

Research Article

Hyperreal World and Simulated Identities in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

Yasamin Hemmat^{1*}, and Hoda Shabrang²

¹M.A. Graduate Student, Department of English Language and Literature, Khatam University, Tehran, Iran

²Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Khatam University, Tehran, Iran

Corresponding Author: Yasamin Hemmat, E-mail: Hemmat.Yasmin@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received: July 13, 2020

Accepted: August 30, 2020

Volume: 3

Issue: 8

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2020.3.8.13

KEYWORDS

Identity, Hyperreality, Simulation, Technology, Jean Baudrillard, Philip Dick, Consumerism

ABSTRACT

In today's postmodern world, the distinction between the real and the unreal has become confusing. This confusion is due to the impact of new media information and cybernetic technology; as a result, our personal and social life have gone under fundamental changes. Our lives have been affected by unreal images and information. We are being deceived by "Absolute Fake". Philip K. Dick in his novel portrays techno-consumer world with strange forms of media and technology that lead to hyperreality, and simulation. Dick's stories typically focus on the fragile nature of reality and the construction of personal identity. His stories often become surreal fantasies as the main characters slowly discover their everyday world is actually an illusion. Philip Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* illustrates a futuristic world where the creation of the android leads to a blurring of the line between the human and the android. Dick's oeuvre wants to answer to two major questions: "what is reality?" and "what is human being?" The philosophical guide for the purpose of looking into Dick's novel is Jean Baudrillard's concepts of simulation, simulacra and hyperreality. Simulacra to Baudrillard is more real than real; it is hyperreal. The hyperreal is simulation and simulation is a copy of copy which is removed from the original and even replaced by the original. Baudrillard argues that the hyperreal world offers fake as a reality. He believes that in techno-consumer culture the models, images, and codes come to control our thoughts and behaviors. In this novel, although characters consider technology and media information as a source of achieving reality, by reading Baudrillard's theory, this research wants to show that, there is no such a thing as reality and characters just slip into hyperreality which disintegrate their identities.

1. Introduction

Philip Dick has been able to win numerous awards for his novels, short stories and articles. He has written forty-five novels in the sci-fi genre, among which the novel "*Do Androids dream of Electric Sheep?*" (Dick, 1972) is considered by many critics as his best novel. The world in which Dick portrays in his novel is a universally-dominated technology that human beings are in an ongoing effort to identify the boundaries between themselves and robots; thus to define and prove their human identity. Through his studies in philosophy, Dick believes that existence is based on internal human perception, which does not necessarily correspond to external reality. After reading the works of Plato and pondering the possibilities of metaphysical realms, he comes to the conclusion that, in a certain sense, the world is not entirely real and there is no way to confirm whether it is truly there. This question from his early studies persisted as a theme in many of his novels. Dick's stories typically focus on the fragile nature of reality and the construction of personal identity. The post-humanistic world is depicted in Dick's novels, in which technology, with its destructive effects, challenges human identity and attempts to penetrate every aspect of human life. In Dick's world the boundary between humanity and machinery has been removed. From Baudrillard's perspective (1994), Dick's novels occur in a parallel world based on simulation. (p. 125). *Do Androids* depicts the extinction of human race and presence of technology in all areas of human life. The story was written during the Cold War, a time when

the atomic bombardment and other means of mass destruction, has created increasing concerns around the world. This novel also demonstrates the consumer society in which everything turns into the signs and images. Baudrillard believes that, present society is the society of images. The images are simulations and we consume the simulations. Thus, we now encounter a situation where there is no relation to any reality. Hence, in this novel the most important question that might arise is that can people sustain their identity in a techno-consumer society?

2. Objective of The Study

The purpose of this study is to explore Philip Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* under the light of Jean Baudrillard's theory. In this novel, Dick creates the world very similar to our contemporary society which is saturated with information and technology and people seek for reality through information and technology, while the distinction between reality and imaginary is long gone. A central concern in this research is how individual identity is treated in the hyperreal society. Therefore, in the examination of this novel, the main focus is on how the characters are affected by the hyperreal world, as well, as the effect of hyperreal condition on the development of their identities. The philosophical guide for the purpose of this inquiry is Jean Baudrillard's theory. The researcher is to answer the following questions by reading Philip Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* through Jean Baudrillard's theory:

- a) How does technology lead to the construction of simulation in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*
- b) How is identity called into question by hyperreality of world in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*
- c) What is the impact of techno-consumer society on the characters' identities?

3. Methodology and Approach

The concern of this research is Baudrillardian studying of Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Baudrillard is a philosopher who writes a philosophical treatise called *Simulacra and Simulation*. This book is best known for its discussion of images, signs, and how they relate to the present day. Baudrillard's philosophy centers on the twin concepts of "hyperreality" and "simulation". These expressions refer to the simulated or unreal nature of contemporary culture in an era of mass communication and mass consumption. We live in a world dominated by simulated experiences and feelings. We experience only prepared realities, edited war recording, meaningless acts of terrorism, and the destruction of cultural values. In Jean Baudrillard's words the hyperreal is entirely in simulation. A simulacrum is a copy of a copy, so far removed from its original, that it can stand on its own and even replace the original. "It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal substituting the signs of the real for the real" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 40). Baudrillard describes the period as an "age of simulations" (p. 41). Since due to the virtual reality, we are detached from reality and virtual reality is not just a particular technology "it is a concept that exceeds mere gadgetry and all its inevitable bugs and breakdowns. The concept is absolute simulation" (p. 247). Baudrillard's work suggests that simulation is particularly prolific in contemporary culture thereby altering our sense of the real. In an era of simulations, the models or codes undermine distinctions between the model and the real. We inhabit a society made up wholly of simulacra, simulations of reality which replace any pure reality. "The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth, it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true. We live in a world full of signs and symbols" (p. 1). "Pure reality" is thus replaced by the hyperreal where any boundary between the real and the imaginary is eroded. Baudrillard's work is an attempt to show that this is how we live and make sense of the world in postmodern times. He is arguing that the signs, simulations, and codes characterize the current era. Simulations are processes whereby events or situations in the past are replaced with virtual, electronic, or digitized images and signs. For instance, drama may simulate real life, we think of this as representation of some part of the real world that idealize or characterize aspects of the social world and television has carried this issue further. Hence, through mass media, simulacra indicate representations of the real but where the essence of the real is missing. What Baudrillard argues is that these simulacra are so universal that it is impossible to distinguish the real from simulacra. We live in a society of simulacra that's why it is no longer possible to distinguish reality from the simulacra. Since we live in a technologically-rich society where media largely shape and filter what we see, what we know to be true, authentic, or real is made by our perceptions as portrayed in mediated form.

Jean Baudrillard is also of the opinion that people are what they consume and are differentiated from other types of people based on consumed objects. Actually, "what we consume is not so much objects, but signs. Consumption is an act of the manipulation of signs. In order to become object of consumption, the object must become sign. It is the code that controls what we do, and do not, consume" (Kellner, 1989, p. 15). In the postmodern society, it is the code which controls the consumption behavior. In such a situation, consumption does not satisfy our needs. The needs are, in fact, not real; they are created by simulations. Toffoletti (2010) postulates that, "consumption is first and foremost a signifying activity that occurs at the level of everyday life. As a system, or order of signification; the consumer society organizes and reproduces signs in a way

that is not dissimilar to how language operates” (pp. 73-74). Therefore, in order to become object of consumption, the object must become sign. In such a situation, consumption does not satisfy our needs. The needs are, in fact, not real; they are created by simulations. For Baudrillard, (1994) the entire society is organized around consumption and display of commodities through which individuals gain prestige and identity. According to him “need is never so much the need for a particular object as the need for difference (the desire for social meaning)” (pp. 77-8). In such society, because everything has become accessible to everyone, and because of mass production, today’s generation desperately is in search of identity.

4. Disucssion

Do Androids happens after the nuclear global war in San Francisco and due to the radiation poisoning, most people depart the earth to the Mars. Rick Deckard is a bounty hunter who works for San Francisco police and his duty is to retire or kill the androids that have escaped from Mars and come to the Earth illegally. These androids are manmade and they are hired as servants. However, they are very intelligent and human-like, thus they are undistinguishable from human beings. Hence, replicants -androids that are indistinguishable from human being- are perfect copies of human beings and as such they challenge the possibility of identifying the humans. The only way to recognize them is through the empathy test since they lack sense of empathy.

Therefore, in this novel, androids and animals are similar to what Baudrillard has called simulation and simulacra. In postmodern world the term simulacrum generates a new concept for the word ‘real’. In searching for a redefinition of the notion of humanity, postmodernism challenges conventional perceptions of reality and witnesses the disappearance of originality within the age of endless proliferation of copies. The result of this proliferation of copies is the loss of originality by the shattering of one’s own identity. Baudrillard’s concept of simulacra implies the inability to locate the referent in the presence of a depthless image. The world of Dick’s novel is devoid of originality by elimination of the referent. Hence, there is no correspondence between images and their reference. Accordingly, the world now becomes simulacra where the sign replaces reality. Baudrillard argues that “the image bears no relation to any reality whatever; it is own pure simulacrum, a copy only of itself” (Olalquiaga, 1992, p. 8). Therefore, the copy has replaced the reality. Baudrillard believes that “very distinction between copy and original disappears. The simulacrum, as the type of representation produced by simulation, is a copy without original. The world itself is a copy of copy and the very notions of authenticity and truth lose their reference point” (Smith, 2010, p. 199). Henceforth, the technology of simulacra undermines the notion of originality by rejecting any differences between human beings and replicants. According to Baudrillard “people destroy the nature by trying to explore and exploit it, and after its devastation, they mourn for what they have destroyed and want to create the signs to simulate the lost things” (Klages, 2012, p. 79). Thus, in *Do Androids*, it is shown that characters live in a hyperreal world in which the boundary between real and unreal is blurred and the notion of identity is undermined.

4.1. Technology and Simulation

Do Androids shows the technological world in which everything becomes mechanical and digitalized; for example, human feelings are reduced to digital codes through the instrument called the Penfield Mood Organs through which any desired mood can be stimulated like the desire to watch TV. In the beginning of the story Iran, Deckard’s wife, decides to maintain her feelings in depressing mood. Deckard tells his wife “even with an automatic cut off it’s dangerous to undergo a depression of any kind” (Dick, 1972, p. 4). This comment of his is ironic as he is saying how dangerous it would be to dial for a depressed mood. However, he happily dials to feel happy about going to see his electric sheep, which he has no real feeling for. Deckard and his wife seem unaware that they do not actually need the Mood Organ to feel emotions, Deckard’s wife must have been depressed already to have wanted to dial to be depressed, thus this device indicates dependency on technology. Hence, in Philip Dick’s world, pure feelings of human being have turned into the apathetic codes. The Penfield Mood Organ is one of the examples of Baudrillardian simulacra and as mentioned before, the feelings produced by this device are not authentic. They are simulations of real feelings since they are programmed and selected by characters. Thereby, emotions have become products; emotions in that matter are not innate but artificial and this demonstrates the artificiality of technology that has invaded our lives. Attaway (2004) asserts that: Dick’s criticism of the loss of human desire, or freedom, is particularly expressed within the narrative through the use of the Penfield Mood Organ. The name of the device is suggestive for two reasons. First of all, the brand name is synonymous with its mention, which alludes to the capitalistic nature of this sensation- synthesizing device. Secondly, the term mood organ insists that the technological tool is a prosthetic that displaces the organic organ that might control these kind of responses naturally (p. 12).

This technology makes humans, like robots, a predictable and programmable inventory. Human beings can use technology to change their most humane states. “Humans are so out of touch with their emotions that they must resort to machines in order to feel anything at all” (Olalquiaga, 1992, p. 23). Therefore, humans are unable to feel and feelings have to be produced

artificially. It also illustrates the fact that humans have the same planning and ability to be controlled as does the machine. As a result, this device depicts the hyperreal world in which we desire something that does not exist but we create this desired thing to fulfill our eagerness.

In this story, even animals are artificial and mechanical since animal species are extinct and only few of them have remained. And every person who owns a real animal is considered as rich and high class. Deckard, also for buying one of these real animals, has decided to be a bounty hunter in order to make a fortune. Henceforth, the purpose of owning animals has changed from having a pet or taking care of the remaining animals, to a sign of wealth. Baudrillard believes that capitalism murders true needs of human and instead creates new needs, which are not needed naturally, and then inspires people to buy more and more to meet these needs (p. 28). Thereby, the reader comes to the conclusion that buying real animal is not just an empathetic act but it concerns money and finance.

The world of hyperreal exists throughout the novel. Even the food in this story is simulated. As Isidor says, "like a cup of water or rather milk; yes, it's milk or flour or maybe an egg- or, specifically their ersatz substitutes" (Dick, 1972, p. 20). Here ersatz means a product made or used as a substitute, typically an inferior one, for something else. After the nuclear war real products have disappeared and the hyperreality of the ersatz products have replaced reality. Furthermore, we also confront with simulated human beings. Characters of this novel are divided into two categories: human beings and androids. Accordingly, there is a binary opposition between nature and technological life. However, through showing this opposition, Philip Dick is questioning the nature of human being in the technological society. He actually wants to answer this question: whether any identity and essence can exist in an industrial and technological society? By juxtaposition of human and androids, he challenges the authenticity of human nature. Thus, this story, is the story of the postmodern world in which all boundaries between the real and the fake are broken, entering into the hyperreality. Androids here are considered as simulations since they are copies of something that resembles a human being but still are not of an original reality and they are not manufactured to be human either; however, they are produced to be exploited by humans, used as slaves on Mars. According to Haraways (2000), there is barely a distinction between human and machine now, they are both programmed in some way or another. As androids are programmed by their creator, humans are programmed by media and society (Dick, 1972, p. 68). For instance, Isidore is told that he is a chicken head, even so he does not know what chicken head means. "I've been living here alone too long. I've become strange. They say chicken heads are like that" (Dick, 1972, p. 55). Therefore, Isidor allows himself to be manipulated by society and media.

4.2. Humanity of Androids and Inhumanity of Human

In this story, when Deckard accepts to work as a bounty hunter, he is sure of his ability to distinguish between androids and humans since he knows that androids lack empathy; they seem to be cold and emotionless. Therefore, through the Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test, he is able to recognize them. The Voigt-Kamff test is an attempt to differentiate between androids and humans, but even this test cannot resolve this crisis since the main problem is that the boundary between androids and humans are blurred. The problem is the rate of penetration of technology in all aspects of human life. The point of using this test is that even the separation of the boundary between man and machine is also possible by technology and by the presence of technology. It seems that the machine has the ability to recognize humans more than humans themselves do. "Am I a man, am I a machine?" There is no answer of any more to this anthropological question" (Clarke et al., 2009, p. 22).

Deckard has to destroy androids without sympathizing with them, nonetheless, he convinces himself that he never kills a human being and he accepts this job since he thinks androids are dangerous. "Evidently the humanoid robot constituted a solitary predator. Rick liked to think of them that way; it made his job palatable. In retiring-killing- an android, he did not violate the rule of life laid down by Mercer. You shall kill only the killers (Dick, 1972, p. 28)."

As can be seen death of the android is titled as "Retirement". In fact, this can be perceived as a human effort who seeks to differentiate as much as possible between humans and androids to give himself a transcendental definition of the concept of humanity. If man cannot prove that the human race has intrinsic qualities that make him superior to other beings, he will not be able to maintain his control over the world.

The first android Deckard encounters with is Rachael of the Rosen Association. Rachael who works for androids' company is totally like a human being. The thought lying behind the mass production of androids by the Rosen Association is what Jean Baudrillard informs us when he represents his postmodern philosophy of simulacra; "the whole system becomes weightless; it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum: not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference" (Baudrillard, 2002, p. 404). The Nexus-6 types, cutting-edge androids fabricated by the Rosen Association, are replicas of real human beings. Their intellects, their memories and their identities all share the human features. However, they are simulacra whose association with their models

is removed. Accordingly, for the first time Deckard comes to realization that, distinguishing androids from human beings is a very difficult task and even after giving an empathy test to Racheal he realizes the uncertainty of the answer of the test. Rachel's correct answer to the test comes somewhat late, demonstrating that she has a simulated empathy and not a genuine one. Finally, Deckard discovers that Rachael is an android. "She must be a Nexus-6. I'm seeing one of them for the first time. And they damn near did it; they came awfully damn close to undermining the Voigt-Kampff scale, the only method we have for detecting them" (Dick, 1972, p. 52). This is in accord with what Baudrillard says: "an immense uncertainty is all that remains from the sophistication of networks of communication and information – the undecidability of knowing whether there is real knowledge in there or not" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 22). Hence, due to the massive network of information in era of technology, one cannot be certain about his/her knowledge.

The second woman Deckard faces with is Luba Luft. She is a professional opera singer and Deckard tends to retire her after the opera. Yet, he is fascinated by her voice and femininity and in his idea Luba is the sign of ultimate creativity and ability of human being. After going to Luba to arrest her, he becomes shocked since Luba mentions that he is cold and unfeeling. "You must be an android... because your job is to kill them, isn't it?... You seem so peculiar and hard and strange" (Dick, 1972, pp. 86-87). Thus, she asks him to take an empathy test first. Deckard cannot give a test to Luba since she calls a police station and they take him with themselves. Deckard finds out that it is a fake police station that belongs to androids. Later on, he gets to know someone named Phil Resch who is according to inspector Garland, an android. When Resch kills Garland, he and Deckard run away from that place; meanwhile, Resch asks Deckard whether he considers android as an object and Deckard answers that: "I did it at one time... when my conscience occasionally bothered me about the work I had to do; I protected myself by thinking of them that way but now I no longer find it necessary" (p. 108). After giving a test to Resch, it is shown that he is a human. But after finding out about Resch's identity, he makes doubt about reality since he realizes that he is not able to distinguish between the real and the unreal. When Resch takes the empathy test he says he takes care of a squirrel and asks Deckard if he saw an android who can take care of an animal and Deckard answers him "he is unable to keep the animal alive. Animals require an environment of warmth to flourish; "Except for reptiles and insects" (p. 135). Thus, here the fixed definition of the human subject is challenged.

The important point to take into consideration is that before Deckard kills Luba, she wants him to buy an artwork for her. This request by Mrs. Loft represents part of the existence of this android that brings her closer to humans. Thus, an android can understand beauty and art; however, Deckard, eventually destroys this work of art. Hence, although an android wants the artwork as her last request, a human being destroys the same work of art. But After the Luba is killed, Deckard sympathizes with her for the first time. And the sympathy of human being with an android represents a tremendous transformation in human attitude of the post-humanist era. Such a sensation actually eliminates the distance between the man and the machine and places them on the same level. Perhaps that's why android's useful life is only four years old. The creators of these humanoid robots know well that the long life of androids, and subsequently their greater association with humans, make them alike. As it has stated, after killing Luba, Deckard becomes very disturbed and he starts sympathizing with her:

He had never thought of it before, had never felt any empathy on his own part toward the androids he killed. Always he had assumed that throughout his psyche he experienced the androids as a clever machine—as in his conscious view...Empathy toward an artificial construct? He asked himself. Something that only pretends to be alive? But Luba Luft had seemed genuinely alive; it had not worn the aspect of a simulation (Dick, 1972, p. 121).

Thus, he asks Resch to take the empathy test from him and he discovers that he is able to show emotional responses toward a female android "Rick said, I'm capable of feeling empathy for at least specific, certain androids" (p. 122). Therefore, he says to Resch, "I'm getting out of this business... I can't anymore; I've had enough" (p. 117). Deckard who is conscience-stricken at his killing Luba Luft, finds out about the inhumanity of human beings and the humanity of androids. Therefore, he feels that there is no way to prove that humans are real and not androids. He makes doubt about his humanity so he tells himself "what I've done, he thought; that's become an alien to me. In fact, everything about me has become unnatural; I've become an unnatural self" (p. 230). Jill Galvan also asserts that "as Rick himself realizes, bounty hunting no longer fortifies an inherited notion of himself as subject; it rather challenges all that he understands to be" (p. 426). Accordingly, here the notions of self and other and subject and object have been undermined. Hence, "what we are witnessing is nothing less than the disappearance of the human. There is a vanishing of will and freedom, because consciousness is now everywhere, absorbed into the world of objects" (Clarke et al., 2009, p. 45). Thus, in a technological world machines replaces human being and human being becomes machine-like.

Although Deckard becomes doubtful about his identity and he is on the horns of a dilemma between his conscience and his job, he chooses the latter over the former. Rachael, the android from Rosen Association, tries to use her femininity to dissuade him from killing the remaining androids. As a result, she has empathy towards other androids. For this matter, she sleeps with him since she thinks if she does this, he will not kill Pris, her twin. But their sexual relation does not affect Deckard's emotions since their relation is so mechanical, devoid of any emotion. In terms of emotions, Deckard is as cold as replicant. However, Rachael's feelings are even more than Deckard's since she shows her concern about her identity. Her awareness of her technological nature points to the undeniable proximity of androids and humans, since Rachael, like humans, is self-conscious about the difference between human and android. More importantly, Rachel Rosen attempts to establish an affective relation with Deckard, a relationship that appears to be possible only among humans. Therefore, *Do Androids* (1972) depicts human characters in androids:

Androids can't bear children...Is it a loss? I don't really know; I have no way to tell. How does it feel to have a child? How does it feel to be born, for that matter? We're not born; we don't grow up; instead of dying from illness or old age we wear out like ants. Ants aging; that is what we are. Not you. I mean me. Chitinous reflex-machines who aren't really alive... I'm not alive! You're not going to bed with a woman (p. 165).

Also after Pris has been killed by Deckard, Rachael pushes Deckard's goat- the real goat that he bought to prove his humanity-off the roof. Moreover, this act shows that Rachael has, indeed, some humanistic emotions. Katherine Hayles (1999) postulates that:

He turns home to discover that Rachael has pushed his goat off the roof, Why? Because she is jealous of his love for the goat, or in revenge for his killing her friends...? whichever interpretation one chooses, the action is not consistent with the official picture of android psychology, which like Dick's essays insists that androids are incapable of feeling loyalty or indeed feeling anything at all (p. 170).

Another point about Rachael is her identity. She might be taken for Pris, the android that Deckard is looking for to kill, since she exactly looks like Pris. "In the confusion you'll retire me, not her... We are machines, stamped out like bottle caps. It's an illusion that I_ I personally_ really exist; I'm representative of a type" (Dick, 1972, p. 11). For this reason, Rachael who is a copy of human beings, can be replaced by Pris. Thus, Rachael is duplicated. As Deckard says, "there is no Pris... only Rachael Rosen, over and over again" (p. 12). Accordingly, this sentence shows the process of simulation in which a copy is placed by another copy in an interminable circuit. Rachael becomes an example of the postmodern depthless image which does not hold a particular identity. The result of such proliferation of images is a crises of identity. Thus, in postmodern era, the individual is constantly seeking for his/her identity to prove their existence, though this image of 'self' gives rise to feeling of fragmentation. As Olalquiaga (1992) asserts:

Images are central to the shaping of identity: largely constituted by the perception of the self as a separate totality, identity must resort to an image to acquire a sense of wholeness. Without such a reflection of the self onto a literal or figurative mirror, self-perception remains fragmented- exactly as if we had never seen our image in full (p. 13).

Therefore, when technology makes replication, it problematizes the concept of authenticity, and the idea of identification is questioned as well. As can be seen, there is an ultimate collapse between reality and its representation since it is no longer possible to differentiate between the real and the fake.

4.3. Media and Simulated Religion

When Deckard is on the verge of doubt, goes home to connect through empathy box to ask help from Mercer. However, not only does not Mercer help him, but also he makes him more doubtful. "How can I save you... if I can't save myself?... Don't you see? There is no salvation... You will be required to do wrong no matter where you go. It is the basic condition of life, to be required to violate your own identity" (Dick,1972, p. 152). Thus, according to Mercer, human beings are required to violate their own identity and this issue leads to suffering. Mercerism is a theological school which results in empathy among people. Mercer, the prophet of this doctrine, is able to turn back time and resuscitates death animals. But some people are against the revival of the dead animals; therefore, they arrest him and destroy the tumor in his mind which is the source of his power by radioactive radiation; then they imprison him in the underworld. Every day, Mercer, Sisyphus like, has to ascend to the top of the hill and after that he rolls down. As a result, he is in a perpetual ascension. Another aspect of his religion is that, each person is able to empathize with other human being only through getting the handle of empathy box, in that way they can attain peace. While only humans are able to communicate with Mercer, the androids cannot connect with him due to lack of empathy. The empathy box indicates the emptiness of the human world from any human meaning and the

entrance into a fully mechanized world. In this technological world, human beings gradually get away from their inherent characteristics.

As it already mentioned, Mercer goes to the endless cycle of repeated suffering, which can be interpreted as human suffering. The recurrence of suffering, which has been objectified in the form of Mercer, can be implicitly interpreted as the futility of human effort in the era of technology in the creation of meaning. The question is what does human life expect to be in a world where its religious leader has been so caught up in futility? And in such a world, is salvation of human being possible? The fact that only humans can communicate with Mercer. This effort is based on the assumption that the android is free from any sense of belonging to a transcendental power. A question which might come to the reader's mind is that, is Mercer a real prophet in the hyperreal and simulated world or not? Here, we encounter the type of religion which is produced in technological society. Hence, Mercerism is an android's religion and an empathy box is like TV or a virtual world. It just creates an illusion of empathy and affinity. According to Jennifer Attaway (2004), empathy box is "a site of communication, a way in which human beings merge into a virtual embrace" (p. 11) and Anthony Enns (2006) also calls Mercerism a "television religion" (p. 81). Thus, Mercerism acts like Television, although it offers unity and affinity to people, at the same time it creates remoteness and alienation. As can be seen, by holding the handles of an empathy box, characters begin a virtual journey above hills. All kind of people hold these handles and start to climb up the hills together forming a collective mind. This reminds us of Baudrillard, who purports that we are mass-produced children of a media society.

Hence, in a simulated world which is under the dominance of technology, there would be no authentic relation between human beings since technology gives rise to detachment and estrangement. Bukatman (1993) asserts that "A citizenry alienated by the industrialist-capitalist mode of production is granted an illusion of belonging and participation; the fragmentation of the productive and social realms is replaced by the appearance of coherence and wholeness" (p. 37). Therefore, as mentioned before, Mercerism is a fake religion; it is the religion of androids and in fact Mercer is an alcoholic actor named Al Jerry:

Al Jerry made a repetitious and dull film... It has often been said by adherents of the experience of Mercerism that Wilbur Mercer is not a human being, that he is in fact an archetypal superior entity perhaps from another star. Well, in a sense this contention has proven correct. Wilbur Mercer is not human, does not in fact exist. The world in which he climbs is a cheap, Hollywood, commonplace sound stage which vanished into kipple years ago (Dick, 1972, p. 203).

Although he is fake, all characters believe in him. One of the characters who is very dependent on empathy box and Mercerism is Isidore. Due to the radioactive dusts, he is afflicted with physical and mental problem that is why he is called especial. Therefore, he is not able to travel to other planets and he is an outcast who needs compassion. When Pris and other androids take refuge to his house, he accepts them warmly and protects them. As stated before, he uses empathy box more than other characters to gain spiritual unity since he cannot attain this closeness in real life. Isidore believes that "an empathy box is the most personal possession you have! It's an extension of your body; it's the way you stop being alone" (p. 57). Nonetheless, one day Mercer appears to Deckard to give him a message without the help of the empathy box. "What you are doing has to be done... Quick, Mr. Deckard" (p. 198). As a consequence, Mercer is at the same time a real and a fake prophet since in the postmodern world there is no boundary between the real and the counterfeit. The messenger of the postmodern world appears to people through a box which is similar to TV. Therefore, the religion of this hyperreal world is a simulated religion. Yet, all characters accept it because there is no way for them to distinguish between the real and the unreal. On top of that, empathy, which is the only yardstick to discern authenticity, has been undermined. "Mercerism is a swindle. The whole experience of empathy is a swindle" (Dick, 1972, p. 204). As a result, there is no transcendental signified and there is no touchstone for morality. According to Mercer, all people have to do wrong since there is no way for distinction between good and bad. As Mercer said, "I am required to do wrong. Everything I've done has been wrong from the start" (p. 200). Accordingly, in this story we confront a Godless world in which we cannot separate true from false. According to Baudrillard in "an age of simulacra and simulation, in which there is no longer any God to recognize his own, nor any last judgment to separate true from false, the real from its artificial resurrection" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 9).

After seeing Mercer, Deckard feels that he becomes Mercer himself. "I'm Wilbur Mercer; I've permanently fused with him. And I can't unfuse" (Dick, 1972, p. 206). However, fusion between Deckard and Mercer is the fusion of reality with fakeness. "Mercer isn't a fake. Unless reality is a fake" (p. 208). Hence, through the assimilation of the real and the fake we encounter the state of hyperreality. Thereupon, in the world of this story "there is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 3). As a result, everything here is simulated and "simulation threatens the difference between true and false, between real and imaginary"

(p. 4). Therefore, in this society, the main purpose of Deckard is not searching for androids, on the other hand, he is seeking himself; his search is the quest for authenticity of human nature. The more he loses interest in his job, the more confidence he gains in Mercer's view, "What a job to have to do, Rick thought. I'm a scourge. Like famine or plague. Where I go the ancient curse follows. As Mercer said, I am required to do wrong. Everything I have done has been wrong from the start (Dick, 1972, pp. 193-194).

Aside from the empathy box, there is another technological apparatus which controls the minds of characters. It is a TV program named 'Buster friendly'. Buster has a television and radio show as each conducts for "twenty-three unbroken warm hours a day" (p. 63). During this time its audiences are subjected to advertisement almost every hour of the day, stopping the audiences from thinking about the messages the show is distributing. Baudrillard interprets the media:

As key simulation machines which reproduce images, signs and codes which in turn come to constitute an autonomous realm of hyperreality. Media intensify massification by producing mass audiences and homogenized ideas and experience. So the masses absorb all media content and demand and obtain more spectacle and entertainment, thus further eroding the boundary between media and the real (Lane, 2009, pp. 68-69).

Moreover, Buster himself blurs the boundaries of reality as it would be improbable for a human to produce two live shows, twenty-three hours a day. The television shows further blurs the line between reality and illusion when Buster apparently divulges reality by displaying Mercer as a fake. Buster exposes Mercer as a fake but he still hides reality as he does not accept that he is an android, instead, this is informed to Isidore by Pris, an android, when she says "Buster is one of us" (p. 184). Buster reveals the truth about Mercerism but it is in his interests not to disclose the reality about himself, therefore he still prevents the characters from knowing the reality. According to Baudrillard, society is 'sheltered from reality' and believes that the reality of society is constructed by the mass media to an extent that 'reality' is unobtainable. Hence in the technological era where everything is presented through media, there would be no criterion for distinguishing the real from the fake; on that account, the conflict between Buster Friendly and Wilbur Mercer demonstrates the powerful influence that technology has on humans. These two characters, both products of technology, compete for humans' attentions and at the same time they want to manipulate humans' thoughts. This struggle represents the absolute control that technology exercises on humans. According to Jill Galvan (1997):

Technology drastically compromises and insulated human community in two ways: it separates the individual from human contact; but more significantly, it makes us her dependent upon-addicted to- the life of machine. Hooked up to her empty box, entranced by the simulation of television screen, the human has already, become the post human (p. 418).

Later on when Deckard finds a toad and he thinks that for the first time he detects something real. Moreover, he assumes that he sees everything through the Mercer's eyes. "Did Mercer arrange it? But I'm Mercer. I arranged it; I found the toad. Found it because I see through Mercer's eyes" (Dick, 1972, p. 220). Nonetheless, he soon finds out that the toad is also a fake. However, in the end he and Iran accept the fake toad which indicates the acknowledgment of the hyperreal world in which they live. Finally, Deckard says, "Electric things have their own lives (p. 241). Recognizing androids' life represents a huge change in the human approach to technology. Olalquiaga (1992) argues that "no longer distinguishable from computers, the body is thought of as a system whose parts are perfectible and replaceable. Slowly, body and computer have begun to exchange their peculiar traits: the body becomes mechanized at the same rate that technology is made human" (p. 23). Accordingly, juxtaposition of humans and androids leads to an intertwined relationship between these two.

5. Conclusion

To put it in a nutshell, *Do Androids' world* is the site of everything that is alienating: the empathy box, the TV and even the religion, Mercerism. Inauthenticity pervades the world of *Do Androids*, in which animals, religion and even characters' emotions are ersatz imitations. Hence, in this world the question of identity would be undermined since human and android share common points. Their feelings and individuality are manipulated as they are produced artificially. Consequently, through technological devices such as the Mood Organs and the empathy box, the story is questioning the notion of humanity. This novel illustrates the notion of postmodern identity in which the concept of autonomous subject is challenged. *Do Androids* problematizes the definition of being a human in a world that relies on simulation to the point where differentiation between the real and simulation is both almost impossible and futile. The artificial beings become representatives of the new reality that discard all notions of originality. This story also delineates the fact that androids are more human than their human counterparts. At the same time, humans are androids and are the ones who lack empathy for their own kind. Hence, replicants become humanized by the appropriation of human features, like feelings, whereas human

beings become mechanized by being apathetic. Therefore, postmodern individuals end up in a state of despair to keep their identity, since the body has been replaced by the technological inventions. Consequently, in the novel, the boundary between humanity and technology is blurred to the point where social identity no longer uniquely belongs to human being; now androids, simulated human organisms, have human characteristics and social identity as well. Thus, this simulated world which is based on reproduction, brings about a crisis of identity, as the individuals are never sure about their identities. They are reduced to codes and their identities are disintegrated. Hence, Dick's novel illustrates the most significant feature of postmodern era: the limitation on human knowledge of truth and reality. In consequence, in the world where reality is replaced by simulacra, the concept of truth is lost.

Apart from Baudrillardian theory, Dick's works can be studied through the lights of Guy Debord, Jameson and Zizek's discussions of the capitalist basis of postmodernism. Fredric Jameson and Zizek have demonstrated interest for reading Dick's fiction to develop a theory of postmodernism which is essentially colored by Marxist ideas. Guy Debord rereads Marx's notion of commodity fetishism in today's world of media and images. Debord perceives the feature of society of spectacle as the moment when our social life is colonized by commodity and consumerism. Moreover, these philosophers raise the question of ideology and argue that the practices and systems of representation that produce our understanding and perception of ourselves and of our reality play an essential part in the maintenance and reproduction of our existence. Thus, the critical works done by most scholars on Dick tend to take into account how his fictions divulge the ideology of capitalist society by exploring the role of technology in shaping the characters' perception of reality, and how in doing so Dick opens up a new perspective for critique of ideology.

About the Authors

Yasamin Hemmat (M.A.) holds an M.A. in Dramatic Literature from Azad University, Tehran Central Branch. She received her M.A. in English Literature from Khatam University, Tehran, Iran. She is also a part-time English teacher.

Hoda Shabrang (PhD), Assistance Professor of English Language and Literature, Faculty Member, English Department, Khatam University, Tehran, Iran. Dr. Hoda Shabrang is a university lecturer in BA, MA and PhD of English Literature in Tehran Azad University, Ershad Damavand University and Khatam University since 2013. She received her PhD from Putra University, Malaysia. She has published a number of books, articles and papers on several literary texts and films.

References

- [1] Attaway, J. (2004). Cyborg bodies and digitized desires: Posthumanity and Phillip K. Dick. Reconstruction: *Studies in contemporary culture*, 4(3). <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/043/attaway.htm>. Accessed 20 May 2019.
- [2] Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and simulation*. Sheila Glaser (Trans.). Ann Arbor: Michigan University Publisher.
- [3] Baudrillard, J. (2002). Simulacra and simulations, In D. Lodge and N. Wood (Eds.), *Modern Criticism and Theory* (pp. 404-412), Singapore: Longman.
- [4] Bukatman, S. (1993). *Terminal identity: The virtual subject in postmodern science fiction*. USA: Duke University Publisher.
- [5] Clarke, D. B., Doel, M., Merrin, W., & Smith, R. G., (2009). *Jean Baudrillard: Fatal theories*. London: Routledge.
- [6] Dick, P. K. (1972). *Do Androids dream of electric sheep?* Great Britain: Grafton.
- [7] Enns, A. (2006). Media, drugs, and schizophrenia in the works of Philip K. Dick. *Science Fiction Studies* 33(1), 68-88.
- [8] Galvan, J. (1997). Entering the Posthuman collective in Philip K. Dick: Do Androids dream of electric sheep? *Science Fiction Studies*, 24(3), 413-429.
- [9] Haraway, D. J. (2000). A Manifesto for cyborgs: Science, technology, and socialist feminism in the 1980s. In G. Kirkup et al. (Ed.) *The gendered cyborg*. London: Routledge.
- [10] Hayles, N. K. (1999). *How we became posthuman: Virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics*. Chicago: Chicago University Publisher.
- [11] Kellner, D. (1989). *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to postmodernism and beyond*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- [12] Klages, M. (2012). *Key terms in literary theory*. London: Continuum International Publishing.
- [13] Lane, R. (2009). *Jean Baudrillard (Routledge critical thinkers)*. London: Routledge.
- [14] Olalquiaga, C. (1992). *Megalopolis: Contemporary cultural sensibilities*. USA: Minnesota University.
- [15] Smith, R. (2010). *The Baudrillard Dictionary*. Scotland: Edinburgh University Press Publisher.
- [16] Toffoletti, K. (2010). Baudrillard Reframed. *LES Review of Book*. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseviewofbooks/2012/09/24/ baudrillard-reframed-kim-toffoletti/>



Your gateway to world-class research



©2020 The Author(s). This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license.

You are free to:

Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format.

Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially.

Under the following terms:

Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made.

You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

No additional restrictions

International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation is published by Al-Kindi Center for Research and Development.

Why Publish with Us?

Indexed in world-class databases

Open access format of published content ensures maximum visibility

Prestigious Editor-in-Chief with a strong expertise in the field

Prompt submission and review process

Retention of full copyright of your article

Nominal article processing charges (APCs)

Rapid online publication of your paper following expert peer review

Every article is provided with DOI (Digital Object Identifier)

Free certificate of Article publication

Extensive global readership and online visibility

Discounts and waivers for authors in developing regions

Submit your manuscript to International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation at editor@ijllt.org