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Author(s): Jill Galvan

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Jill Galvan

**Entering the Posthuman Collective in
Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?***

"The morning air, spilling over with radioactive motes, gray and sun-beclouding, belched about him, haunting his nose; he sniffed involuntarily the taint of death."¹ Such is the atmosphere that assails Rick Deckard, protagonist bounty hunter of Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, as he sets out upon his most lucrative—yet final—day in the business. Insidious, strangely menacing, the air Rick breathes confronts him with the perils of his world, a world increasingly transformed by nuclear fallout and the forces of entropy. Additionally, it is a world progressively peopled—both literally and figuratively—by technological devices, among which the android, a "solitary predator," seems as greatly to endanger human survival as the tainted environment (§3: 31). Against the backdrop of televisions, vidphones, and mood organs, Rick meets head-on with this consummate twenty-first-century machine, the humanoid robot that has murdered its master in assertion of its liberty. Indeed, as much for its will to independence as for its manifest violence, the fugitive android threatens a community of authentic human subjects: capable of masquerading as non-android, it blends in with mainstream society, infringing upon the boundaries of the human collective. In short, the machine, by declaring its right to live as an autonomous self, challenges the very categories of life and selfhood—and, in turn, the ontological prerogative of its creators.

For Dick, this fictional predicament does not far exaggerate the conditions of nonfictional reality, of an existence progressively altered by innovations in technology. In "The Android and the Human," a speech delivered four years after the publication of *Do Androids Dream*, Dick addresses just this issue of a progressively blurred distinction between humans and their own mechanical creations.

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

And what can we glean from the growing animation of the things that surround us? As much about *their* being as about ours, Dick says: "Rather than learning about ourselves by studying our constructs, perhaps we should make the attempt to comprehend what our constructs are up to by looking into what we ourselves are up to" (184). But as Dick goes on to explain, the two explora-

tions are not easily divisible: whether we accept it unquestioningly or rebel against it, technology, in the hands of the powers that be, has acquired not simply a life of its own, but a life that substantially infiltrates *our* lives, changing our character in subtle yet meaningful ways. If we succumb unwittingly—or, worse, indifferently—to the totalitarian mechanization of our world, we risk becoming androids ourselves, reduced to “humans of mere use—men made into machines” (187). To deny technology’s pervasive role in our existence means, then, to deny reality—the reality of a world in which we are advancingly imbricated in a mechanical presence. Only by recognizing how it has encroached upon our understanding of “life” can we come to full terms with the technologies we have produced.

Do Androids Dream tells the story of one individual’s gradual acceptance of these changing parameters. A bildungsroman for the cybernetic age, Dick’s novel describes an awakening of the posthuman subject. As I hope to illustrate in the remainder of this paper, Rick Deckard’s experience policing the boundaries between human and android teaches him to question the traditional self-other dyad, which affirms a persistent human mastery over the mechanical landscape. The androids Rick encounters, together with the numerous machines by which he and others interface with their world, blast the illusion of an exclusive and empathic community of humans, one uncompromised by the technologies with which they share the Earth. *Do Androids Dream* thus interrogates a fixed definition of the human subject and at last acknowledges him as only one component of the living scene. In effect, the narrative repudiates the idea of a confined human community and envisions a community of the *posthuman*, in which human and machine commiserate and comaterialize, vitally shaping one another’s existence.

At the novel’s outset, however, Rick has yet to rethink the dominant ideology of the juridical system that employs him. He accepts without contest the ontological categories of his culture, according to which humans’ principal difference from their android look-alikes lies in their ability to feel empathy. This credo, which Rick adheres to in order to identify his android victims, not only nominally separates human from machine, but also helps to insulate the human community: if humans alone have the power to empathize, then their only emotionally profitable, mutually beneficial relationships occur with each other. The android’s deficiency patently expels it from the collective—any collective, for that matter, even one of other androids. As the party line goes, the android lacks the capacity for fellow feeling for its own kind as much as it does for human beings. “An android,” Rick avers, “doesn’t care what happens to another android” (§9:101).

But as it gets played out in the novel, this reputed existential distinction runs into irresolvable contradictions. Notably, a few of the androids Rick deals with exhibit what appears to be caring for their own kind and even, in some cases, for the humans with whom they interact. N. Katherine Hayles has pointed out that Rachael Rosen, the android who most pointedly calls Rick to account for his actions, shows real concern for the six escaped androids he has been commissioned to “retire.” After seducing him in order to detour him

from his task, for example, Rachael confesses to Rick that she and one of his victims “had been close, very close friends for almost two years” (§17:199). Moreover, in both word and deed, Rachael intimates her affection for a human—for Rick himself. “After Rick succeeds in killing the last three andys,” Hayles notes,

he returns 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.²

And if on the one hand androids reveal their ability to feel compassion, the reader begins to surmise, on the other hand, that what passes for “empathy” among humans derives far more from a cultural construction than from any categorical essence. The Voigt-Kampff scale—which, because it measures empathy, Rick uses to ensure the android identity of his potential prey—throws into relief the contrived nature of this putatively most basic of human qualities. Almost all of the scenarios Rick poses to his respondents stage some incident of animal cruelty—a live lobster in a pot of boiling water, a stag’s head mounted on a cabin wall, a nude woman lying on a bearskin rug. Yet one quickly identifies these hypothetical situations for what they really are: instances of brutality and exploitation, yes, but not uncommon in many social contexts—in fact, too common to trigger consistent empathic reactions in most human beings. As Judith B. Kerman aptly puts it, the scenarios that Rick professes to his android suspects would not, should they generate an apathetic response, “differentiate [androids] from modern Americans” (71).

The Voigt-Kampff scale refers in large part to incidents of animal mistreatment because live animals, in a post-nuclear era which finds them scarce, have been fetishized as the repositories of human empathy. Additionally, though purchasing one entails a considerable expense, a live animal marks the buyer as a zealous adherent of Mercerism. The legendary eponym of this widespread philosophy/religion, a figure persecuted by the authorities for bringing dead animals back to life, encourages animal ownership as a sign of his followers’ moral solidarity. Those who regularly submit themselves to Mercerist “fusion” endure the utmost in human empathy: in gripping the handles of the empathy box, they experience the pain of Wilbur Mercer—whose screen image toils ceaselessly up a desert mountain to extract himself from the “tomb world” to which he has been sentenced—as well as the emotions of every other Mercer devotee.

By the close of the narrative, though, Wilbur Mercer has been exposed as a sham—a bit player named Al Jarry hired to lend his image to the empathy box. Behind the facade of the new messiah lies only a hack actor, an alcoholic now living in Indiana amid a welter of entropic “kipple.” Buster Friendly—another cultural icon, who happens to be an android, unbeknownst to his own fans—clearly revels in his human audience’s misplaced idolatry: “Wilbur Mercer is not human, does not in fact exist. The world in which he climbs is

a cheap Hollywood, commonplace sound stage which vanished into kipple years ago. And who, then has spawned this hoax on the Sol System? Think about that for a time, folks" (§18:209). Having raised the possibility of a mass conspiracy, however, Buster Friendly does not stop there. He goes on to indict not simply the theology of Mercerism, but an entire ethic of human empathy. "Ask yourselves," he demands of his TV viewers, "what it is that Mercerism does. Well, if we're to believe its many practitioners, the experience fuses... men and women throughout the Sol System into a single entity. But an entity which is manageable by the so-called telepathic voice of 'Mercer.' Mark that. An ambitious politically minded would-be Hitler could—" (§18:209).

As Buster Friendly insinuates in his own heavy-handed fashion, Mercerism and the ideology of empathy that is its mainstay, far from appealing to innate human characteristics, function merely as the means by which the government controls an otherwise unwieldy populace. Earlier in the narrative, John Isidore—a brain-damaged fallout victim, who covets the human companionship that his "chickenhead" label precludes—speculates confusedly about Buster Friendly's evident antagonism towards Mercerism. Isidore cannot reconcile Buster's attitude with the official endorsements the theology has received: "No one else seemed bothered by it; even the U.N. approved. And the American and Soviet police had publicly stated that Mercerism reduced crime by making citizens more concerned about the plight of their neighbors. Mankind needs more empathy, Titus Corning, the U.N. Secretary General, had declared several times" (§7:74-75). But it is not just Isidore who has bought into the compelling effigy of the plaintive Wilbur Mercer. Indeed, the government has managed to foist this image off any number of gullible citizen-consumers—among whom Rick's wife Iran figures prominently. Like an evangelist lit up by her own fervor, Iran describes to Rick her latest experience with the empathy box in decidedly enthusiastic terms: "...I remember thinking how much better we are, how much better off, when we're with Mercer. Despite the pain. Physical pain but spiritually together; I felt everyone else, all over the world, all who had fused at the same time" (§15:173).

But although the empathy box serves ostensibly to bring disparate individuals into emotional community, Rick, for his part, notes with sadness the separation it effects between him and his wife: "Going over to the empathy box, she quickly seated herself and once more gripped the twin handles. She became involved almost at once. Rick stood holding the phone receiver, conscious of her mental departure. Conscious of his own aloneness" (§15:176). Indeed, this aloneness exactly fulfills the project of the empathy box, as that mechanism is manipulated by the government: in interpellating the political subject and fixing her passively before the screen, Mercer's image serves the purpose not of social solidarity but of disintegration—an outcome which dramatically reduces the potential for public unrest. In his discussion of science fiction and media in the postmodern age, Scott Bukatman follows the lead of Guy Debord in emphasizing just this totalitarian exploitation of the screen image:

The fundament of the spectacle is its unilateralism.... The citizen/viewer, no longer participating in the production of reality, exists now in a state of pervasive *separation*, cut off from the producers of the surrounding media culture by a unilateral communication and detached from the mass of fellow citizen-viewers.

The spectacle controls by atomizing the population and reducing their capacity to function as an aggregate force.... (36)

Fragmented, isolated, and transfixed by the spectacle of a latter-day Sisyphus, the Mercerist stands beyond the pale of the social collective. Furthermore, because it claims that Mercer, the emblem of its authoritative apparatus, suffers eternally for having broken rules outlawing revivification, the political order accommodates into its own structures a safety valve for sedition. In effect, in being called upon to fuse with Mercer, the political subject is encouraged to empathize with a noble criminal, to vent lurking feelings of rebellion, *but only in the controlled space of her own living room*. The empathy box thus operates as the state's optimal homeopathic remedy: it recuperates the citizen's transgression into bounds where it can have no consequences.

Further, should an official commendation of Mercerism fail to habituate the individual to her empathy box, the simulation itself—which always defers literal gratification—keeps her coming back for more. In *Do Androids Dream*, the government, the main producers of Mercer's screen likeness, abide by a capitalist advertising strategy to intoxicate and then ensnare the citizen/consumer. Again invoking Debord, Bukatman describes the phenomenon of "image addiction" as another component of the political scheme to segregate the masses:

The spectacle is infinitely self-generating; it stimulates the desire to consume (the only permissible participation in the social process), a desire continually displaced onto the next product and the next.

In the society of the spectacle, all images are advertisements for the status quo. The commodity is replaced by its own representation, and the fulfillment of need is replaced by pseudo-satisfaction of desire. A citizenry alienated by the industrial-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. (37)

The pure artifice of the spectacle holds the viewer more greatly than does its content; it is the commodified illusion, the enchantment of unattainability, that piques the viewer's desire. That desire applies, Bukatman tells us, not just to the thing advertised, but to the advertisement itself: one begins to crave it for its own sake, as much as, or even more so than what it depicts. In other words, by exalting the "product" it represents (here, human companionship through empathic fusion), the processed image perpetuates its own *raison d'être*, since it always *tantalizes* more than it fulfills the consumer appetite. Thus the spectacle addicts its viewer by continually engendering a surplus desire; Mercer's image creates a longing for Mercer's image.

Television, which Isidore anxiously clings to as a surrogate for human interaction, offers the individual a similar "fix," in that its screen simulations salve—but only temporarily—the anguish of social dislocation. Isidore's broken

TV set broadcasts only the channel the government has nationalized, a platform for various plugs for its Mars colonization program. Notwithstanding the monotony of his viewing experience, Isidore realizes that in order to avoid feelings of seclusion, he has no choice but to endure these repetitive ads for emigration (ads which, to add insult to injury, pointedly exclude him due to his "special" status). Without the benefit of television, he cannot break free from his loneliness. He is overcome by a silence that descends upon "not only his ears but his eyes; as he stood by the inert TV set he experienced the silence as visible and, in its own way, alive" (§2:20). As holds true for the image that summons Iran to the empathy box, TV's simulations beckon to Isidore with the promise of company, disguising momentarily the fact of his solitude.

As these examples demonstrate, technology often acts in Dick's novel as the long arm of the government, furtively breaching the bounds between public and private. Moreover, in maintaining the illusion of a social network that they in fact forestall, both television and the empathy box covertly disperse individuals, dramatically rupturing the human collective. This rupture proves, of course, especially ironic in the case of the empathy box, which despite its name more undermines than facilitates the experience of emotional community. And by extension, the accepted notion of empathy, the purported marker of humanity, falls under the same suspicion as does the device that has presumably enabled it. If the "empathy" one exercises when fusing with Mercer divides rather than draws individuals together, then what does that say for an accepted understanding of human beings, as differentiated from androids by natural affective interconnections?

The electronic image brings this question to the fore, and further it reveals the firm boundaries of the human collective as wholly fictional. Dick's human characters naively pride themselves on their empathic unity and derogate technological constructs as inherently secondary to biological ones—as for example in the case of Rick's electronic sheep, the ownership of which he finds "gradually demoralizing" (§1:9). Yet as we have seen, machines have not only infiltrated the human collective, but have also become an integral part of the establishment—an ineradicable element of human day-to-day existence. Technology thus drastically compromises an insulated human community in two ways: it separates the individual from human contact; but more significantly, it makes her dependent upon—*addicted* to—the life of the machine. Hooked up to her empathy box, entranced by the simulation of the television screen, the human has already, in fact, become the posthuman.

But by enunciating and publicizing an ethic of empathy, the political order conceals this dependence on the mechanical; it maintains the fallacy of a cohesive fraternity of autonomous human subjects. Indeed, only by prolonging the public's belief in Mercerism and in an essential human empathy can the state obscure how much technology has invaded individual lives—how much the mediated spectacle permits the government a check on its citizens' activities. It is thus in the best interest of the political authorities to ostracize the android, since the android—a fully animated and thoroughly intelligent creature—

directly challenges the individual's perceived biological mastery over the machines that surround her in her quotidian environment. And besides alerting the citizen to her already infringed subjectivity, a community in which humans and androids freely coexist would resurrect the ultimate threat to the totalitarian state: that its diverse members, joined by mutual affinities and demands, will rise up against the powers that dominate them.

With these considerations in mind, the reader appreciates more clearly the imperatives behind Rick Deckard's duty as bounty hunter. As dictated to him by the San Francisco Police Department, Rick's responsibility is nothing less than to reclaim the disturbed hierarchy between human and machine. In so doing, he reclaims also the illusion of the liberal-humanist subject, of a citizen both self-possessive and self-defining and who freely determines the course of his relationships with others.³ Conversely, on Rick falls too the task of denying these privileges to the android. In this sense, the Voigt-Kampff scale paves the way for the android's annihilation on two fronts—as a living being and as a legitimate subject, one who might otherwise have carried on a cooperative existence in a posthuman society.

When Rick attempts to apply the scale to his android suspects, however, he finds the results decidedly more ambiguous than he had expected. In particular, his encounter with Luba Luft, a fugitive posing as a German opera singer, throws Rick into much confusion about the properties and rights of android identity. Inasmuch as it stages a humorous yet meaningful attempt on Luba Luft's part to elude Rick's authoritative hold, the conversation between the two characters is worth repeating at length.

[Rick begins:] "Now please listen carefully. These questions will deal with social situations which you might find yourself in; what I want from you is a statement of response, what you'd do.... You're sitting watching TV and suddenly you discover a wasp crawling on your wrist."...

"What's a wasp?" Luba Luft asked.

"A stinging bug that flies."

"Oh, how strange...."

"They died out because of the dust. Don't you really know what a wasp is?"

...

"Tell me the German word."

... "*Wespe*," he said, remembering the German word."

"Ach yes; *eine Wespe*." She laughed. "And what was the question? I forgot already."

"Let's try another." Impossible now to get a meaningful response. "You are watching an old movie on TV, a movie from before the war. It shows a banquet in progress; the entree...consists of boiled dog, stuffed with rice."

"Nobody would kill a dog," Luba Luft said....

"Before the war," he grated.

"I wasn't alive before the war.... Was the movie made in the Philippines?"

"Why?"

"Because," Luft said, "they used to eat boiled dog stuffed with rice in the Philippines. I remember reading that."

"But your response," he said. "I want your social, emotional, moral reaction."

"To the movie?... I'd turn it off..."

"Why would you turn it off?"

"Well," she said hotly, "who the hell wants to watch an old movie set in the Philippines?"

...After a pause, he said carefully, "You rent a mountain cabin.... In an area still verdant."

"Pardon?" She cupped her ear. "I don't ever hear that term."

"Still trees and bushes growing. The cabin is rustic knotty pine with a huge fireplace. On the walls someone has hung old maps, Currier and Ives prints, and above the fireplace a deer's head has been mounted, a full stag with developed horns. The people with you admire the decor of the cabin—"

"I don't understand 'Currier' or 'Ives' or 'decor,'" Luba Luft said; she seemed to be struggling, however, to make out the terms. "Wait." She held up her hand earnestly. "With rice, like in the dog. Currier is what makes the rice currier rice. It's *Curry* in German."

He could not fathom for the life of him if Luba Luft's semantic fog had purpose.... (§9:102-04)

As a matter of fact, this "semantic fog" *does* have purpose—most obviously, to save the speaker from the clutches of the law. Clearly, Luba Luft's numerous circumlocutions make it virtually impossible for Rick to interrogate her; and without an interrogation Rick can obtain no conviction, since protocol enjoins that all suspects be put through this test of fire. But too, I think it's worth noting that Luba's subversion involves, principally, a deliberate equivocation on points of the linguistic code—a code that in and of itself has the power to condemn her. To understand how the code might possess such a capability, we may refer to Jean Baudrillard's observations about language as they relate to his overall conception of mass media. On the subject of the media, Baudrillard, like Debord and Bukatman, forsakes an Orwellian picture of a Big Brother who is always "watching" to proclaim a more subtle, but no less fascistic, media presence: "There is no need to imagine [television] as a state periscope spying on everyone's private life—the situation as it stands is more efficient than that: it is the *certainty that people are no longer speaking to each other*, that they are definitively isolated in the face of a speech without response" (172). Here again, the spectacle asserts the government's unilateral prerogative over its citizens: it roots the viewer as a passive recipient of the media image, as well as cuts her off from the possibility of human interaction.

Baudrillard extends this interpretation further to announce that Roman Jakobson's analysis of "Linguistics and Poetics" asks us to conceive the communication of the media and that of language in analogous terms. Onto the paradigm of transmitter-message-receiver that he has already laid out in his discussion of the media, Baudrillard maps Jakobson's linguistic model of addresser-message-addressee, declaring one-to-one relationships between each component of the first triad with the parallel component of the second:

Transmitter	Message	Receiver
‡	‡	‡
Addresser	Message	Addressee

Next, he extrapolates from his general comments about the media to locate in language a similar instrument of totalitarian control: in both methods of communication, the three-part circuit—its inescapable dialectic of speaker versus auditor—upholds the political hegemony, in that it utterly prevents an exchange founded on *reciprocity*. By insisting upon an inexorable back-and-forth, language prevents a simultaneous bilateral communication; instead, it merely enacts the tyranny of the unilateral state order. In the event, even, that the interpellated individual *reverses* the circuit and becomes for a time the transmitter instead of the receiver, the dialectic itself remains intact, hence asserting the power of those who govern it. Similarly, a message of would-be rebellion performs its own cancellation, since it by necessity partakes of the authoritative code. In Baudrillard's schema, then, language, like television, is enough to enforce the domination of the political order, inasmuch as it does away with the potential for authentic—because mutual—communication. For him, “the absolutization of speech under the formal guise of exchange is *the* definition of power” (171).

Viewed in this light, the Voigt-Kampff scale's linguistic apparatus itself assures the android's condemnation, apart from any content it may appear to deliver. In effect, it is not the scenarios that Rick posits that might prove Luba Luft guilty; rather, it the resolute relationship of signifiers and signifieds—the vise-like stability of the dialectical code—that proclaims the law's authority and thus already brands her a criminal. Deputized to administer the test, Rick insists repeatedly upon Luba's “response,” but in Baudrillard's view, of course, that response would only confirm the operation of the hegemonic code. To respond means to submit to the code's inherent lack of reciprocity and thus to forfeit all chance of dodging the totalitarian order.

And yet Luba does here succeed in skirting the authority of the bounty hunter, if only for the moment—and she can do so *precisely because she refuses to respond*, to participate in a dialectic that already finds her culpable. In effect, she takes advantage of what Baudrillard states is the only out still open to the subject arraigned by language: through her numerous semantic evasions, she calls attention to the always unstable relationships between signifier and signified, creating static in an otherwise apparently lucid and unproblematic medium. She thus “volatilizes the category of the code” itself, exposing it as always tenuous, never natural, and as imposed as the political order it sustains (184).

Luba's android revolt depends upon her capacity to destabilize language, in such a way that throws into question (for Rick, her interlocutor) previously unexamined structures of power. As Baudrillard would have it, furthermore, Luba's actions highlight the inherent hegemony of not only the medium of language, but of media in general, since every technology that transmits a message must by its very operation uphold the totalitarian state. According to this theory, television and the empathy box cannot help but subserve the dominant order, no more than the most articulate revolutionary manifesto can help but reinforce the very government it seeks to overturn. In spite of every good intention, Baudrillard concludes, all media have intrinsically a tendency to

oppress the individual, and only by demolishing the machinery itself—as Luba has done—can one hope to get out from under the thumb of the political order.

Yet in the final estimation, *Do Androids Dream* does not bear out Baudrillard's somewhat Luddite perspective on the problems of an advanced technological society. In Dick's narrative version of mass-media culture, the fault lies not with a totalitarian essence in the media itself; rather, all blame falls upon the authoritarian forces who bring the image to life. On this matter, then, Dick would most likely disagree with Baudrillard, as with Marshall McLuhan before him: the medium is *not* the message; it simply provides a venue—in itself neutral—for the affirmation of political power. Dick makes the point explicit in "The Android and the Human," in which he theorizes about the real-life possibility of a technological backlash that would thwart the government's fascistic maneuvers:

The continued elaboration of state tyranny such as we in science fiction circles anticipate in the world of tomorrow...—as we thoroughly comprehend, this evil process uses technology as its instrument.... Like all machines, these universal transmitters, recording devices, heat-pattern discriminators, don't in themselves care who they're used by or against.... Before the absolute power of the absolute state of tomorrow can achieve its victory it may find such things as this: When the police show up at your door to arrest you for thinking unapproved thoughts, a scanning sensor that you've bought and built into your door discriminates the intruders from customary friends and alerts you to your peril. (196-97)

The electronics-savvy renegade that Dick postulates here—an individual who co-opts machinery for his own purposes—is adumbrated in the Buster Friendly of *Do Androids Dream*, who we recall has established a media following rivaled only by that of Wilbur Mercer. In maintaining his presence on both TV and radio an impossible twenty-three hours a day, the android Buster has managed to squeeze in on the audience that the government, by exploiting Mercer's image, otherwise secures for itself. Buster's often vocalized contempt for Mercerism leads even John Isidore to guess at what the two pop idols are battling for: "Our minds, Isidore decided. They're fighting for control of our psychic selves; the empathy box on the one hand, Buster's guffaws and off-the-cuff jibes on the other" (§7:75).

As Buster Friendly's media imperialism makes evident, the technologies Dick imagines in his fiction are the exclusive instruments of no one power. That is to say, as Bukatman has said for the author's oeuvre as a whole,⁴ that Dick's novel finds the media itself ideologically neutral—a mere canvas for the views of those who use it. Of course, Buster's intention to conquer the minds of his audience members strikes us as hardly more palatable than the state's own attempts at prosthetic control. Yet the android's success bodes well, if nothing else, as a sign that currently duped citizen/consumers have themselves the capacity to chip away at the government's technological dominion. We should note also that the method of Buster's concealed android rebellion pointedly contradicts Luba Luft's: whereas she has circumvented the state apparatus by "smashing" the medium with which it asserts itself, Buster, for his part, *manipulates* the medium to his own advantage, and in direct defiance of the

government's authority. This achievement opens up the possibility of an even greater one: that, despite Baudrillard's statements to the contrary, the mass media might be wrested from the totalitarian order—and, by extension, from any plan to control the "psychic selves" of the populace.

But if *Do Androids Dream* denies the usual sf conjunction between a technological and a dystopian society, why does it predicate Luba Luft's revolt on a disintegration of the symbolic medium?—Because, quite simply, that medium has been virtually dominated by an incriminating rule of power. Inasmuch as Rick and Luba find themselves entrenched in a totalitarian state, Baudrillard is right in this case to claim that language, which here constitutes the vehicle of the authoritative Voigt-Kampff scale, functions like other transmissible media, in that it prostrates its listeners in the face of a (literally) dictatorial power. Yet in searching for the key locus of this power, we should look not for an essential property in the linguistic code, but instead at the specific projects that code has served. Luba's escape depends upon her ability to shatter a medium already greatly implicated in the fascistic order, one calcified—if Rick could but see it—as an unchallenged reservoir of control. In effect, she must splinter language in order to show Rick how one might wrench it from the hands of those who wield it. Further, by disclosing the artificial and malleable quality of this medium, Luba forces upon Rick the revelation that will change dramatically how he views the various technologies in his world: that the media by which humans interact, so far from being evil in and of themselves, have instead been exploited by the institutions that monopolize them.

Additionally, in subverting language, Luba calls attention to the contrived nature of Rick's human mastery, which only in reality extends so far as the state whose authority he props up. How could language—the Voigt-Kampff scale—do anything *but* convict the android, when language has become just one instrument of a government whose business is based on the exploitation of machines? Perhaps it is this question, along with his acquaintance with the pitiless Phil Resch, that leads Rick to pose those other, more central questions of the novel—"Always he had assumed that throughout his psyche he experienced the android as a clever machine—as in his conscious view. And yet, in contrast to Phil Resch, a difference had manifested itself. And he felt instinctively that he was right. Empathy for an artificial construct? he asked himself. Something that only pretends to be alive?" (§12:141).

However, when Rick confesses these feelings to Phil Resch (whose avid bounty hunting makes him the perfect mouthpiece for the law), Resch exactly perverts Rick's empathy for Luba Luft into its opposite—into lust, sexual longing: in short, an objectifying *desire*, which undercuts rather than corroborates Rick's acknowledgment of Luba's position as subject. "Wake up and face yourself, Deckard," scoffs Resch. "You wanted to go to bed with a female type of android—nothing more, nothing less" (§12:143). In thus diagnosing Rick's feelings of compassion for Luba Luft, Resch calls upon Rick to recollect his subject status—a status inherently due him, according to the authority that Resch represents, by virtue of his biological humanity. What's more, it is no mere chance that Resch appeals to desire to bring Rick back into the

fold, for in desire resides the very safeguard of the human ego—its characteristic mastery over the objects that surround it.

At this point in the narrative, Rick accepts Resch's explanation for his emotions and, as if to further assure himself of his privilege as a desiring subject, seeks to gratify his commercial lust as well. Having already pocketed the money earned from his first three kills, Rick finally indulges himself in the commodity he has long been craving—a live sheep, to replace the electronic one that grazes upon his roof. Rick enters "animal row" with hopes of subduing a "new and horribly unique depression": "In the past, anyhow, the sight of animals, the scent of money deals with expensive stakes, had done much for him. Maybe it would accomplish as much now" (§15:167). In this regard, other suggestions in the novel—e.g., Buster Friendly's eventual exposé—only confirm what this scene makes manifest, namely that live animals do not so much indicate their owners' devotion to Mercer as showcase their wealth and cultural cachet. In short, Rick's animal purchase reinforces his position in the social order in two important ways. The high rate of interest compels him to continue bounty hunting—a point which he expressly considers in justifying his decision: "But I had to do it, he said to himself. The experience with Phil Resch—I have to get my confidence, my faith in myself and my abilities, back. Or I won't keep my job" (§15:170). Second, by at last fulfilling his desire for a live animal, Rick reestablishes himself as a self-determining political subject, in contrast to the diverse creatures which it is his right to command and possess.

To more fully illustrate how desire might function for Rick as the marker of the autonomous subject, I'll turn my attention now to Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch's *The Embodied Mind*, which suggests that Western science should begin to reformulate its cognitive notions of the ego-self. It can only do justice to this task, *The Embodied Mind* claims, by thoroughly considering our day-to-day perceptions of the world, perceptions that oftentimes belie the neat pronouncements of philosophy. The authors overview numerous Western cognitive theories—most of which markedly exclude an examination of phenomenological experience—and conclude that we should bear in mind the discoveries of Buddhist tradition if we are to get a more complete picture of the embodied self. "Self," that is, in a nominal sense only: for in fact what we call "self" is, according to Buddhist practices, no more than an epiphenomenon, a fictional construct that results from a continuous pattern of "grasping." "Constantly one thinks, feels, and acts," the authors write,

as though one had a self to protect and preserve. The slightest encroachment on the self's territory (a splinter in the finger, a noisy neighbor) arouses fear and danger. The slightest hope of self-enhancement (gain, praise, fame, pleasure) arouses greed and grasping.... Such impulses are instinctual, automatic, pervasive, and powerful. (62)

Yet when we recognize this grasping for what it is—an attitude literally self-ish, in that it alone creates what we think of as self—we recognize too that our individual identity has in truth no solid ground, that we instead emerge, moment to moment, from our physical interactions with the world. Likewise,

the world itself takes its contours from our own; our presence affects the world as much as it affects us. The embodied self is thus always in process, as is the environment with which it is materially coupled: the two cooriginate in an unceasing interweaving, an “entre-deux” that contradicts all notions of a Cartesian subject-object diad.

Once we comprehend selfhood in this way, we can better understand the nature of Rick’s anxieties about bounty hunting, as well as his tendency to alleviate those anxieties by asserting his sexual and commercial desires. This grasping after what he pretends will fulfill him allows Rick to retain the illusion of an insulated self; and conversely, it casts the objects of his desire as other, as things merely out there in the world. By acting on his desire, Rick recapitulates conventional ideas about his social significance as a bounty hunter and—more generally—as a human being. In this way, desire reinforces the imaginary perimeters of Rick’s own person as much as of the human community, which by definition jettisons the android as disconnected and foreign. In their own account of collective identity, the authors of *The Embodied Mind* describe such clannishness as a dangerously divisive planetary fact:

Grasping can be expressed not only individually as fixation on ego-self but also collectively as fixation on a racial or tribal self-identity, as well as grasping for a ground as the territory that separates one group of people from another or that one group would appropriate as its own. The idolatry of supposing not only that there is a ground but that one can appropriate it as one’s own acknowledges the other only in a purely negative, exclusionary way. The realization of groundlessness as nonegocentric responsiveness, however, requires that we acknowledge the other with whom we dependently cooriginate. (254)

According to this vision, the principal problem with group mentality rests in its appeal to ideology. Such ideology will not educate the individual as to her codependency with others in her environment, because it simply insists on another ground for the self. The individual maintains a false sense of a non-permeable ego or group so long as she grasps onto an abstract theory or philosophy and fails to examine herself as experiential actor in the world. In experience alone can she come to an awareness of her existential continuity with the other. “Why should it make any difference at all to experience?” the authors query. “The answer...is that as one becomes mindful of one’s own experience, one realizes the power of the urge to grasp after foundations—to grasp the sense of foundation of a real, separate self, the sense of a foundation of a real, separate world, and the sense of foundation of an actual relation between self and world” (225).

And what ensues when one abandons philosophy and becomes mindful of one’s phenomenal existence?—Compassion, the authors respond, a compassion that enacts itself as respect and concern for the well-being of the other. But this compassion, it is important to remember, must arise solely from experience, for a prescriptive philosophy, as we have seen, always re-grounds the fleeting subject. In brief, “spontaneous compassion” shuns “axiomatic ethical system[s]” and “pragmatic moral injunctions,” as metaphysical dogma oblivious to the continually emergent entre-deux of self and other (250).

In my view, it is this notion of compassion—or empathy—that we should have in mind when we attempt to interpret Rick’s changing perspectives on his mechanical environment. Not until he has forfeited a more doctrinal definition of empathy—that promulgated by the government in Mercerism—can Rick countenance the possibility of a posthuman community, one in which humans and androids coexist and cooriginate. Not surprisingly, this revelation starts to take form almost immediately after his eye-opening encounter with Luba Luft. Returning home from this exchange and from his foray into animal row, Rick entertains new suspicions that the official concept of empathy may serve, at bottom, largely utilitarian ends: “But now he had begun to sense, for the first time, the value that people such as Iran obtained from Mercerism. Possibly his experience with the bounty hunter Phil Resch had altered some minute synopsis in him, had closed one neurological switch and opened another” (§15:174). Small wonder that Rick imagines his mental processes in cybernetic terms: this language betrays his creeping apprehension that he forms just one element of the technological landscape. And in turn, that apprehension—brought about, as he himself realizes, by his experience with Phil Resch and with Luba Luft—guides him closer to a more sincere empathy for the humanoid robots in his world.

But given his growing compassion for the creatures he has been consigned to hunt, why does the narrative require, finally, that he complete his mission? How can we truly believe in Rick’s reformation—in his recognition of a post-human community—when he bears the taint of six android killings?

To answer these questions, we may look to Rick’s own evaluation of the murders he has committed: “But what I’ve done, he thought; that’s become alien to me. In fact everything about me has become unnatural; I’ve become an unnatural self” (§21:230). As Rick himself realizes, bounty hunting no longer fortifies an inherited notion of himself as subject; indeed, it rather challenges all that he understands himself to be. Now that he has carried out the task he has been appointed to, he finds himself “defeated in some obscure way” (§21:230). Yet that defeat—of an old understanding of self against world—also marks, paradoxically, Rick’s triumph: his new awareness that he lives in fluid conjunction with the technologies that populate his environment. There is no human self, Rick has discovered, that is not also other, and no android other that does not partake of self.

Yet Rick could not have had this realization without the full benefit of his bounty-hunting experience, an experience that has taken him again and again into close proximity with the androids he has been assigned to kill. Only having had this contact can he feel compassion for the ostracized android, in ways that make him sensible that that creature compromises his self-ish human ego. In sum, Rick cannot see himself as part of a posthuman community until he has abjected himself, in aspects both figurative and literal—until he has horrified himself as a murderer and, by this act, acknowledged himself as a non-subject.

For their own part, the authors of *The Embodied Mind* call such an acknowledgment of the fictional self the very imperative of modern existence:

“If our task in the years ahead...is to build and dwell in a planetary world, then we must learn to uproot and release the grasping tendency, especially in its collective manifestations” (254). Dick’s novel expressly formulates this same sentiment—but its speaker is, strangely enough, none other than the debunked Wilbur Mercer: “It’s the basic condition of life,” he informs Rick, “to be required to violate your own identity” (§15:179). We can only make sense of this narrative irony—that the most important statement of the book comes from the icon of an ersatz theology—when we consider how personal experience has gradually altered Rick’s conception of empathy and, by association, of the figure who represents empathy as well. By novel’s end, Mercer has become the spokesperson not of the government’s chauvinistically human version of empathy, but of a version which, as Rick has discovered, encompasses both human and android together. This semantic change in Mercer’s character is borne out by the fact that he continues to appear to Rick even though Buster Friendly has uncovered him as a fraud, as a political expedient to corral the masses who have fused with him. For Rick nonetheless, Wilbur Mercer remains the emblem of compassion—but of a compassion radically refigured by his practical awareness of the posthuman community.

In fact, so greatly has Rick’s bounty-hunting experience enriched his appreciation of empathy that although he has evinced some prior dubiousness about the efficacy of Mercerism, he imagines himself, soon after the last three killings, locked in a perpetual fusion with Wilbur Mercer. Notably, the event takes place in a wasteland desert, miles away from the spurious empathy box, in a location where Rick may disavow the official empathy that has only abased and divided the human collective. The drastic geographical shift permits Rick an emotional one as well, and consequently, he responds to reports of Buster Friendly’s recent exposé with an unmitigated incredulity. “Mercer isn’t a fake,” he announces in short. “Unless reality is a fake” (§21:234). And in fact, as it refers to his own reconception of reality, Rick’s statement is the most necessary of truths: the life of the planet depends upon Wilbur Mercer, as the preserver of a nonpartisan and all-englobing compassion.

To reiterate: Rick’s new appreciation of the empathy that Wilbur Mercer incarnates derives from the grave experiences he has undergone, as it never could have from the empathy made popular in Mercerist doctrine. To be sure, we could ascribe this difference to the underhanded motives the government has had for publicizing a formal ethic of empathy; but just as likely, it stems from the inadequacies of metaphysics itself, as contrasted to the embodied perception that Varela et al. set forth as an essential prerequisite for authentic compassion.⁵ Philosophy alone will not suffice to make Rick cognizant of his material coextension with the android other. He must rather submit himself to a phenomenological experience—an experience that teaches him an empathy that is unmistakably real, insofar as it grows out of his understood intimacy with his technological environment.

Accordingly, in the novel’s last pages, Rick verbally renounces the ideology of a living community restricted to humans and humans alone. Having found in the desert what he believes to be a natural toad, Rick hurries home

to tell his wife, only to have her reveal to him that the toad is mechanical. But in reacting to the news, we remark, he explicitly contraverts the creed of the android-hunting policeman: "The electric things have their lives, too. Paltry as those lives are" (§22:241). Thus describes the situation that an interaction with the mechanical landscape has brought to Rick's attention: that technology is indeed a vital part of the planetary environment. To have overlooked this reality has meant denying the basic *entre-deux* between self and world—and denying, specifically, the established presence of diverse machines, ones materially intertwined into the lives of the novel's characters. As Rick at last conceives it, technology always *already* impinges on the human subject, always *already* cooriginates with him. It is up to the individual, merely, to acknowledge that fact: to relinquish a self that has outgrown traditional human bounds—to be subsumed, in other words, into the posthuman collective.

NOTES

1. Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968; New York: Ballantine Books, 1975) §1:8. All future references to this work will be parenthetical.

2. Hayles explains this paradox in Rachael's android character by appealing to a trope that recurs throughout Dick's fiction—an oscillation between the "dark-haired girl" (the emotionally warm female whose archetype is Dick's dead twin sister) and the "schizoid woman" (the stolid and unfeeling female, modeled after the author's affectively detached mother). Hayles identifies Rachael as a character oddly split between these two alternatives. Of course, this split patently complicates the novel's ostensible ontological categories: neither fully empathic nor patently cold, Rachael's liminal status calls into question the formal parameters of humanity.

3. For a more detailed explication of this notion of the liberal-humanist subject, see C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

4. "While Dick may evidence a profound suspicion of technology, it must be remembered that the technological societies of his fiction are overwhelmingly capitalistic and largely fascistic. It is less technology per se than the mythifying uses to which it is directed by the forces of an instrumental reason that serve as the targets of Dick's satire" (Bukatman 53).

5. In this connection, it's worth noting that Peter Fitting, in his analysis of five of Dick's novels, has similarly proposed that the author's oeuvre repeatedly stages characters who discover that ideology has misrepresented not just their own identity but all of reality as well. According to this account, in many of his works, Dick's characters accept for a time a set of metaphysical ideas agreed upon by the collectivity; at some eventual point in the novel, however, they realize by their own experience that these ideas have played them false. Fitting reads in this pattern an "epistemological critique of the dominant positivist view of empirical reality as an objective 'world of facts' which can be apprehended by the knowing subject" (92). He concludes that the repetition of this trope expresses "the author's uneasiness and ambivalence towards the metaphysical solution. The possibility of an answer 'behind' phenomenal reality is more of a temptation than a resolution . . ." (95).

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ABSTRACT. As staged in Dick's novel, the android inaugurates a crisis of subjectivity. What does it mean to be human in an era wherein human conjoins with machine, biology with technology, nature with manufacture?—Clearly, it is a question confronted by Rick Deckard, protagonist bounty hunter of the twenty-first-century cyborg. Rick's ability to empathize with other creatures—the defining aspect of humanity, according to the juridical system that employs him—leads him to an ethical conundrum: he begins to empathize with the android, the very creature he has been consigned to exterminate. Far from reassuring him of his existential privilege as human, then, Rick's empathy underscores the speciousness of that hierarchy. It throws into relief the contrived ontological imbalance between self and other, human and android.

My paper explores this failure of empathy to secure Rick's prerogative of human selfhood. Extrapolating from ideas expressed in Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch's *The Embodied Mind*, I argue that Rick's new respect for android lives stems not from the ethic of empathy promulgated in the narrative's Mercurist theology, but from another, more authentic form of empathy, one that dramatically challenges traditional notions of existence. This version of empathy (or "compassion," as *The Embodied Mind* names it) is sensed by one who conceives his self as, in fact, a non-self—as a being that amounts to no more than a sequence of embodied experiences. Such a being does not (as Rick has been told to do) insulate himself from external depreciations, but rather perceives himself in an existential continuity with the other that materially shares his world. It is this eventual understanding that provokes Rick's empathy for the android, one of the many technologies with which he resides in a state of mutual determination. Indeed, human subjectivity, as the novel posits it, has always already been infringed upon by these technologies—the television and the empathy box most notably. This fact is hyperbolized in the human community's dependency upon them, a dependency that I explicate in terms of Scott Bukatman's discussion of "image addiction." In effect, Rick's experience of this broad technological landscape awakens him to his basic planetary contingency—to the cooperative materialization of human and machine in the posthuman collective. (JG)