

Science fiction, ecology of mind and the uncanny in “Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?” by Philip K. Dick

SANTIAGO SEVILLA-VALLEJO

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.31577/WLS.2022.14.4.9>

INTRODUCTION: THE DEFINITION OF HUMAN

Science fiction is a genre that very often delves into human nature, the relations between people, and the world that surrounds us. Some authors defend the idea that science fiction is a literary genre that prospers for philosophical matters. In this sense, Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) reflects on many aspects of human existence since its author foresaw some of the problems faced by contemporary society. In his short stories and novels, human society has developed a complex organization and technology; however, it is divided, dehumanized and deeply empty. Social relations between citizens are cold and scarce, and technology offers no help. Instead, the bureaucratic organization and the technological tools reveal a profound existential lack. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* shows a society which seems to be united by “empathy boxes”, but it is soon discovered that human beings live in isolation, and they are very similar to androids. Androids function as mirrors to the deep dehumanization of that community.

This article analyzes the interdiscursive relations between Philip K. Dick's science fiction, the ecology of mind by Gregory Bateson, and the Freudian concept of the uncanny. These theoretical models are useful for analyzing the conflicts that underlie fictions, i.e., those themes that are not expressed directly, but which through signs, show a content that must be interpreted. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (which will be referred to below as *Androids*) is an action novel that reflects on the mental processes inherent in the processing studied by Bateson and Freud's discomfort at the appearance in consciousness of previously unconscious contents. First, Dick's science fiction is devoted to the relation between fiction and social criticism. Secondly, Bateson differentiates primary and secondary anthropological processes or, in other words, unconscious and language, and *Androids* reflects this inner interdiscursive relation. Finally, we must consider the sense in which we take the concept of the

This work has been carried out within the framework of the Language, Emotion and Identity Research Group (LEIDE). It is a discourse analysis within the R+D+I Project “Communication, emotion, and identity in the acquisition and learning of Spanish as a second language”, MINECO, challenges of society, with reference FFI2017-83166-C2-1-R.

uncanny. When we refer to the psychological experience of the uncanny, this refers to a situation in which the real conveys something beyond the everyday experience. This provokes a feeling of unease which, as Dawson (1989) has pointed out, resembles fear not of a material threat, but of an existential or even transcendental discovery. Dawson discusses Freud's studies of the uncanny feeling produced by non-human beings with a human appearance (290ff). These non-human beings, such as androids, provoke unease because they bring to consciousness aspects of the construction of the subject's psyche. Freud's definition of the uncanny has been widely criticized for its limitations by among others, Dawson (1989), Lydenberg (1997) and Masschelein (2011). For example, as Lydenberg has observed, this term is confusing in application to literary style because Freud did not consider the effect of the narrator but only the theme of the story. Therefore, its application to a literary text can be very subjective when we refer to aspects of the author's intentions or the reception of readers. Nevertheless, the uncanny captures a psychological experience observed in clinical therapy and is useful for studying works whose subject matter concerns the discomfort produced by a character's perception of himself or herself and an aspect that contradicts this perception. This article focuses on the psychological experience felt by human characters in relation to androids. In this sense, *Androids* is a paradigmatic case of the Freudian concept of the uncanny, because androids produce an uneasy feeling due to their psychology, which seems very different from humans', but it is much more similar than expected.

As an example of the extensive tradition of science fiction where the future is depicted as space that has been almost destroyed by human activity, *Androids* reflects on many aspects of human existence (Moreno 2010, 366). It takes place after World War Terminus, a future nuclear conflict which has irradiated the atmosphere to the point that the planet is hardly habitable. In this society, technology offers an unreal appearance of community. However, Dick goes far beyond the cliché to consider one of the main problems that contemporary society is facing: human identity in a technological society. According to Sherryl Vint, the "novel's major concern is with alienated, modern, technologized life rendering humans increasingly cold and android-like" (2007, 112). The more our society develops technology, the more we realize the advantages and disadvantages that come along with it.

Many authors have exposed their concerns on the relations between technology as one means of getting a more comfortable life and the social impact produced by the changes involved. Some studies include the following: Postman (1996) analyzes the way that the development of information media has fostered the loss of reflection, Barlow (1997) observes that Dick reflects a society where technology has become a tool of domination, Brand (2013) adds that technology reduces personal experience in favor of the use of new media as an end in itself, and finally, the present author (Sevilla-Vallejo 2017) compares different works by Dick that reflect that the disconnection of human beings from reality even leads them to live in a virtual reality, which resembles the real experience, but conceals it. *Androids* is a very reflective work on how humans need and fear technology or, in a broader sense, technology goes against humans because it reflects unsolved human problems. The action happens on the "fifth (or sixth?)

anniversary of the founding of New America, the chief U.S. settlement on Mars” (Dick [1968] 2007, 14). Most people have emigrated to this planet, but some individuals are stuck on Earth. The novel has two protagonists: Rick Deckard, a bounty hunter who eliminates the androids that have escaped from Mars, and J.R. Isidore, a man whose mental capacity has been diminished by radiation. Deckard represents normal humans, and Isidore, the class named chickenheads (or specials) because of the intellectual limitations they suffer out of radiation, and they are not allowed to leave the planet due to their condition. Human culture remaining on Earth has three main interests: they care for animals to prevent the mass extinction of several species and Mercer religion, they watch Buster Friendly TV programs, and they connect themselves to a machine named the empathy box, which offers them a community experience and guidance from Wilbur Mercer, the prophet of the religion.¹ In addition, there are corporations that construct androids very similar to human beings, to the point that Rosen Association has achieved the Nexus-6 model, a kind of android that is even more intelligent than humans. This new model threatens human beings because they are no longer the superior intelligent creature and, as humans enslave androids, the latter sometimes kill their owners to get freedom. It is very hard to tell the difference between Nexus-6 and humans, but they supposedly lack one main characteristic that makes them different from human beings: empathy.

The importance of technology for human existence in *Androids* is crucial because society is constructed around it. In this novel, humans need technology all the time and, as it is not so easy to detect Nexus-6, technology poses a great threat to humans. Jill Galvan sustains that:

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. (1997, 418)

The lack of empathy, not only from androids but also from humans, leads us to connect the literary genre and previous anthropological discourses to the psychological processes reflected in both kinds of characters. Therefore, this article analyzes interdiscursive connections between the literary gender and collective and individual discourses that have defined relevant research fields about human existence.

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY PROCESSES

Androids shows a potential conflict that science fiction authors take into consideration. The history of human beings is a succession of fights and conquests of nature. Humankind is the only creature that is able to keep learning about the world and to keep developing more and more sophisticated tools to control it. Human society seems to follow the biblical mandate be fruitful and multiply, driven by some inner force to control the environment. Regardless of religious beliefs, human beings feel the need to contribute to the progress of society, but they are beginning to lose a defined paradigm of what values they should pursue (Sevilla-Vallejo 2017). From the 18th to the early 20th century, it was believed that humans would gradually improve their knowledge to create a better society thanks to reason, which would bring

better life quality, peace and happiness to everyone. However, this utopian scenario has not happened. During the rest of the 20th century, war, pollution, and inequalities have been constant. *Androids* fictionalizes these three problems provoked by the idea of progress. Although technology poses threats to the world where Deckard and Isidore live, society keeps producing it (Sevilla-Vallejo 2019). The paradox is that people simultaneously demand Nexus-6 androids and are afraid of them. In Neil Postman's words, trust in reason has been deeply wounded, nevertheless it is still there. In *Androids* humans see the terrible effects of technology, but they keep creating machines and, even more, they give a human appearance to some of them. This novel is part of a long tradition about the desire of creating an artificial being from human knowledge (Brand 2013, 5ff).

It is hard to understand the contradictory human behavior in *Androids*. Why to devote efforts to develop a technology that can turn against oneself? Since humans are the cause of the problem, the explanation shall remain in the way they think: the conflict between primary and secondary mental processes can comprehensively explain the hostile world of *Androids*. The human mind handles information on two levels: primary and secondary. At the first level, when we receive any information, the immediate answer is an emotion, which can be translated to the secondary process and/or stored in the unconscious (or preconscious). At the second level, we are able to translate the prior process into words. The difference between both levels is that the primary process is an irrational response, more connected to emotional intelligence than to reason (Goleman 1998), while the secondary process depends on rational rules. Gregory Bateson explains the relation of primary and secondary process in the following manner:

These algorithms of the heart, or, as they say, of the unconscious, are, however, coded and organized in a manner totally different from the algorithms of language. And since a great deal of conscious thought is structured in terms of the logics of language, the algorithms of the unconscious are doubly inaccessible. It is not only that the conscious mind has poor access to this material, but also the fact that when such access is achieved, e.g., in dreams, art, poetry, religion, intoxication, and the like, there is still a formidable problem of translation. (1987, 148)

It is hard to access the primary process because it tends to be unconscious and primary and secondary processes have different codes. In the first place, the relation of any person with other people and with the world is given by emotions. The mental operations at play in this case are the primary process: "the relationship between self and others, and the relationship between self and environment, are, in fact, the subject matter of what are called 'feelings' – love, hate, fear, confidence, anxiety, hostility, etc." (Bateson 1987, 148–149). Once we have felt something, we can use words to talk about it. In this case, the mental operations at play in this case are the secondary process. The problem is that our linguistic discourse cannot collect the same information. Contemporary society tends to give more importance to the secondary process because we trust the processes related to reason beyond the ones related to emotion. *Androids* follows a complex reflection reaching our time:

The version of the human self that emerges in the novel can be traced back to Descartes' cogito, which marks the entrance of a number of important distinctions that have structured modernity. Descartes conceptualized the human self as separate from nature, including the nature of its own body. (Vint 2007, 112)

In spite of Descartes' theory, primary and secondary are necessary:

that mere purposive rationality unaided by such phenomena as art, religion, dream, and the like, is necessarily pathogenic and destructive of life; and that its virulence springs specifically from the circumstance that life depends upon interlocking *circuits* of contingency, while consciousness can see only such short arcs of such circuits as human purpose may direct (Bateson 1987, 155).

Humans in *Androids* have problems in integrating primary and secondary processes. There are three types of intelligent beings: normal humans that supposedly have accurate emotional responses; androids, who are very intelligent, but whose emotions are supposedly very little developed, and chickenheads, whose brains have been damaged and, as a result, their capacity to think and to feel is supposedly lower.

We have said several times the word "supposedly", because the differentiation between these three types is more apparent than real. Dick (1972) maintains that the tendency to animate matter is a form of primitivism (primary process). He points out that:

Modern depth psychology has requested us for years to withdraw these anthropomorphic projections from what is actually inanimate reality, to introject – that is, to bring back into our own heads – the living quality which we, in ignorance, cast out onto the inert things surrounding us. Such introjection is said to be the mark of true maturity in the individual. (n.p.)

The impulse to construct robots as if they had life is an expression of the projection inherent to primitive thinking. In spite of this, the imitation process to get an animated android demands a refined knowledge and the use of reason (secondary process). As a result, the effort to animate androids is both primitive and sophisticated.

Androids also reflects on the formation of consciousness. Marilyn Gwaltney states that it has to do with the connection we establish with other people or, in her words, depends on relatedness or belongingness. Self-consciousness has two levels: natural level, the normal relations we tend to establish with other people; and the normative level, which refers to the self-reflection "one must *strive* to become oneself" (1997, 35). Our consciousness combines the connection with other people (also named interpersonal intelligence) and the knowledge we have about our own feelings and ideas (intrapersonal intelligence).

THE UNCANNY ANDROIDS: OUR UNKNOWN CRUELTY COMES BACK

Philip K. Dick's *Androids* is a "modern variation on one of the oldest literary motifs: the double or *Doppelgänger*" (Francavilla 2003, 4). Nexus-6 androids are so sophisticated that is very hard to tell the difference between them and humans. The double is used to express "unfathomable oppositions in the world" (4). Descartes

started a very complex debate around the relation between body and soul: “Body and soul go together, but, under some circumstances, literature explores the liberation of soul from body” (4). The human society of future San Francisco and New America use reason to get material commodities, while existential aspects like emotions and spiritual life receive little attention. Characters reflect very little on how they feel, and their religious experience is only possible thanks to a machine. There is a clear carelessness to important aspects of human identity and, as psychoanalysis states, unsolved conflicts reappear suddenly in the conscience. In the same sense, androids mirror human problems: “According to Freud, the double or *Doppelgänger* in literature is a manifestation of that class of phenomena known as ‘uncanny’” (5).

The uncanny is the feeling that something is strange and, at the same time, familiar. In *Androids*, Nexus-6 androids are different due to their inhuman behavior, as most evident when they chop off the legs of the spider. Since androids look like human and we sustain that they are very similar to humans, androids create the uncanny sensation. “The intimate, unbreakable bond between doubles indicates an empathic, love-hate relationship whose development goes well beyond mere coincidence or chance” (5). Androids represent the best and the worst of human beings: “On the one hand, we view the androids or robots with awe and wonder [...]. On the other hand, [...] are projections of our fears concerning dehumanizing technology run rampant and scientific creations out of control” (7).

It is clear that the “novel’s setting and characterizations reveal that this society’s very obsession with defining ‘human’” (Palumbo 2013, 1276). The society of *Androids* establishes a clear inequality between the abovementioned groups: normal humans can emigrate to a safe place, but chickenheads and androids are trapped on Earth and Mars respectively. Chickenheads have to live with radiation to avoid the transmission of their deficiencies to future generations and androids are slaves to help and accompany those who have emigrated to Mars. In *Androids*, the human is an ideal that only part of society can reach and those who aren’t considered human are discriminated against. For this situation, the definition of human “is undertaken in bad faith and, consequently, that its accepted, legalistic, official definitions – as their incompatibility suggests – are both false” (1276). The definition is expressed in the laws that forbid Isidore to emigrate and allow bounty hunters to go after androids.

We realize that the society in *Androids* is more unfair and contradictory than we originally thought, when we see that the differences in empathy among humans, androids and chickenheads are not so clear. On the one hand, Rick Deckard, whose work is to detect androids, is only able to do so with a test. Moreover, some normal humans under psychiatric conditions fail the exam, which is a great concern because it means there is no reliable tool to tell the difference between humans and androids. In addition, the Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test does not measure complete empathy, but the

reaction to “a number of social situations,” [which] clearly reveal that the test really measures only a socially engendered, culture-specific aversion to killing or harming animals, this society’s primary taboo, rather than any truly universal, innate, and exclusive – and therefore definitive – human quality. (1277)

On the other hand, humans are only capable of experiencing emotions and spiritual life through technology:

humans in this society most commonly experience empathy through a machine, the “empathy box,” and use yet another machine, the “mood organ,” to avoid “despair... about total reality,” it is similarly ironic that Deckard gauges empathy by machine, his “testing apparatus”; moreover, the test questions, which elicit a physiological “reaction” to “a number of social situations.” (1277)

When humans have so many issues with experiencing emotions and empathy, it is absurd to discriminate androids on the base that they lack this inner experience. Furthermore, it is also unclear the difference between normal humans and chickenheads. Isidore’s attitude shows much more empathy than any normal human. For all of these reasons: “A close reading reveals not only that both definitions are false, but also that both are similarly assumed in ‘bad faith’ – through this society’s willful self-deception [...]. That is, this society makes both specials and androids its scapegoats” (1280).

At this point, we have to ask ourselves why humans construct androids without empathy. Potentially, the Rosen Association could have provided empathy to androids in order to make them harmless, the same way they gave them intelligence. The problem is that, as we have seen, humans are not empathic either and, since they do not know empathy, they cannot respond to it. The best that humans can do relates to reason rather than to emotion.

Androids shows two cases of the uncanny. Androids are uncanny because their psychology seems very different from that of humans, but, in reality, it is much more similar than we expected, which Freud describes as “in some way a species of familiar” (2003, 134). In a different manner, chickenheads produce an uncanny feeling, because their supposed inferiority reflects another human aspect: “The affective position of the mentally undeveloped, mentally delicate, or mentally damaged individual towards many ordinary incidents of daily life is similar to the affective shading that the perception of the unusual or inexplicable generally produces in the ordinary primitive man” (Jentsch [1906] 2008, 7).

Paradoxically, in *Androids*, brain damage is the cause of the main human characteristic: empathy. Isidore acts most of the time in an empathic manner: when he learns that people have moved to his block, he cares about them, even when he discovers that they are androids; he also cares for animals, like the spider. The simple way that Isidore thinks reveals more empathy than Rick Deckard, at least at the beginning of the novel. The other paradox is that Wilbur Mercer, the model of empathy (Viskovic 2013, 168), also has brain damage (20).

LOGIC AND EMPATHY: THE UNENDING HUMAN CONFLICT

In *Androids*, humans have built a very fragile identity on empathy. Perhaps not many people are conscious of the social crisis they are involved in, but bounty hunters do perfectly. As Sherryll Vint points out, “[d]espite the need to posit empathy as the defining characteristic of human beings in order to distinguish humans from androids in the novel, the actions of most “normal” humans in the novel suggest sub-

jectivities still dominated by the rational, calculating logic of the cogito” (2007, 113). Human psychology is imbalanced. Not only Isidore, who is a chickenhead, cares about others more than normal humans, but, as Richard Viskovic has shown (2013, 176), the conversation between the android Luba Luft and Deckard reflects the possibility of androids being more passionately human than humans themselves. Androids seem to have “more vitality and desire to live” (82) than Deckard’s wife (and probably more than Rick Deckard himself). The dilemma of *Androids* “becomes a quest for an uncontestable essence of human being that separates ‘us’ from the ever more human seeming androids” (McNamara 1997, 422).

The society depicted by Dick seems quite strange. Normal human beings emigrate and live isolated in Mars, helped by their slave androids. Few normal humans have to stay on Earth due to their responsibilities, like bounty hunters (where they also live in isolation) as well as chickenheads. Although all human beings are connected by the empathy box, they do not experience empathy in their daily life: they care very little for other human beings, despise chickenheads, and fear androids. However, they love animals: “the world’s few remaining real animals are defined as being worth much more than the numerous androids and chickenheads” (Barr 1997, 25). As radiation from World War Terminus destroyed almost all creatures on Earth, the remaining animals are much more valuable than androids (Dick [1968] 2007, 106) and chickenheads. Humans live obsessed with possessing both machines and animals. Rick Deckard constantly desires to have a real animal, instead of the mechanical sheep he and his wife have, and despite his love for animals above everything, he doesn’t have a real empathy for them but sees them as property and needs to have one to feel important. This situation can be read in terms of social criticism: “Like the inhabitants of his future world, we also dream of those mechanical commodities we define as status symbols” (Barr 1997, 26).

Christopher A. Sims defines technology as “the adaptation of available material or knowledge into an instrument or process that provides humans with an advantage over their environment” (2009, 67). Technology is connected to the idea of progress, and “might be considered as an evolutionary adaptation that humans have acquired and used to gain dominance over the other forms of life or aspects of nature (rivers, weather, raw materials, etc.) on the overarching ecosystem we call Earth” (68). However, to paraphrase Neil Postman, technology brings advantages and disadvantages simultaneously: “The more sophisticated the technology becomes, the more serious the consequences become for misusing the technology” (Sims 2009, 69). In *Androids*, humans use reason to improve their quality of life, but at the same time they unintentionally express their conflict between reason itself and empathy. Humans are so focused on getting commodities that they have difficulty in reflecting on their own existence. At the beginning, Rick Deckard does not pay attention to anyone or anything except when intending to obtain a real animal. He uses the mood organ to avoid emotions (Dick [1968] 2007, 2), as his wife tells him, he has never understood the use of the empathy box (151), and he considers androids as simple means for his purposes (83). He does not perceive that they also have emotions. Deckard’s

attitude can also be analyzed as a critique of contemporary society: we depend too much on material things. In *Androids*, a very clear example of this is the interview with Mrs. Klugman, a middle-aged woman who has emigrated to Mars. When the TV announcer asks her about her new life, she answers that she has more dignity there: “Having a servant you can depend on in these troubled times... I find it reassuring” (15). Androids are supposed to provide everything to humans: help and confidence. Since humans would feel insecure if androids weren’t there to help them, we can argue there is a social problem. As Fernando Moreno argues, materialistic culture could go against human nature (2017).

Therefore, in *Androids* all the efforts made to construct androids could not only improve human life, but make it worse, in the “tendency of the world around us to get even, to twist our cleverness against us” (Tenner 1997, 6). The Rosen Association creates androids that are perfect for processing logic, but this enterprise does not pay any attention to imitating human soul. In other words, “android subjectivity is similar to the Cartesian model of subjectivity, used to justify the exploitation of animals because of their mechanical nature and lack of a soul” (Vint 2007, 113). The Rosen Association denies androids empathy or a soul in order to make them slaves, rather than providing them with some sort of rules for behavior, such as the three laws of robotics by Isaac Asimov. Humans have devoted efforts to knowing everything related to logic, and therefore they can give intelligence to androids; however, empathy has received very little attention. Since humans are not especially interested in empathy for themselves, they cannot offer it to androids either. Nonetheless, there is a cost: the uncanny feeling of artificial machines that resemble human coldness, emptiness and sometimes cruelty.

In *Androids*, people do what they are supposed to almost automatically. Rick Deckard spends years killing androids because it is his job, but he does not consider whether this is fair or not until he reaches a certain point of his last assignment. He has not spent time thinking who he is and why he works as a bounty hunter, but follows orders just as androids do. As Sherryl Vint points out, “the test for empathy that divides androids from humans, the line drawn between human and nonhuman that justifies the use of violence without ethical consequence exists only when and where its existence needs to be constructed” (2007, 115). Nonetheless, when Deckard sees the death of Luba Luft, he starts having empathy for androids. He realizes that they also have some primary processes, like art and emotion. “Deckard’s discovery that he feels empathy for androids is the first sign that he is becoming a new sort of human, one who cannot separate cognition from affect, and thus is resisting becoming like an android himself” (Vint 2007, 115). In addition, he takes part in Mercerism with no conviction, only for the sake of habit. He does not like to use the empathy box, but he consents. At this point, we can conclude that humans are troubled about empathy to the point that there is very little difference with androids. “Though able to identify androids, he must also face up to the possibility that something ‘human’ lies within them” (Barlow 1997, 86). In *Androids*, humans are almost robots and androids have some traces of humanity.

A LONELY SOCIETY: FOSTERING INHUMAN BEINGS

Existential psychiatry influenced the way Philip K. Dick understood human conflicts. Richard Viskovic studies the relation between the case of Ellen West, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia and the difficulties experienced by schizophrenic in *Androids*. Dick is inspired by Ludwig Binswanger's work in his representation of schizophrenia and even he takes the expression "tomb world" to refer to the fall of Wilbur Mercer. This is relevant to this study for two reasons. The first reason is that Binswanger's thinking was heavily influenced by Freud's work. Binswanger starts from psychoanalytical concepts about mental disorders, but offers as a solution the encounter between people. In *Androids*, it is mentioned that schizophrenic could fail the Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test, because they live separately from other people. It has been a long time since the works by Ludwig Binswanger and today we have much more accurate information about mental illness. As a result, it is easy to see that both the diagnosis of Ellen West and the image of schizophrenic at *Androids* are dubious. It has been proven that schizophrenic have some deficits in role-play, which is an activity that demands to put oneself in social situations and this maybe has connections with the lack of empathy (Cohen et al. 1972, 236). Schizophrenic could have problems to relate to others, but they tend to have a wide cognitive deficit that affects many other areas. When androids show a lack of real emotional response, but they pretend to experience it, they are more similar to psychopaths. It really does not matter too much, because the important point is that Dick tells us that some people could lose what in *Androids* is considered as the essence of humanity. The second reason is that Dick explicitly uses the term Tomb world to express the fall of Wilbur Mercer, who represents human isolation, as opposed to the rise of Wilbur Mercer, who symbolizes the struggle to return to the encounter with others.

As previously mentioned, the Empathy Test "is a startling indicator of how little difference, both biologically and empathically, there actually is between 'humans' and 'androids'" (Bremmer 1999, n.p.). The society of *Androids* is very artificial. Supposedly, they are very worried about the human ideal. They have to connect themselves to an empathy box regularly to share their feelings and thoughts with the rest of the population and all of them share the fight of Wilbur Mercer. However, most of the characters of *Androids* have very little empathy; they are only interested in doing their jobs and the administration of Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test is the only way they have to know for sure if a reaction is empathic. This could be interpreted as a critique to the superficiality of human society and psychiatry, as many authors did during the sixties (Méndez-García 2003, 17).

One of the main ideas of *Androids* is that the cultural definition of "normal" is an arbitrary creation of social values at given circumstances. "The reader would fail the empathy test in exactly the same way Rachael does" (Viskovic 2013, 174). The definition of human is not something universal, but the agreement done by a precise society. And, as a result, the Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test informs about social values, rather than the difference between human and inhuman. In fact, the questions of this test are not about general empathy. Instead, they focus on the empathy

to animals, because it is the only concern of the society of *Androids*. In this future, the people of San Francisco and New America live in their homes and their only contact with other people is through television and the empathy box. This fosters the lack of social skills that everyone has (normal humans, chickenheads and androids). In any case, normal humans and chickenheads at least have the chance to share feelings with other individuals thanks to the empathy box, but androids do not have any way to get an emotional education:

Thus the considering that the androids are forcibly kept socially separate from the humans in their defined roles as slaves, it is not surprising that they do not have exactly the same values as humans. In fact, in relation to the social values of the reader, the androids who have empathy for each other, compared to the humans who have more empathy for animals (or at least they seem to value them more) than for the androids. (Bremmer 1999, n.p.)

Androids receive a false memory in order to make them feel human. For instance, Rachel Rosen is convinced that Eldon Rosen is her uncle because he programmed her with those memories: “Poignantly, the reason the colonists wanted androids to be indistinguishable from humans is that androids are a technological solution to the major conflict of the novel, the lonely human condition” (Sims 2009, 73). All humans in *Androids* live alone or just with their partner; they do not have any children and do not interact with anyone, except for working reasons. Their social inability demands an artificial solution. The novel put emphasis on the uncomfortable sensation of silence (Dick [1968] 2007, 16), which “is usually the precipitating force that makes a subject aware of itself and the absence of other nearby subjects” (Sims 2009, 77).

The only hope for overcoming human isolation is the empathy that Wilbur Mercer represents. Empathy means literally suffering inside the feelings of other people: “Empathy allows one person to see and feel the humanity in another. Without a basic level of that recognition and empathy, other people would appear as mechanical robots, mere meat machines that enact authentic-seeming behaviors but nothing more” (Viskovic 2013, 171). For the above reasons: “The subject experiences the thoughts and feelings of everyone involved, including Mercer, and adds their own subjective experience into the mix” (164). As we read, we find out that androids are not a problem for humans, but the solution. Both protagonists, Deckard and Isidore, improve their empathy out of the uncanny contact with androids, and they “became connected to the androids by extending his empathy to them” (178). Each responds in a different manner to this experience; Deckard evolves because “his empathy causes him to question his actions in hunting and destroying them” (170) and starts having empathy for them because he realizes they are too similar to humans. The uncanny contact provokes a discomfort that makes him more sensitive. Dick’s novel proposes an interesting paradox: androids are cruel on many occasions, but also capable of feeling strong emotions for themselves and for other androids, while humans at first do not seem to feel any empathy for anyone, if not for the empathy box. This leads Deckard to discover his own lack of humanity when he comes into contact with the androids and, although he does not realize that he is not human, he is unable

to feel any empathy for himself or other androids. At this point, we face another paradoxical situation: our protagonist becomes empathetic not to human beings, those who supposedly have emotions, but to androids, who supposedly are only machines that look like humans.

Deckard feels attracted to Rachel Rosen and, when Luba Luft is killed by his colleague, he feels sorry and realizes he has to leave his job, understanding that androids also have the right to live because they have something human:

With the border between human and android gone, the two become intimately connected. The androids have become tied to Deckard, even though he knows that beneath their surface of humanity lies only, as Rachel provocatively reminds him, a simple “reflex machine” that is ultimately “*not alive!*” (Viskovic 2013, 176)

Isidore also develops his empathy and behaves as he remembers was required by hospitality before the war (Dick [1968] 2007, 54), when human relations were more common. When he learns they are androids, he keeps trying to make them comfortable, but when they snip off a spider’s legs because they think it has too many (179–184), he finds out that they are insensitive to pain and they can even be cruel: “Having included the androids in his personal definition of humanity, his realization of their inhumanity comes as a tremendous shock” (Viskovic 2013, 178). Isidore is in trouble because, since the androids are made so similar to humans, their cruelty is human cruelty. Finally, the androids are retired by Deckard, but he and Isidore have discovered something that has changed their lives: “When the tide of empathy retreats, the androids are revealed as dead, and the life we posited in them as a projection of our own humanity on to an inhuman shell” (180).

CONCLUSION

In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, everything seems to have gone wrong: humans live in isolation and they cannot help it, they have almost destroyed nature, and they have constructed an artificial world where they both depend on and fear android company. They have problems in interacting and they need the mood organ to regulate their emotions. Furthermore, they find out that, according to their own definition, they are inhuman. Humans are not empathetic enough to understand other people (normal humans and chickenheads) and the android lack of empathy resembles this human problem. The rational and technological culture of *Androids* threatens to destroy humanity, and humans themselves have created this situation not only due to their use of technology, but because they are too focused on reason (secondary process), neglecting the emotions (primary process). Although the main human characteristic is supposedly empathy, it is very scarce among humans. A technologized society seems to provide everything to individuals, not only material means, but bearable emotions (the mood organ), a feeling of community (the empathy box) and a method to distinguish between humans and androids (the Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test). However, the unattended primary process is shown in androids, and then humans experience it as uncanny. The lack of empathy

makes them insensitive and cruel, as humans are, and this is the cause of the society of *Androids*: apparently sophisticated, well-organized, and connected, but actually violent, scared, and lonely. Nonetheless, there is still hope to reverse all problems by achieving real empathy.

NOTES

- ¹ In a previous article, I have discussed the relationship between Philip K. Dick's work and religion; see Sevilla-Vallejo 2019.

REFERENCES

- Barlow, Aaron. 1997. "Philip K. Dick's Androids: Victimized Victimizers." In *Retrofitting Blade Runner: Issues in Ridley Scott's Blade Runner and Philip K. Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, ed. by Judith B. Kerman, 76–89. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Barr, Marleen. 1997. "Metahuman 'Kipple' or, Do Male Movie Makers Dream of Electric Women? Speciesism and sexism in Blade Runner." In *Retrofitting Blade Runner: Issues in Ridley Scott's Blade Runner and Philip K. Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, ed. by Judith B. Kerman, 25–31. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Bateson, Gregory. 1987. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc.
- Brand, Maria. 2013. "Empathy and Dyspathy between Man, Android and Robot in Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? by Philip K. Dick and I, Robot by Isaac Asimov." Degree essay in English Literature, Lund University. Accessed on July 29, 2022. <https://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordId=4023784&fileId=4023785>.
- Bremner, Kyla. 1999. "Philip K. Dick's Human Vision." *The Ethical Spectacle.org*, August 1999. Accessed on July 29, 2022. <https://www.spectacle.org/899/bremner.html>.
- Cohen, Alex S., Courtney B. Forbes, Monica C. Mann, and Jack J. Blanchard. 2006. "Specific Cognitive Deficits and Differential Domains of Social Functioning Impairment in Schizophrenia." *Schizophrenia Research* 81, 2–3: 227–238. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.schres.2005.09.007>.
- Dick, Philip K. 1972. *The Android and The Human*. Accessed on July 29, 2022 https://sporastudios.org/mark/courses/articles/Dick_the_android.pdf.
- Dick, Philip K. [1968] 2007. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* London: Orion Books.
- Dawson, Lorne. 1989. "Otto and Freud on the Uncanny and Beyond." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 57, 2: 283–311.
- Francavilla, Joseph. 1997. "The Androids as Doppelgänger." In *Retrofitting Blade Runner: Issues in Ridley Scott's Blade Runner and Philip K. Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, ed. By Judith B. Kerman, 4–15. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Freud, Sigmund. [1919] 2003. *The Uncanny*. Trans. by David McLintock. London: Penguin Books.
- Galvan, Jill. 1997. "Entering the Posthuman Collective in Philip K. Dick's 'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?'" *Science Fiction Studies* 24, 3: 413–429.
- Gardner, Howard. 2001. *Estructuras de la mente. La teoría de las inteligencias múltiples*. Colombia: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Goleman, Daniel. 1998. *La práctica de la inteligencia emocional*. Barcelona: Kairós.
- Gwaltney, Marilyn. 1997. "Androids as a Device for Reflection on Personhood." In *Retrofitting Blade Runner: Issues in Ridley Scott's Blade Runner and Philip K. Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, ed. by Judith B. Kerman, 32–39. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.

- Jentsch, Ernst. [1906] 2008. "Document: 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny' (1906): Ernst Jentsch." Trans. by Roy Sellars. In *Uncanny Modernity*, ed. by Jo Collins and John Jervis, 216–228. London: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230582828_12.
- Lydenberg, Robin. 1997. "Freud's uncanny narratives." *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 112, 5: 1072–1086.
- Masschelein, Anneleen. 2011. *The Unconcept: The Freudian Uncanny in Late-Twentieth-Century Theory*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- McNamara, Kevin R. 1997. "Blade Runner's Post Individual Worldspace." *Contemporary Literature* 38, 3: 422–446.
- Méndez-García, Carmen. 2003. "Retórica de la esquizofrenia en los epígonos del modernismo." PhD. diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid.
- Moreno, Fernando Ángel. 2010. *Teoría de la literatura de ciencia ficción*. Vitoria: Portal Editions.
- Moreno, Fernando Ángel. 2017. "La cultura material del aislamiento." *El laberinto de la soledad*. Accessed on July 29, 2022. https://laberinto35.rssing.com/chan-15051271/all_p12.html.
- Palumbo, Donald. 2013. "Faith and Bad Faith in Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" *The Journal of Popular Culture* 46, 6: 1276–1288. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.12088>.
- Postman, Neil. 1996. *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Sevilla-Vallejo, Santiago. 2017. "Sociología literaria de la modernidad. Estudio comparado de 1984 de George Orwell y *La Fundación* de Antonio Buero Vallejo." *Cálamo FASPE* 65: 72–79.
- Sevilla-Vallejo, Santiago. 2019. "La realidad virtual y la creencia en la trascendencia en Philip K. Dick. Estudio comparado de ¿Sueñan los androides con ovejas eléctricas?, *Ubik* y *Valis*." *Cálamo FASPE* 67: 45–52.
- Sims, Christopher A. 2009. "The Dangers of Individualism and the Human Relationship to Technology in Philip K. Dick's 'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?'" *Science Fiction Studies* 36, 1: 67–87.
- Tenner, Edward. 1997. *Why Things Byte Back: Technology and the Unintended Consequences*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Vint, Sherryl. 2007. "Speciesism and Species Being in Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" *Mosaic* 40, 1: 111–126.
- Viskovic, Richard. 2013. "The Rise and Fall of Wilbur Mercer." *Extrapolation* 54, 2: 163–182. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3828/extr.2013.10>.

Science fiction, ecology of mind and the uncanny in “Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?” by Philip K. Dick

Science fiction. Ecology of mind. Uncanny. Empathy. Community. Dystopia.

This article analyzes the interdiscursive relations between Philip K. Dick’s science fiction, the ecology of mind by Gregory Bateson, and the Freudian concept of the uncanny. Gregory Bateson differentiates primary and secondary anthropological processes or, in other words, unconscious and language, and Dick’s novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* reflects this inner interdiscursive relation. Finally, the Freudian concept of the uncanny demonstrates how androids produce an uneasy feeling due to their psychology, which seems very different from that of humans, but which is actually much more similar than expected.

Santiago Sevilla-Vallejo
Associate Professor
Faculty of Education
University of Salamanca
Paseo Canalejas 169
37008 Salamanca
Spain
santiagosevilla@usal.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9017-4949>