

# The Science Novum as Metaphor

## Analysis of Philip Dick's 'do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?'

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**Abstract**—*Science fiction is a tale of futurity which narrates the unique world of science and technology foregrounding the human element in the text. Philip Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (1963) is a science fiction on postwar nuclear communities on earth caught in the quagmire of techno andys. The study analyses how science and technology acts as a metaphor in the text for narrating the impact of technology on humanity. It utilizes the concept of Novum as a broad framework and takes into account the notions of SF theorists, Dark Suvin, Robert Scholes and Damien Broderick which serves us with appropriate approaches towards the text. The study analyses the alternate realities of our existence which dangles between human intelligence and artificial intelligence succinctly exemplified in the text. The novel raises the question of 'what makes us human' in the world of man-machine symbiosis.*

**Keywords**—*Nova, Structural Fabulation, Cognitive Estrangement, Imaginative Difference, Kipple.*

Science Fiction has always flourished as the stories of farfetched imagination of techno culture foregrounding human element in the text. Right from the fantasy elements in the Epics, ancient technologies in One Thousand and One Nights, Flying chariots in Ramayana, Alien worlds in Gullivers travels, Time machine in Wells' fiction, scientific creed in Frankenstein, these fiction of fantasy has firmly rooted its presence over centuries.

The twentieth century was characterized with intense attraction for science and technology. The flying saucers, Space shuttle, rocket ships, humanoid robots, techno andys, alien invasion and travel to Mars were identified as elements of scientific folklore. These tales represented the 'history of humanity's perspectives over space and time', the conflict of the natives and the aliens and the position of the human species in the universe. These tales are narrated with the nova as metaphor in a serious scientific language of suggestive richness.

Science fiction uses cognitive narrative strategies to unfold the tales of love and hatred in the ambience of the Android world. These scientific fabula are stories of such oeuvre of weird and wondrous, fantastical and factual,

estranged and yet satirical of the postmodern existence. Philip Dick's Science Fiction, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (1963) mediates between the psychic space of the characters and technological space of the world. The diegetic involvement of the postmoderns, their parasocial relationships, fantasy escape are dealt with intense seriousness in the text. It places a vital question of what makes a humanity? Philip Dick places the Nexus -6 Andys to counteract the concept of humaneness with the humans on earth.

SF texts expresses the 'cultural logic of postmodern human society' and raises the question about the posthuman subject. Dick sees humaneness as an ideology or cultural construction by the society. Being a postmodern, he presents the pluralisation of fictional world by juxtaposing the present world and the future human-posthuman world. Mc Hale describes SF as one which 'creates ontologically heterogenous world by interrupting into the world of beings of different ontological order'. Thus Science Fiction as a genre of popular culture presents a vision of alternate realities. The Proposition takes the perspectives of the three major SF critics Darko Suvin, Robert Scholes and Damien Broderick with three significant terms - Nova", Structural fabulation and cognitive estrangement which serves as the guideposts to analyse the SF texts .

Novum' signifies an innovation or a hypothetical new thing which has a scientific base but fictionalised by the writer. This novum becomes the defining concept which brings in what Darko Suvin calls as the Imaginative difference. The world represented by the SF writers focuses on the deployment of this difference. This novum attributes not only to the difference but to the symbolism in the text and hence technology is metaphorical. Adam Roberts in his book on Science fiction as a critical idiom presents a fine conceptual definition of nova as "one grounded in a discourse of possibility, which is usually science or technology, and which renders the difference to a material .The emphasis is on difference, and the systematic working out of the consequences of differences, of novum or nova, renders framework for SF". (7)

Dick presents a world of humans who are on earth and about humans who migrated to Mars due to Mars colonization programme. These sites are infested with Androids simulating the humans which act as a novum in the text. The key symbolic function of the SF novum is precisely the representation of its encounter with difference, Otherness and alterity. It is important to understand the three representational terms difference, Otherness and alterity. SF challenges all assumptions to think through how things might be different in the future. On the other hand, For Adam, the radical alterity of human diversity, is something we need to train ourselves into accepting as it presents the caricature version of ourselves. (183) SF represents otherness, the paradox of reality and virtual reality by metaphorically representing the world through their fiction.

It was Robert Scholes who defined the metaphorical aspect of Science Fiction with the term structural fabulation. It suggests that 'Structural fabulation is neither scientific in its methods, nor a substitute for actual science. It is a fictional exploration of human situations made perceptible by the implications of recent science'. Adam in the book *The History of Science Fiction* quotes Broderick who observed SF as that which is the result of culture undergoing the epistemic changes implicated in the rise and supercession of technical-industrial modes of production, distribution, consumption and disposal. It is characterised by metaphoric strategies and metonymic tactics. (1)

One could conclude that 'the 'novum' of SF is a part of the imagined world that stands in for the process of a whole environment; whereas the whole SF text operates metaphorically'. (13) The analysis of Dick's text will focus on this aspect of how the scientific mode of presenting the premise is important for conveying the message. At the time of writing the text, Dick foresaw the future when we will be living with the human andys. This alterity is what he wants everyone to accept and Suvin calls it as cognitive estrangement. Adam Roberts explains Suvin's conception that 'Cognition', with its rational, logical implications, refers to that aspect of SF that prompts us to understand, and Estrangement refers to that element of SF that we recognise as different, that 'estranges' us from the familiar and everyday life. (8) This feature of SF makes it realistic and fictitious giving way to metaphorical mode of expression.

In Philip Dick's text, Rick Deckard, a bounty hunter is employed to retire the rebellious human andys who wreak vengeance against the cops on earth. One meets Rick in the atmosphere bound by vid phones, television, synthetic animals, mood organs and empathy box into which humanoid robot enters. This robot has killed the master and challenges the entire humanity on earth. By

masquerading as real humans, a group of human andys enters the earth to exemplify themselves as superior race on earth. Suvin describes the scientific novum as that which dominates as a hegemony throughout the text. (10). These andys are nova which present us with a symbolic vision of our human existence. The novel deals with the metaphorical use of technology like mood organ, empathy box, Voigt Kampff scale and Television.

The text deals with the humans craving for real animals as a status symbol. Animals have disappeared after the radioactive pollution on earth. Those who could not afford real pets are looking for artificial pets to maintain their status symbol. For example, Rick Deckard has a mission in his life and that is to secure a real animal. Isidore who works in the Van Ness Pet Hospital which repairs artificial animals accidentally murders the real cat. He was shocked to learn his inability to decipher the real from the unreal. The text shows the seems to be electric cat which is symbolic of human existence that masks the real for the unreal. Also it implies that the world has become so disillusioned to misapprehend the real as unreal. On the other hand, there is subversion of the traditional notion and hence technology becomes real and supreme while the real is slowly deteriorating and doubtful of its validity. The mastery of the production of fake animals and absolute power of technology are exemplified. The rage of the humans to possess the available few real animals, the ensuing depression of the ordinary humans unable to possess them and the status assigned by the society for the animal possessors are enough fodder for us to think about the ecology of the future.

The novel begins with Rick Deckard conversing with his wife about setting the Penfield mood organ which will help them in dialing the proper phthalamic suppressant or dialing for inducing range of emotions. This enables them to move to alternate realities and shows how humans are dexterous in resorting to the fantasy world with the aid of technology. The use of Penfield mood organ in the text shows how technology creates paranoia and also suffragates the trauma of the human psyche. As the story moves, we understand that dialing 3 is for cerebral cortex, 594 for pleased acknowledgement of husband's superior wisdom in all the matters, 382 for despair and 481 for awareness of future possibilities. Rick says 'I know the 481,' he interrupted. He had dialled out the combination many times; he relied on it heavily. (9) As described by Iran, it breaks her emptiness instead of rage and though outwardly it appeared peaceful, it is not so. She describes her experience that 'although I heard the emptiness intellectually, I did not feel it. Later, She

claims having a Penfield mood organ as a privilege ' but then I read how unhealthy it was and was sensing the absence of life...and not reacting. They call it as absence of appropriation effect.( 4 )

The existence of this man-machine symbiosis signifies how humans are becoming part andys with their programmed existence. The substitution of the human body with technoorganic bodies again proves our robotic existence. The use of prostheses, the synthetic support by medical technology makes the humans to reassess their capabilities in maintaining the body and mind. This implies how humans are slowly but certainly becoming invalid unless technology helps them. Further the programmed existence nullifies the worth of the humans. If 'What ifs' are questions on human capabilities, one speculates on humans creating the technoandys which slowly surpasses the humans who are turning more and more inhuman.

Andys challenge the assumptions of humans as the superior race on earth. Human ingenuity has led to greater advancements in the field of Medical technology but on the cold equation of human validity. This raises the question of how this could be felt as advancement in the history of humanity. Dani Cavallaro makes the following observation in his Preface: The consensus produced by contemporary technoculture is the product of contingent trends and is accordingly open to ongoing redefinition. (10)

On one hand, SF offers the familiar but also desires newness which brings imaginative difference in the text. In the text, Rick Deckard uses the Voigt Kampff testing apparatus to measure the quality of empathy in order to check the identity of the Andys. Andys are sure to fail as empathy is felt as a feeling of the humans. But the notion of empathy as the unique quality of humans is questioned by Dick. This dialectic ends up as the dialectic on nature of language as we see in the example of Luba Luft. If language is going to be the manipulator of thoughts and truth, then how ingenuous is the humans' capacity on creation of language for communication?

Also, the text revolves around two major influences Wilbur Mercer and Buster Friendly who manipulate the minds of millions through their languages. These two are the arms of the media to keep the otherwise insane chaotic postnuclear world. The authenticity of Empathy, the defining quality of the humans is questioned throughout the text. Both Rick and Iran listen to Wilbur Mercer who was projected as a humanitarian, a savior through the empathy machine. He brings millions of people to share their grief through the empathy box. But Isidore reflected that Mercer isn't a human being; he

evidently is an archetypal entity from the stars, superimposed on our culture by a cosmic template.(32)

The empathy box shows Wilbur Mercer as an old man who ascends the mountain with the stones darting at him. This metaphorically implies humans' vision of progress in spite of very many hurdles that hinder their elevation. He invites millions to participate in this, in order to feel the collective responsibility for the present depraved world. By experiencing the piercing stones and the ensuing pain, they atone for their sins. This was seen as a spiritual exercise to keep them sane through the illusory world of Wilbur Mercer through the machine. By being participatory, he makes millions to feel that empathy is a great virtue which will hold them as a community. Empathy box" is the most personal possession you have! It's an extension of your body; it's the way you touch other humans, it's the way you stop being alone. But you know that. Everybody knows that. Mercer even lets people like me - ( 31)

Mercerism strengthened the feeling of righteousness in the otherwise guilty Rick who retired the Andys. Rick Deckard kills all the Androids but when his own goat was killed, he becomes disillusioned. He starts walking over the mountain and says, 'I had the absolute, utter completely real illusion that I had become Mercer and people were lobbing rocks at me. (106) The difference is I wasn't with anyone; I was alone.' This is the certainty that humans are left with in their endeavour to find fulfillment through the media or any material things. On the other hand, we see humaneness of Rick when he starts sympathizing for animals, androids like Luba Luft when he says 'we could have used her'. But for character like Phil Resh, andys are disposable consumer commodities. Dick parodies the postmodern world culture with several isms which has been projected as the ideal constructs of humans. This illusory life is shattered when later Buster Friendly counteracts the Mercer philosophy by exposing how fraudulent are the ways of Mercer.

Mood management is the most significant emotional gratification of media use. Merson calls it as 'Affective disposition'. Media has to satisfy the cognitive needs but it encourages affective needs and leads to fantasy escape. The writer portrays how the nuclear war 'no one remembered today why the war had come about or who' has ransacked the earth with radioactive pollution. The people were immediately sent to Mars with free andys which could support them. People who were already affected by radioactive pollution were classed as biologically unacceptable. We find Isidore as such 'chicken heads' who has been socially isolated and lives in the dilapidated apartment with no human contact. Further he has failed in the IQ test and hence he is ill-

fated to live on earth and not on Mars. Television becomes the social surrogate for him. As highlighted in the text, Isidore did not own a working clock, he depended on TV for time signals. The human interaction has become very less as we can see the characters of Iran and Rick who never engages in emotional attachment. Rather they are shown as empathetic towards the animals. The questionnaire Rick uses to find android robots and the behavior of the humans are testimonials of the unhealthy existence shared by the humans. This brings us to the question of how Andys could be differentiated from humans who have no sympathy for each other. Their attachment towards the animals whether synthetic or natural are mere commodities sought as a matter of prestige. Rick does not find meaning for his life other than fixing his ambition on breeding animals. The text satirises on the absurdity of pinning our ambitions on what is expected by the world. Dani in *Cyberpunk & Cyberculture on Science Fiction and the Work of William Gibson* remarks that they create a 'curious notion of commonality, based on the assumption that belonging to a culture amounts to desiring the same commodities desired by virtually any other individual inhabiting that culture. In this illusory community, people are often little more than anonymous strangers to one another: all that connects them is an abstract network of representation sense, supported by the idealization of science and technology as unproblematically rational discourses...'( 10 )

Ecoconsciousness has been the serious concern of science fiction which Lawrence Buell identifies as 'the growing malaise about modern industrial society's inability to manage global risk society which its unintended environmental consequences that Ulrich Beck calls as 'reflexive modernization' meaning in particular the fear of the privileged classes of the world inhabit a world whose hazards cannot be anticipated, calculated and controlled much less escaped.(5) The text highlights the digital junk which accumulates beyond imagination. The entire planet had begun to disintegrate into junk, and to keep the planet habitable for the remaining population the junk had to be hauled away occasionally and it is foreseen that Earth would die under a layer, not of radioactive dust but of kipple. (35) But we hear the alert that 'But eventually I'll die or go away, and then the kipple will again take over. It's a universe principle operating throughout the universe; the entire universe is moving toward a final state of total, absolute kippleization.'" (31)

The text revolves around how human minds has been capsized by the android world and media. The whole conversation in the text is worth quoting: Why did Buster Friendly always chip away at Mercerism? 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 Coming, the U. N. Secretary General, had declared several times. Isidore conjectured. Sure, that would explain it; he and Wilbur Mercer are in competition. But for what? Our minds, Isidore decided. They're fighting for control of our psychic selves; the empathy box on one hand, Buster's guffaws and off-the-cuff jibes on the other. (34 )

The text presents different models of subjectivity to portray the expanse of human faculties. After all, this is the world of human intelligence and artificial intelligence which are created by the humans. But this is not just fantasy stuff but heavily foregrounds and questions such traits with which we identify humanity. Thus in the text, Technology acts as the nova to deliberate the invasion of earth by andys from Mars, transformation of human bodies by technological manipulation, media power on earth, alarming digital junk and most important of all the humans' struggle to be humane.

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