresh aspects of reality. Such terms as *kipple*, *nonkipple* or *kipplezation* show that new conceptual structures are created to give account of the ontological entropy of society. There is a sign for this decaying process: dirt. For this type of dirt, K. Dick proposed the term *kipple* in order to grasp semantically this mode of being. By contrast, the elements that do not have this universal extinction rate are *nonkipple*, and the dynamics of degradation through filling is *kippleization*:

Kipple is useless objects, like junk mail or match folders after you use the last match or gum wrappers of yesterday's homeopape. When nobody's around, kipple reproduces itself. For instance, if you go to bed leaving any kipple around your apartment, when you wake up the next morning there's twice as much of it. It always gets more and more. (...) There's the First Law of Kipple, "Kipple drives out nonkipple." (...) No one can win against kipple, except temporarily and maybe in one spot, like in my apartment I've sort of created a stasis between the pressure of kipple and nonkipple, for the time

being. But eventually I'll die or go away, and then the kipple will again take over. It's a universal principle operating throughout the universe; the entire universe is moving toward a final state of total, absolute kippleization.¹⁰

The second problem is when language becomes an instrument to manipulate people:

The basic tool for the manipulation of reality is the manipulation of words. If you can control the meanings of words, you can control the people who must use the words.¹¹

Mind is used as a tool, as a screen on which images, signs, scraps of alternative worlds are projected, all connected into a unified field. Mind can also be used as an imaginative projector that provides fictional worlds some sort of referential consistency. The levels of existence are captured within one single frame of text, but the narrative layers configure a multidimensional fictional universe, shaped by absolute subjectivity. From this viewpoint, science-fiction is a form of exercising new consciousness designs. It is an open invitation to perceive reality in a whole new fashion. It is a key to understand the possibilities for expanding the horizons of knowledge. In fact, K. Dick knows that a simple cognitive support cannot fill in the whole gaps in understanding about how our consciousness connects to the universe and how it manages to generate knowledge beyond the five (or six, or seven) senses. As Heidegger puts it, a simple summarization of the data given by the senses cannot give, on its own, any account of how knowledge is created¹², how possible data is used as a means of reaching some factual data. He moreover takes the role of the Devil's advocate in order to



change the perspective of how reality can be internalized and externalized by human sub-

jects. Between the possible and the certain, a grey zone develops, according to which the entire Universe can be kept in a computer program. For K. Dick, science-fiction is a constant experiment, but one of a great interest in the matter of metaphysics, scientific research, religion, social behavior, psychology. He creates stories out of fragmented consciousness and disturbed individuals. He does not understand reality as a mere abstraction, but as a factor of human progress.

Dick introduces rather blurry characters only to extrapolate their viewpoints on their own fabricated realities, so to speak, and in doing so, he takes good care not to alter their discourse in any way. He implicitly triggers the readers into expanding their own knowledge on the logic of contradictions verifiable in textual frames. K. Dick shares a lot of radicalism in terms of understanding reality in relation to individual identity, for instance. The splitting personality affects Bob Arctor's life, as he crosses every moral boundary and delves into madness and self-destruction. But there are actually many angles from which the issue can be analyzed. Let us suppose that, for some unknown reason, somebody made a trick with his mind and implanted all the experiences he remembers as real facts. This scenario is quite possible, especially if we maintain ourselves in the area of conspiracy theories, which is quite often implied by many of K. Dick's novels. Then the fact that someone intended to mislead Arctor would be revealed and, as far as the actual text world concerns, we can understand that the character lives in a bubble of manufactured consent, not realizing its true situation. If we presumed that his state of mind was artificially induced, we would also have to change the perspective of interpretation.

Time and its avatars

There is a constant degree of uncertainty regarding the nature of time in K. Dick's novels¹³. The maximal image of time, as it emerges from the events presented, is very contradictory, and this is solely a good reason for our concern regarding the sense of reality. However, contradictory objects appear always in fiction, sometimes only marginally, moreover centrally, as in the metaphysical stories of Borges or in the science-fiction writings of Philip K. Dick. The presence of contradictions will not stop us from considering fictional worlds as creditable possible worlds and reducing the theory of fiction to a Kripkean theory of modality. However, there is no lesser truth in the statement that contradictory objects were a proof against the notion of world in itself. Nothing stops philosophers from talking about impossible worlds. Contradictory worlds are not so distant from our empirical world as we might expect them to be. Not only light is composed, simultaneously, from particles and waves, but also our daily worlds host such entities as individual psychological structures, wishes, dreams, symbols. Coherent worlds emerge in the process of idealization. Nevertheless, our attachment to coherence is less motivated than it seems to be. After all, humans used to live incongruent worlds long before these worlds became more or less capable of cohesion¹⁴.

Time receives a special status, being regarded as a core in the fabric of reality¹⁵. In *Ubik* (1969), characters are led into an amazing trip of reversing reality. This can be successfully achieved by means of the so-called "half-life" experience, a state of pseudo-frozen consciousness maintained by a mysterious substance called *Ubik* (a metaphor for God, as Dick himself recalls). What K. Dick warns us with reference to this novel is that we have forgotten the quality of



our space-time interactions. Temporal loops are only parts of a scenario in which time itself is considered to be a hypnotic impulse that triggers humans to act as they do for all the circumstances their lives are placed in. When someone is capable of changing the flow of time, the multiple futures, s/he is also capable of manipulating our subconscious experiences and opinions (that is an idea developed in the movie *Inception*). It is relatively easy to imagine scenarios in which someone activates a different path in time, by programming an alternative future and thus altering the whole chess-board configuration of reality. If someone travels in the past and changes a certain move, the whole configuration of the play would be changing.

However, the hypnotic and automatic levels of existence do not exclude the seeds of freedom, which might develop moreover in our imagination and in our dreams. All things a person dreams about could be transposed into reality (an idea developed by Ursula K. Le Guin in her novel *The Lathe of Heaven* and by Milorad Pavic in *The Dictionary of the Khazars*). – Marginal predictive patterns are designed in order to explain this holographic functionality of the mind. Therefore, “real facts” can be a very tricky notion, as any fictional events can be called real facts from the viewpoint of the textual world itself. Universe resembles a giant loop. But when someone alters this reality, s/he does not erase the original loop; s/he instead adds new dimensions to the previous state. K. Dick understood a rather strange fact: we exist in many parallel realities, each reality having certain distinctive features. We are aware mainly of a single reality, and we call it “our reality” as we are pretty much concerned with it. But other realities come into our existence through dreams, meditation, extra-sensorial phenomena, or mentally induced altered states (psychedelic trips, hallucinations, drug consuming).

In trying to access these parallel dimensions, we would certainly modify the entire shape of our actual world. If we could gain access to a past world mentally or physically – and change one or several events that are meant to lead to a certain future configuration of the actual world – the entire actual world would then be modified. But it would be modified only in its sequential shape of events, not in its actual essence. The transformation would affect only the states of affairs at a local rank, not the global structure or functioning of reality. According to this assumption, what was possible in a past alternative world would become actuality, and what we experienced as actual in the actual world would become only a possibility among other possibilities. But this alteration would never change *the actual world's essence* or nature. It would only lead to a kind of paradoxical situation, to a reconversion of states of affairs. If the real world consists in many puzzled alternative worlds, it follows each possible world close to the real world has the same basic pattern. There are, however, different levels of interpreting his ontological approach¹⁶. The author creates a combination of incompatible world structures that modify the idiosyncratic pattern of universal reality. Many of K. Dick's novels set their action in a post apocalyptic dystopian future, where human mankind is forced to deal with its own destruction.

However, a subsequent issue appears: the difference between “being fiction” and “being regarded as fiction”.¹⁷ Philip K. Dick has developed the idea that one cannot escape one's world, although time travelling is an attempt to reach other worlds. For instance, in *Nick and the Glimmung*, the characters actually get to travel to another world, where they find robotic copies of themselves. The strange thing is not the fact they encounter their “alter ego-s”, but the



reason they leave Earth: having a pet becomes illegal! Practically, in order to keep their cat, Nick and his family begin a trip and they manage to modify the shape of events. This fact allows us to see time as a qualitative dimension of being, through which characters expand their reality. In fact, every person modulates the actual world by using all sorts of heterogeneous pieces. The reality is designed as a global puzzle, and some of these pieces are recollected from very different levels of consciousness.

Scenarios and modal knowledge

If we speak in modal semantic terms, we must say that the readers have to focus on the concept of Trust, rather than the concept of Truth¹⁸. Umberto Eco describes our virtual global encyclopedia in terms of “trust”, a concept which often stands for the concept of “truth”. Eco argues the fact that we almost always rely on interface experiences in designing our system of beliefs about reality (or “history”, in more general terms). This is a dramatic consequence driven by our physical impossibility to cope with all the events in the course of history. We cannot attain such a global experience; we cannot envision with our own eyes everything that is going on at a certain point in time. That is the main reason why we deposit our trust in the alleged good faith and good intentions of our informers. To a great extent, the decision whether a certain fact is presented truly or falsely implies a number of sometimes difficult choices for us to make. In this regard, Eco brings forth an argument stated previously by Hillary Putnam, namely our direct knowledge reaches only a 10% from the global background knowledge that we use to inform ourselves about all matters of reality. The remaining 90% is provided by other informers, such as scientists, teachers,

journalists, politicians etc. This is a matter that affects our way of understanding everything that happens in our empirical world. K. Dick was quite aware of this “anxiety of influence” that is constantly shaping our consciousness through the “doors of perception” when he stated that:

Because today we live in a society in which spurious realities are manufactured by the media, by governments, by big corporations, by religious groups, political groups. So 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.¹⁹

Modeling the impact of external factors on the nature of textual reality, the author displays an open field regarding some controversial aspects of the problem. However, the main point in this regard is that K. Dick creates worlds that are, in a certain way, nonfictional. K. Dick states this without a shadow of a doubt: “some of my fictional works were in a literal sense true”; all the events, phenomena, characters are, at some extent, non-fictive, shattered between two realms of consciousness. Yet, they are *prêt-à-porter* unreliable²⁰. The situation is awkward and a bit preposterous we might say: the novels are meant only to present the facts, as they “really” happened, but not to prove by any chance whatsoever the nature of their reality. All readers have to take them for granted, beyond any reasonable doubt. But at the same time, the discourse almost always leads readers to undisclosed parts of distant possibilities.

The tenses of the verbs themselves open a dimension of actuality, of a reality which is in fact non-actual. There are also modal expressions that appeal to the readers’ common sense in order to induce the



idea of verisimilitude/ authenticity of the referential counterpart of their discourse. K. Dick recognizes the great impact scenarios have on people. Hence we could argue he wrote a single novel, an Ideal Book in which he led the concept of individual and social entropy to the highest level of understanding.

Using scenarios is in fact taking for granted the analytical perspective on the edge of referential ambiguity. Scenarios provide basic methods for analytical purposes, with a high degree of credibility and imaginative power. Thus, K. Dick remarks the infinite possibility of scenarios to develop the human project. All these scenarios (possible worlds, or fictional worlds, as we know the verb *conceive* acts like a world generator) proposed are in fact compatible with our empirical world. The ultimate reason for appealing to scenarios is to emphasize the intrinsic value of one's statements. To put it in other terms, scenarios are meant to account the nonfictional character of what is said. It is a very clever way to direct thoughts and to prepare one's consciousness in order to create a rather emotional response. In this way, readers become more open-minded, more willing to take the facts presented as real things²¹.

When we try to check up whether a character's allegations could be captured within a larger frame²², we may consider this frame according to K. Dick's own statements regarding those allegations. A narrative strategy is the use of modal operators in order to enlighten the value of what characters declare. The modal perspective restores a degree of uncertainty, of possibility in the knowledge progression. This way, the author creates a maze of possible worlds on a concentric multiverse structure scale, such that of *Time Out of Joint* (1959).

We may also notice K. Dick has a strong sense of social issues, namely social disorder and individual entropy. We would

be tempted to think his novels are only fiction, as they project fictional worlds. However, if we study the discourse features of a novel like *Radio Free Albemuth* (1985), we can guess the book is designed to influence public opinion, to persuade the readers to take the events for granted in the sense of a social activism. The purpose is deconstructive (create anarchy, destabilize the political system, the credibility in the national forces and so on).

As we reach the final part of our study, the distinction between "world" and "universe" has to be made. The two terms are more or less synonymous in K. Dick's approach. We should keep in mind that the notion of "parallel realities/ universes" implies a whole different semantic value than the logic concept of "possible worlds". There are, of course, some similarities between the two concepts, detected in their common area of signification, but a major different perspective brings each into light. The formal semantics solved this very delicate issue by postulating the possible worlds anchoring to a modal base. This would be the frame for the possible worlds to develop their semantic value. But K. Dick's proposal is to jump from the actual world (or from a possible world) to an impossible world, which is no longer connected to the modal space. So his novels are, for sure, fictional, but we must understand the nature of their fiction as a powerful absorbing one. This type of fiction is aggressive, as it tries to erode, to dismantle the actual world and to make it look like fiction. While other novelists present their books explicit as fictionally intended, Dickian novels do not construct any sense at all by simply pointing to their fictional roots. If we were to take into consideration the novelist's vision, we would begin to understand the subsidiary purposes of his books. The whole novels seem to be a development of Orwell's syllogistic statement: "He, who



controls the past, controls the future. He, who controls the present, controls the past.”

Each of K. Dick's writings creates a certain stage in a global scenario in order to submit the readers to a certain mood, at a subliminal level, and to provide them insights in respect to the verisimilitude of the facts he recalls. An entropic state of mind is created in a decaying world configuration, where conspiracies, mutants, androids, political corruption, murder, war, drug addiction, hallucinatory states, and madness picture altogether a horrific image of the future. It is a world of chaos, driven by the secret wish to see the spectacle of destruction brought to its last consequences. This narrative option is, in our opinion, the most appropriate, giving the peculiarities of his visionary discourse. We are able to recognize, in fact, a narrative pattern by which the reader is permanently led to paradoxical interpretations.

In order to grasp the distinction between the levels of world actualization and the levels of consciousness involved, we might state the fact that knowledge is always modal, not only regarded in the way of patterns of convictions, but also regarded as mental process, or as a series of mental chained acts. The modal basic functions, as part of a computer program, integrate the entire Universe and interconnecting the whole background knowledge on both the actual world and the possible/ alternative worlds. Impossible worlds do not fit into the limits of modal base, but they expand/ dissipate into an extremely vague field of unknown nature, into an amorphous, unidentifiable distant horizon. The fiction is dissimulated, and its main goal is to undermine the status of the real world. However, the conclusion that knowledge in itself is modal may be regarded cautiously. There are many gaps in the field of our knowledge and this fact entails many partial viewpoints, as there is no human capacity to reach absolute

cognitive powers. One may think K. Dick took elements from real world, redesigned them and shifted them according to his fictional needs. The reasons of this interpretation stand for the general idiosyncratic discursive configuration of the Universe and for the narrative balance between two distinct realities: the actual world and the emerging fictional impossible world. All his novels design objects through a functional recombining process, so that their ontological pattern virtually exists without actually coming into being.

From this point of view, K. Dick's writings might represent a kind of “beyond science-fiction” illustration of a deconstructing movement. One deconstructs in order to reconstruct, to fill in the blanks between the known and the unknown. Yet the gaps within our background knowledge are speculated in an uncanny manner. He tends to deconstruct the whole Universe and then reinsert features that were not actually there in the first place. He considers himself to be gifted with extra sensorial capacities, beyond his capacity of understanding, as he travelled other times and dimensions. He opens a channel of communication with unknown forms of energy, divine ones, on his beliefs. However, this projection is meant for an uncanny area – the troubled mind. But then again, our fear that his thoughts would come to existence, in the literal sense, is an epistemic nonsense. Meanwhile, empirical world has its own monsters to deal with and, curiously or not, they very much resemble to those created by K. Dick.



Concluding remarks

We can extract several major seminal concluding remarks from the investigations concerned upon K. Dick's writings. Firstly, reality has a heterogeneous nature in fictional worlds. It is difficult to distinguish reality (fictional worlds have their own reality, given by their referential dimension) from dreams, or from altered states of mind, for instance. In fact, dreams and altered states present their own realities, a fact which makes us talk about a spiral of concentric realities within the fictional worlds. And these realities tend to absorb empirical reality in the process of fiction making. Secondly, the paradox is that the author, although keeping in mind that his novels are fictional, as their events occur only in alternative worlds, and they do not refer to real situations (even synchronicities are a narrative strategy), always leaves a door open for ambiguous interpretations of their status. His novels are *opera aperta*, as they create a chain of fictional reality. K. Dick makes his point: he implies the events presented in his works, concerning several topics, are authentic. Furthermore, all his books may be regarded as the attempt of finding a personal truth, of putting the pieces resulted from re-collected memories together, so that he would overlap eons of cosmic mystery. All K. Dick efforts are drawn to the idea of reality as non-fictive fiction, which is quite an interesting idea, as a matter of fact. Fiction escapes its limits and configures itself in modal realities, re-centering empirical reality to such a manner in which it would be virtually impossible to uncover the hidden complexities of its fabric. In the end, reality becomes a trans-subjective battle of ideas.

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Notes

¹ His seminal works, both the theoretical and the fictional ones, are a source of inspiration for many novelists and filmmakers, among which we can state the following: Ursula K. Le Guin (*The Lathe of Heaven*), Milorad Pavic (*Dictionary of the Khazars*), George Lucas (*THX1138*), David Cronenberg (*Stereo; Crimes of the Future; Scanners; Videodrome; eXistenZ*), David Lynch (*Eraserhead; Twin Peaks; Lost Highway; Mulholland Drive; Inland Empire*), Darren Aronofsky (*Pi; Black Swan*), Terry Gilliam (*Brazil; Twelve Monkeys; The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus; The Zero Theorem*), Christopher Nolan (*Following; Memento; Inception*), David Fincher (*The Game; Fight Club*), Richard Kelly (*Visceral Matter; Donnie Darko; Southland Tales*), Peter Weir (*The Truman Show*), Alex Proyas (*Dark City*), Adrian Lyne (*Jacob’s Ladder*), Spike Jonze (*Being John Malkovich; Adaptation; Her*), Andrew Niccol (*Gattaca; S1mOne; In Time*), Cameron Crowe (*Vanilla Sky*), John Maybury (*The Jacket*), Miguel Sapochnik (*Repo Men*), Neill Blomkamp (*Elysium*), Enki Bilal (*Immortal Ad Vitam*), Nacho Vigalondo (*Los cronocrimenes*), Dennis Cabella (*Pathos*), Olivier Smolders (*Nuit noire*), Jeff Renfroe (*One Point O*), Joseph Kosinski (*Oblivion*) etc.

² Philip K. Dick, “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, Lawrence Sutin (ed.), New York, Pantheon Books, 1995.

³ This idea, coming from Plato's philosophy, has undoubtedly stimulated many philosophers into seeking the roots of reality in the soil of human (inter)subjectivity.

⁴ C.S. Peirce, "The Concept of Reality", in *Collected Papers*, Volume VIII: *Reviews, Correspondence and Bibliography*, Edited by Arthur W. Burks, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1958, p. 39-44.

⁵ Eugenio Coseriu, "Determinación y entorno. Dos problemas de una lingüística del hablar", *Romanistisches Jahrbuch*, VII, 1966, p. 29-54.

⁶ Eugenio Coseriu, "Orationis Fundamenta. La plegaria como texto", *RILCE*, no. 19, 2003, p. 1-25.

⁷ Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994.

⁸ Philip K. Dick, "If You Find This World Bad, You Should See Some of the Others", in *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick: Selected Literary and Philosophical Writings*, ed.cit.

⁹ They are, in fact, ghosts, as Roland Barthes put it, they are "paper beings".

¹⁰ Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, New York, Doubleday, 1968.

¹¹ Philip K. Dick, "How to Build a Universe that Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later", ed. cit.

¹² Martin Heidegger, "The Problem of Reality in Modern Philosophy", in *Supplements: From the Earliest Essays to "Being and Time" and Beyond*, Edited by John van Buren, State University of New York Press, 2002, p. 43.

¹³ As David Lewis emphasized, the actual world (and, implicitly, the possible worlds

related to it) depends very much on physics development. In order to cover all possibilities in matter, it is obvious that our "modal opinions do change, and physicists do a lot to change them" – David Lewis, "Possible Worlds", in M. Loux (ed.), *The Possible and the Actual*, Ithaca, Cornell, 1979, p. 189.

¹⁴ Cf. Thomas Pavel, *Fictional Worlds*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 79-80.

¹⁵ Temporal succession is a simple case of asymmetrical accessibility. In Thomas Pavel's opinion on the matter, we could reach the world of January, 1999, having as a starting point the world of January, 1991. Accessibility and alternance encompass the intuition that it might be possible some states of affairs were reliable to the real ones, whereas others may not. We have access to possible alternatives, but are in fact isolated from impossible worlds – Thomas Pavel, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

¹⁶ If possible worlds existed somewhere in a distant hyperspace, then it would be counterintuitive, for instance, to consider that Dick has gained access to that multitude of worlds and described them in such a thorough manner. David Lewis, on the other hand, argued that all possible worlds, with all their objects attached to, are as real as our empirical world. But this form of possibilism is rather extreme, and it goes against our common intuitions. Moreover, philosophers argue that possible worlds are not real entities that could be analyzed if we had adequate technological equipment, but abstract models which may be conceived as real abstract entities, or as mere conceptual constructions.

¹⁷ See, in this matter, Ștefan Oltean, "Reflecții asupra ficționalității", *Steaua*, no. 4, 2001, p. 67-71.



¹⁸ For a clear analysis of this conceptual dichotomy, we point to Umberto Eco, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ Philip K. Dick, “How to Build a Universe that Doesn’t Fall Apart Two Days Later”, *ed. cit.*

²⁰ Many writings tend to be regarded, against the authors will, as “blatantly impossible” stories about time travel. On Currie’s account, in the process of interpretation we “should attribute to the narrator a belief in contradictory things, for instance, in the possibility of squaring the circle or incoherent time travel.”, Gregory Currie, *The Nature of Fiction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 87. Hence *belief* (or *trust*) is the concept that should modulate the ontological status of Dick’s discourse. In fact, there are many nonfactive, declarative verbs that sustain this account.

²¹ As Thomas Pavel argues, the ontology of fiction needs objects related to everyday levels of existence rather than, let us say,

mathematical entities. However, these ideal objects cannot be immediately assigned to the real world. Their status resembles to that of unfinished projects or utopias, fact which makes the balance between fiction and empirical world an unsettling mood for philosophers, semanticists, and semioticians and, leading ultimately, to what Richard Routley called “the freak of reality”, Thomas Pavel, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

²² According to Terence Parson’s ideas, for instance, we understand fictional texts by means of extrapolating the sense of previous lines and projecting a global image which is progressively modified and enlarged on the course of reading. The final result is a maximal image, created on basis of a total evidence principle, which in fact expands what the texts are telling into a further act of interpretation combining with readers’ acquaintance on the world and with a contextual frame” (Terence Parsons, *Nonexistent Objects*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1980, p. 179-180).