

# Radical Detours

A Situationist Reading of Philip K. Dick

by

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## Abstract

In this project I read four Philip K. Dick novels against the writing of the Situationist International (SI). In doing so, I seek to disrupt two critical trends that arguably impede Dick criticism: the depoliticization of Dick and the lack of focus on his style. Through reading his work against the politics of the SI, Dick's own radical politics can be defined and reaffirmed. I make the case that Dick is a writer predominantly concerned with politics and ideology over and above philosophy and ontology. Secondly, I argue that the political power of Dick's work is inseparable from his avant-garde style; in particular, his frequent use of what the Situationists termed *détournement*. With revolutionary politics and avant-garde aesthetics in mind, I re-examine the canonical novels *Martian Time-Slip* and *Ubik*, and redeem two of Dick's neglected novels, *The Game-Players of Titan* and *Galactic Pot-Healer*.



## Introduction

[W]hat can I do with a nature ordered in terms of profit and loss, a world where the inflation of techniques conceals the deflation of the use-value of life? Besides; just as the sexual act is not intended to procreate, but makes children by accident, organised labour transforms the surface of continents as a by-product, not a purpose. Work to transform the world? Bullshit. The world is being transformed in the direction prescribed by the existence of forced labour; which is why it is being transformed so badly.

Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (53)

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

“I see.” The girl regarded him uncertainly, not knowing whether to believe him. Not sure if he meant it seriously.

Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (56)

## I

Philip K. Dick scuttled through the disintegrating ruins of 20<sup>th</sup> century America. Choked by the greying debris of consumer life, Dick, like poor John Isidore, tried to create a space, a sort of “stasis between the pressure of kipple and nonkipple” (*Androids* 57). Dick’s works can be read as attempts to pull free,

hundreds of goes at shucking the gentle piling up of trash, of leaving behind a world of motel matchbooks, receipts and white-ware junk mail. Dick's body of work is one of refuse and refusal. He evokes a visceral and inalienable rejection of the capitalist world around him: the pain of quantification, the threat of the commodity, the violence of colonization, and the drudgery of wage labour. Dick found himself trapped in a fake world animated by the circulation of useless objects. He moved within and against this cycle through the highly commercialized form of pulp-SF. In the yellowed, crumbling pages of pulp issues and Ace Doubles, Dick tried to sabotage the internal logic of the kipple machine. To halt the reproduction of trash, to send defective products down the assembly line, to prevent the "total, absolute kipple-ization" of the universe (57). For Dick, an old gum wrapper or a crumpled can lying in a Californian gutter contained the clearest map of progress, of history, of what capitalism had in store for the future. As residents of Dick's futures, we must salvage what remains of his failed escapes.

We live today in an environment saturated with kipple. The plastic rubbish we try to recycle ends up in the ocean, choking fish and seabirds in tiny motes, or silently joining the ever-expanding Great Pacific Garbage patch. The gyre swirls with gentle menace, seeming to reproduce itself, a sort of Mecca for drink bottles. Mckenzie Wark writes, "[t]he disintegrating spectacle can countenance the end of everything except the end of itself. It can contemplate with equanimity melting ice sheets, seas of junk, peak oil, but the spectacle itself lives on" (3). We read Dick's work in wry awareness of the extent to which our present is a hellish amalgam of



his fiction. Dick's futures are those of our fallen planet, the sick planet that Guy Debord described in 1971:

One measures and extrapolates with excellent precision the rapid augmentation of chemical pollution in the air; in the water of rivers, lakes and even oceans; and the irreversible augmentation of radioactivity accumulated by the *peaceful* development of nuclear energy; the effects of noise; the invasion of space by plastics that can claim an eternity of universal landfill-storage; rapid birth-rates; the senseless falsification of food; the urbanistic leprosy that over-runs what used to be the town and the country; thus mental illnesses—including neurotic fears and hallucinations that will not fail to soon arise and multiply on the very theme of pollution, of which one everywhere displays an alarming image—and suicide... (“The Sick Planet”)

Debord's words remind us of the freeways of *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), the cracked and smouldering pavements of *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1965), the poisoned air and species extinction of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968), the drugs, paranoia and suicide of *A Scanner Darkly* (1977), the suicides of *Martian Time-Slip* (1964) and of *Valis* (1981), the alcoholism and suicide of Debord and the untimely death of Dick himself—the immanent death of the planet. Death by kipple, the décor of its illness.

Critic Carl Freedman describes Dick as very much a writer of the 1960s (“Editorial” 149). The major themes of conspiracy and commodification that dominate Dick's work were born of a decade bookended by Dealey Plaza and

Watergate, a decade in which the “mass awareness and criticism of commodification began,” in which major ruptures peaked along issues of civil rights, feminism and the exploitation of the environment (“Editorial” 149). And yet, fifty years later, Philip K. Dick’s fiction burns with the most acute issues of everyday and political life. Freedman makes the case that Dick’s work persists because many issues of the 1960s have only intensified. The novel *Ubik* (1969), for example, seems imbued with an awareness of the neoliberal reforms just around the corner. Joe Chip’s apartment is the ultimate neoliberal abode. As David Harvey writes, “[n]eoliberalization has meant, in short, the financialization of everything” (33). There is a black humour to watching a man unscrew his own door. Joe Chip’s bad finance means he cannot even take a shower or get his apartment cleaned. In an era in which whole generations of students are leaving universities with tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars of debt, the humour only gets blacker. And what of Freedman’s second point, the lineage of conspiracies that stretch from Dealey Plaza, to Watergate, through to the Iran-Contra affair. Today we can add Edward Snowden’s 2013 NSA revelations of the United States’ global surveillance operation to the list. In a development we suspect Dick might have enjoyed, “Edward Snowden’s revelations of the NSA’s mass surveillance also exposed plans for the facial recognition of webcam users that were inspired by Steven Spielberg’s 2002 adaptation of a Dick short story: in the words of one NSA document, “[T]hink Tom Cruise in *Minority Report*” (Dunst “Introduction” 8).

## Recuperation

How is Dick's fiction able to inspire Government secret agents and revolutionaries alike? How can an author so acutely critical of commodities and conspiracies end up in NSA headquarters? It is unsurprising that the secret agent above refers not to Dick's short story but to Steven Spielberg's 2002 film adaptation. Through Hollywood adaptations, Dick's work has moved from the niche genre of pulp-SF to the centre of the entertainment industry. In the same year as Spielberg's film, Activision Studios released a video game titled *Minority Report: Everybody Runs* (2002). And in September 2015, a television sequel with the same title was released on FOX. His works, mainly his short stories, have been thoroughly recuperated into the spectacle. Philip K. Dick is big business. To date there are twelve feature film adaptations of his work including *Blade Runner* (1982), *Total Recall* (1990), *Barjo* (1992), *Screamers* (1995), *Impostor* (2002), *Minority Report* (2002), *Paycheck* (2003), *A Scanner Darkly* (2006), *Next* (2007), *Radio Free Albemuth* (2008), *Screamers: The Hunting* (2009), *The Adjustment Bureau* (2011), and *Total Recall* (2012). The short story "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" (1966) has also been made into a television series titled *Total Recall 2070* (1999). In 2015, in a development which has a faintly Dickian ring to it, Amazon, a multinational shipping conglomerate, produced a series based on *The Man in the High Castle* (1962). Currently, director Michel Gondry has a film adaptation of *Ubik* (1969) in mind and Dee Rees, the director of *Pariah* (2011), is set to adapt *Martian Time-Slip* (1964). The film adaptations of Dick's work have failed to capture the powerful aesthetic and political charge of his fiction. Dick has proven to be grist for the Hollywood mill; each year another director lines up

to transform his fiction into industry standard action films, most of which garner decidedly average reviews. Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) is an obvious exception. However, whilst the film is held in high regard aesthetically, it sacrifices the political charge of the novel and transforms it into, as critic Peter Fitting writes, "a cynical legitimization of the status quo" ("Neutralization" 133). *Blade Runner* (1982) offers us a stark example of the tendency of Hollywood directors to transform Dick's work into the noir genre, a genre which Freedman describes as "deeply pessimistic about human possibility and human happiness" ("Dialectics" 71).

Recuperation, as Bill Brown writes, is the "turning of rebellion into money" ("Yet Another" 142). The Situationists were particularly aware of this dynamic. American Situationist Robert Chasse writes in 1968: "We have used the word *recuperate*, which means recover; the activity of society as it attempts to obtain possession of that which negates it" ("The Recuperation of Marcuse"). The recuperation of Philip K. Dick has moved along several somewhat contradictory planes. On the one hand, a minority of his works have been made into aesthetically compelling yet politically conservative noir films such as *Blade Runner* (1982) and *The Man in the High Castle* (2015). On the other, the majority have been transformed into lackluster kipple: the uniformly segmented action sequences, the chase, the bullets, the girl.

The process of transforming Dick's work into commercial kipple is not altogether straightforward. Dick is not an outsider or an avant-garde artist being absorbed into Hollywood. Rather, Dick was writing from within spectacular

commercial culture. He moved within and against the highly commercial form of pulp-SF, a genre whose cheap paper, racy plots, recognisable characters, and familiar tropes all serve to impose, in Peter Bürger's words, "a particular kind of consumer behavior on the reader" (54). The aesthetic and political power of Dick's work stems from his intimacy with the pulp-SF tradition and his meticulous subversion of its form and formal devices. Dick burrows into the mainframe of pulp-SF's devices: flying cars, Martian colonies, lasers, telepaths, space travel and jetpacks. Once in the mainframe he snips a handful of wires and produces defective narrative devices; devices which seem familiar and yet disrupt the ideological and economic function of the genre. Behind the flying car lies a narrative of technological liberation, a faith in science; behind the Martian colony lies imperialism, a blind faith in progress, expansion and growth; behind the form of pulp fiction itself lies a conservative paranoid ideology, an ideology which, as Freedman writes, "is finally based on a refusal of any complex theoretical structure of differentials" ("Paranoia" 117). One by one, Dick moves through these devices and upsets their ideological function. One by one, Hollywood adaptations' undo Dick's reversals; they tighten loose screws, snip and sew up unravelling threads, and send the characters back to wardrobe until it all makes sense again. When we wake up tomorrow morning there will be more of it.

The second pincer movement in Dick's recuperation is his recent canonization by the Library of America. Between 2007 and 2009 the Library published *Philip K. Dick: Four Novels of the 1960s*, *Philip K. Dick: Five Novels of the 1960s and 70s*, and *Philip K. Dick: VALIS, and Later Novels*. If Hollywood tends to reduce Dick's work to total kipple, then the Library of America raises his

work up into the realm of the timeless classic. All of these editions are made to last; the material form inscribes value onto the content. They are beautifully bound in a shiny black hardback. The reader is encouraged to delicately turn the silky smooth pages; to contemplate and muse as the text sits open in biblical repose. These are no longer books to be read on the train, on the commute, or in-between shifts. They gleam with prestige, with the promise of intellectual stimulation and status. When we read *Ubik* in The Library of America series, we lose much of the paratextual generic framework of pulp-SF. It is not that the Library of America is mistaken in its celebration of Dick as a worthwhile writer. However, Dick's aesthetic and political charge stems from his work being read as pulp-SF. Gone is the defective commodity sent out with a thousand others. Gone are the camp covers and crumbling paper. Gone also is the cheap price; each Library of America edition retails at over thirty US dollars. These are novels that Dick himself could have rarely afforded.

In republishing Dick's work The Library of America enacts a wholesale decontextualisation of Dick's generic context. Even the likes of *Wired* magazine sense a radicalism dampened, announcing that "[t]he most outré science fiction writer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has finally entered the canon" (Rose). In turn, the aesthetic and political power of his works, a power dependent on the subversion of specifically pulp-SF devices, gradually disintegrates. His subverted devices no longer turn sharply within a specific generic context, within a specific ideological context. Dick's flying cars, novums, his Martian colonies, telepaths, and ray guns remain bizarre and unsettling, yet without this unsettlement being coupled to a specific ideology, Dick moves from making material interventions within the

kipple machine to being another one of its products. The series was edited by the writer Jonathan Lethem, a New York Times bestselling author. In a 2007 interview with Frank Rose from *Wired*, Lethem himself acknowledged that the power of Dick lies in his marginal status. Lethem comments: “[H]e’s so deeply of his time. And I don’t think it’s an accident that he was so marginal. There was something about him that was deeply fugitive. It’s hard to believe in a Dick who’s been domesticated into a life of literary prestige the way we are currently domesticating him” (qtd. in Rose).

Criticism has also routinely compared and evaluated Dick against a more literary set of writers. John Fekete observed in 1984 “far ranging allusive comparisons of Dick with Blake (Pierce, Disch), Kafka (Aldiss, Hayles),...Dickens (Aldiss), Whitman, Spillane (Disch), Barth, Cortazar (Hayles), and Mozart, Fitzgerald, Nijinsky (Malzberg)” (121). However, to take Dick out of a pulp-SF context is to obscure the aesthetic power of his work. Fitting asserts that Dick must be read within an SF context and that “its co-optation into some larger literary tradition, effectively strip[s] it of its specific or generic qualities” (“Deconstruction” 41). We find that when grounded in pulp-SF, we can judge the value of Dick’s works in their frustration and estrangement of the genre. How does Dick expose pulp-SF’s imposition of a “particular type of consumer behavior”? How does the anti-capitalist content of his novels interact with his use of pulp-SF’s formal devices? With his generic context in mind we can move through questions of specific, material, cultural interventions, through discursive tactics and strategies that work against the ideology of capitalism. When it is lost, Dick becomes a writer of more abstract concepts and ideas. He moves from a

politician to a philosopher, interested in questions of good and evil rather than right and wrong. The less Dick is grounded in the genre of pulp-SF the more he floats up in the realm of apolitical abstraction. Which is really just another form of kipple—“[it] always gets more and more” (*Androids* 56).

### Literature Review

We are faced with an uneasy situation in which all of the problems identified by Dick still persist and persist with violence. We have never needed a writer like Dick more, a writer who searches out and dissolves the ideology currently guiding our planet towards environmental catastrophe. And yet Philip K. Dick’s work has been smothered by a two-pronged culture industry, pulled into the dust of mindless films and elevated outside of its context into the literary sphere. Let us turn to the field of academic criticism. The academic study of Dick’s work falls into three periods, stretching roughly from 1975-1988, from 1988-2015, and from 2015 onwards. This final period is inaugurated by the first essay collection dedicated to Philip K. Dick in over two decades, *The World According to Philip K. Dick* (2015). This collection signals a renewed interest in Dick as a politically engaged author.

The 1960s and 70s were a period of social and political turmoil. For us in 2016, these decades shine with the promise of a future that could have been. In 1967 Raoul Vaneigem proclaimed the oncoming revolution of everyday life:

Watts, Prague, Stockholm, Stanleyville, Turin, Mieres, the Dominican Republic, Amsterdam: wherever passionate acts of refusal and a passionate



consciousness of the necessity of resistance trigger stoppages in the factories of collective illusion, there the revolution of everyday life is under way. Resistance intensifies as poverty becomes more general. Things which for years justified fighting over particular issues – hunger, oppression, boredom, sickness, mental anguish, isolation, deceit – now all serve to underscore poverty’s basic coherence, its omnipresent emptiness, its appallingly oppressive abstractness. It is the whole world of hierarchical power, of the State, of sacrifice, of exchange, of the quantitative – of the commodity as will and representation of the world – that is now coming under attack from the moving forces of an entirely new society, a society still to be invented, yet already with us. Revolutionary praxis now affects every cranny of this world, changing negative into positive, illuminating the hidden face of the earth with the fires of insurrection and mapping out the contours of the planet’s imminent conquest. (271)

The most highly political readings of Philip K. Dick came out of this period of social upheaval, of mass refusal, of the collective vision of another way of life. It was in the midst of these worldwide struggles that the first collection of essays on Philip K. Dick emerged, the 1975 special Dick issue of *Science Fiction Studies*.

The 1975 special issue of *Science Fiction Studies* marks the first phase of Dick criticism, featuring Dick the politico-revolutionary. The edition shines with what Freedman has called an “evangelical intensity,” exuding something of the “excitement of the manifesto” (“Editorial” 146). In part, the excitement stems

from the discovery of a largely neglected author of great worth. Yet the enthusiasm that fills the pages also derives from the kinship between Dick's radical SF and the projects of leftist social transformation that characterise the 1960s and 70s. The canonization of Dick came about with the memory of May 1968 fresh in the minds of critics. Dick was read and essays were penned as revolutionaries established workers councils in Chile 1972, as the dictator Marcelo Caetano was overthrown by workers in the Carnation Revolution of 1974. The resistance against the capitalist world showed little signs of slowing down. The horizon of many Marxist scholars was optimistic and rightly so. In 1979 workers in Iran revolted and established independent workers councils. The following year the Solidarity mass movement in Poland swept to power. Whilst none of these movements ultimately succeeded, they exposed the constructed nature of capitalism, its historicity, and the power of workers themselves to construct an alternative. In this historical context, the power and urgency of Dick's work is located in his fictional estrangement and critique of the same forces: social relations, wage-labour, exploitation, capitalist architecture, capitalist science and technology, conceptions of nature and the quality of everyday life. The fervour of criticism was nourished and animated by the dialogue between Dick's ideas and real-world political events. Dick was read as a cultural revolutionary.

In the 1975 issue of *Science Fiction Studies* the major coordinates of Dick scholarship were first established. Darko Suvin's introductory note and essay "The Opus: Artifice as Refuge and World View" and Stanislaw Lem's essay "Philip K. Dick: A Visionary Among the Charlatans" offer the first totalizing

accounts of Dick's then unfinished oeuvre. Suvin establishes the persisting lineaments of the Dick canon; the early "apprenticeship" years of the 1950s, the "breakthrough" phase of the 1960s, and so-called "falling off" into concerns of ontology of the 1970s ("Opus" 2). Each essay marks out the terrain on which criticism would operate for years to come; Dick's anti-capitalist politics, his class-based character systems, his peculiar relationship with the SF form and the SF tradition. Perhaps above all, they reveal a foundational interest in Dick's promiscuous play at the threshold of ideology and ontology, cognitive order and chaos. Stanislaw Lem describes Dick's oeuvre in religious terms: "[t]he disintegrating worlds of his stories, as it were inversions of Genesis, order returning to chaos" (58). Similarly, Carlo Pagetti locates the intense terror of the Dick text in the dynamic wherein "the more man is insecure, dazzled, confused, the more he is in need of faith, of a trust in something absolute and transcendental" (20). In Fitting's words, "Dick's characters often react to the discovery of a breakdown in reality by attempting to find something or someone "behind" phenomenal reality" ("Reality" 95). Ian Watson argues that "one rule of Dick's false realities is the paradox that once in, there's no way out, yet for this very reason transcendence of a sort can be achieved" (67). The transcendence in question is how to cope with what Fitting describes as "the discovery of ideology itself" ("Reality" 93).

I share with these critics the same overarching interest in Dick's form. Across Dick's body of work we find an oft repeated dynamic: firstly, Dick establishes a fictional world which appears stable; the reader assumes the presence of a consistent structure with a centre. By 'centre,' I am referring to the

ideological grounds upon which we imagine these futures. In most of Dick's works we enter worlds of heightened scientific discourse that portray individuals with stable subjectivities. The flow of the narrative is typically linear, and the futures is placed on a linear historical continuum. The texts appear familiar in that we can detect the background presence of overarching concepts such as science, humanity, time, and history. Ideological grounds that we experience in everyday life as "neutral or eternal" (Fitting "Reality" 93). Secondly, one or two, and sometimes several, major ruptures will explode these centres. The protagonist is always the same: a helpless everyman who is bewildered by the sudden disintegration of his way of ordering the world. Through these ruptures the grounds upon which we interpret the world today—and upon which we assumed these fictional worlds were built—become both visible and historicized. Finally, the archetypal Dick text simmers down from this rupture and starts to piece together a synthesised structure with a new centre. Yet the centre is no longer assumed to be absolutely secure, outside of history. Through this dynamic the Dick text demands a worldview that can at once hold consistency and rupture together, a worldview that can appreciate the permanent play of stability and ephemerality that underpins all structures of thought.

In particular, many of the critics involved in the 1975 issue of *Science Fiction Studies* located Dick's power in his critical relationship with science. It is Dick's critical relationship with the presuppositions of science that lend his work an air of the metaphysical, the ontological and the religious. It is also this relationship that lends a heightened awareness to Dick's use of the SF form itself. In "Dick's Maledictory Web: About and Around *Martian Time-Slip*," Brian Aldiss

reads *Martian Time-Slip* as a technological dystopia and in “After Armageddon: Character Systems in *Dr. Bloodmoney*,” Fredric Jameson takes *Dr. Bloodmoney* as an example of Dick’s denunciation of “an evil or perverted science” that was “exposed by the invention of the atom bomb” (26). Of particular interest is the way that Dick threads a suspicion of scientific absolutism into his formal devices.

In Carlo Pagetti’s “Dick and Meta-SF” the critic explores the origins of Dick’s devices in the work of Asimov, Van Vogt, and Heinlein but notes that “there is a subtle deviation in respect to their conception, a difference in the use of these motifs, which is both critical interpretation and personal probing” (18). Accompanying Pagetti’s observations is Peter Fitting’s acute article “Ubik: The Deconstruction of Bourgeois SF.” Like Pagetti, Fitting makes the case that Dick plays with the SF form so as to undermine the ideological presuppositions that underpin science itself. He describes how

[t]he classic bourgeois novel has been described in recent French literary theory as itself a metaphysical construct: traditionally, the novel has been a representative medium, and the concept of representation implies that the text is a restatement of some pre-existent meaning. (45)

Through a reading of *Ubik* (1969), with its relentless hermeneutic shuffling, Fitting makes the case that Dick frustrates the approach which “reduces reading to a *looking through* the text to the ‘real’ meaning, whether that meaning be empirical reality, the author’s conscious design or his unconscious intentions” (45). Amidst the upheavals of the time, Fitting links this estranging form not to, on Suvin’s terms, irrationality, mysticism, or drugs, but rather Dick’s

estrangement of a “transcendental conception of reality which mystifies the actual reality of the capitalist mode of production” (45). In Fitting’s view, the novel’s rejection of a scientific absolutism was evidence of the most resolutely materialist worldview. Critic Howard Canaan summarises these early essays, in particular those of Suvin, Lem, and Fitting, as interested in “the mystery and ambivalence of Dick’s work as a veiled criticism of the contradictions in capitalism” (309).

Through the 1970s and 80s, *Science Fiction Studies* retained, in general, a firm perspective on Dick as a leading light of revolutionary SF. In an article “Reality as Ideological Construct: A Reading of Five Novels by Philip K. Dick” (1983), Fitting continues his work begun in 1975. Fitting reasserts that the power of the Dick text lies not in the “various answers” Dick gives, but in Dick’s work “as a *mise en scène* of the constructed nature of reality” (93). In 1984, Freedman continues the study of Dick in relation to capitalist ideology. In his essential essay “Towards a Theory of Paranoia: The SF of Philip K. Dick” (1984) Freedman performs a Marxist-Lacanian reading of Dick’s *Ubik*. Freedman historicizes Dick in the context of the 1960s, the decade of conspiracies and the rising consciousness of mass commoditization, and makes a convincing case that the paranoid ideology is produced through the everyday workings of the capitalist system. He argues that it is an ideology produced by the circulation of mystified commodities and of government conspiracies. Freedman’s argument then moves from Dick’s representations to the implications of paranoia on the SF form itself. He notes that “SF closely corresponds to the weird and coherent interpretive systems of the paranoid” (116). As for the controversial indeterminacy of *Ubik*, Freedman reads this “textually explicit failure of closure” as “hinting at the

conceptual limits of paranoia itself” (117). Fitting and Freedman mark a high point in Marxist readings of Dick. They firmly place Dick in his historical context, comfortably grapple with Dick’s chaotic and disintegrating worlds, and move deftly from content to a close reading of Dick’s form. For both of these critics, the most valuable and urgent aspects of Dick’s fiction stem from the author’s formal qualities.

### The Dick Industry

Between 1982 and 1988 a handful of book length studies accompanied single articles published by such journals as *Science Fiction Studies* and *Extrapolation*. These include Hazel Pierce’s *Philip K. Dick* (1982) and Martin Harry Greenberg and Joseph D. Oleander’s edited collection of essays, *Philip K. Dick* (1983). Critic John Fekete takes particular issue with these collections in his essay “The Transmigration of Philip K. Dick” (1983), published in *Science Fiction Studies*. Fekete uses these texts to map several emerging trends which he regards as a hindrance to the flourishing of Dick criticism. He laments a certain “content fetishism,” a lack of analysis of Dick’s style and form, and a deficiency of connections “to the prominent concerns of contemporary literary theory and criticism” (121). Fekete contrasts these trends with the early work of such writers as Suvin, Fitting, and Freedman, arguing that Dick criticism was suffering from a trend towards a “listing of...ideational contents” over and above form (121). I share Fekete’s critique of these critical trends and make the case that from the 1980s through the 2010s, the focus on Dick’s content rather than his form has been a definitive trend.

During the 1980s, *Extrapolation* hosted a range of essays that read Dick primarily in terms of content and without political impetus. In the June 1983 edition of *Extrapolation*, Robert Galbreath raises the thematic questions of reality versus illusion, genuine versus fake, the nature of truth and of salvation – ultimately Galbreath concludes that the Valis trilogy “is Philip K. Dick’s cosmic message of trust, hope, and human redemption” (113). In the September 1983 edition of *Extrapolation*, Terri Paul reads Dick’s “A Little Something For Us Tempunauts” (1974) as a critique of time-travel; she writes that “[i]maging ourselves beyond the force of entropy leads to the death of the imagination” (278). In the final *Extrapolation* article of the 1980s, Merritt Abrash, in “Sparring with the Universe: Heroism and Futility in Philip K. Dick’s Protagonists” (1986), reads Dick in broad humanist terms concluding that he presents characters who strive to be good in an evil universe. The final two book length studies of the 1980s are Patricia Warrick’s *Mind in Motion: The Fiction of Philip K. Dick* (1987) and Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Novels of Philip K. Dick* (1984). Warrick’s book continues the emerging trend of reading Dick in terms of apparently timeless humanistic themes. On the other hand, Robinson’s work signifies a return to a politically and historically engaged reading of Dick, although the short treatment of each novel leaves little room for close reading and sustained formal analysis.

Alongside the focus on the content of Dick’s work, Fekete laments the frequent recourse to Dick himself; he writes “critical discussions at this juncture could only benefit from cutting or at least loosening the umbilical links with Dick’s biography and pronouncements” (122). Despite Fekete’s article, recourse is a central feature of Dick criticism from the early 1980s to the present day. The



most prominent example is the speculative work of Gregg Rickman in *To the High Castle: Philip K. Dick A Life, 1928-82* (1989). Rickman treats Dick's body of work as symptomatic of Dick's known and unknown pathologies. Whilst Rickman's approach is the most extreme example, a fascination with the author's biography and pronouncements haunt Dick criticism. In the 1995 collection *Philip K. Dick: Contemporary Critical Interpretations*, editor Samuel J. Umland makes the claim that "[k]nowledge of Dick's biography is essential to an understanding of his work" (2). Within Umland's collection, Karl Wessel makes the claim that "[i]t is clear that Dick felt trapped within a false reality from which he couldn't seem to extricate himself, and began to explore its meaning through a series of science fiction short stories," a comment which brings Dick's fictional enterprise uncomfortably close to therapeutic self-help (45). In the same collection, Michael Feehan argues, "[f]or Dick, the source of infinite paradox resides in the idea of twins, in literal and metaphorical doublings," and that Dick "continually reenacts the death of his twin sister" (198, 199). Finally, Hazel Pierce's essay "Philip K. Dick's Political Dreams," regularly draws on Dick's non-fictional pronouncements to raise the questions of appearance versus reality, the authentic human, and the Dick's championing of "compassion and understanding" (132).

### From Politics to Ontology

Dick criticism from the 1970s through to today displays a clear movement from direct questions of politics, ideology and aesthetics, the approaches inaugurated and maintained by *Science Fiction Studies*, to broader questions of content, of ideas, of what it means to be human, the nature of reality, and the

relationship between Dick's fiction and his own life. Broadly speaking, we move from an outward facing, political Dick to an insular, apolitical one. The trends critically observed by Fekete in 1983 only gained in momentum through the late 1980s, the 1990s and 2000s. In the otherwise politically engaged pages of the 1988 second special Dick issue of *Science Fiction Studies*, two essays stand out as emblematic of Dick criticism's departure from concerns of politics and everyday life. Firstly, Scott Durham's "From the Death of the Subject to a Theology of Late Capitalism" (1988) marks a shift away from the language of the 1975 edition. For example:

Hence, the death of the subject is staged twice: first as an expansion of subjective powers in which desire is freed from its contemplative prison and immediately invests a complicit everyday; secondly, as the triumph over the subject of desire by a raw matter which seems paradoxically endowed with an antagonistic subjectivity of its own—as the destruction not only of the transcendent power of negation which was once the province of the aesthetic subject, but even of the alienated or latent subjectivity enshrined in objects themselves by the whole history of human thought and labor. (191)

Durham's argument reveals an intensification of abstract language. In turn, this language enacts a move away from direct material and political concerns.

Durham's article is accompanied by George Slusser's similarly abstract essay "History, Historicity, Story" (1988). In this article Slusser makes the case that Dick produces a specifically American sense of historicity; that he operates on an

Emersonian field of temporality. Slusser hones in on Dick's lack of temporal rigidity and a sense of contingency and difference. The political connection between Dick's fiction and the real world is diminished as a turn to abstract ideas gains momentum, a trend which only increases from this point onwards.

A glance at the development of Dick criticism in the journal *Extrapolation* from the 1990s through to today confirms a general shift away from politics towards ontological concerns. In Christopher Palmer's essay "Critique and Fantasy in Two Novels by Philip K. Dick" (1991), the author does hone in on the politics of Dick's anti-psychiatry novels *Martian Time-Slip* and *Clans of the Alphane Moon*. However, Palmer returns to the life of the author as a means of understanding the novels. He writes:

If Dick sets out to write a satiric novel contrasting the sanity of the "mad" and the insanity of the "sane," he does not maintain the necessary detachment. A novel about derangement becomes a deranged novel; Mary's aggression towards Chuck is capped by the author's aggression towards Mary. This is a return of P. K. Dick's repressed. (225)

Where Dick criticism does occasionally turn to an analysis of form, the analysis has increasingly been decoupled from any political charge. In Laura E. Campbell's "Dickian Time in *The Man in the High Castle*" (1992), the critic reads Dick's temporal play not in relation to ideology or to constructions of historical narratives, but in relation to human perception of time and space in general. She writes that in the novel, "one cannot predict which event will affect other events"

therefore “[o]ur perception of time must necessarily be local, but its true nature is not so restricted” (198).

The critical turn away from reading Dick as a politically engaged author continues through the late 1990s and 2000s<sup>1</sup>. In Umberto Rossi’s “Just a Bunch of Words: The Image of the Secluded Family and the Problem of λόγος in P.K. Dick’s *Time Out of Joint*” (1996), Rossi reads Dick against biblical scholarship and the relationship between words and the nature of reality. Rossi’s article provides a clear example of a critical approach that is committed to a largely apolitical close reading of Dick. Twenty years after Fitting connected Dick’s wordplay to a subversion of a historically specific capitalist reality, Rossi reads Dick’s wordplay against the nature of an imagined empirical reality. In Yves Potin’s “Four Levels of Reality in Philip K. Dick’s *Time Out of Joint*” (1998), the critic continues Rossi’s investigation into the biblical relationship between the logos and the deed in Dick’s *Time Out of Joint* (1959). In 1998, critic Lorenzo DiTomasso contributed further to this topic in response to Rossi and demanded a more accurate focus on the etymology of ancient biblical scripture. DiTomasso makes the case the novel is “one of Dick’s first attempts to grasp the entire issue

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<sup>1</sup> From the 2000s through to today, *Extrapolation* published several articles which read Dick in largely apolitical terms. These include Umberto Rossi’s “Fourfold Symmetry: The Interplay of Fictional Levels in Five More or Less Prestigious Novels by Philip K. Dick” (2002), Kyoko Magome’s “The Player Piano and Musico-Cybernetic Science Fiction between the 1950s and the 1980s: Kurt Vonnegut and Philip K. Dick” (2004), Valerie Holliday’s “Masculinity in the Novels of Philip K. Dick” (2006), Ritch Calvin’s “The French Dick: Villiers de L’Ilse-Adam, Philip K. Dick, and the Android” (2007), Umberto Rossi’s “The Holy Family from Outer Space: Reconsidering Philip K. Dick’s *The Divine Invasion*” (2011), and Eric Doise’s “Are they real and really different from us? Testimony and simulation in *Radio Free Albemuth*” (2012).

of real-versus-unreal in the cloak of dualistic cosmologies” (288). These three essays on *Time Out of Joint* (1959) all move Dick’s political critique of Cold War ideology into the realm of timeless ontological questions.

If the 1975 edition of *Science Fiction Studies* was energized by the social and political ferment of the era, then the 1988 special edition can be read as its final gasp. The critical trends outlined by Fekete have a basis in academic methodology, yet they also stem from the political context of the era. It is no wonder that Dick has been read less and less as a politically radical aesthete, and more and more as a writer of ideas, of philosophy, of Gnosticism and ontology, as the political movements of the 1970s fade into distant memory. As Perry Anderson writes:

What has happened in between the two [periods]? Essentially, three decades of nearly unbroken political defeats for every force that once fought against the established order. Intellectually, and imaginatively, that has meant a remorseless closure of space . . . . It was Thatcher’s rule that coined the motto of the time: ‘there is no alternative’. Soon it was no longer necessary to proclaim that capitalism was superior to socialism, as if there could be a choice between them—it was the only conceivable social system, coextensive with humanity for all time to come . . . . In these conditions, it is little surprise that not just the political but the utopian itself has been in general suspension since the mid-seventies. (71)

Accompanying the methodological trends outlined by Fekete, this historical downturn in the visible, material disruption of capitalism has produced many apolitical readings of Dick.

### Dick in France

From a contemporary perspective, the 1988 special Dick issue of *Science Fiction Studies* resembles an alternative route, a set of sketched coordinates for a journey never undertaken. In this thesis I return to the concerns of this issue, to discover a different Dick to the one we have become accustomed to today. In his editorial introduction to the 1988 special issue, Freedman lamented that it was now possible to “detect at least the beginnings of a critical ‘Dick Industry’” (145). However, rather than lead to a flourishing critical field, however abstract, the ontological and thematic turn, and disappearance of aesthetic and political analysis, have cumulatively come to numb the critical field. By 2007, Andrew Butler pondered whether the field of Dick criticism had become saturated: “[w]hether the continual canonization of Dick is a good thing remains to be seen – he is not the only exceptional figure in sf” (qtd. in Canaan 308).

The majority of the essays in the 1988 special issue respond to the concerns raised by Fekete in 1983. John Huntington grounds Dick in the pulp-SF context, Freedman reads Dick in the political context of 1960s America, and Eric S. Rabkin draw connections with contemporary economic developments. Of particular significance for this thesis, many of the essays heed Fekete’s call:

The critical capacity to recover the danger and power in Dick's objective world creations will likely be much enhanced by the articulation of a methodical gesture of bringing Dick's writings, as aesthetically apprehended, into contact with the contemporary character of our social formations as apprehended through other discourses. (122)

Fekete calls for a clash of sorts, a collision of separate worlds, in order to estrange each other and bring out the particular and the shared qualities of each. In this thesis I seek to "recover the danger and power" of Dick's work through strategically bringing him into conversation with the Situationist International. The coupling of Philip K. Dick and the Situationists produces both comfortable connections and violent sparks, a critical kinship and a sense of utter disparity. It enacts a cognitive estrangement of both parties in terms of aesthetics, content, and politics. Above all, it facilitates a close reading and a politicization of Dick's aesthetics.

In the 1988 special edition of *Science Fiction Studies* several critics turned to Dick's reception in France as a means of recovering something of his radical politics. In France, Dick was foremost read as a radical anti-capitalist author. Indeed, as Roger Bozzetto writes, "such a reading was considered at the time the only valid one" (157). The politicised reading of Dick is in part due to the differences between French and American culture; as George Slusser writes, "In France, in fact, it might be said that there really is no 'popular' literature as we understand it. Unlike the Anglophile world, with its strict borders between 'high' and 'low' literature, in France all literature has the potential of becoming serious

literature” (“Foreword” 2). In the 1988 issue, Roger Bozzetto, Daniel Fondanèche and Emmanuel Jouanne all focus exclusively on Dick’s reception in France and on his lasting impact on French science fiction. However, beyond the destabilising potential of cultural borders, the political climate of France was fertile ground for Dick’s radical anti-capitalist aesthetics. Fondanèche maps out the publishing history of Dick’s work and locates the peak demand for Dick’s fiction from 1970 through to 1975—that is, immediately following the events of May 1968.

Above all, Fondanèche and Bozzetto locate Dick’s politicised popularity within the events of May 1968, a month in which France was brought to a standstill by a nationwide series of strikes, protests and clashes between a mass of workers and students and the forces of the state. *Ubik* (1969) found its way into the French language barely two years after these events, and, as Fondanèche writes, “The scent of May 1968 appeared to waft from his pages” (162). The critic firmly reads Dick as an author of “fire and brimstone,” an author whose radically unsettling aesthetics correspond closely to the political upheavals of the material world (162). Historian Kristin Ross describes May 1968 as a “crisis in functionalism,” a series of “political experiments in *declassification*,” a disruption of the “‘givenness’ of places” (25). She writes of “displacements that took students outside of university, meetings that brought farmers and workers together, or students to the countryside—trajectories outside of the Latin Quarter, to workers’ housing and popular neighborhoods, a new kind of mass organizing (against the Algerian war in the early 1960s, and later against the Vietnam War) that involved physical dislocation” (25). It is precisely this interrelationship between the radical aesthetics of Dick and the radical upheaval of May 1968 that



animates my thesis. Dick's liquidation of the givenness of our everyday world clearly speaks to the moment of May 1968—the revolutionary convulsion of the material world.

Just as Dick's French connection has been acknowledged, so too has the connection between the Californian writer and Situationist Guy Debord. This connection takes us beyond the 1988 special issue of *Science Fiction Studies*. In his essay "Towards a Theory of Paranoia: The SF of Philip K. Dick" (1984) Carl Freedman locates Dick's fiction as responding within and against the world theorized in Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). Freedman writes that "[v]irtually no aspect of life is left untouched: if our sexual lives are as dependent on over-the-counter contraceptive devices as our political awareness is on televised representations of the 'news,' yet all of these components of what has been called 'the society of the spectacle' are first and last mystifying bearers of exchange-value" ("Paranoia" 118). In the 1988 special edition of *Science Fiction Studies*, Roger Bozzetto picks up Freedman's claims and points again to the similarities between Dick's dramatization of "the manipulative power of political, economic, and law-enforcement institutions" and the precarity of the "'pseudo-events'" that make up a society which "the 'situationists' define as the Society of the Spectacle" (157). Scott Bukatman's essay "Who Programs You?" (1990), affirms Dick's challenge to the "instrumental rationalism of spectacular society" and the "alienation which results from seeing *through* the spectacle" (208). And finally, in his 2003 work *Philip K. Dick: Exhilaration and Terror of the Postmodern* (2003), Christopher Palmer notes the similarities between Dick's vision and Debord's theories of industrial production outlined in *The Society of*

*the Spectacle* (7). The connection between Dick's work and Debord's has been made several times without controversy. However, no study exists which engages in a sustained comparison of Dick and Debord; no study exists which addresses the work of any of the other members of the Situationists; and finally, all of the comparisons between the two remain at the level of content rather than form.

Across this thesis I connect Dick and the Situationists on grounds that are inseparably aesthetic and political. The Situationists prove particularly effective in this endeavour for the group was formed, in a charged duality, as an artistic avant-garde and as a revolutionary political group. In their preface to Frances Stracey's *Constructed Situations: A New History of the Situationist International* (2015), Esther Leslie and Mike Wayne write:

The Situationists were the most cultured of all and the most revolutionary. It was the force-field between these two aspects that powered their thought. Even when art was ostensibly abandoned in favour of theoretical-political analysis, it shadowed the political theory as a – or its – negative image. Too frequently the counter-parts of art and politics have been broken apart in interpretations of the Situationist legacy: artists alight on the aesthetic aspects, the avant-garde techniques, the questions of recuperation of culture; politicians debate the questions of form, the analysis of the state, the legitimacy or not of the vanguard party. (viii)

The value of comparing Dick and the Situationists lies in the Situationists' politically committed aesthetics. Through reading Dick against the Situationists'

aesthetic theories, we are able to return to a political reading of Dick and move away from content based readings that have come to yield meagre returns.

Chapter one and chapter two of this thesis read *Ubik* (1969) and *The Game-Players of Titan* (1963) against the Situationist theory of détournement. Détournement emerged as a founding principle of the Situationists' cultural practice. In part, this was due to the technique, in its various forms, being a "constantly present tendency of the contemporary avant-garde, both before and since the formation of the SI" (SI "Detournement" 67). That is to say, something of détournement belongs to the tradition of the historical avant-garde and stretches back towards the practices of Dada and Surrealism. In 1959, two years after the group's founding, the Situationists furthered the theorization and application of détournement. In the third issue of the *Internationale Situationniste* they write:

"Detournement is a game based upon the capacity for *devalorization*," Jorn writes in his study entitled *Detoured Painting* (May 1959), and he adds that all elements of the cultural past must be "reinvested" or disappear. Detournement thus at first reveals itself to be the negation of the value of the previous organizations of expression. Detournement arises and reinforces itself more and more in the historical period of the decay of artistic expression. But at the same time, attempts to re-employ the "detournable bloc" as a material for another ensemble express the search for a vaster construction, at a superior level of reference, as a new monetary unit of creation. ("Detournement" 67)

Détournement moves to empty out the meaning of signifiers and to reinvest them with new meaning. This double movement lends “a specific strength to détournement” described as “the enrichment of the greatest part of the terms by the coexistence in them of their old and immediate meanings—their double depth” (“Detournement” 67).

At once, we can begin to sense a connection between détournement and Dick’s relationship to the pulp-SF tradition, the “double depth” of Dick’s debt towards and departure from the tradition of pulp-SF. As Pagetti noted in 1975, Dick deploys pulp-SF devices in a peculiar fashion, describing how “there is as subtle deviation in respect to their conception” (18). Pagetti’s use of the word deviation is strikingly similar to the meaning of the word détournement, a word which suggests a detour, a divergence, a hijacking. In his essay “Philip K. Dick: Authenticity and Insincerity” (1988), Huntington describes Dick’s inheritance of the van Vogtian 800 word-rule; the shifting and turning plots of van Vogt who “himself seems to enjoy the surface disarray and instability because he trusts to a few deep and unchanging principles” whereas “Dick, on the contrary, allows that the surface disarray may disrupt the deepest structure” (172). Huntington’s analysis complements Pagetti’s earlier insights, and builds upon Fitting’s argument that Dick seeks to estrange our most deeply held ideologies through subverting generic expectations. The aesthetics of Dick’s work evoke similar effects to the Situationist practice of détournement, a technique which Guy Debord described as “the fluid language of anti-ideology” (*Spectacle* 146). Through reading *Ubik*, one of Dick’s most highly esteemed works, and *The Game-Players of Titan*, one of Dick’s least esteemed works, alongside

détournement, we can salvage and further politicise these critics' earlier observations.

The third chapter of my thesis comprises an analysis of *Martian Time-Slip* (1964), another highly regarded text, and the fourth involves a reading of *Galactic Pot-Healer* (1969), one of Dick's most innocuous texts. Both of these novels engage with one of the Situationists' most central preoccupations: the ideology of progress under capitalism. The Situationists emerged out of the rubble and ruins of post-war Paris. The three decades following the war would see a period of unprecedented change in the French economic, social and urban landscape, a period of unprecedented *progress* towards a new and once again powerful France. As Bradford Lyau writes:

If France wanted to re-enter the circle of important world powers, it had to transform its society—and do so quickly. The top priority became the creation of a modern industrial base. France still possessed much of its nineteenth-century rural, small town society in the late 1940s. Thus, a level of social planning unprecedented in French history became a necessity. (13)

The Situationists cut their theoretical teeth against Le Corbusier's concrete, the creeping "urban leprosy" of a city built by dictats of capitalism (Debord "Sick Planet"). Le Corbusier's wide open streets, his strictly delineated zones of work, leisure and rest, his hideous housing blocks in the banlieues of Paris remain now, as then, sites of poverty, strictly delineated economic ghettos. The Situationists saw a new economy mapping itself onto Paris. As Kotányi and Vaneigem write:

“The development of the urban milieu is the capitalist domestication of space” (“Basic Program” 87). The ideology of capitalist progress was made material in the wholly functional city; a denial of excess, of play; just the empty rise and fall of the clock.

Le Corbusier built cities for machines to live in; quantified labour power and consumers that labour and quantify. Both Philip K. Dick and the Situationists saw the rapid rise to power of the market economy, “capital’s colonization or subsumption of, not just labour or economic activity, but the whole of life” (Stracey 4). As capital encroaches and permeates more and more, the essential process which follows is one of quantification. The Situationists and Dick share a common and deep disgust with the logic of quantification. In *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, Vaneigem writes:

[T]he tendency is towards planning, and planning tends to quantify social differences in terms of ability to consume and to make others consume. With the differences growing in number and shrinking in significance, the real distance between rich and poor is diminishing, and mankind is levelled into mere variations on poverty. The culmination of the process would be a cybernetic society composed of specialists ranked hierarchically according to their aptitude for consuming, and making others consume, the doses of power necessary for the functioning of a gigantic social computer of which they themselves would at once be program and print-out. A society of exploited exploiters where some slaves are more equal than others. (74)

Vaneigem's words strike chords with Dick's repeated representation of androids that too closely mimic human life, and humans who too closely mimic androids. We think of the artificial android government of *The Simulacra* (1964), the commoditized androids of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), the Abraham Lincoln android of *We Can Build You* (1972), the argumentative and patronizing door in *Ubik* (1969), the murderous television in *The Penultimate Truth* (1964), the violent factory in *Deus Irae* (1976), Hoppy Harrington's bizarre and powerful wheelchair weapon in *Dr. Bloodmoney* (1965), the patronizing artificial intelligence of Pete Garden's car in *The Game-Players of Titan* (1963), and the descent into madness of Bob Arctor as he monitors himself in *A Scanner Darkly* (1977). It is a rare Dick story that contains a friendly machine. What's more, Dick's unfriendly machines function also as prosaic commodities. As Vaneigem writes, "Only objects can be measured, which is why exchange always reifies" (89). We can read Dick's fiction as an exposure of the insidious and inhumane logic of quantification and its basis in capitalist economics.

In this thesis I take *Martian Time-Slip* (1964) as Dick's most accomplished critique of the logic of quantification. Dick seamlessly moves through the everyday life of a Martian colony and charts the acute and diffuse trauma of quantification. It is perhaps Dick's most depressing work. At its heart lies the familiar hegemony of capitalist clock time, the source of all economic equivalence, and the means of measuring labour time. There is no joy on Dick's Mars, no fun, and no play. Rather, we have what Walter Benjamin described as a permanent "state of emergency," a sense that the reign of the clock itself, the source of what he terms "homogeneous, empty time" must be stopped,

interrupted, and transcended (qtd. in Löwy 57, 86). We live today in the same state of emergency. Walter Benjamin, Dick and the Situationists resist the same ideology of progress that remains with us today, the same ideology that means a mass migration to Mars might be just around the corner. But perhaps the androids will save us.

Philip K. Dick is famous for his terrifying and often depressing dystopias. The novels of my thesis, *Ubik* (1969), *The Game-Players of Titan* (1963) and *Martian Time-Slip* (1964) all match this description. In my final chapter, however, I turn to one of Dick's most inconspicuous novels, *Galactic Pot-Healer* (1969). In this bizarre minor novel we find a close correlation between the more utopian elements of the Situationists and Dick. If many of Dick's texts, especially *Martian Time-Slip*, revolt against the ideology of progress and against the logic of quantification, then *Galactic Pot-Healer* maps an alternative world, a world based on art, on play, and on the dissolution of boundaries between work and leisure. I read Dick against Constant Nieuwenhuys' New Babylon; a grandiose vision of a labyrinthine city on stilts that covers the entire globe. In the sectors and laneways of New Babylon we find an alternative way of life. New Babylon the city of the *dérive*; an alternative way of moving through urban space, unquantifiable, and filled with excess and play. As Debord writes in 1958:

In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. Chance is a less important



factor in this activity than one might think: from a *dérive* point of view cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones. (“Theory”)

Constant’s New Babylon envisions a world in which citizens are freed from work and able to travel the world, constructing a grand game out of life. In Constant’s work we find the activity of play and the experience of a qualitative way of life, one that stands in strong opposition to the utilitarian values of work and quantification.

Through the unexpected clash of New Babylon and *Galactic Pot-Healer* something of Dick’s playful side is revealed, for one of the great joys of reading Philip K. Dick is his wild sense of play. The future worlds that he creates are always ridiculous. Dick’s playfulness often strikes me in sudden bursts and I find myself putting the book down to laugh: when Ragle Gumm witnesses a hot-dog stand transmute into a cryptic note in *Time Out of Joint* (1959), when a way point to another world appears in a faulty motorized trike in *The Crack in Space* (1966), when Stanton Mick in *Ubik* (1969) inflates, slowly rises to the ceiling and explodes, and, my personal favourite, in *Martian Time-Slip* (1964) when Arnie Kott hires a schizophrenic mechanic to build a machine that can quantify an autistic child’s sense of time. Even when they are explained blow-by-blow, Dick’s plots are absurd. You can’t help but smile when an adventurous romp ends with an affirmation of clay pot sculpture (see *Galactic Pot-Healer* (1969) and *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said* (1974)). Find me a reader who does not giggle at the

clothing worn in *Ubik*; or when Joe Schilling's flying car tries to fly off without him in *The Game-Players of Titan* (1963). What other body of work can boast a cast including the likes of Lord Running Clam, Heliogabalus, Manfred Steiner, Jory, the Glimmung, Gauk, Herbert Schoenheit von Vogelsang, and Glen Runciter. Towards the end of his career, in his most religious phase, Dick placed himself at the centre of his fiction. Even then, beset by mental illness and divine visions, Dick bestowed a character with the name of Horselover Fat. As fans of Philip K. Dick, we celebrate and sink into this heightened sense of play. As McKenzie Wark writes, "[t]he key to the Situationist project of transforming everyday life is the injunction 'to be at war with the whole world lightheartedly.' This unlikely conjuncture of levity with lucidity, of élan with totality, has rarely been matched" (15). Let the games begin.

## Dip-Dyed Cheesecloth Cravats: *Détournement* and *Ubik*

Understood in its totality, the spectacle is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production. It is not something *added* to the real world – not a decorative element, so to speak. On the contrary, it is the very heart of society’s real unreality.

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (13)

Within culture, the SI can be likened to a research laboratory . . .

SI “*Détournement* as Negation and Prelude” (67)

### I

Philip K. Dick’s *Ubik* (1969) is exemplary of the subversive cultural tactic which the Situationists termed *détournement*. *Détournement* is a subversive and often playful means of turning against spectacular culture from within. As historian Frances Stracey writes:

the SI’s tactic of *détournement*, meaning to hijack and re-function an already existing element, works by de-familiarizing the spectacle’s already estranged images in order to bring about unexpected re-appearances. It does this by damaging and polluting given spectacles so as to trigger or re-mediate a different social imaginary based on non-alienated relationships.

(7)

*Ubik* is written within the commercial form of pulp-SF. A form which functions, as Peter Bürger writes “to impose a particular kind of consumer behaviour on the

reader” (54). Dick adopts an already “estranged” form and through *détournement*, he is able to produce a wholly “unexpected” text; a text which destabilises the ideological grounds upon which capitalism, science and religion rest. There is no evidence to suggest that Dick had come across the Situationists or their theories of *détournement*. Rather, the fascination of this chapter lies in the sheer disparity between these two groups; a revolutionary political organisation based in France and a science fiction writer in Berkeley, California. The acute convergence between the SI’s theories of *détournement* and Dick’s *Ubik*, exposes how the worldwide penetration of the spectacle produces common forms of resistance.

*Ubik* is perhaps Dick’s most provocative and terrifying work. It has sparked a kaleidoscopic range of interpretations. The giddy and open-ended narrative form has provoked both celebration and accusations of a “serious loss of narrative control” (Suvin 14). It has been read by many Marxist critics such as Carl Freedman, Peter Fitting, and Darko Suvin as an examination of everyday life under monopoly capitalism and as a refusal of reified scientific rationality. Umberto Rossi reads it as an example of Dick taking up the role of the “game-player” who delightedly toys with his characters and readers (191). N. Katherine Hayles reads it as an exploration of the nature of writing fiction (190). There have been a host of religious readings such as Samuel J. Umland’s reading of it as a tale of an inverted Eucharist, where Christ devours the characters (93). The novel seems porous, malleable, and open-ended enough to be brought into contact with innumerable phenomena. Contemporary critics, such as Mark Poster, have even heralded it as an anticipation of internet technology. In this chapter, I hope to show that through considering Dick’s use of *détournement*, an expansive and

politicized reading of the novel can be achieved. For it is through the lens of détournement that the novel's political urgency and aesthetic power can at once be grasped.

### Détournement

In *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) Guy Debord defined détournement as the “fluid language of anti-ideology” as language which “occurs within a type of communication aware of its inability to enshrine any inherent and definitive certainty. This language is inaccessible in the highest degree to confirmation by any earlier or supra-critical reference point” (146). It is then, a means of resistance; the subversion of totalising ideologies. The meaning of the word détournement circles around notions of a diversion, a hi-jacking, a detour, the reorientation and repurposing of a cultural element. It is a technique where one combines elements of the surrounding culture into a superior and subversive synthesis. In “A User's Guide to Détournement” (1956) Guy Debord and Gil Wolman explain that “Any elements, no matter where they are taken from, can be used to make new combinations” (15). The function of détournement is to clarify, condemn, and transform spectacular language and culture. As the spectacle was seen as penetrating more and more domains of public and private life, then it is no surprise that the Situationists applied the technique to such a range of elements. The SI détourned news reports, comic books, kung fu films, cheap paperback fictions, advertising, urban planning and philosophy. The technique seeks to reveal and renegotiate the spectacular ideology embodied in a subservient cultural element, or to revalue and recharge a previously subversive, or neutral, cultural

element that has fallen out of imminence. Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* recombines Marx, Hegel and Lukács, but not in the sense of quotation, rather, as appropriation and revaluation.

The opposite of détournement is recuperation. Recuperation is détournement used by the spectacle to mystify, promote, and reinforce existing conditions. Debord and Wolman write that "It is in the advertising industry, more than in the domain of decaying aesthetic production, that one can find the best examples" (16). In using détournement the Situationists are able to speak the language of the spectacle in a subversive dialect. Frances Stracey writes that détournement was "conceived as an immanent mode of language critique, in the sense that they recognized that they could not step outside of the conditions of the spectacle" (80). If we return to the definition of détournement as "the fluid language of anti-ideology" we can imagine recuperation as the frozen language of spectacular ideology. For both détournement and recuperation are premised on the indeterminacy of the ideological status of any artwork or discourse. All of culture is revealed to be malleable and open to co-option. Yet recuperation is "frozen language" in that it seeks to impose a single, absolute, spectacular meaning and to refuse open-endedness, dialogue, and indeterminacy (Stracey 86). Recuperation seeks to capture and freeze the meaning of an element. Conversely, Situationist détournement is fluid in that it seeks to release and retain the indeterminate quality of culture and language. In repurposing a comic book to becoming an expose of spectacular social relations, the Situationists did not seek to affirm this as the purpose of the comic book form. Rather, they sought to negate any definitive purpose to any and all forms. Stracey writes that the "[r]efusal of

definitive language regimes was proof that no words were inherently fixed or frozen, that is, ‘informationist,’ but that they ‘embody forces that can upset the most careful calculations’” (81).

### Half-life

The novum of half-life is introduced in the opening chapter of *Ubik*. A person in half-life exists in a state of “cold-pac” within a facility known as a “moratorium” (4). The “half-lifers” are in many ways dead but have a certain amount of “cephalic activity” remaining and can be communicated with from the outside until this runs out (3). Half-life is drawn from the field of cryogenics; a field which gained momentum in the 1960s with the publication of Robert Ettinger's best-selling work *The Prospect of Immortality* (1962). Ettinger's main thesis was that the early stages of death may be reversible in the future and that if the patient was frozen early enough they may be revived. The book was picked up by science fiction authors Isaac Asimov and Frederik Pohl and republished by Doubleday in 1964, reaching a worldwide audience. Before Ettinger's work, cryogenics had been explored in the realm of science fiction with such works as H.P. Lovecraft's “Cool Air” (1928), Edgar Rice Burroughs “The Resurrection of Jimber-Jaw” (1937) and Robert A. Heinlein's *The Door into Summer* (1957). Following the excitement of Ettinger's work, cryogenics featured as a central plot device in the “Space Seed” episode of *Star Trek* (1967), and, most famously, in Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). The question therefore becomes, into what new context does Dick place these circulating ideas of cryogenics? What superior synthesis does Dick create?

Dick deploys three types of discourse when describing the novum of half-life. The first belongs to commercialism, the second to medical science, and the third to religion. In representing each of these areas, Dick uses a type of language that the Situationists' termed "Newspeak;" language that has "been all but killed by its reduction to the quantitative and cold exchange of blunt formulas or ready-made information" (Stracey 80). Dick sets out to combine these discursive areas in such a way as to render such ready-made language fluid. The resulting meaning of the concept of half-life then itself becomes indeterminate. Firstly, Dick thrusts to the foreground the commercial nature of half-life. The reader is introduced to the Beloved Brethren Moratorium in a scene where Herbert Schoenheit von Vogelsang, the "owner," has, as usual, arrived at work before his "employees" and attends to a "customer" at "reception" who has a "claim-check stub in his hand" (3). The language used is universal business discourse that could apply equally to a dry-cleaners as a rental car company. Dick next develops the specific nature of the business. When Herbert received the claim-check stub he "made his way back to the cold-pac bins to search out number 3054039-B," and when he arrived he "scrutinized the lading report attached" (3). Finally, Herbert sought out a "union man to perform the actual task of carting 3054039-B to the consultation lounge" (3-4). The descriptor of "bins," the vast quantities of half-lifers signalled by the number "3054039-B," and the presence of a unionized workforce all indicate an industrial-scale operation. The scale of the business is confirmed through the phrase "lading report," a phrase which belongs to the discourse of industrial shipping. Dick later explicitly confirms this context: "A truck had now appeared at the loading platform at the rear of the moratorium; two men hopped down from



it, wearing familiar pale-blue uniforms. Atlas Interplan Van and Storage, Herbert perceived. Delivering another half-lifer who had just now passed, or here to pick up one which had expired” (5).

The second discursive context in which Dick situates half-life is that of advanced medical science. Half-life is described as a material process determined by knowable scientific laws. When Glen Runciter is communicating with his half-lifer wife Ella, he uses an “earphone arrangement,” with a “plastic disk” fitted “against the side of his head,” and a “microphone” (11). When Vogelsang assessed the state of an individual in half-life he pressed “a portable protophason amplifier into the transparent plastic hull of the casket, tuned it, listened at the proper frequency for indication of cephalic activity” (3). The interaction between the outside world and with the half-lifer is thus grounded in scientific knowledge and material, electronic equipment. An illustrative scene occurs when the half-lifer Jory Miller begins to infiltrate and dominate the mind of Ella Runciter. Vogelsang explains this process to Glen Runciter in the “ready-made” language of biology and physics, “After prolonged proximity,” von Vogelsang explained, “there is occasionally a mutual osmosis, a suffusion between the mentalities of half-lifers” (16). Vogelsang describes this process through reference to electronics technology: “Think of two AM radio transmitters, one close by but limited to only five-hundred watts of operating power. Then another, far off, but on the same or nearly the same frequency, and utilizing five-thousand watts” (17). The grounding of half-life within a materialist, scientific context is reflected by the attitude of the characters in the outside world. Runciter jokingly asks Vogelsang if Ella is ready

to be “cranked up for a talk?” (5). The next chapter begins with Runciter watching Ella “rev back into sentience” (11).

The final context in which half-life is placed is a religious context. Initially, Dick détourns the language of Western Christianity. The very title of his business contains the biblical phrase “Beloved Brethren” (3). Considering that moratorium implies a period of waiting, the phrase “Beloved Brethren” implies that the subject is waiting to die and go to heaven. The Christian belief system is further revealed in the way Vogelsang deals with the friends and family of those in half-life. When Joe Chip calls to arrange the arrival of Glen Runciter, Herbert responds in the “ready-made” language of a priest: “What we deem an ‘accident,’” von Vogelsang said, “is ever yet a display of God’s handiwork. In a sense, all life could be called an ‘accident’” (82). What’s more, when Herbert arranges for Runciter to be transferred in a helicopter he puts on Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis* in the cabin of the helicopter. The piece is a Mass; a sacred composition that musically illustrates portions of the Christian Eucharistic liturgy. The Christian rituals and cultural accompaniments to the process of dying thus continue to be present in the event of half-life. Finally, Dick also includes discourse from Tibetan Buddhism, namely, the description of the process of dying found in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. In chapter two, Ella describes the experience of half-life: “A lot of my dreams aren’t about me at all. Sometimes I’m a man and sometimes a little boy; sometimes I’m an old fat woman with varicose veins...” (12). Glen Runciter’s response indicates the commonplace acceptance of Eastern theology; he responds casually, “Well, like they say, you’re heading for a new womb to be born out of. And that smoky red light—that’s a bad womb; you

don't want to go that way. That's a humiliating, low sort of womb. You're probably anticipating your next life, or whatever it is" (13).

The coalescence of industrial business, medical science, as well as both Western and Eastern religion cannot form a stable whole. Rather, the combination of these four areas of discourse results in a liquidizing of all monologic meaning. The meaning of half-life, and the epistemological grounds upon which the storyworld rests, becomes indeterminate and fluid. The opacity of such a synthesis is indicated in Ella's description of half-life:

"I was dreaming." Ella said. "I saw a smoky red light, a horrible light. And yet I kept moving toward it. I couldn't stop."

"Yeah," Runciter said, nodding. "The *Bardo Thödol*, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, tells about that. You remember reading that; the doctors made you read that when you were—" He hesitated. "Dying," he said then. (12)

In the world of *Ubik*, what to the reader are absolutely disparate discourses and ideologies, are represented as unproblematically integrated. The vertigo of such a synthesis derives in part from the novel being set in 1992. From the standpoint of the novel's publication in 1969, the near-future appears as a very foreign place. The reader's discomfort at the synthesis of these discourses stems from their attendant totalising ideological claims. Each discourse loses its totalising authority and becomes one ideology making claims against another. The "ready-made" language is estranged and revealed to be an attempt to impose concrete meaning on an indeterminate reality. It is in this sense that we can see the function of "language captured by power." It is language that is used to impose a definitive

and closed off meaning upon an element of life that is indeterminate and open to many interpretations. Through the Situationist tool of *détournement*, Dick exposes and subverts “ready-made” spectacular language.

### The Marriage of Joe Chip

*Ubik* is a quest narrative. The reader follows protagonist Joe Chip as he makes his way through a series of imminent and life-threatening dilemmas; time begins to regress, the characters do not know who is alive and who is dead, or whether they’ve somehow become trapped within one another’s constructed world. Such dilemmas are never resolved so much as made more complicated in a crescendo of false solutions and reversals. In particular, two events stand out as key moments in the disintegration of Joe Chip’s familiar, stable life. The first is the introduction of Pat Conley in the third chapter, and the second is the explosion of the humanoid bomb on Luna in chapter six. Through examining Dick’s use of *détournement* across these two events, we can read the series of events in political and aesthetic terms.

The first event which destabilises Chip’s sense of reality is the introduction of Pat Conley in the third chapter. Joe Chip works at Runciter Associates; a firm which specialises in detecting the presence of corporate psychic surveillance. Pat has been scouted as a potentially employee by Chip’s colleague G.G. Ashwood. He takes Pat to Chip’s apartment to have her ability tested after which a work contract can be drawn up. Pat has the powerful ability of being able to alter the past without other characters knowing it. However, Pat immediately

uses her ability to alter the past so as to control Joe Chip. She alters the past so that in the narrative present they become married. Considering that Chip and Ashwood both know that Pat's parents work for Ray Hollis' rival organization, it is likely that her motivations are those of corporate sabotage. However, we can also read Pat's alteration of the past in another, more political sense.

It is widely agreed upon that Joe Chip is another one of Dick's "buffeted but persistent *schlemiel*" protagonists (Suvin 13). Joe Chip is the little man who works at a large corporation and struggles just to get by. He is poor, he is stoic, and he is loyal. We first encounter Joe Chip lamenting his hangover, his drunken use of a ration stamp to buy authentic coffee, and his desperate attempts to convince his apartment's cleaning robots to clean his room despite his terrible credit rating. Chip is the universal equivalent of the downtrodden American proletarian worker. Yet despite his oppressed situation, Chip has internalised the ideology of the spectacle. Such a belief is shown by his "ready-made" spiel regarding the economic niche into which Pat Conley's ability fits:

"As a survival factor for the human race," Joe said, "it's as useful as the psi talents. Especially for us Norms. The anti-psi factor is a natural restoration of ecological balance. One insect learns to fly, so another learns to trap him. Is that the same as no flight? Clams developed hard shells to protect them; therefore, birds learn to fly the clam up high in the air and drop him on a rock. In a sense, you're a life form preying on the Psis, and the Psis are life forms that prey on the Norms. That makes you a friend of

the Norm class. Balance, the full circle, predator and prey. It appears to be an eternal system; and, frankly, I can't see how it could be improved." (27)

This passage perfectly illustrates what is meant by the term "language captured by power." The passage is petrified, totalising, and monologic. Such language performs the function of recuperation; it attempts to naturalise and render eternal the spectacular organisation of life. The spectacle is seen here to have détourned the language of evolutionary biology and applied to itself.

Pat subverts the assuredness of such ready-made language when she responds, "I might be considered a traitor" (27). Joe Chip assumes that she means that she would be betraying both her parents and Ray Hollis. Yet Pat does not work for Ray Hollis. Rather, Pat was scouted from and works at the "Topeka Kibbutz," where she maintains "the subsurface vidphone lines" (26). Pat explains that she chose to work at Topeka because "[o]nly women can hold jobs involving manual labor at that particular kibbutz" (26). Pat proudly states that at her kibbutz "everything is free" and the members "are putting in more than we're taking out" (31-32). When Pat describes her work "[h]er black eyes blazed pridefully" (26). It is the socialist and feminist values of the kibbutz that Pat would be betraying were she to work for Runciter Associates. Pat and the world of the Topeka kibbutz is thus established as a fundamentally different society to the spectacular world of Joe Chip. Where Joe Chip is hung-over and disorganised, Pat is fit and healthy with "tanned, competent arms" (25). Where everything is free at the kibbutz, everything costs in Chip's apartment; including the fridge, the shower, and even the door. Where women are the dominant, empowered gender at the Topeka

kibbutz, in Chip's apartment Pat is relentlessly sexualised. This is demonstrated initially by Ashwood, with "his arm, with ostentatious familiarity around the girl's waist" (25). We see it next in Joe Chip, who is shocked when she enters: "My God, he thought, she's beautiful" (25). Finally, the sexualisation of Pat reaches its peak when Runciter sees her and admires "her intense, distilled beauty" and wonders if she "resisted being attractive, disliked the smoothness of her skin and the sensual, swollen, dark quality of her lips" (45). Pat's contrariness to the sexist, capitalist spectacle, and her membership in a utopian socialist alternative, undermines the absolute surety of Chip's earlier observations regarding the naturalness, eternity, and the perfection of spectacular capitalism. It becomes détourned and moves from a totalising claim to a particular claim. Pat is the embodiment of a socialist alternative; her presence liquidates the totalising discourse of Joe Chip.

The novel establishes Joe Chip as a synecdoche of the average American spectacular subject and Pat Conley is established as a radical, anti-capitalist feminist. Considered in this light, it is not surprising that Chip's reality loses something of its stability when Pat alters the past so that they are married. I would like to resist the impulse to read Joe Chip's terror and confusion as having been caused by Pat's metaphysical ability to alter the past. It must be remembered that this is a world in which the psychic manipulation of reality is thoroughly normal. Joe Chip works for a company which employs a range of individuals with psychic powers and tests their abilities on a daily basis. It is not Pat's ability itself that destabilizes Chip. Rather, it is the ideological position that Pat embodies. For Pat uses the ability to bond together two irreconcilable ideological standpoints. The

marriage results in Chip being unable to ignore the existence of an alternative, and perhaps better, organization of the world. It forces Chip to undergo, on a daily frequency, what Peter Fitting describes as “the discovery of ideology itself” (“Reality” 93). No longer can Chip trust the “ready-made” language of the spectacle to accurately describe reality. We can read Pat as an embodiment of the technique of *détournement* itself. Pat’s ability releases the narrative present from any necessary subservience to the past in the same way that *détournement* releases spectacular language from any subservience to the spectacle. Just as *détournement* liquidizes language, Pat Conley liquidizes Joe Chip’s reality.

#### Fashion

The first thing Joe Chip notices about Pat Conley, besides how beautiful she is, is her clothing. It is Chip’s recognition that she is dressed differently that provokes Pat to describe life at the kibbutz. Pat considers herself to belong to a meaningful social collective, so much so, that when she talks about it “[h]er black eyes blazed proudly.” When Pat enters the apartment she is wearing “an ersatz canvas work-shirt and jeans, heavy boots caked with what appeared to be authentic mud. Her tangle of shiny hair was tied back and knotted with a red bandana” and “At her imitation leather belt she carried a knife, a field-telephone unit and an emergency pack of rations and water” (25). Pat is dressed in functional and militaristic clothing and gear; she is dressed in a uniform. An outfit can only be considered a uniform if it signifies membership to a larger collective. As described above, Pat and the kibbutz are established in opposition to the capitalist world of G.G. Ashwood, Joe Chip and his apartment. This opposition sheds light



on the fashion of Joe Chip and G.G. Ashwood, not to mention all the other capitalist subjects. The capitalist characters are dressed in the precise opposite of uniforms. Joe Chip wakes up wearing “gay pinstripe clown-style pajamas” and gets dressed for the workday “in a sporty maroon wrapper, twinkle-toes turned-up shoes and a felt cap with a tassel” (19,24). When G.G. Ashwood arrives he is wearing “his usual mohair poncho, apricot-colored felt hat, argyle ski socks and carpet slippers” (25). Immediately the reader recognises that these outfits stand in opposition to Pat’s minimalist, functional kibbutz uniform. Where Pat’s clothing forms a cogent whole, with each item belonging with each other item, Chip’s and Ashwood’s outfits are incoherent.

This can be read as an example of what the Situationists termed minor détournement. This involves the resituation of an innocuous element, for example, a newspaper clipping, a photo, or a description of a hat, into a new subversive synthesis. Dick détourns elements of clothing, from wholly disparate contexts, to create estranging outfits. There is no connection between a “felt cap with a tassel” and a “sporty maroon wrapper” nor between “argyle ski socks” and “twinkle-toes turned-up shoes.” The novel contains such bizarre combinations of clothing in order to represent a world where not even fashion exists to connect individuals to each other. The representation of clothing in *Ubik* is the representation of alienation made material. In this sense, the clothing is continuous with social relations under the capitalism of the 1960s. In the opening thesis of *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord writes, “The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation” (12).

Such a statement is applicable to the world of the 1960s reader, yet the future world of *Ubik* denies even the image of social relations. The reader must imagine a world where individuals appear as wholly distinct from others. What is hard for the reader to imagine is the clothing. What is hard for the reader to bear is the total absence of social relations that the clothing represents. Hence why the descriptions quickly transition from being somewhat amusing and outrageous, to downright terrifying. If this wasn't enough, there is also no logic linking an individual's shoes, to their pants, to their top, to their hat. The sense of historicity implied by fashion is shown to have been thoroughly eviscerated by the spectacle. Dick describes these internally incoherent outfits through the prosaic form of the list. By representing the clothing in the most causal and literal way possible, Dick represents such a terrifying social prospect as prosaic and routine for the citizens of the 1990s. Through the presence of Pat Conley in her contrasting uniform, the outfits of Joe Chip and G.G. Ashwood, and the impoverished social relations that they imply, are rendered mutable and historically contingent.

#### Glen Runciter

The second event which destabilises Joe Chip's reality is the Luna expedition in chapter five. Glen Runciter, Joe Chip, and a team of eleven inertials are hired to travel to the moon in order to detect and neutralise a team of telepaths who are suspected of surveilling the business of a man known as Shepherd Howard. However, through having a telepath, Miss Nina Freede, read the mind of Howard's representative, Runciter is able to find out that it is in fact Stanton Mick's business. The telepath Nina Freede relays the information to Runciter:

“Assuming that the second-hand knowledge is accurate, the Lunar project involves a radical, new, low-cost interstellar drive system, approaching the velocity of light, which could be leased to every moderately affluent political or ethnological group. Mick’s idea seems to be that the drive system will make colonization feasible on a mass basic understructure. And hence no longer a monopoly of specific governments.” (42)

Stanton Mick’s secretive operation on Luna reveals a range of fault lines running through the story-world. Mick’s production of a “new, low-cost interstellar drive system” is set to empower political and ethnological groups as well as to undercut the “monopoly of specific governments” (42). We find then that the future capitalism of *Ubik* is bound by a logic of crisis and competition. The emerging instability of Joe Chip’s ideological sureties is thus complemented and synthesised with the fundamental volatility of the capitalist economic system. We find the novel tethering ideology to its economic base; a shift in either sends tremors both ways.

In his offices, Runciter assembles a team of eleven inertials and prepares to leave for Luna. However, just prior to departure Pat manipulates the past and renders the present different. Firstly, Pat alters the past so that she is no longer married to Joe Chip. Secondly, she alters the past so that Runciter did not get the contract to protect Mick’s business; rather, Ray Hollis’ company did. Runciter and Chip retain enough vestigial memory to recognise that Pat has altered reality. Runciter requests that Pat alters reality back so that he did the Stanton contract. Pat enacts this transformation whilst retaining her separation from Joe Chip; yet

electing to keep the ring. Pat Conley's temporal tampering works to unsettle any sense of stability that the narrative might have developed over the prior couple of sentences, paragraphs and chapters. As this instability spreads, the hermeneutic drive of the reader becomes increasingly geared towards fixing events and characters. However, as the chapter progresses Dick uses *détournement* more and more to liquidize any fixed, absolute hermeneutic safe-havens.

When the team arrives on Luna, they are met by Zoe Wirt who delivers a series of "ready-made" descriptions of the facilities. While Wirt does so, Joe Chip and Glen Runciter take a reading of the "psi field":

"Are you attempting to take measurements?" Miss Wirt inquired alertly.

"Mr Howard expressly contraindicated that, as I explained."

"We're taking a reading anyway," Runciter said.

"Mr Howard—"

"This isn't Stanton Mick's business," Runciter told her.

To her drab assistant, Miss Wirt said, "Would you ask Mr Mick to come down here, please?" The assistant scooted off in the direction of the syndrome of elevators. (66)

In this passage there are two elements that subtly disturb the reader. Firstly, Dick *détourns* the word "contraindicated" from its usual place within medical discourse. Contra-indicate is a transitive verb that means "To give indications contrary to; said *esp.* of symptoms in a disease which make against the usual

treatment, or a particular remedy” (“contra-indicated” 1). In the fast-paced mode of reading invited by the genre of pulp-SF, this unhinged word is unlikely to stop the reader in their tracks. The word’s meaning and appearance is so similar to the word “contradicted” that it is barely likely to register as an oddity. Yet upon a closer reading and a turn to the dictionary, we find that Dick’s détournement results in a quite profound perturbation. Dick’s wordplay captures what the Situationists’ described as the “double depth” of détournement; “the enrichment of the greatest part of the terms by the coexistence in them of their old and immediate meanings” (SI “Detournement” 67). At once, the reader holds the original context and meaning of the word together with its new context and new meaning. In doing so, each of these meanings is estranged and rendered historical. As the characters do not raise any questions as to Miss Wirt’s use of the word, the reader cannot help but consider the future of *Ubik* to be one where this meaning has become normalised. We find then that Dick’s détournement moves in two directions. Firstly, the meaning of individual words are estranged and revealed to be historical. Secondly, the generic boundaries which contain these words are also historicized. The generic boundaries of science and of science fiction, of fiction and non-fiction, are denied any claims to absolutism.

The next act of détournement in this passage concerns the word “syndrome.” Unlike the first example however, the word “syndrome” has always been threaded through with multiple meanings. The *OED* notes that the word has its origins in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century medical discourse and pertains to “A concurrence of several symptoms in a disease; a set of such concurrent symptoms” (“syndrome,” 1). Yet in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the word also meant “A

concurrence, concourse; a set of concurrent things” (“syndrome,” 2a). This second definition clearly seems most appropriate in Dick’s description of a “syndrome of elevators.” However, this definition is defined as obsolete by the *OED* and it is recorded as having fallen from common usage mid-way through the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In this case then, we find that Dick is not threading a new meaning through the word, as in the case of “contraindicated.” Rather, he is reviving an obsolete meaning from three centuries prior. In this way, Dick reveals that the meaning of words has always been and already is historical and liable to change. Dick’s use of *détournement* reveals that the historicity of language can be revealed through instilling words with a new function or through returning them to a previous, obsolete function. Finally, the *OED* notes that the word “syndrome” has since mutated across new fields of meaning. Since the mid-twentieth century the term has also come to mean “In recent use, a characteristic combination of opinions, behaviour, etc.; freq. preceded by a qualifying word” (“syndrome” 2b). The technique of *détournement* is thus shown to be useful in illuminating the intrinsic contingency of the meaning of words. Through inscribing these singular words with a sense of mutability, Dick erodes the basis of spectacular ideology from the ground up. As Guy Debord writes, “Ideology, whose whole internal logic led toward what Mannheim calls “total ideology”—the despotism of a *fragment* imposing itself as the pseudo-knowledge of a frozen *whole*, as a *totalitarian* worldview – has now fulfilled itself in the immobilized spectacle of non-history” (*Spectacle* 150-151). Through *détournement*, Dick affirms the historical particularity and contingency of the smallest word against the totalizing and ahistorical narrative of ideology.

Accompanying Dick's *détournement* of language, in this passage we also find a major plot turn. When Miss Wirt protests that Mr Howard has forbidden them from taking a reading of the "psi-field," Runciter asserts bluntly that this "isn't Stanton Mick's business." Thus far, the reader has assumed that the business was in fact Stanton Mick's and that Shepherd Howard was a deceitful misnomer. Prior to departure, Nina Freede's telepathic reading of Miss Wirt's mind indicated as much. This leads the reader to suspect that when Pat altered the past prior to the departure of Runciter's team, she also altered the owner of the business. The effect of this passage is to show that since the introduction of Pat into the narrative, it has become impossible to know what aspects of reality she has altered. The narrative is rendered wholly indeterminate and uncertain. Within this context of uncertainty and radical contingency, the *détournement* of the words "syndrome" and "contraindicated" take on extra power. The reader cannot rely on a stable plot and nor can they even rely on the stability of words. Subsequently, matters are made far more uncertain when Stanton Mick arrives and reveals himself to be a humanoid bomb. In a terrifying and absurd scene, Mick inflates, rising to the ceiling and blows up, appearing to kill Glen Runciter.

Through the actions of Pat, Joe Chip's reality has become progressively more unstable, contingent, and liable to radical shifts. Yet it is not until the apparent death of his boss that Joe Chip himself is forced to act. Chip remains entirely passive to both of Pat's manipulations of their marital status. Yet following the death of his employer, Joe Chip is forced to act for his fundamental identity, that of proletarian employee, is destroyed. The importance of Joe Chip's relationship with Runciter, as that of employee to employer, is emphasised

through an increase in both Chip's and the narrator's references to commercial social relations. Following the bomb blast, Al Hammond and Chip "carried their apparently dying employer toward the elevators" (72). When Von Vogelsang asks Chip, "Is the deceased a relative?" Chip responds "Our employer" (82). When they are carrying Runciter to the moratorium Chip laments, "We're carrying our dead employer" (89). Commercial social relations are thrust to the forefront of the text. Crucially, Chip's distress is caused by both the loss of Runciter as a "life-loving, full-living man" and through the loss of "a man greater than all of us put together" (89-90). Chip is simultaneously distraught at the death of the individual and at the death of his employer, for, an employer is necessarily greater than all of the employees put together. Hence why, Chip laments, "If Runciter were alive," he said, "sitting out here in this lounge, everything would be okay. I know it but I don't know why" (91). This passage reveals that Chip does not understand his relationship to Runciter. His reliance on him as an employer is mystified by his admiration of him as an individual. The apparent death of Runciter leaves Chip in an indeterminate state. He no longer knows how to relate to his world and to other people.

However, Runciter specified that in the case of his death, Joe Chip was to take over as the manager of the business. Through examining a series of passages, we can see how Joe Chip traverses the state of indeterminacy that lies between his status as employee to that of employer. The principle means through which he does this is the deployment of "ready-made" sets of petrified commercial language. Joe Chip attempts to recuperate and concretize a contingent, unstable reality. The first example of Joe Chip's use of recuperative



language is seen in his new relationship to Al Hammond. When Hammond refuses to give Chip a quarter for the vidphone. Chip responds:

“In a manner of speaking,” Joe said, “you’re my employee; you have to do what I say or I’ll fire you. As soon as Runciter died I took over management of the firm. I’ve been in charge since the bomb went off; it was my decision to bring him here, and it’s my decision to rent the use of a precog for a couple of minutes. Let’s have the quarter.” He held out his hand. (91-92)

The passage marks a distinct shift in the character of Joe Chip. Chip delivers a series of monologic sentences that shut down any sense of dialogue. Chip asserts himself as employer over Hammond as employee through the use of totalizing “ready-made” language.

Up until this point in the narrative, Chip has been passive, incompetent, and downtrodden. Through the use of “ready-made” language, he is able to assert himself and appear confident. The next time Chip practices discursive recuperation is when Herbert Schoenheit von Vogelsang questions Joe Chip’s requests for money for breakfast, Chip responds:

“Al based his estimate on the assumption that I would rent a more modest room than this. However, nothing smaller than this was available, which Al did not foresee. You can add it onto the statement which you will be presenting to Runciter Associates at the end of the month. I am, as Al probably told you, now acting director of the firm. You’re dealing with a positive-thinking, powerful man here, who has worked his way step by

step to the top. I could, as you must well realize, reconsider our basic policy decision as to which moratorium we wish to patronize; we might, for example, prefer one nearer New York.” (101-102)

Just as Joe Chip exercised his newfound power of Al Hammond, here he exercises it over Von Vogelsang. Chip as the meek proletarian worker of the opening chapter has become unrecognisable. His use of spectacular discourse culminates in the phrase: “It’s a harsh world we’re living in,” Joe said, accepting the money. “The rule is ‘Dog eat dog’” (102). Such a cliché harks back to the scene in Chip’s apartment where he issues a monologic synthesis of evolutionary theory and capitalist economics.

It would be wrong to assume that Joe Chip’s newfound identity is any more stable than his identity as a worker. If anything, Chip’s reality disintegrates at an increasing pace. It is necessary to remember that following the apparent death of Runciter, Chip does not understand why he is so disturbed. Chip’s use of spectacular discourse is overtly hollow for he does not understand the basis of the social relations which have been transformed. Joe Chip cannot grasp the transformation for, in order to grasp that transformation, he must understand the nature of the commodity structure. Chip must recognise that an employee is commodified labour power and that an employer purchases commodified labour power. However, in the world of *Ubik* the nature of the commodity has been destabilised beyond comprehension. Through examining the epigraphical adverts for *Ubik* that open each chapter, we can determine the way in which the commodity structure has been thoroughly mystified. Joe Chip’s attempts to

understand the world around him becomes a quest to discern the nature of the commodity.

### Ubik

Following the death of Glen Runciter, Joe Chip's quest becomes centred around the search for the mysterious substance Ubik. However, it is by no means clear what Ubik is. Dick deploys the same three types of discourse in describing Ubik as when describing half-life. Again Dick manages to combine these discursive areas in such a way as to render such ready-made language fluid. The resulting meaning of the word Ubik itself becomes indeterminate.

Firstly, Ubik is ubiquitous. Through representing Ubik in epigraphical commercials at the beginning of each chapter, it becomes situated outside of the narrative, framing and encompassing the story world. The reader cannot discern in what medium the adverts are being transmitted; whether through newspapers, radio, television, or an unknown future technology. In each advert, Dick détourns the ready-made language of commercials and substitutes the original product with the product Ubik. Across the novel, Ubik takes the form of beer, used-cars, money-lending services, plastic bags, and deodorant, to name a few. I agree with Peter Fitting's argument that "[t]hese 'commercial messages' provide a restatement of Marx's description of value, for Ubik is a *universal equivalent* (the embodiment of exchange value), which can represent or replace any other commodity: under capitalism everything has its price" ("Deconstruction" 50). I would like develop Fitting's argument through examining the opening advert and

the second advert. Through this comparison that we detect Dick's nuanced détournement of advertising discourse. For example:

Friends, this is clean-up time and we're discounting all our silent, electric Ubiks by this much money. Yes, we're throwing away the bluebook. And remember: every Ubik on our lot has been used only as directed. (1)

It is impossible to discern exactly what is for sale. The advert contains the ready-made discourse of a 1960s used-car advert. Such a context is indicated through the phrase "throwing away the bluebook" and the noun "lot." Yet the phrase "silent, electric" seems to belong more to the electric razor advert than to the used-car advert. Furthermore, the concluding phrase, "every Ubik on our lot has been used only as directed" finally renders the commodity totally indiscernible; for such language belongs wholly to pharmaceutical discourse. The commodity becomes mysterious as three irreconcilable contexts are combined. The reader is confronted with a world in which a used-car, an electric razor, and a pharmaceutical product have somehow been reconciled into one product. The effect is that each individual aspect is destabilised and rendered fluid. If such disparate categories can coalesce into a commercial product, then the disparity of such categories is rendered mutable and historically contingent.

The second advert of the novel is far less estranging and contains no combination of disparate categories. It reads:

The best way to ask for beer is to sing out Ubik. Made from select hops, choice water, slow-aged for perfect flavor, Ubik is the nation's number-one choice in beer. Made only in Cleveland. (10)

Such an advert would be wholly familiar to the reader of the 1960s and likewise is familiar to the reader today. Therefore, it contrasts greatly with the mysterious advert of the opening chapter. I argue that such a comparison affirms Peter Fitting's argument that *Ubik* is the universal equivalent of exchange value. Through comparing such disparate products, one which isn't even imaginable, Dick reveals that the commodification process, which entails the stamping of an exchange value onto the product, renders all commodities equal. Dick thus shows how the commodification process can render equivalent a mysterious vehicular, razor-like, medicine with a product as prosaic as beer. As Fitting states, "under capitalism everything has its price" ("Deconstruction" 50). Through *détournant* the "ready-made" language of commodity commercials, Dick thus reveals the way in which the spectacle can commodify the most mysterious and the most disparate objects.

However, the establishment of *Ubik* as the embodiment of the universal exchange value is not its only meaning. *Ubik* is also present within the main narrative as some sort of reality support substance. At various stages, Joe Chip is provided with *Ubik* and it functions to temporarily slow the regression of time. *Ubik* functions to restore a sense of stability to Joe Chip's environment. The powerful substance initially takes the form of a medicinal spray can, and then, as history regresses, it devolves into an elixir and then some sort of balm. Dick *détourns* the language of medical science and has *Ubik* described at the stage of it as a balm, as an amalgamation of "Processed oleander leaves, oil of peppermint, charcoal, cobalt chloride, zinc oxide—" (223). At its elixir stage, a bottle of *Ubik* is described as containing "Gold flakes suspended in a base composed mostly of

mineral oil” (152). Towards the end of the novel, a woman explains what Ubik is to Joe Chip using the “ready-made” monologic language of physics:

“A spray can of Ubik is a portable negative ionizer, with a self-contained, high-voltage, low-amp unit powered by a peak-gain helium battery of 25kv. The negative ions are given a counterclockwise spin by a radically biased acceleration chamber, which creates a centripetal tendency to them so that they cohere rather than dissipate. A negative ion field diminishes the velocity of anti-protophasons normally present in the atmosphere; as soon as their velocity falls they cease to be anti-protophasons and, under the principle of parity, no longer can unite with protophasons radiated from persons frozen in cold-pac; that is, those in half-life.” (224)

Ubik, therefore, is a substance that provides a material support to those in half-life. It is produced within the context of medical science and physics and is thus composed of knowable, material ingredients.

The final context in which Ubik is placed is that of religion. In the last epigraph of the novel, Dick détourns the language of the Gospel of St. John, replacing the figure of the Logos with that of Ubik. The final epigraph reads:

I am Ubik. Before the Universe was, I am. I made the suns. I made the worlds. I created the lives and the places they inhabit; I move them here, I put them there. They go as I say, then 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. (226)

At the end of the novel, then, *Ubik* takes on a metaphysical significance. It becomes a ubiquitous, religious force that is unknowable, unnameable, and all-powerful. By this point it becomes clear that the *Ubik* is not a stable concept. Dick détourns the ready-made language, first of commercials, then of science and medicine, and then of religion, in order to produce a wholly indeterminate concept. It is impossible for the reader to imagine a concept that is simultaneously commercial, medicinal, and religious. The materialist worldview of medicine and science cannot coalesce with the metaphysical worldview of religion. Each aspect is incongruous with each other aspect. However, in the narrative world of *Ubik*, commercialism, science, and religion are shown to have all been integrated and the synecdoche for this integration is the concept/substance *Ubik*. Therefore, in order to imagine this world, the reader must release the three domains of commercialism, science, and religion, from their respective established meanings. In describing *Ubik*, Dick détourns such “ready-made” monologic examples from each domain precisely in order to render each of these concepts fluid and open-ended. The very meaning of commercialism, of science, and of religion is destabilized. If the quest of Joe Chip is the quest to understand what *Ubik* is, then he will never find out what it is. We can imagine the three domains of *Ubik* to be examples of the three dominant worldviews that make up 1960s America. The totalising assertions of commercialism, of science, and of religion are revealed to be impositions of particular ideologies upon reality. Through détourning “ready-made” sets of language from each of these domains, Dick reveals how each domain lays claim to a totalising distortion of reality. This is why Joe Chip’s

search is futile, for he is searching for a concrete and definitive reality which does not exist.

### Building on the Ruins of the Spectacle

In *Ubik*, Dick deploys a range of “ready-made” discourse. We have seen how he repurposes the language of the spectacle across the subjects of business, science, and religion. Through repurposing such language in the context of the narrative world of *Ubik*, Dick manages to destabilise each ideology’s totalising claims. Dick reveals each of these areas to be but partial aspects of the narrative world. However, the practice of a Situationist poetics of *détournement* does not end there. The ultimate goal of *détournement* is to “open the way for the emergence of radically new realities and subjectivities” (Stracey 81). It is necessary to couch a Situationist poetics of *détournement* within an overarching revolutionary project of *ultradétournement*. Frances Stracey writes that “*Ultradétournement* extended *détournement* into everyday social life, where, for example, all the meanings and values of bodily gestures, words, clothing or architecture, could be subjected to a playful re-appropriation and subversive overturning” (78). The Situationists recognised that in order to be revolutionary, *détournement* must render all aspects of life under the spectacle as mutable. The “liquidation of language” is a fundamental but partial step (78).



## Paranoid Reading and *The Game-Players of Titan*

Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading. Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language.

Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (14)

### I

Philip K. Dick made his way through the heady 1960s with a dusty pulp costume box in tow, unhinging adventure plots, upsetting dated tropes and posing urgent new questions. This refusal to sit neatly within generic expectations is at the heart of his work's surreal nature. It is also crucial to understanding his take on paranoia. In this chapter I read *The Game-Players of Titan* (1963) as an anti-paranoid novel, which gains its effect from a détournement of the pulp-SF tradition. The definition of paranoia that underpins this chapter is taken from Carl Freedman's essay "Towards a Theory of Paranoia: The Science Fiction of Philip K. Dick" (1984). In this essay Freedman writes, "The paranoiac is not only someone for whom every detail is meaningful – for whom nothing can be left uninterpreted or taken for granted – but someone who holds a conception of meaning that is both totalizing and hermeneutic" (112). Through the technique of détournement, most famously championed by the Situationists, Dick is able to expose and derail the cultural and economic function of pulp-SF. For *Game-Players* is a pulp novel which refuses to inscribe a paranoid psychology, rather

estranging and frustrating it. In this case, the value of *détournement* stems not simply from its powers of negation. Rather, the key anti-paranoid action of *détournement* is the felicity with which it can weave multiple, often contradictory meanings into specific narrative devices. Words, tropes, formal devices and characters are rendered internally inconsistent, fluid, and mutable. These are textual qualities inimical to the “thoroughgoing, internally logical” and totalizing hermeneutic of the paranoid (“Paranoia” 16). What’s more, as Carl Freedman argues, these are also textual qualities inimical to the subjects of capitalism. Beware, unsuspecting readers, this is not a comfortable text.

#### Flying Cars and Paranoid Projections

Philip K. Dick is no stranger to the paranoid hermeneutic. In 1974 he reacted to academic attention from a range of Marxist critics, the likes of Stanislaw Lem, Peter Fitting, and Fredric Jameson, by construing it as a Communist plot against the field of American SF. Ten years after Dick contacted the FBI claiming that a cohort of Marxist intellectuals were plotting against him, Carl Freedman noted in “Towards a Theory of Paranoia: The Science Fiction of Philip K. Dick” (1984) the psychological affinity between paranoia and science fiction. Freedman’s connection between paranoia, the form of SF, and consumer culture invites a reading of Dick’s work that is specifically grounded in the commercial context of pulp-SF. Firstly, the critic makes the case that SF and paranoia share a “privileged relationship” at a formal level—SF and paranoia share something of a generic tendency towards a “thorough and totalizing presentation” of plausible futures (“Paranoia” 19, 20). In the sub-genre of pulp-SF

this factor is heightened. The typical pulp text consists of a singular plot line in which all parts amount to and arrive at its conclusion; nothing remains unaccounted for, everything is wrapped up. The rigidity of this narrative form bears much in common with the “the typical paranoid outlook,” which Freedman describes as “thoroughgoing, internally logical, never trivializing, and capable of explaining the multitude of observed phenomena as aspects of a symmetrical and expressive totality” (“Paranoia” 16).

The second connection Freedman notes is the shared presence of estrangement and cognition. Suddenly the paranoid leap, and its methodical rationalization, resembles the SF novum, and its scientific buttressing. However, the particular intimacy between paranoia and pulp-SF is not founded on the mere presence of estrangement and cognition. Rather, we find it born of a particular balance between the two tendencies. The paranoiac and the pulp-SF text both display an overwhelming privileging of cognition over estrangement. For estrangement opens out towards indeterminacy, towards a volatile, unknown future. It is precisely this opening outward that the paranoiac fears, and that pulp-SF, as a consumer form, discourages. In both modes we find estrangement domesticated and controlled through a “thoroughgoing” hand of cognition (Freedman “Paranoia” 16).

The dominance of cognition across the pulp genre produces very comfortable, satisfying texts. Roland Barthes described the pulp text as a text of pleasure; a text “that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it” (Barthes 14). The pulp text is structured to

uphold the status quo rather than to upset it. It is a form which encourages a conservative and paranoid psychology; a relation to the future as a consistent extrapolation from the present. In part, this paranoid quality comes down to the economic function of the genre. Peter Bürger writes that pulp fiction works to “impose a particular kind of consumer behaviour on the reader” (Bürger 54). The consistency of the text with the reader’s “historical, cultural, psychological assumptions” converges with the fast-pace, the transparent characters and plotting, the short-length, and the crumbling cheap paper (Barthes 14). In our hands we find a commodity practically agitating for its own rapid consumption and disposal. In a dual paranoid action, the reader revels in the “consistency of his selfhood” and the image of a familiar capitalist future, all the while behaving in a consumer manner which strengthens this flight-path (Barthes 14).

Before I paint too rigid, too consistent a picture of the convergence of paranoia and pulp-SF, we should take heed of a certain variance. While these two forms share something of a conservative relation to the future, pulp-SF also carries with it a wildly poetic charge; a progressive orientation born of its intimacy with a burgeoning capitalist science. Pulp-SF and popular science strode hand-in-hand across a period which saw the Wright brothers fly, the mass production of cars and television, the growth of plastics, the Polaroid camera, lasers, the contraceptive pill, the microwave, the development of radio, radar and countless more gadgets. A brief glance at the bookshelf signalled little difference between the magazines of popular science and those of pulp-SF. Technical magazines such as *Popular Mechanics*, *Mechanix Illustrated*, or *Illustrated World* shared covers of flying cars and Martian hills with pulp issues of *Amazing Stories*

and *Science Wonder Stories*. Within the covers, both forms engaged in fevered acts of extrapolation; ray guns, food pills, flying cars, space travel and more seemed just around the corner. The same artists, writers, producers, editors, and readers appear across both genres; perhaps the most emblematic of whom was Hugo Gernsback. A science enthusiast, Gernsback serialized his novel *Ralph 124C 41+* (1911) in his own amateur radio magazine *Modern Electrics* and produced both *Amazing Stories* and *Everyday Science and Mechanics*. Fuelled by the age's technological developments, the possible, the scientific and the fictional became blurred.

Rather than diminishing pulp-SF's paranoid qualities, this cultural context expands our understanding of paranoia. The paranoid need for consistency can be seen here not only as an ascetic and fearful relation to the future, but as a colourful, confident, unbridled and utopian orientation; at once conservative and riotously progressive. Paranoia in science and pulp-SF gives rise to wild promises of an exciting, capitalist, technocratic future, yet at the same time inhibits the imagining of alternative possible futures. Who needs estrangement when cognition is tabling a flying car?

#### Prosaic Contradictions

Philip K. Dick is a writer steeped within this pulp tradition; a writer familiar with its narrative form, its content, its economic function and close relationship with popular science. Dick claimed to have read his first SF magazine in 1940 at the age of twelve, an issue of *Stirring Science Stories*. Not much more than a decade later he began publishing works in *Planet Stories*, *If* and *The*

*Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*; it seems that “Between 1952 and 1964 PKD had thirteen stories published in *If*” (RC 290). In 1953 his first novella *The Defenders* appeared on the cover of *Galaxy Science Fiction*; the cover illustrated with a Martian surface, a space shuttle and an armed robot. It is out of the pulp tradition that Dick built up such a vast costume box of characters, plot devices and tropes. Throughout his work we find the same extrapolations that permeated both pulp-SF and popular science; ray guns, interplanetary space travel, Martian colonies, amnesia, flying cars, talking appliances, androids, alien life forms, to name a few.

It is a rare Dick story that contains only one of these pulp elements. However, it is a rare Dick story that contains all of these elements and more. *The Game-Players of Titan* (1963) attracts the eye for precisely this reason. It is an ostentatiously pulpy novel. The novel reads as an almost complete index of Dick’s pulp heritage. Yet *Game-Players* also reads as a significant departure point for Dick. For the pulp-SF devices of *Game-Players* do not behave in their accustomed manner. There is something strange and jarring about them. We find ourselves far removed from the text that “contents, fills, grants euphoria” (Barthes 14). Dick’s devices refuse to inscribe a comfortable, paranoid psychology.

Through the Situationist tool of *détournement*, Dick turns the tradition of pulp-SF against itself. Dick’s overburdening of the text with far too many tropes is part of this strategy of *détournement*. As expressed in *Internationale Situationniste* in 1959, “The two fundamental laws of *détournement* are the loss of importance (going as far as the complete loss of its original meaning) of each

detoured autonomous element—which may go so far as to completely lose its original sense—and at the same time the organization of another meaningful ensemble that confers on each element its new scope and effect” (SI “Detournement” 67). Dick’s *détournement* of vast swathes of pulp tropes indicates a wholesale devaluation and repurposing of the pulp tradition. In this chapter I will range across several salient examples. Let us begin with one of the most persistent and poetic speculations to arise out of the era; the vision of mass produced flying cars; the vision of a daily commute through the clouds.

In a 1959 Ford advert for the X2000 flying car, a four-door sedan emerges from a cloud of dry ice. As otherworldly high-pitched music plays the X2000 slowly turns, showing off its pulpy spaceship aesthetics; raised cylindrical tail-lights, fins, a glass-roof and a glowing rear engine. The advert represents a contented father taking his family on a cruise through the city. The advert’s host seductively claims, “I think you’ll agree with me that if tomorrow is going to look like this, it can’t come too soon” (Men and Motors). Philip K. Dick seemed to disagree. On the Earth of *Game-Players*, set in the 23<sup>rd</sup> century, we are immediately confronted with a very different vehicle. The novel opens with a flying car rebuking and patronising protagonist Pete Garden. For the car has detected Pete’s drunken state and is refusing to let him drive. This opening scene is the precise opposite of the X2000 advert. Instead of a proud and satisfied father taking his family on a cruise through skyscrapers, we find a sad, drunk, bachelor being humiliated by a hostile vehicle. Instead of facilitating adventurous liberation, we find all of the car’s features working together to deny Pete control. The AI senses that he is too drunk to drive, the “auto-auto mech” allows it to drive

without him, and through the “Rushmore Effect” the car verbally mocks him (Dick 5). As his vehicle “skimmed through the night sky, its signal lights blinking,” Pete sits in the back seat contemplating suicide (5).

Situationist Gil Wolman writes of *détournement*: “any sign—any street, any advertisement, painting, text, any representation of society’s idea of happiness—is susceptible to conversion into something else, even its opposite” (qtd. in Stracey 108). In this opening scene, we find Dick reversing the traditional image of the trope. The flying car of *Game-Players* is a repressive and rather boring vehicle. Rather than liberating and exciting its owner, it ends up managing Pete’s behaviour. In fact, we soon find that almost all of the advanced technology found throughout the novel behaves in a similar fashion. Pete’s talking medicine cabinet tracks and controls his consumption; telepaths are regularly hired to infiltrate and survey people’s minds; and the police use “tattletales,” a tracking device similar to modern day ankle bracelets (Dick 87). The novel is saturated with technology that functions, like the flying car, to enforce the rules, to maintain a consistency of behaviour, to survey and track. Dick *détourns* the pulp dream of the flying car into a tool of control; a tool which enforces a paranoid psychology upon Pete Garden.

Whilst Pete’s flying car fosters and encourages a paranoid psychology upon the characters, it frustrates this very psychology in the reader. Considered against its generic history, Pete’s flying car is an anomaly. The car ruptures the pulp and popular science narrative of a glorious technological future. The car of *Game-Players* shares the aesthetics of those found on the covers of *Popular*



*Mechanics* and *Amazing Stories*; it appears very similar to the cars found in mainstream television shows like *The Jetsons* (1961) and *Supercar* (1962). Yet Pete's car has long since shucked what Elizabeth Guffey and Kate C. Lamay call the "bullish" optimism of popular science (435). It negates the comfortable and consistent extrapolation of the status quo. In doing so, it realizes the worst fear of the paranoiac: the fear that the future is susceptible to unfolding in unpredictable ways. On the level of the reader then, Pete's flying car actually discourages the paranoid hermeneutic. For it discourages too rigid an expectation of the consistency between tropes and their generic tradition. It encourages the reader to consider both the trope's history and its singularity; its potential to behave in an anomalous fashion.

Dick détourns the flying car and threads it through with two incommensurable meanings. On the level of representation, the car enforces rigid, consistent and rule-bound behaviour upon its owner. On the level of genre, the car encourages the reader to approach the text with a sense of indeterminacy, a sense of the play between the device and its tradition. It is the simultaneous presence of these two levels of signification that strikes at the heart of the paranoid hermeneutic. The reader is asked to consider the trope as internally inconsistent; to relate to signifiers as containers filled with multiple, contradictory, inconsistent and ephemeral signifieds. The paranoid hermeneutic cannot cope with this relation.

Let us turn to the next act of anti-paranoid subversion, Dick's careful détournement of the SF novum. In the world of *Game-Players*, life is structured

by a sort of superimposed monopoly-esque board game. Characters draw coveted playing positions from a lottery whilst the majority of the population spectate, relegated to a lower-class position. The Game resembles monopoly in that property deeds, not to mention players' wives, are staked over each evening of play. What's more, in the circulation of land deeds and wives, The Game also resembles a sort of aristocratic capitalism. The novum is hardly distinct from the capitalist division of labour, the society built on competition, the trading of private property and the management of reproduction along class lines. In these ways it is a rather banal and transparent novum; sufficiently estranging yet altogether very similar to existing social conditions. The reader is not made to work hard at all.

This easy consistency all lends a parodic quality to Joe Schilling's exposition in chapter six. In heavy-handed exposition, a device frequently found in pulp-SF, Schilling explains the emergence of The Game:

The vugs hadn't invented that; they had merely intensified an already existing condition. Marriage had to do with the transmission of property, of lines of inheritance. And of cooperation in career-lines as well. All this emerged explicitly in The Game and dominated conditions; The Game merely dealt openly with what had been there implicitly before. (56)

Through this didactic exposition, the "thoroughgoing" hand of cognition firmly suffocates any remaining estrangement left in the novum. The global emergence of The Game, three centuries into the future, following a major nuclear war and the domination of Earth by Titanian Vugs, is framed as an intensification of "an already existing condition." Despite whatever estranging interruptions or

anomalous events took place along the way, the novum is presented here as a consistent extrapolation from the 1960s.

Yet whilst the novum is, on a historical level, so transparent as to be dull, its internal logic, its gameplay, is almost totally opaque. Even as the characters frequently access and celebrate the internal logic of The Game, the reader is denied any access to its rules. We are introduced to this frustrating dynamic in chapter five, where we find Pete trying to re-enter gameplay. Having just lost the city of Berkeley and his wife Freya, Pete cannot re-enter play until he rolls a three. Pete is not sure of exactly how many rolls he is able to take so he asks Bill Calumine to consult the “rules book” (45). This scene is a textbook opportunity to engage in exposition, to have the logic behind the decision explained to both protagonist and reader.

However, Dick does not deliver any exposition. In fact, he moves in the opposite direction. The reader is left to spectate the decision. Pete is told that he has six rolls whilst the reader knows only that “A complex rule governed the situation” (45). Soon enough, the game moves on through new, ever more opaque rounds. This frustrating lack of information is made all the worse for the characters are entranced by gameplay. Schilling describes gameplay as a “fascinating” and “complex” mixture of “chance and skill” similar to “Poker” (29). The reader knows the Game has rules, an internal logic, yet we cannot access these rules. We know The Game is “fascinating,” yet we have no share in the excitement. Much like the flying car, Dick threads the novum with inconsistent tendencies. In one chapter, the novum is wholly opaque, an exciting game hidden

from the reader. In another, it is transparent, over-explained and dull. It moves from an abandonment of the pulp device of exposition through to its exaggerated, parodic usage. The reader's expectation for the novum to be "internally consistent" is frustrated. We must hold both qualities in our minds at once, and to do so, we must loosen ourselves from the paranoid hermeneutic.

Thus far I have concentrated mostly on the paranoid outlook, on the way in which pulp-SF fosters a paranoid relationship with the world and its future, with technology and with texts. I've shown how, through the tool of *détournement*, Dick produces divided and de-centered narrative devices, devices that challenge the paranoiac's demand for rigidity, internal consistency and totalized meaning. I will now turn inwards, to Dick's corresponding estrangement of paranoid subjectivity. As Freedman argues, the paranoid outlook depends upon a sense that one is a "centered and autonomous" subject; a stable 'I' who stands at the center of their 'rationalizing interpretations'" ("Paranoia" 17). Once again, we find pulp-SF particularly suited for this task. For across the tradition we find plenty of transparent, one-dimensional character types; the *femme fatale*, the everyman, the paternalistic boss, the villain, the strong maternalistic presence, etc. Such character types foster and concretize the paranoiac's "high investment in the hermeneutic practice which he or she performs on the symptomatic actions of other people" ("Paranoia" 16). The pulp text encourages the violent interpretive movement from appearance to essence, and vice versa.

In chapter four, a trivial debate in a record store illustrates Dick's détournement of the traditional pulp fiction character type. It is necessary to describe the scene at length. Our protagonist Pete Garden has travelled across the country to strategise with Joe Schilling, a formerly great game player. For Pete is desperate to win back the title deed of Berkeley from Jerome Luckman. Pete and Joe decide to form a partnership so as to have a chance of beating Luckman. However, as *The Game's* primary purpose is to regularly cycle heterosexual partners through each other in the interests of raising the birth rate, it is unorthodox for two men to form a partnership. Whilst Pete and Joe plan their strategy, a young woman enters the shop. She asks Joe if he has any records by Nats Katz. Joe responds with disgust and disappointment while Pete explains to Mary-Anne that Joe does not sell "pops" only "ancient classics" (33). Joe apologises for Pete's behaviour and describes him as "an old man" who is "set in his habits" (33). Mary-Anne is shocked and she says to the pair, "You're both really strange people. You're real fnools, for real" (33).

Unlike the transparent, one-dimensional characters of pulp-SF, Dick threads these three through with a series of inconsistencies, leaving each to rest on an opaque fault line, the seam of multiple signifieds. Firstly, Pete and Joe enthusiastically break with the customs of *The Game* in forming a partnership. Yet at the same time, the pair celebrate such "ancient classics" as *Don Pasquale*, *La Traviata*, *Una Furtiva Lagrima* and *La Bohème*, a series of operas or songs centered on the conflict of love across class lines. Pete and Joe are shown to be split, de-centered subjects. Characters who are set in their habits in one domain, and in another, they are enthusiastically unorthodox. The reader cannot infer their

cultural taste from their actions and nor their actions from their cultural taste. We cannot affirm either a conservative or a progressive essence; they rest as unpredictable subjects. We have no option but to hold their inconsistencies together.

Dick then changes the interpretive field of play again when it comes to Mary-Anne. At first she seems de-centered in a similar fashion to Joe and Pete. She is culturally aligned with Nats Katz' popular ballads, a singer of songs with such conspicuously conventional titles as "*Walkin' the Dog*" (33). Yet she also uses unconventional language, describing the pair of men as "fnools." However, we know that all teenagers use slang and listen to popular music. Therefore, unlike Pete and Joe, we can in fact infer her language from her musical taste and her musical taste from her language. It seems then that we are back in the field of the paranoid hermeneutic. Yet what if we pause on the question of slang? For isn't slang itself internally inconsistent? A use of language that is culturally conventional and yet linguistically radical. If we approach Mary-Anne through the paranoid hermeneutic and see her as a stable subject, as a typical teenager, then we do so through an awareness of the internal inconsistency of slang. We thus find a refutation of the paranoid hermeneutic, yet a refutation that manifests in inconsistent ways. Each character demands a different register, an acceptance and awareness of internal contradictions.

Throughout the world of *Game-Players* a certain anti-paranoid psychology simmers. Whilst my close reading slows it down and makes it explicit, these internal altercations of meaning are meant to fly under the conscious radar of the

reader. The flying car, the novum and the characters subtly disconcert, they glitch, but they do not halt the reader's mind. This quiet, diffuse perturbation complements the concern of these chapters with the representation of everyday life. For the flying car, The Game, and the characters are all prosaic things. They are not represented as having split or de-centred under extreme pressure or coercion. Their state of inconsistency is their resting state. The reader is asked to relax into a world where it is normal, even banal, for such things to be internally inconsistent. Through this dynamic, an anti-paranoid psychology is naturalised and encouraged. But again, don't get too comfortable, for soon enough everyday life is turned upside down.

#### The Death of Paranoia

The next devices that Dick sets his scissors to are perhaps the most emblematic and diffuse clichés of pulp fiction; the plot devices of murder and amnesia. Much of the pull of pulp fiction, especially the genres of SF and detective fiction, stems from placing the reader in a position of ignorance. Pulp fiction hooks the reader this way, and then as the plot progresses, information is gradually unveiled, ignorance is alleviated. This narrative dynamic produces satisfying texts. The devices of murder and amnesia, especially in tandem, are excellent means of achieving this dynamic. Yet they are also devices that privileged cognition over estrangement. They rely on estrangement to generate ignorance, indeterminacy, questions and ruptures, and then, the “thoroughgoing, internally logical, never trivializing” hand of cognition wraps everything up (Freedman “Paranoia” 16). A killer is loosed but caught in the end; the

protagonist's memory is lost but gradually pieced together. In short, these are devices that mechanically inscribe and concretize the paranoid hermeneutic.

The first major plot turn of *Game-Players* involves both of these devices being deployed simultaneously. In chapter seven, the world's best game-player, Jerome Luckman, is found dead in the back of Carol Holt's car. At once, several characters, including the chief suspect Pete Garden, suffer from an induced bout of amnesia; this condition is mimicked in the reader through a textual leap forward. Pete is considered particularly suspect, for Jerome Luckman held the title deed to his beloved Berkeley, a deed which Pete was so desperate to win back. However, Pete's entire game-playing group also had motives, for Luckman was on his way to play them and threatened all of their deeds. Through the devices of murder and amnesia, we find ourselves in a classic pulp fiction scenario; protagonist and reader aligned in their ignorance, equally clueless and equally keen to figure out the situation. Yet again, however, we find that something has been carefully altered. Whilst the devices get us into this position of ignorance, the adoption of the paranoid hermeneutic will not get us out.

The estrangement and frustration of the hermeneutic embedded in these plot devices stems from the context into which they are suddenly introduced. Across the first seven chapters, the reader uncomfortably adjusts to a world in which objects, characters and structures rest in a state of internal inconsistency, happily traversed by contradiction. As readers and subjects trained in the paranoid hermeneutic, we initially resist this interpretive demand. We try to read the flying car, the novum, as well as Pete, Joe and Mary-Anne, through the paranoid lens;



we try to detect their internal consistency. Yet it does not work; it proves impossible and almost painful to try. In turn, we begin to relax the paranoid hermeneutic and to let difference play out across and within these narrative devices. We begin to foster the outlines of an anti-paranoid hermeneutic.

Through the plot turn of chapter seven, Dick violently imposes a paranoid hermeneutic back upon the reader. Without warning, we are compelled to move back into a rigid, internally consistent, and totalizing hermeneutic. We are compelled to focus urgently and intently on the “symptomatic actions of other people,” to discern who killed Luckman, to discover what happened during the period of amnesia, and to find out in what manner these events are connected. This demand is in distinct contrast with the quiet, diffuse and steady *détournement* of the opening seven chapters, a contrast further heightened through the dramatic increase of the narrative pacing, the frequent plot turns and revelations. However, as the paranoid hermeneutic is no longer natural or unconscious, as it no longer seems appropriate for interpreting the world and its subjects, its re-adoption strikes the reader as impossible. In fact, the re-adoption of this mode appears manifestly more painful than its relaxation. We find that through inserting these devices into the narrative at this point, their ideological function is brought into sharp focus. Murder and amnesia become visible as the thuggish henchmen of the paranoid hermeneutic.

Dick has cut the artery which connects the paranoid hermeneutic to a “comfortable practice of reading” (Barthes 14). The reader takes up a position of resistance against a denaturalized hermeneutic. The next stage in Dick’s

methodical dismantling of paranoia is to expose its inability to achieve any meaningful interpretive results. As the investigation proceeds into the murder of Luckman, Dick stages four scenes in which the hermeneutic dramatically fails. In particular, Dick estranges the role of the police, the lawyers and the psychiatrist in promoting a defunct paranoid psychology. The reader notes the familiar and prosaic nature of these institutions, lending further weight to Freedman's claim that paranoia is imposed by the everyday conditions of capitalism. Across the next several scenes, the reader and Pete Garden find themselves on a hermeneutic threshold. For the murder and the amnesia urgently need to be solved; our protagonist Pete Garden is practically crippled by fear and doubt. Yet as the investigation proceeds, the paranoid hermeneutic becomes more and more defunct. Dick gradually intensifies this dynamic and pushes reader and protagonist alike to find an alternative, capable hermeneutic.

In chapter eight, we find the first example of the paranoid hermeneutic being adopted and instantly frustrated. Pete's game-playing group have assembled prior to their interrogation by police; in turn, they start interrogating each other. Dick stages this scene so as to estrange and parody the paranoiac's "high investment in the symptomatic actions of other people." For right away, all the actions of each member become rich with implications: that Silvanus Angst "giggled" upon hearing of Luckman's death; that Stuart Marks behaves "hostilely" towards the group; that Bill Calumine challenges Marks in a particularly "icy" tone; that Joe Schilling wants to switch the group's lawyer to his own, personal one (Dick 75, 84, 85, 86). Yet without a minimum degree of information, denied through the amnesia, what can anyone infer from these

actions? The reader and Pete find themselves mired in a state of paranoid equivalence. We see this again when Calumine singles out Carol Holt as a suspect due to Luckman's body being found in her car; Pete protests: "Carol's no more a suspect than anyone else," Pete said, At least, he thought, I hope not. Why should she be? After all, she notified the police as soon as she found it" (76). Across these two interpretations, Carol emerges as an indeterminate subject; much like Mary-Anne, Pete and Joe in the record store scene. She is shown to be threaded through with contrary actions, actions which offset each other, which contradict any firm, totalizing assertions. She is not a one-dimensional, transparent character type; she is not a pulp villain. We find then that to approach Carol, or any member of the group, through a paranoid hermeneutic is utterly pointless.

The second institution that pushes a defunct paranoid hermeneutic is the police. In chapter 8, Pete is interrogated by detective Wade Hawthorne. His partner, E.B. Black, is a Vug who has telepathic abilities. Pete's amnesia, however, makes it impossible to garner any information from his mind. Hawthorne reads this, through a paranoid framework, as an element of Pete's criminal strategy:

"Anyone intending to commit a capital crime would of course know that telepaths would be brought in; he would have to deal with that, and nothing could possibly benefit him more than a segment of amnesia entering to block out that period of his activities". To E.B. Black he said, "I would presume we should take Mr Garden into custody." (80)

In one move the rupture is turned on its head. The detective erases inconsistency by construing inconsistency itself as part of a carefully thought-out plan. We see here the inability of the paranoid hermeneutic in adjusting to situations in which inconsistency and rupture must be faced head-on. Hawthorne's narrative is, for this reason, manifestly unconvincing. Through the device of amnesia, Dick produces a chief suspect who cannot be examined through a paranoid lens, for he is literally psychologically split, clinically inconsistent.

As the narrative cycles through these visibly fruitless bouts of paranoid speculation, both Pete and the reader feel increasingly helpless. Any sort of stable interpretive foothold seems less likely as more and more defunct interpretations are spun out. This dynamic is particularly evident in chapter nine when Pete meets with his defence lawyer Laird Sharp. During their conversation, Sharp proposes a narrative that will take the suspicion off of Pete and place it onto Joe Schilling. Sharp rapidly unveils his plan whilst Schilling takes a bathroom break:

“Schilling came out here to play Luckman again. Right? He was positive he could beat Luckman if they ever tangled again; he's been telling himself that all this time, ever since Lucky beat him. Maybe joe got out here, all prepared to play for your group against Luckman, then lost his nerve . . . discovered at the last moment that when it came right down to it he *couldn't* beat Luckman after all – or least feared he couldn't.” (93)

From no concrete evidence, Schilling is able to construct a totalizing portrait of Schilling as Luckman's murderer. Sharp portrays him as a subject consumed by a rigid, consistent and totalizing rivalry with Luckman; he is one-dimensional in his

lust to beat Luckman, even to kill if need be. As Pete's defence lawyer, we know that this is a performance. The scene exposes the ease at which the paranoid hermeneutic can fabricate convincing and totalizing portraits of guilt. Yet this is not what Pete, nor the reader, want. Sharp reveals that paranoia is particularly suited to fabrication. In turn, it has very little to offer to Pete and the reader, subjects more concerned with the discernment of the truth. Following Sharp's narrative, Pete feels ever more helpless, even more at risk.

#### Dr. Philipson Meets Amphetamine Pete

By the end of chapter nine, the novel has come to rest on a tense threshold, for the case remains completely open. Luckman's murderer is no closer to being caught and the amnesia remains a total mystery. The novel never ceases to demand that we try to pursue these questions; in fact, at each failed attempt the questions become more urgent. Yet the more urgent these questions become, the more the traditional hermeneutic approach becomes defunct. The harder Pete and the reader works, the more we find the paranoid approach actually working against us. We are faced with a strange demand, itself internally inconsistent. We need to produce a consistent and totalizing analysis of the nature of the conspiracy, for someone did kill Luckman and someone did induce amnesia. And yet we cannot achieve this goal through a rigid, consistent and totalizing hermeneutic. The novel demands the adoption of a new hermeneutic. By chapter ten, this demand reaches a dialectical turning point. Through an analysis of two key scenes, I will demonstrate the possibility of a more rewarding mode of reading. Across these scenes we find Pete discover a mode of interpretation that

can at once embrace a consistent and totalizing lens whilst remaining open to, and in fact reliant upon, inconsistency, rupture, and difference. In classic Dick style, this revelation involves a wild “whing-ding” as well as handfuls of methamphetamine (106).

The first stage in the production of this new, anti-paranoid hermeneutic is the wholesale abandonment of paranoia. Firstly, at the end of chapter nine, Pete Garden learns that his ex-wife, Freya Gaines, has become pregnant. Due to the high rates of infertility on Earth, this is an event of nationwide, even global significance. Freya’s pregnancy serves as a welcome distraction for Pete:

The idea of a child, a son or daughter . . . it obliterated everything else in his mind, all that had happened of late, everything connected with Luckman’s murder and death and the banning of the group. (106)

Pete loosens out his hermeneutic quest, he forgets the criminal case and entertains utterly different thoughts. Secondly, Pete celebrates this news through “going out on a whing-ding” (106). Pete announces that “I’m going to get drunker than I’ve ever before been in my life,” before taking “five Snoozex tablets” and “a handful of methamphetamine” (106-107). Pete jumps in his car and thinks, “God knows where I’m going or when I’ll get back. I certainly don’t know—and don’t care” (107). Pete’s bender represents a total dissolution of his rational mind. Pete takes a large amount of depressants and stimulants, filling his bloodstream with an internally inconsistent brew. Through this mixture he abandons both a stable and consistent sense of self as well as a stable and consistent outlook. Pete doesn’t

know where he is going, who he is, or where he's been. Pete's gone off the rails and taken the paranoid hermeneutic with him.

The next step in this dialectical merger involves the ramming of this wild, irrational, dissociated state up against one of the paranoid hermeneutics' most ruthless enforcers. Within two pages of Pete having flown off into unknown directions, he is brought hard up against the psychiatrist, Dr. E.R. Philipson. The psychiatrist symbolically counterbalances Pete's wild "whing-ding." He functions as a clinical enforcer of the consistent self and of the paranoid hermeneutic. Pete of course has no idea how he made it into the consultation room. During the consultation, Dr. Philipson tells Pete that he must face reality for:

"that's exactly what you've failed to do; that's why you're here. You're involved in an intricate, sustained illusion-system of massive proportion. You and half of your Game-playing friends. Do you want to escape from it?" (110)

Dr. Philipson demands that Pete try even harder to interpret the conspiracy that has befallen him, to look more closely, think bigger, be more rigid and totalizing; in short, to continue to approach the situation through an intensely paranoid hermeneutic.

Out of the collision between these two extreme hermeneutic states, Pete arrives at two crucial realisations. Firstly, Pete recognises that the paranoid approach that he has adopted thus far is working against him. Pete responds to Dr. Philipson's demands: "'No,' Pete said. 'I mean yes. Yes or no; what does it matter?' He felt sick at his stomach" (110). All through the novel Pete has lacked

nothing for the desire to discover the conspiracy. Yet now he has come to realise that if he adopts a paranoid hermeneutic then his desire to escape becomes equivalent to its opposite. Subsequently, through this newfound lens, Pete discerns the one vital clue that allows him to judge all others. By the end of the consultation, Pete discovers that Dr. Philipson is in fact a Vug in disguise. From this one piece of information, Pete is able to move through the rest of the novel piecing together a consistent and totalizing, but not paranoid, portrait of a global Vug conspiracy. He discovers that more and more humans are actually Vugs: he discovers that he is the pawn in the battle between two Vug factions, and eventually, he discovers a way to resist, to beat the Vugs at their own game. Whereas pulp fiction typically demands an intensification of the paranoid mode as the novel progresses, here we find that it is only through the abatement of this mode that the conspiracy unfolds.

At the conclusion of the novel, we are presented with an effective, anti-paranoid hermeneutic. It is an amoebic mode of interpretation, neither rigid and stable nor formless and fluid. It is an interpretive approach that can move through the text with an awareness of consistency, an awareness that both people and events often do behave and unfold in regular, uniform ways. That, especially in the case of a crime committed, there is a consistent arc to be charted from the motive to the plan and from the plan to the act. However, Pete's new hermeneutic is also qualified with a sense of contingency, of inconsistency and rupture. It represents a significant loosening of the hermeneutic grip. Pete is able to move through the rest of the novel and tentatively connect one clue with another, whilst abandoning several more at the same time. The great strength of this newfound



mode is that it rejects the “never trivializing” demands of the paranoiac. We find that it is only through an acceptance of the trivial that the clues of significance come to light. We can think of this interpretive mode as a middle ground between the demands of Dr. Philipson and the wild “whing-ding” of chapter ten. For Pete Garden, an internally inconsistent situation produces an internally inconsistent hermeneutic. In turn for the reader, a text filled with internally inconsistent tropes, structures, plot devices and characters intends the same result. Finally, is this not the most appropriate hermeneutic for the player of games? A mode appropriate for the mixture of chance and skill, of control and luck. Pete starts the novel as a loser and ends as the greatest player in history. The reader enters the text as a paranoiac and leaves as a playful, albeit bruised, subject.

## Quality Time with Manfred Steiner

The quantitative and the linear are indissociable. A linear, measured time and a linear, measured life are the co-ordinates of survival: a succession of interchangeable instants. These lines are part of the confused geometry of Power.

Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (88)

The revolutionary project of a classless society, of a generalized historical life, is also the project of a withering away of the social measurement of time in favor of an individual and collective irreversible time which is playful in character and which encompasses, simultaneously present within it, a variety of autonomous yet effectively federated times . . .

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (116)

### I

Philip K. Dick's *Martian Time-Slip* (1964) takes two antagonistic literary forms. The first is the linear and causative narrative that occupies the majority of the novel. This narrative depicts everyday life in a Martian colony, through strictly delineated perspectives of individual characters and language that Carlo Pagetti has described as "functional to the limits of triviality" (21). Criticism has thus far chosen to focus almost exclusively on this narrative form. Prominent examples include essays by Brian Aldiss, Carlo Pagetti, and Darko Suvin. These perspectives are useful, but fail to account for the second literary form that runs through the novel, that of the lyrical monologues of Manfred Steiner and the climactic explosion of the main narrative. These passages produce a radically different reading experience, immersive and immediate with a non-linear temporality. The rich and surreal language refuses to be categorised as either functional or figurative. The strictly linear narrative perspective is dissolved into

an ambiguous and collective subject position; and the subject matter is more mythic than quotidian. In both form and content, these passages read as violent interruptions into the progression of the linear narrative. In turn, the narrative form reads as a suppression of these interruptions and as a conservation of the capitalist status quo. This chapter examines and politicises the relationship between these two literary forms. I argue that the narrative sections of the novel not only represent everyday life under capitalism, but by doing so expose the way in which it is reproduced. To make this case, I draw on Guy Debord and Walter Benjamin's critiques of capitalist concepts of time. The struggle between the individuated, linear narrative form and the collectivized, non-linear lyric form can be read as a political struggle between a capitalist conception of the world and a more communistic alternative.

Thus far, there have been two main approaches to *Martian Time-Slip*. Many critics have read the narrative as a didactic exposition of everyday life under capitalism. This approach is exemplified by Darko Suvin, Brian Aldiss, and Kim Stanley Robinson. These critics tend to focus on the interpersonal relationships between characters, specifically in the context of their class positions. Suvin reads the novel as exemplary of Dick's use of characters "as narrative foci and as indicators of *upper and lower social class or power statuses*" (Suvin 3). Robinson builds on Suvin's claims and makes the case that the novel's central theme is the preservation of meaningful social relations against "the destructive influence" of "business" (K. Robinson 110). Others, such as Christopher Palmer, Anthony Enns, Anthony Wolk, and Roger Luckhurst, have argued that the novel can be understood in the context of the anti-psychiatry

movement of the 1960s. These critics draw on the novel's interest in mental illness and the role of the education system in producing such illnesses. These critics draw on the presence of particular psychiatric theories within the novel as well as evidence that Dick had done extensive research on the subject. As Wolk writes, "Dr. Glaub's theories on schizophrenia (and Jack Bohlen's as well) come directly from the existentialists" (113). Both of these approaches draw fascinating parallels between the novel and the cultural and economic conditions that it reflects and emerges from. Yet they have failed to account for the significance of the temporal contrasts in the novel's literary forms. The only exception to this critical trend is Fredric Jameson's brief foray into the novel's temporal politics in his essay "History and Salvation in Philip K. Dick" (2005). In this chapter, I perform an extended close reading of the relationship between these two narrative forms.

The significance of each antagonistic narrative form hinges upon Dick's investigation into the capitalist conception of time. In particular, Dick estranges and renders visible the specific structure of clock-time. The opening chapter depicts a typical Wednesday morning in the lives of Silvia Bohlen and her husband Jack. The novel opens with Silvia waking up from a "phenobarbital slumber" as her son David announces the arrival of the ditch-rider (1). Two events occur which key the reader into a heightened awareness of time. Firstly, upon waking Silvia thinks, "Time by the clock: nine-thirty," which emphasises that clock-time is a particular type of time and not the only one. Secondly, upon hearing that the ditch-rider has arrived, Silvia thinks, "this must be Wednesday" (1). Silvia again relies on an external mechanism to indicate the time of week,

exposing it as a construction. For Silvia, the time of the clock and the calendar is an unnatural imposition, at odds with her own sense of time. Others also experience this disjuncture: the neighbouring Steiner family have forgotten the ditch-rider too.

The nature of the alternative sense of time can be seen in Silvia's use of the barbiturate phenobarbital and the amphetamine Dexamyne: "She felt irritable, and it occurred to her that she was not fully awake; she needed a Dexamyne, or her eyes would never be open, not until it was nightfall once more and time for another phenobarbital" (3). The first two clauses hint that Silvia is not awake in a physiological sense. The consumption of an amphetamine thus makes perfect sense. However, Dexamyne is also raised as the solution to another, more ambiguous condition, the state of being in which "her eyes would never be open." The solution to this state of being is either a Dexamyne in the morning or a phenobarbital at night. The oppositional effects of these drugs indicates that this second state of being is not a matter of simple physiology.

In order to understand the nature of this state we can consider the flow of time on Mars. Dick sets the novel on Mars because the natural flow of time is different to that on Earth. The Martian day runs roughly 2.7 percent longer than Earth's and the orbital eccentricity is far more extreme; on Mars the sun can run fifty minutes slower or forty minutes faster than a Martian clock. Dick uses these two differences to stage a radical disjuncture between the natural passage of Martian time and the artificial, imported structure of clock-time. This disjuncture is of course present on Earth too, yet the orbital eccentricity is less extreme and

clock time and natural time have become invisibly conflated. However, through setting the novel on Mars clock-time is denaturalized and estranged, both within the novel and for the Earth-bound reader. Clock-time can now be approached as a historically specific and specifically capitalist way of ordering time. As E.P. Thompson writes, “We are concerned simultaneously with time-sense in its technological conditioning, and with time-measurement as a means of labour exploitation” (80).

The opening passages show Silvia’s experience of this imported time to be at odds with her sense of Martian time. Silvia’s use of phenobarbital and Dexamyne can be read as an attempt to align herself with the orbital eccentricity on Mars. Her routine consumption of these drugs, barbiturates at night and amphetamines in the morning, signals that she is consciously aligning herself with the at once accelerated and slowed-down flow of Martian time. Silvia knows that if she does not align herself with this flow of time, “her eyes would never be open,” at least, not until nightfall. We can now understand Silvia’s earlier thought regarding phenobarbital: “I must not take any more of that, she thought. Better to succumb to the schizophrenic process, join the rest of the world” (1). A central conceit of the novel is that schizophrenia is caused by a disjuncture between an artificial ideology and lived experience. Silvia’s use of drugs appears to be a management technique mediating between the two structures of time in which she lives. However, her thought that it would be better to succumb to schizophrenia indicates that private co-habitation in both Martian time and capitalist clock-time is actually worse than schizophrenia. Silvia feels it is better to live in ignorance of the artificiality of one’s sense of time than in an alienated awareness.

The political importance of this staged disjuncture arises when we consider the specific temporality of the daily life of a domestic labourer. Silvia finds her daily life in the home “a form of barbarism” and longs for “something more” as she faces another day of children and housework (4). In contrast to the wage-labour of her husband, the raising of children and the maintenance of the house is “task-oriented” work (Thompson 79). In his work “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism” (1967), the English historian E.P. Thompson writes that “despite school times and television times, the rhythms of women’s work in the home are not wholly attuned to the measurement of the clock. The mother of young children has an imperfect sense of time and attends to other human tides” (79). The temporality of Silvia’s day thus varies quite dramatically depending on the task at hand. Silvia’s day can thus be described as made up of periods of accelerated labour and periods of prolonged idleness. Therefore, Silvia’s consumption of phenobarbital and Dexamyne can also be read as a means of aligning herself with the temporal demands of domestic labour. The specific temporality of this labour thus becomes denaturalized and estranged. As E.P. Thompson writes, “Such hours were endurable only because one part of the work, with the children and in the home, disclosed itself as necessary and inevitable, rather than as an external imposition” (79). Silvia longs to return to a sense of domestic labour as necessary and inevitable. She longs to “succumb to the schizophrenic process, join the rest of the world.” These opening passages thus work to cast both clock-time and domestic labour as external, artificial impositions. The naturalization of these temporal structures is also shown to have its basis in the reproduction of labour.

The chapter then shifts to the perspective of Jack Bohlen as he begins work for the day in the city. As the chapter develops, clock-time is further estranged and the focus turns to Jack's experience of a temporal disunion; Jack reflects that "perhaps time flowed differently on Earth than on Mars; he had read an article in a psychology journal suggesting that" (5). This reflection indicates that whilst the citizens of Mars may experience a temporal disunion, as Silvia and the Steiners do, this is not a fully conscious experience. The novel reveals the effects of this ignorance on both Jack's everyday experience and the wider Martian colony. At the beginning of the workday, Mr. Yee points to his wrist watch and tells Jack that he needs to repair a refrigeration unit on the McAuliff cattle ranch. Mr Yee says, "At unpredictable times the motor slows until the safety switch cuts it off to keep it from burning out", and that it is a problem with "the power source or conduit" (7). It becomes clear that the nature of the problem is temporal. The problem is located in the parts of the unit responsible for the flow of electricity and water; the rate of this flow is bound intrinsically to the consistent flow of clock-time. Finally, the problem is caused by a disjuncture between the unit's clock-based coding and the time-flow of the environment, implied by the fact that the "refrigeration unit, according to the file, was worked on us two months ago for the same complaint" (7). The implications of this scene are two-fold. Firstly, it reveals that the obfuscation of Martian time is the cause of the inefficiency and precarity of a dairy farm responsible for "fifteen thousand gallons of milk" (13). Secondly, it shows Jack to be alienated from his everyday reality. Jack senses but does not fully understand that there is a disjuncture between



clock-time and Martian time. He is shown to be far less aware of the constructedness of time than his wife.

The novel exposes the artificial and alienating nature of clock-time in a way that invites connection with the economic process of quantification. Both Silvia and Jack recognise that the logic of quantification underpins the process of commodification and that this logic impoverishes their individual and collective lives. The narrative establishes this dynamic firstly in relation to water and secondly in relation to labour time. Consider Silvia's earlier statement:

It's a form of barbarism, this pettiness we're reduced to. What's the point of all this bickering and tension, this terrible concern over each drop of water, that dominates our lives? There should be something more. . . . We were promised so much, in the beginning. (4)

The water supply on Mars has been monopolised by Arnie Kott and is rationed out in quantities that permit little beyond survival. While Silvia's comment is provoked by the Steiner family requesting water from her own limited supply, the language used points to a more generalised concern. Silvia recognises that her situation is shared by the many in the colony through her use of collective language—"we're," "our," and "we." Secondly, Silvia moves from a specific concern over her neighbours to a larger question of the meaning of life on Mars. She recognises that as the quantification of water intensifies the quality of life decreases. The qualities associated with everyday life on Mars, in which water is quantified and rationed, are those of "barbarism," "bickering," "pettiness and tension." It is crucial to note that these are qualities that describe social relations.

The economic process of quantification, a process that underpins the production of commodities, is cast as an alienating force. Silvia's vague demand for "something more..." for what "We were promised," cannot be the demand for greater quantities of water. Rather, it is the demand for a way of life that is collective. A way of life that is free from the process of quantification.

The same economic dynamic between quantity and quality is shown to play out in relation to labour time. The quantification of labour is a fundamental process under capitalism. Before a commodity can be sold on the market its exchange value must be determined. The chief determinant of this exchange value is the socially necessary labour time that has gone into its production. That is, labour time needs to be rendered equivalent to a monetary sum. This process requires time to be measured in quantities of homogeneous and identical units. The mechanism used to measure these units is the clock. In the opening scenes, the novel does not estrange a neutral way of measuring time but the very basis of the capitalist economy. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord has described clock-time:

The time of production, time-as-commodity, is an infinite accumulation of equivalent intervals. It is irreversible time made abstract: each segment must demonstrate by the clock its purely quantitative equality with all other segments. This time manifests nothing in its effective reality aside from its exchangeability. It is under the rule of time-as-commodity that "time is everything, man is nothing; he is at the most time's carcass" (*The*

*Poverty of Philosophy*). This is time devalued – the complete inversion of time as “the sphere of human development.” (110)

Jack Bohlen’s experience of wage-labour reveals the psychological pressure of having one’s time quantified into these units. Jack works for Mr Yee at the most successful repair firm on Mars. The reason that Mr Yee is so successful is because “Everything was conducted on a rational basis” and that Mr Yee behaved “like something put together to calculate” (7). Mr Yee initially immigrated because he “had calculated that he could operate a more profitable business on Mars than on Earth” (7). The traits of a successful businessman are those which facilitate the process of quantification: rationality, calculation and an ability to render disparate objects, even planets, economically equivalent. Crucially, Dick draws these traits into opposition with qualities of emotional sensibility. Mr Yee is cast as abnormally affectless and machine-like, a man for whom the decision to leave Earth was *equivalent* to “visiting a dentist for a set of stainless steel dentures” (7). Dick here draws an explicit opposition between the act of commodification and the quality of being human. Mr Yee’s proficiency in quantification reduces the quality of Jack’s working day. Jack finds that working for Mr Yee “was hard” (7).

As the novel develops the commodification of Jack’s time is shown to be the cause of his schizophrenia. As the quantification of his time increases, the quality of his mental health decreases. This dynamic is confirmed by the content of his breakdowns, the first of which occurs prior to his interplanetary immigration. In Dick’s characteristically wry humour, Jack Bohlen works as “quality control” on an electronics assembly line (82). Following the purchase of

“an apartment in the huge new co-op building,” a goal which he worked towards for fourteen months, Jack realises that “[h]is life had no purpose” (81). He listens to Bach, he buys food and browses books but he doesn’t know “what for” (81). Jack is called to a meeting with his personnel manager who enquires why he is no longer spending his wages. During the meeting Jack sees

the personnel manager in a new light. The man was dead. He saw, through the man’s skin, his skeleton. It had been wired together, the bones connected with fine copper wire. The organs, which had withered away, were replaced by artificial components, kidney, heart, lungs—everything was made of plastic and stainless steel, all working in unison but entirely without authentic life. (82-83)

This episode encapsulates a central tension present in much of Dick’s fiction. At once we can read the scene as a mental breakdown. Yet we can also read the scene, Peter Fitting’s terms, as a “breakthrough,” a “breaking through the psychological and perceptual confines imposed on us by capitalism” (“Deconstruction” 46). In this scene, Jack sees his personnel manager as symbol of his economic role, that of a quantifying machine. In turn, he experiences himself as a quantifiable seller of labour time and purchaser of commodities. The text encourages us to read the episode in economic terms through the representational similarity between his personnel manager and Mr. Yee. Both are described as machines. Dick is by no means positing that the personnel manager is actually a machine. Rather, under capitalism he functions as a machine. This is indicated through the symbolic “stealthy replacement” of his organs by

mechanical parts (83). We are encouraged to read this scene as a political critique of capitalism as a system that makes humans perform as quantifying and quantified machines. This pressure is shown to effect Jack in a psychologically devastating manner.

Jack emigrates to Mars in search of a life free from the pressure of quantification. However, as the mode of production on Mars is capitalist, we unfortunately see his schizophrenia return. Jack's illness returns when the commodification of his time increases. By mid-novel, Jack is on-call for Arnie Kott seven days a week. He is forced to build a machine that will quantify Manfred Steiner's experience of time. Steiner is an eleven year-old autistic child who seems to experience reality in a profoundly different manner. Kott believes that Manfred can see the future and he wants to translate this vision into data so as to get a head-start on other business ventures. However, Manfred Steiner experiences time in a way that is utterly inimical to the process of quantification. Steiner's alternative sense of time is indicated in both narrative form and content:

It rained gubbish, now; all was gubbish, wherever he looked. A group of those who didn't like him appeared at the end of the bridge and held up a loop of shark teeth. He was emperor. They crowned him with the loop, and he tried to thank them. But they forced the loop down past his head to his neck, and they began to strangle him. They knotted the loop and the shark teeth cut his head off. Once more he sat in the dark, damp basement with the powdery rot around him, listening to the tidal water lap-lapping

everywhere. A world where gubbish ruled, and he had no voice; the shark teeth had cut his voice out. (137-138)

At the level of content, Manfred's experience bears no transparent relationship to the events described in the main narrative. Whatever Manfred is experiencing, it certainly is not the prosaic life of a worker, a domestic labourer, or a boss. Unlike the schizophrenic episodes of Jack Bohlen, Manfred's thoughts lack any correspondence to discernible events so they cannot be read as simply symbolic. Yet as the sentences lack linearity and causation they cannot be read in a functional or literal manner either. The depiction of Manfred's decapitation and his subsequent return to the "dark, damp basement" frustrates both a literal and a symbolic reading. Ultimately, these passages are deployed to estrange the reading process itself. The estrangement of the reading process is intimately linked with the estrangement of clock-time; each can only be understood through their relationship.

The estrangement of the reading process is produced through the temporal structure of Manfred's narrative. The opening sentence reads, "It rained gubbish, now; all was gubbish, wherever he looked." This sentence moves from the past tense, to the present, through to a totalising tense that evokes an eternal temporality. These tenses are separated with a semi-colon indicating that they bleed out of and into each other. What's more, these wildly differing temporal registers evokes the orbital eccentricity of Martian time. It would seem that Manfred, who exists outside of the capitalist system of production, experiences Martian time and not clock-time. This theory is confirmed in the following

sentences. The temporal pace then accelerates through several short sentences in which Manfred is decapitated. However, within this rapidly evolving set of events the line “He was emperor” indicates that Manfred experiences the moment in which the group “held up a loop of shark teeth” as a sort of coronation. In this moment, Manfred inhabits the historical time-frame of the succession of rulers. This mixture of an accelerated time and a slower, more drawn out time again reflects Martian time. Yet more importantly the larger time-frame evoked by this sentence takes up the least amount of words in the entire paragraph. This disjuncture signals a lack of equivalence between Manfred’s expression and his experience. This unpredictable disequivalence appears again following the arrival of Manfred back “in the dark, damp basement.” The sentence begins with “Once more,” evoking a large temporal breadth, a sense of inevitability and eternity. What’s more, the sentence continues with a generosity of descriptive language. However, whereas the previous sentence “He was emperor” evoked a large sense of time in a small amount of words, this sentence evokes a large sense of time in the largest amount of words. Whilst we cannot determine the nature of these events we can deduce that whatever Manfred experiences, it is comprised of a multitude of temporalities which are not at all equivalent. Manfred’s separateness from the time of commodity production is represented through a lyrical, internally inequivalent, narrative form. The novel thus begins to estrange the intimacy and dependency between clock-time and linear, prose narrative.

Arnie Kott wants to commodify Manfred’s experience of time and his supposed access to a vision of the future. However, Manfred’s experience is defined by its internal temporal disequivalence and its disequivalence to the

clock-time of commodity production. Arnie Kott wants to translate a qualitative sense of time, into the quantitative time of the clock and commodity production. The larger, political consequences of this opposition are best considered through the work of Walter Benjamin, specifically his work *On the Concept of History* (1939). Benjamin posits a very similar opposition to Dick. On the one hand, there is the “*homogeneous, empty time*” of capitalism (qtd. in Löwy 86). Benjamin understands this as a continuous flow of quantified units, the experience of which is “anaesthetising, desensitising and meaningless” (A. Robinson). This is the time experienced by Silvia and Jack. Consider Silvia’s longing for something “creative, useful, or exciting” to “fill up the long empty afternoons.” Or Jack’s sensitivity to the quantification of his time into units that mean nothing to him, that induce visions of mechanised dead humans. By contrast, there is messianic time, “*time filled with now-time [Jetztzeit]*” (qtd. in Löwy 86). Michael Löwy writes of “*Jetztzeit*” as “as an [*Explosivstoff*] to which historical materialism adds the fuse. The aim is to explode the continuum of history with the aid of a conception of historical time that perceives it as ‘full’, as charged with ‘present’, explosive, subversive moments” (Löwy 88). The charged, “full,” and “present” qualities of “*Jetztzeit*” accord with Manfred’s immediate, ruptural, emotional, meaningful, and above all, qualitative experience of time. Both Dick and Benjamin can be read as pointing towards an alternative, revolutionary temporality. With this structure in mind, I will now consider the implications of Manfred’s sense of time on a larger, more historical scale.

Benjamin and *Martian Time-Slip* demonstrate that under capitalism history is structured as a linear narrative of events that take place in homogeneous empty



time. In *Martian Time-Slip* this is indicated through the naming of landmarks after historical figures. The equivalence of each moment in history is revealed through the landmarks being equally named after figures such as Alger Hiss, an American citizen who was convicted as a Communist spy in 1950, as after Franklin D. Roosevelt. Through the historical narrative of capitalist progress, these figures and the moments in time they represent take on the aspect of a quantity of land. The qualitative impact of each figure on the history of world is transmuted into a homogeneous and equivalent unit. Instead of being figures who affect or subvert the history of the world they are represented as having filled up an empty quantity of time of the history of the world, which in turn remains unchanged. This way of narrating history is deeply ideological, for it attempts to represent history itself as impervious to change. The capitalist history of the world is represented as the natural history of the world. The naming of mountains after historical figures literally naturalises history. Bound up with this question of the equivalence of moments in history is the narration of history in a linear form. Both Benjamin and Dick centre their critiques of capitalism and models for alternative life on the ideological function of linearity. More than anything the examination of linearity results in a critique of capitalist conceptions of progress.

*Martian Time-Slip* was written in 1964 and projects a vision of life in 1992. The colonisation and settlement of another planet aligns with capitalist notions of progress, especially in its favoured technological form. As John F. Kennedy proclaimed at Rice University in 1962, in front of 40,000 people, “[b]ut this city of Houston, this state of Texas, this country of the United States was not built by those who waited and rested and wished to look behind them. This

country was conquered by those who move forward—and so will space” (Kennedy). The impoverished life of the citizens of the Martian colony sharply undercuts this narrative. The Martian colony is filled with horrifying events: Arnie Kott sexually abusing Doreen Anderton, Norbert Steiner committing suicide, the sexist abuse levelled at Anne Esterhazy, the psychological pressure of Jack Bohlen’s job, the intense boredom and despair of Silvia, the violent destruction of Otto Zitte’s business, the suicidal competitiveness of Arnie Kott, the impoverishment, slave labour and implied genocide of the Bleekmen, the financial desperation of Milton Glaub, and the terrified isolation of Manfred Steiner. All of these horrors have their basis in the capitalist mode of production, whether it’s the tedium of wage-labour, of domestic labour, of imperialism, of the control and subordination of women, or the violent competitiveness of the capitalist class. The novel demonstrates that any notion of progress that is founded upon the homogeneous, empty time of capitalism is not a progression to better things. As Walter Benjamin writes, “*The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule*” (qtd. in Löwy 57). The characters of *Martian Time-Slip* form the tradition of the future oppressed—victims of an oppressed future. The historical continuation of domination thus stretches from “those who moved forward” and conquered the United States, to the fictional colonization of Mars.

The novel is set in the now-past near-future of 1992. The future setting undermines the reader’s confidence in the capitalist narrative of progress. Yet it is striking that the novel is set only twenty-eight years ahead of its time of writing. Dick does this to create a sense of urgency in the reader. It is not a far off future

that will be horrifying but a future that the reader will most likely encounter in their lifetime. The reader is then asked to envisage Manfred's vision of the future as seen from Mars in 1992. Manfred envisages himself as trapped and abandoned in the decaying remains of the AM-WEB co-op building. AM-WEB is set to be the latest development on Mars. Manfred's vision of his future state, roughly one hundred years ahead in time, completes the novel's critique of progress. Under capitalism, both the immediate future of the reader and the far off future of the reader are shown to be horrifying. When Arnie Kott is presented with Manfred's vision of AM-WEB he is thoroughly disgusted and refuses to believe in the validity of the vision. For the vision of a capitalist future as equal to or worse than the present does not fit within the logic of linear progress.

*Martian Time-Slip* turns violently against this historical narrative of capitalist progress. To understand the nature of the novel's resistance, we can turn to the formal turmoil that takes place across chapters nine, ten and eleven. These sections of the novel involve the irruption or penetration of Manfred's experience of time into the lives of Arnie Kott, Jack Bohlen, and Doreen Anderton. Heliogabalus is also present but his Bleekman time structure is less opposed to Manfred's than the others so it cannot be considered as an irruption. Across these chapters the narrative loses its linearity, causation and temporal equivalence. It reproduces the emotional intensity, immediacy and immersiveness of Manfred's experience. The reader experiences these passages as rich and meaningful. Yet this meaning is largely inaccessible. These passages are, in form and content, read as an interruption of the linear narrative thus far. This section of the novel is best understood through Benjamin's conception of "jetztzeit," the "revolutionary

presence of now-time” which “blasts open the linear continuum of history” (Robinson). This is undoubtedly a revolutionary moment in the novel. As Andrew Robinson writes:

A revolutionary moment is a moment when messianic time enters and explodes homogeneous empty time. In such a moment, the whole of time is experienced as a monad. It is as if all life is reconciled and compressed into a single moment. The implication is that every singularity is brought into the new future, but minus the existing relations among different things. This moment is accessed through the dialectical image or profane illumination. (Robinson, A)

Manfred is described throughout the novel as an external force, and here his sense of time “enters” that of the capitalist society. It is crucial to note that this is not a moment of magic or a mystical transfusion of autism between characters. This moment in the narrative is a revolutionary opportunity that has its basis in the economic structure of Mars. This moment happens at the same moment in which Arnie Kott loses his position as the leading economic force on Mars. Arnie’s loss of economic authority renders fluid “the existing relations” between Arnie and all of those whom he holds economic power over: his prostitute and secretary Doreen, his worker Jack, his servant Heliogabalus and his commodified project-child Manfred. As the economic ruling class has yet to establish a successive power over them, these subjects have their best opportunity to revolt.

Yet following these chapters only Manfred and Heliogabalus successfully revolt. These two manage to escape the Martian colony and its capitalist

construction of time through moving into the Bleekmen tribes in the Martian desert. The Bleekmen live free from homogeneous empty time, for they don't participate in the process of commodity production. This is indicated through the qualitative nature of their worldview and conception of time. Heliogabalus had been training and aligning Manfred into developing the beginnings of a common language with the Bleekmen. Manfred thus escapes into the Bleekmen collective following Arnie's distraught and suicidal attempt to turn back time and avoid the economic transition. Arnie's desperate attempt to turn back time reveals his alienation and misunderstanding of what exactly the capitalist conception of progress entails. The supersession of Arnie as an economic force by a more powerful, land-investment collective is wholly in line with the capitalist narrative of progress. That progress under capitalism is hellish for both Arnie and Manfred, yet only Manfred conceives of it as such, indicates the extent to which capitalism relies on alienating even its most successful citizens from its nightmare logic. The unification of the experience of both Arnie and Manfred, the opposing forces of that drive the novel's tension, produces the dialectical image of "truth." Yet whilst the opportunity for Manfred to escape with the Bleekmen is by far the strongest, Jack and Doreen too have a chance to shuck the fetters of quantification and commodification. I will conclude this chapter by examining their chance to do so and its loss. Whereas Manfred has had his consciousness raised by Heliogabalus to prepare for a moment of rupture, Jack has, as I have demonstrated, remained throughout the novel ignorant of the economic forces that affect him so much. Jack experiences the oppressive nature of quantification acutely, yet he fails to take the opportunity to revolt against it.

Following the quantification of all of his time by Arnie Kott, Jack's distress is offset through Arnie's prostitute Doreen Anderton. Upon seeing Doreen, Jack immediately quantifies and commodifies her. He considers her as "A fine, deep, subtle, highly invigorating compensation," an investment made by Arnie that "would not wear out" (124, 107). Significantly, he keeps her number in his wallet. In these passages we see Jack render equivalent the commodification of his time to the use of Doreen as a prostitute. Jack engages in the same act which drove him from Earth and which inflames his episodic schizophrenia. However, whilst Jack remains unconscious of the economic function he is performing, he does sense that Doreen is also a human being. Jack senses but does not understand the contradiction between Doreen as a sexual commodity and Doreen as an empathic and loving companion. This experience is revealed as he finds that "Her expression was cool and intelligent, with a faintly mocking quality which was peculiarly rewarding and annoying" (106). Jack is shown to be pulled between a desire for Doreen as a passive, quantified, lifeless commodity and as a qualitative, conscious human being. The death of Arnie Kott momentarily liberates Jack's time from its quantitative status and also liberates Doreen Anderton from her commodified status as a prostitute. The quantitative equivalence that has structured their relationship drops away. It is at this point that Jack is faced with treating Doreen as a commodity that has now lost its value or as a worthwhile human being to have a relationship, of any sort, with. Ultimately, Jack abandons Doreen after Arnie's death. Jack chooses to value Doreen as a commodity as opposed to a human being. He remains unaware of the nature of the choice he has made. This makes Jack an utterly frustrating and tragic figure. He

exhibits no emotions as Doreen, who is fully aware of the logic of quantification that has governed their relationship, explains didactically the nature of this decision. She recognises that they were “going to drift away from each other, you and I. Maybe not right away, maybe not for months or possibly even years. But sooner or later we will, without him” (270). This is the moment in which Jack and Doreen lose their revolutionary moment to achieve social relations outside of the logic of quantification. Whilst Manfred is able to leap from the capitalist world into the society of the Bleekmen this drastic shift is not available to the colony’s citizens.

*Martian Time-Slip* demonstrates that one cannot achieve revolution, let alone recognise a revolutionary moment, without being fully conscious of the nature of the system that you want to revolutionise. The transformation of social relations between two people is just the first step, yet it is an absolutely crucial step to take. Following Jack’s failure to choose correctly, he returns to his wife, he returns to Mr Yee, the economy stabilises and the narrative form returns to its causative, equivalent, and linear progression through a nightmarish present towards a nightmarish future.

## Astronomical Hash-Doctor

“A humanoid biped cannot maintain metabolic processes by means of plankton flour merely”

Philip K. Dick, *Galactic Pot-Healer* (4)

Will man of the future be able to play his life?

Constant

### I

The most grandiose utopia to come out of the Situationist movement was Constant's New Babylon. The Dutch architect drew up the blueprints for his anti-capitalist city as early as 1959 and he persisted to develop and exhibit his plans throughout his life. Constant imagined a world totally transformed. New Babylon is a city on stilts that rises above and covers the Earth's surface. It is a sort of patchwork of “sectors” through which inhabitants drift in a nomadic, borderless life of fun and games. The meaning of life in New Babylon emerges in the seeking out of “new experiences” and the discovery or construction of “unknown ambiances” (Constant). It is a vision that depends upon the liberatory power of automation—the out-sourcing of manual labour to large underground machines. New Babylon is one answer to the question: what would humans do if they did not have to work? Constant argued that they would transform the world into a playground. They would become the architects and aestheticians of a whole new way of life.



Philip K. Dick's *Galactic Pot-Healer* (1969) is fuelled by the same energies as Constant's utopian architecture. Both works are underpinned by a revolt against utilitarianism and the privileging of work over all other human capacities. Against the core capitalist ideology, Constant and Dick found its counter-point: the inalienable human desire to play and to create art. The protagonist of the novel, Joe Fernwright, is a man who is crippled by the tedium of work and invigorated by the joy of games. The novel charts his quest to escape from a utilitarian world. Across this chapter I will conduct Constant and Dick through focussing on the political nature of play and of art. I will base my understanding of play on Johan Huizinga's work *Homo Ludens* (1938). Constant's architecture was explicitly underpinned by Huizinga's theories. Constant writes in 1974, "Huizinga nevertheless had the merit of pointing to the *Homo Ludens* dormant within each of us. The liberation of man's ludic potential is directly linked to his liberation as a social being" (Constant). There is no evidence to suggest that Dick had come across *Homo Ludens* (1938). There is a tenuous connection between the two figures found in *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* (2011). In one section, Dick draws on Huizinga's lesser known work *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (1919). Yet Dick made the entry in 1980, more than a decade after *Galactic Pot-Healer* was published. This chapter does not argue that Huizinga influenced Dick. Rather, I produce estranging insights into Dick through bringing him into contact with an unlikely figure. Secondly, I will base my understanding of aesthetics from Terry Eagleton's reading of Kant in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990). Through introducing Kant, we find fascinating

correlations between creativity and play, insights that estrange the book we hold in our hands.

Joe Fernwright dreams of the ludic society. He dreams of New Babylon. But Joe is stuck, like us today, in a utilitarian world. The year is 2046 and the place is the Communal North American Citizens' Republic, a post-revolutionary socialist state. All of life is organised around work. The police enforce a minimum walking speed for commuters, citizens live and work in massive Le Corbusian housing blocks, and at night they all dream the same artificial dream of their vital importance to the state. Joe Fernwright is a pot-healer, like his father and his grandfather before him. What's more, Joe takes great pride in being the best pot-healer. Joe's ceramic abilities separate him from "other men" (1). However, by the year 2046 the automated plastics industry has supplanted the value of Joe's labour; polystyrene, polyvinyl chloride, phenol-furfural resin, polyethylene and polypropylene had long since spelt the death of ceramics, the inevitable dearth of pots to heal. Where does this leave Joe's sense of self-worth? Joe's pride represents the internalisation of the utilitarian value-system. Joe values himself solely for his ability to heal-pots and now that "almost no one needed his work" his sense of self-worth plummets (1). He sits in his office in stasis, collecting the war veterans' dole and contemplating suicide, doubting his pot-healing skills and considering starting a new trade. He even considers "killing someone high up in the hierarchy of the Peaceful International World Senate" (1). What is it that keeps Joe from falling over the edge of self-destruction? What is it that gets him out of bed each morning?

Joe Fernwright as Homo Ludens—a man sustained and inspired by play. In 1938 Johan Huizinga posited this alternative to our self-understanding as Homo Sapiens and Homo Faber. Huizinga drew from a wide array of anthropological research and found a common quality at the basis of language, art, war, philosophy, poetry, and law. He argues that play is a universal and irreducible part of human activity and that culture arises out of and in play. Throughout the novel we find Joe semi-conscious of his nature as Homo Ludens. In the opening chapter Joe is repeatedly drawn to smoking illegal cigarettes:

Therefore he returned, then, the cigarettes to his pocket, rubbed his forehead ruthlessly, trying to fathom the craving lodged deep within him, the need which had caused him to break that law several times. What do I really yearn for? he asked himself. That for which oral gratification is a surrogate. Something vast, he decided; he felt the primordial hunger gape, huge-jawed, as if to cannibalize everything around him. To place what was outside inside. Thus he played; this had created, for him, The Game. (4)

Joe displays a self-awareness that his drive to play is irreducible. That it is a force which underpins and transcends consciousness—an ancient, animalistic drive. Joe describes this internal force as having created The Game to satisfy itself. If left unsatisfied, this force of nature will not go away but will manifest in “surrogate” ways. In attempting to eradicate this drive, the utilitarian society plays whack-a-mole with its infinite manifestations.

As soon we encounter gameplay we come up against a few apparent contradictions. The psychological intensity of the drive to play suggests a

seriousness that is not matched by The Game itself. For The Game is defined by its triviality. It is, in fact, a trivia game. Joe plays The Game with a range of players “scattered here and there across the map of Earth, in little offices, in puny positions, with nothing to do, no tasks or sorrows or difficult problems” (5). Gameplay involves discerning the original title of a cultural artefact that has been translated and retranslated through foreign language machines. The Moscow-based player Gauk moves first and challenges Joe to discern the book-title “The Lattice-work Gun-stinging Insect.” Within minutes Joe “tossed down his pen in triumph” proclaiming, “*The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald” (5). Joe receives ten points. Joe then challenges Gauk with “The Male Offspring in Addition Gets Out of Bed” and “eyed Gauk, then, feeling the warmth of knowledge that he had gotten a good one.” However, the Russian immediately recognises “A phononym,” and “effortlessly” deduces the original as “*The Sun Also Rises*.” Joe angrily throws another at Gauk: “Those for Which the Male Homosexual Exacts Transit Tax” to which Gauk responds cheekily, “Another by Serious Constricting-Path,” “For Whom the Bell Tolls” (6). The Game is based on phononyms, homonyms, metaphors, similes and oblique transformations. The skilful player shows a flair for wordplay and cultural knowledge—for trivia. Whilst the game undoubtedly looks fun, its simplicity seems at odds with the primordial, biological force which created it.

However, the satisfaction of serious needs through trivial means has always been a feature of both play and aesthetics. The apparent opposition between the serious and the trivial falls away when we consider the raw materials of The Game. Across several rounds we find easy challenges made out of works

by Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Truman Capote. More difficult rounds are constructed from the lesser known authors Emlyn Williams and Edward Lewis Wallant. Finally, the most difficult round, and the only one left unsolved, is made out of a work by pulp-SF author Ray Bradbury. This dynamic transforms the most serious works of modern literature into the most trivial challenges. In turn, pulp-SF works that are marketed as trivial entertainment become the most difficult, serious challenges. This double movement estranges the cultural standing of these works. The reader is familiar with the cultural association between canonical literature and the satisfaction of a “vast,” “primordial,” and untheorizable “hunger.” In Kantian terms, we know these works speak to an “intuitive” and “vital register of our being” (Eagleton 84). And yet in *Galactic Pot-Healer* we now read these works as trivia. What’s more, the reader is accustomed to the cultural alignment of pulp-SF as a trivial genre made up of works designed to be quickly read and forgotten. And yet here, we read these works as the most serious, difficult challenges. The reader is being asked to hold both of these meanings at once, to consider these works as simultaneously serious and trivial. The reader, as a consumer of art, and Joe Fernwright, as a player of trivia games, thus become aligned. Literature and games are cast as two ways of satisfying serious human needs.

The equivocation of aesthetics and play is compounded through the inclusion of unsolved clues. These clues invite the reader to join in and play a round of The Game. The first unsolved clue is: “Bogish Persistentisms” by Shaft Tackapple (Dick 8). It was only in August 2009 that the search was called off thanks to Ian Wakeham’s post on a boardgamegeek.com forum. Ian brilliantly

deciphered the title as *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) by Ray Bradbury (Wakeham). Wakeham's relationship to the text now sits on the seam of interpretation and play. Through turning the process of reading into play, the novel correlates our desires to know the answer with the "vast" and "primordial" impulses that directed Joe to create The Game in the first place. Later in the novel, another character, Smith, invents an alternative game which involves finding funny newspaper headlines from the 1960s. One of the titles that Smith challenges Joe with is "ELMO PLASKETT SINKS GIANTS" (Dick 51). Joe has absolutely no idea who Elmo Plaskett was, and he glumly leaves his office, abandoning the headline game. Again, the challenge is left hanging, inviting the reader to go on a playful treasure hunt. Through the powerful search capacities of the internet, readers today can quickly discern that Plaskett was a baseball player from the Virgin Islands who hit a crucial home-run "off the right-field foul pole at Forbes Field off Mike McCormick" during the 1962 major-league baseball season. Plaskett's home run "dropped the Giants four games behind the Dodgers with 13 to play" (Costello). Through the teasing inclusion of unfinished clues the novel entices the reader's inner Homo Ludens. The novel is threaded through with trivia games, literary references, and baseball headlines. It is no wonder that such an eclectic and playful mixture led to its strange afterlife on a boargamegeek.com forum.

In utilitarian societies, art is looked down upon with distaste. For it provides a means of connecting with others on the basis of "intersubjectivity" and not on instrumental, means ends terms (Eagleton 75). Eagleton's interpretation of Kantian aesthetics are in many ways fruitfully applicable to The Game. This is

especially true when we turn to the social function of play. In the novel, *The Game* provides alienated individuals with the means of establishing themselves “as a community of feeling subjects linked by a quick sense” of their “shared capacities” (Eagleton 75). In the Communal North American Citizens’ Republic, Joe ruminates that “through *The Game* our isolation is lanced and its body broken” (Dick 7). As the novel progresses, however, we see non-utilitarian activities discouraged more and more. In the opening chapter, as Joe connects with Gauk for another round, he receives “a glare of puritanical disapproval” from the Russian switchboard operator (4). The societal pressure, added to by his ex-wife mocking his inability to make money, pushes Joe to breaking point. Joe finds himself painfully caught between the demands of society and the demands of his nature as *Homo Ludens*. Joe laments that he cannot “fiddle away a lifetime without meaningful work” he cannot continue to play at the “voluntarily trivial” (7). Gauk becomes seriously upset for Joe is threatening the existence of the entire game. Joe threatens to destroy what Huizinga terms the play-mood:

The play-mood is *labile* in its very nature. At any moment "ordinary life" may reassert its rights either by an impact from without, which interrupts the game, or by an offence against the rules, or else from within, by a collapse of the play spirit, a sobering, a disenchantment. (21)

Joe’s ruminations on quitting puncture the security of *The Game* as an enclosed and distinct haven of non-productive fun. He threatens to destroy the grounds upon which a “community of feeling subjects” can come together.

As the narrative develops, Joe finds himself increasingly caught between his desire to live within and his desire to escape his utilitarian world. As soon he hangs up on Gauk, as soon as he disparages and leaves The Game, a molecular process begins in his body:

And yet, as he gazed sightlessly down at his piece of paper, he felt dim action occurring within him, a kind of photosynthesis. A gathering of remaining powers, on an instinctive basis. Left alone, functioning in its sightless way, the biological effort of his body asserted itself physically; he began to jot a further title. (7)

The ludic and creative drive stirs at an embryonic level. Joe comes up with a new title to challenge Smith in New York and his “energy, aroused by human amusement, surged up and invigorated him” (8). The language used to describe these sensations is explicitly biological, irreducible, a force in itself. No matter what he does, Joe’s desire to play will assert itself. Yet Smith in New York ignores Joe’s suggested title and rudely challenges Joe first with a difficult clue. The play-mood collapses and Joe reaffirms his decision to quit playing. It is at this point that Joe is at peak oscillation between the need to live within and the need to escape the utilitarian world. As is typical of Dick’s works, it is at this moment of untenable contradiction that the novel enacts its first major turn. As is not typical of Dick, the narrative form remains wholly consistent.

The novel’s first major turn is a drastic invigoration of Joe’s work prospects. As he sits in his office a letter arrives which reads, “Pot-healer, I need you. And I will pay” (10). Joe is propositioned by a deity known as the Glimmung



to travel to Plowman’s Planet and aid in the raising of its sunken cathedral. In the cathedral, known as Heldscella, there are thousands upon thousands of ceramic pots to be healed. To his delight, Joe is selected for he is the best pot-healer on Earth. There are two important aspects to the job offer. Firstly, Joe is offered an astronomical sum of money; a payment of “200,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000.00” Earth dollars (18). Again we sense that Dick is playing games; tempting the reader to translate the figure into its appropriate linguistic form of two quattuordecillion dollars. Secondly, the Glimmung promises Joe that “YOUR LIFE WILL SIGNIFY SOMETHING; YOU WILL CREATE A PERMANENT ENDEAVOUR WHICH WILL OUTLAST ME AS WELL AS YOU” (22). On one level, the Glimmung’s job offer appears an interruption of Joe’s staid, destitute and depressing life. It is the promise of full employment, amazing pay, adventure and engagement in a supra-historical/religious endeavour.

On a formal level, however, the Glimmung’s job offer disrupts nothing. The consistency of the narrative form before and after the job offer is most clear during the scene in which he is abducted by the Glimmung:

Two cops appeared ahead of him and they lunged toward him as he ran; they came closer unnaturally rapidly, as if on video tape speeded up. And then, suddenly, they were under water; they, like slender silver fish, gaped at him and rhythmically maneuvered themselves among—good god! coral and seaweed. And yet he himself felt nothing, no water; but here was a tank of water, instead of the police station, all the furniture like sunken

wrecks, half-buried in the sand. And the police twisted and streaked by him, lovely in their glittering gliding movements. But they could not touch him, because he, although standing in the center, was not in the tank. (30)

This scene has all of the ingredients of a classic Dickian narrative rupture.

However, the narrative form does little to reflect or to reproduce the disruption of Joe's everyday life. In the majority of Dick novels, it is at points like this when the narrative form will operate in tandem with the content to produce a wholly disorienting experience for the reader. Yet in this case, the reader can, with the equanimity of Joe Fernwright, simply read on; we do not even have to re-read sections. The scene is transparent, simple, and consistent. Dick makes no effort to even make the scene surprising or estranging barring the singular "good god!"

Joe's equanimity and the consistency of the narrative form indicate that the Glimmung's job offer is not the major disruption it initially appears to be. Rather it is an intensification of work and of utilitarian ideology. The Glimmung's job offer is a caricature of the utilitarian dream. Joe's excitement at the offer is the excitement of a man who will again be valued for his pot-healing skills.

Considering the weight placed upon play thus far, we can see that Glimmung's job offer will do little to satisfy Joe. However, as a caricature of the utilitarian dream, it allows us to further clarify the now stark oppositions between work, play and aesthetics. We find that the attributes of The Game that Joe celebrates so much find their absolute antithesis in the task of raising Heldscella.

One of the key elements that Huizinga's notes about the qualities of play is its separation from any "material interests" (9). Joe does not play The Game for

any profit-motive; it is an enclave of fun that is separate from the demands of productivity. Similarly, as an end in itself, art challenges the instrumental rationality that the utilitarian profit drive is built upon. The Glimmung's offer of a ridiculous amount of money stands in stark contrast to the immaterial rewards of guessing translated book titles and recontextualising newspaper headlines.

Secondly, Huizinga notes that play has to be voluntary; play is a "free activity" (13). Joe reflects on the trivial nature of *The Game*, but he qualifies this triviality with an awareness of its "voluntary" nature. By contrast, *The Glimmung* gives Joe little choice in accepting his job offer. Joe is in the process of pursuing alternative employment options when the Glimmung mysteriously compels him to break the law by giving all his money to the homeless. Following Joe's arrest, the deity then magically transmutes the police station underwater and turns the police into fish. Subsequently, Joe is trapped in a packing crate in the basement of number 301 Pleasant Hill Road, kidnapped by a deity and a fugitive from the police. It is at this point that the Glimmung tells Joe, "The time has come for you to choose, to act. To participate—or not participate—in a great historical moment" (36). Later we find that everyone whom the Glimmung has hired has been put in this same bind.

Huizinga is particularly interested in the distinction between play and everyday life. He describes play as a "free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life" (13). *The Game* fits into this category as a consciously non-productive activity within a utilitarian world. Initially, the raising of *Heldscella* seems to fit this definition. For the job is on a distant, unfamiliar planet. It involves working with a mystical deity who often appears as hoops of

spinning fire and water. Finally, the task is described as having religious and historical significance. These are all qualities that contrast to Joe's ordinary routine on Earth. However, the task is not an interruption or an escape from utilitarian dogma; on the contrary, it is an intensification of it. The astronomical wages and the exotic location do little to disguise the fact that all the characters are being used in an instrumental manner. Whereas the community of game players were "a utopian community of subjects, united in the very deep structure of their being," we find the Glimmung's group to be made up of "individuals bound together in purely external fashion for the instrumental pursuit of ends" (Eagleton 97).

Finally, Huizinga describes the necessity of play's ephemerality, its self-acknowledged impermanence. This essential quality of play contrasts to Glimmung's proclamations that they will all achieve a "PERMANENT ENDEAVOUR" that will last beyond their lives. The raising of Heldscella promises a temporal duration and a significance on a supra-historical and religious plane. The Glimmung claims that the job will have significance beyond and outside that of the action itself. This type of thought directly opposes the realm of play. Huizinga notes that play has a certain temporal "secludedness, its limitedness. It is 'played out' within certain limits of time and place. It contains its own course and meaning" (9). Each round of The Game must end. To orient oneself in the spirit of the Glimmung is the opposite of play; as Guy Debord writes: "Eternity is the grossest idea a person can conceive of in connection with his acts" ("Report" 41).

It is not surprising then that Joe finds the job with the Glimmung unfulfilling. The same desires that drove him to construct and play The Game remain unfulfilled by the task. During his time on Plowman's Planet the topic of The Game surfaces repeatedly. Moreover, it surfaces at moments in which Joe's immersion and involvement should be at its most intense. Firstly, whilst the majority of the employees debate the ethics of Glimmung's hiring practices and the need for a collective union, Joe continuously interrupts by bringing up the story of The Game:

“So anyway,” Joe said, “this article on engineering, when the computer translated it into English, had one strange term in it that appeared over and over. ‘Water sheep.’ What the hell does that mean? they all asked. I dunno, they all said. Well, what finally they—” (44)

Joe directs his speech largely at the marine biologist Miss Yojez. She doesn't acknowledge his off-topic remarks and continues to speak to the other workers suggesting that “Perhaps now is the time for us to establish a union and work collectively” (44). In the face of the malevolence of Glimmung, the lack of written contracts, the suspected collaboration between Earth-based QCA forces and the Glimmung, and the forced nature of their position, Joe continues to return to the subject of the mistranslated “hydraulic ram” (44). He continues to long for a connection with others on a subjective level.

The second point at which Joe brings up The Game is at what should be the novel's most intense point, the point at which the Glimmung is fighting an ultimate religious battle against the Black Glimmung. This scene is the novel's

climax, the scene during which the success of the entire venture depends. It is the scene in which the Glimmung's life is at stake. Joe Fernwright and Mali Yojez are standing on the edge of Mare Nostrum waiting for a sign of life from the Glimmung:

“He’s going to die,” Mali said quietly.

“Glimmung?” Joe asked.

She nodded. In the dim light her face seemed ghostly; across it vague shadows flitted, like ebbing tides.

“Did I ever tell you about The Game?” Joe said.

“I’m sorry; at this moment I—”

“It works this way. You take a book title, preferably one well known, and you feed it orally into a computer in Japan, which translates it into Japanese. Then you—” (110)

From a utilitarian perspective, this is perhaps the most inappropriate time possible for Joe to bring up The Game. To bring up what Mali terms his “puerile pastimes” from which Glimmung was trying to “save” him (111). Yet, at the same time, the reader cannot be surprised nor disappointed by Joe’s remarks. For no matter how exciting, adventurous, collectivised, or meaningful the Glimmung’s job is, it remains wholly restricted to the fulfilment of utilitarian ends. By their nature, these ends are inimical to and exclusionary of Joe’s ludic, creative and social needs. In fact, whilst Joe’s remarks initially appear distracted and callous they

actually represent a caring and feeling man reaching out to another human being. Ultimately, the scene represents that even the most absurdly amazing job will not suffice; work cannot satisfy Homo Ludens. The contradiction established in the opening scenes between work, play and creativity thus resurfaces. The Glimmung's job offer is revealed to have been a false turn, simply the intensification of the utilitarian status quo.

The novel concludes with a true synthesis of the opposition between work, play and art. Joe decides that instead of healing pots he will make them. Joe decides to embrace the risk of imperfection in the pursuit of a playful and creative hobby. He détourns his "Wheel," "clay," "glazes," and "kiln" away from their prior utilitarian function (147). Joe's creation of pots fit neatly within Huizinga's definition of play. The creation of the pot is a goal unto itself, much like playing a round in *The Game*. It is a voluntary activity and it takes place outside of the instrumental demands of ordinary life. The act plays out in its own limited temporality, and finally, it is connected with no material interest. Joe makes a brave decision to embrace a childlike spirit of playful creation which is utterly inimical to the utilitarian society he comes from. Joe's subversive turn is sealed in the novel's closing lines, "He professionally appraised its artistic worth" and concluded that "The Pot was awful" (148). Joe Fernwright is now ready for New Babylon. He is ready to travel the nomadic planes of a global playground, to engage in what Constant described as "*an uninterrupted process of creation and re-creation*, sustained by a generalized creativity that is manifested in all domains of activity" (Constant). Joe travelled to the limits of the joy that utilitarianism can bring. As he watched the Glimmung thrash in epic battle, all he could think of was

The Game. Joe Fernwright as Homo Ludens, a man inspired and sustained by play.



## Conclusion

This thesis looks back to a moment in time across a gulf of fifty years. The Dick novels I read were penned in the 1960s and the Situationist International officially dissolved itself in 1972. Both of these figures walked streets long since paved over. Dick cannot be read without sensing the Berkeley of the 1960s, its rich mixture of politics, religion and drugs. And the SI belong to the Paris of the 1950s and 60s, the cobblestones and coffeehouses, the presence of a powerful communist party to debate and to contradict. So what is the resonance between these figures and the world today? What is it in their work that still demands our attention? Despite recuperation, despite half a century of history.

A close reading of four Dick novels alongside the Situationists reveals a deep distrust of capitalist conceptions of progress. The dystopian worlds of *Ubik* (1969) and *Martian Time-Slip* (1964) are now twenty years in the past, the dreary planets of *Galactic Pot-Healer* (1969) lie just thirty years away. And though *The Game-Players of Titan* (1963) is set two hundred years from now, nuclear catastrophe and the gambling of property deeds are hardly unfamiliar events. The shock of Dick's fiction comes not from unknown futures, but from the absence of a future at all. Dick exposes capitalist promises of progress, from the era of peak hope, as having nothing to offer but more of the same.

In 2016, under the spectre of climate change, there has been renewed debate around the left's orientation toward conceptions of progress and technology. The debate has been invigorated by the publication of Alex Williams'

and Nick Srnicek's *Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics* (2013). Like Dick, Williams and Srnicek argue that the future "has been demolished by neoliberal capitalism," reduced to the promise of "greater inequality, conflict, and chaos" (#Accelerate). Unlike Dick, the manifesto demands that in order to recover a future worth fighting for, we must accelerate capitalist technoscience beyond its constricted neoliberal form. We must embrace and unleash technologies of mass quantification. We must reinstate the quest for the transcendence of "our immediate bodily forms." We must realise "the mid-Twentieth Century's space programme," and reach a properly accelerationist state of "future shock" (#Accelerate). In short, the accelerationists want the flying cars that they were promised in the 1960s. Williams and Srnicek would have done well to read some Philip K. Dick.

Dick's entire oeuvre is built upon exposing the decay at the centre of 1960s spectacular technology. In *The Game-Players of Titan* (1963) we find a future world saturated with malevolent, controlling technologies. Pete Garden's flying car is shown to strip agency rather than to unleash it. The Martian colony of *Martian Time-Slip* (1964), sees space technology as a tool for the extension of imperialist violence and the maintenance of an impoverished everyday life. Dick repeatedly pierced the confident myth of space colonization and not from a sense of pessimism. David Graeber details how even as the dreams of space travel and flying cars were being outlined "the material base for their achievement was beginning to be whittled away" ("Flying Cars"). Williams and Srnicek's desire to return to the 1960s is built upon a simplistic reading of the actually existing

material conditions. Technological change in the 1960s was in fact slowing down. The space race simply gave the illusion of speed.

The accelerationists want to realise the faded dreams of a capitalism built upon militarised consumerism. By contrast, Dick and the SI offer us the tools to properly hi-jack the spectacle and embark on a radical detour. Dick and the SI remind us of what is at stake in the survival of the human species. We are yet to achieve the revolution of everyday life, the construction of a meaningful, qualitative sense of time, and the creation of world centred on human goals, those of play, art, adventure and love.

These concluding reflections on the accelerationist debate signal the ongoing political and aesthetic relevance of Dick and the Situationists.

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