

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

IN THE DIRECTION OF THICK DUST: NAVIGATING
HUMANISM AND POSTHUMANISM IN PHILIP K. DICK'S *DO
ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?*

by
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: In the Direction of Thick Dust: Navigating Humanism and Posthumanism in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

This thesis focuses on Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). It joins the academic conversation surrounding the book's posthumanism with a thorough investigation of humanism, of which I am critical. This is guided by the realization that while the human being is a player, even an engineer of the novel's postapocalyptic world, he is hardly the point or center of this world. Nor is he unchanged by it. Instead, he is being redefined by postapocalyptic ecology and technology. Yet, there is human resistance to this realization within the narrative, which I attribute to humanism.

Humanity reacts as if threatened and infringed upon. Next, it obsesses over the details of its existence. It defines itself with humanist flair and vigor, emphasizing empathy, reason, and dignity. Humanity's attempts to assert itself, however, discriminate against those who fail to meet human standards (androids and specials). More so, this self-assertion, or humanism, is fallible. For example, empathy is not depicted as an inherent human quality. I look at this closely and describe it as a crisis in humanism.

This thesis explores the suggestion to look beyond what is thought of as human in the novel. It turns to new life-forms, perspectives, and means of construing the human. Reality is more imbricated than it is perceived to be by humanity. I discuss how certain identities in the novel reflect this as well as the role that technology and ecology play here.

In conjunction, I identify on Earth an econormativity (a term borrowed from Giovanna Di Chiro) that organizes humanity along heteronormative lines. Once again, this is in reaction to perceived threats to human continuity within the radioactive environment. I then read the radioactivity carried by dust in relation to econormativity. I portray it as a transgressor to human order, but one with much insight when embraced. In that sense, my thesis moves in the direction of dust when navigating humanism, posthumanism, and the details in between.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is believed that in 1777, on his third and final voyage to the South Pacific, Captain James Cook presented a Tongan chief with a member of the medium-sized, radiated tortoises native to Madagascar. In May of 1966, Tu'i Malila (King Malila) died of natural causes at the Royal Palace of the Kingdom of Tonga in Nuku'alofa. Experts entrusted with the animal's embalmment at the Auckland War Memorial Museum suggested that she was a female and that her carapace recorded injuries sustained over the span of nearly two centuries.¹ The ancient, time-worn tortoise was a bridge in history. The notion that she may have boarded Cook's ship as an exotic pet or potential food source is not inconceivable. One way or another, she was resettled in Tonga where she was made a chief and survived into the twentieth century. This was an enduring animal of status and significance who upon her death was mounted and exhibited at the Auckland Museum for a short while then sent back to the Tongan government where she would remain on display.

In 1968, a Reuters piece dating back two years and announcing Tu'i Malila's death was made the epigraph to Philip K. Dick's science fiction (sf) novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* The epigraph's significance is said to lie with the animal.² As stated above, the tortoise was of elevated status in Tonga. Reuters even mentions how "special

¹ See Robb and Turbott's posthumous examination of Tu'i Malila at the Auckland Museum, published in 1971.

² I state this carefully as few scholars shine a light on the epigraph. Those who do, however, note the animal theme linking novel and epigraph. For instance, Cole writes in an endnote, "Dick's use of the epigraph supports my argument that animals are the central theme in the novel" (190n8).

keepers were appointed to look after it.” This level of care echoes the treatment of animals in the novel. Animals are given special status in the book and are considered precious, sympathetic creatures. Moreover, the tortoise’s obituary recalls the “perpetual animal obits” that circulated amongst people as a result of the mass extinctions occurring on irradiated Earth (Dick 36). To reiterate, there is an obvious animal connection between the epigraph and the novel’s themes.

However, I believe that there are more connections to uncover between the epigraph and the novel. Firstly, Tu’i Malila’s association with Cook is an association with empire and colonialism, which are important themes in the novel. Cook’s explorations expedited British colonization in the South Pacific.³ For example, he famously claimed parts of Australia for Britain that would later become penal colonies with the aid of his notes and surviving crew. The novel, meanwhile, imagines exploration and colonization taking place in space. It no doubt builds on the 1960s space race that captured imagination and the sf tradition of space travel plots, but carries an awareness of colonial history to which “Cook’s tortoise” might have been a witness.

Secondly, the Pacific region, to where the tortoise was relocated, was a site of intense nuclear testing in the decades following the end of World War II and the onset of the Cold War. The novel consummates its time’s fears of nuclear confrontation, all while being privy to consequences that regions like the Pacific endured with the development of nuclear technology. For example, incidents such as the *Castle Bravo* detonation of 1954

³ Even Tonga, which is said to have been resistant to European colonization in the South Pacific region, agreed in 1900 to become a British protected state, essentially handing Britain control over its foreign affairs. This remained the case until 1970.

raised awareness about nuclear fallout, and the detrimental effects it has on people and ecologies.⁴ Nuclear fallout features prominently in the novel as radioactive dust is virtually inescapable on Earth since the end of a nuclear world war. Even colonization is said to have evolved from its beginnings as a “meager” space program after fallout engulfs all of Earth, stifling its living beings and plaguing its environments (16). Thus, the novel and the epigraph (by way of invoking conversation about the Pacific) connect over nuclear predicament.

Thirdly, there is continuity in the treatment of the other, or rather, that which is perceived as the other by Western powers in the Pacific region. The other is another emerging theme in the novel. A disregard for Islanders and indigenous people connects colonial and nuclear history in the Pacific region. In the eighteenth century, Cook claimed New South Wales for the British Crown without the consent of the Aborigines inhabiting the land, treating it, some would say, as unoccupied territory.⁵ In the twentieth century, nuclear tests were callously conducted over the Pacific, in locations nearing inhabited islands and atolls. To note is that “the testing was conducted in colonial dependencies or United Nations trust territories administered by the Western powers” (MacLellan 3). The disregard for the lives of Islanders and natives is related to how they were seen as somehow inferior, different, distant, primitive—other. The novel also grapples with the idea of the

⁴ Some 4200 km northwest of Nuku’alofa, Tonga, the United States (US) tested a thermonuclear device over an evacuated Bikini Atoll on March 1, 1954. The detonation was so powerful that the contamination unexpectedly spread to inhabited atolls, nearing the coast of Japan.

⁵ See Banner 100-04. He writes of the reasons why the British treated Australia as *terra nullius* when there had been a population of indigenous people living on the continent.

other from the point of view of its human characters. The other is embodied mainly in the enslaved android of the colonies and the mutated special of radioactive Earth.

The epigraph is a gateway to the complex world of the novel and the cluster of themes it traces: reverence for animals, space colonization, radioactive fallout, and othered beings, among other things. The intricacies of this world are the subject of my study. I start with the question, what is linking these themes in the novel? The answer is the human being. He causes a war, ruins a planet, travels into space, and inflicts injustice wherever he goes. But then, what of the human being, who is he, and what is his place within the narrative? Although he thinks that he is at the center of the narrative, he is not. He tries to set standards and definitions for himself but is constantly challenged. So while humanity is the engineer of the postapocalyptic world we are thrust into, by the end of the novel, it is hardly the universe's point of reference. Much like the epigraph that focuses on Tu'i Malila, our attention turns to other life-forms and new perspectives, although human activity and exploits have clearly shaped the story. From the quandary over humanity and its place within the world, I segue into a discussion on humanism and posthumanism in the book.

Recent academic input on the novel tackle a wide range of subjects. For example, Jennifer Rhee critically applies roboticist Masahiro Mori's theory of the uncanny valley onto the novel, Aaron A. Cloyd inspects the conversation that the novel has with the environmental awareness that characterized the 1960s, and Seyedahmed Moosavi conducts a study into the confusing task of identifying good and evil in the text's society of humans. The overall literature, however, is tipped in favor of posthuman analysis. And this is for

good reason as Dick challenges rigid notions of humanity in a myriad of ways. Tony M. Vinci, for instance, examines how traumatic encounters challenge human subjectivity by opening up posthuman discourse on vulnerability.

Upon further inspection, even the works that deliver new arguments can subtly carry posthuman insight, or cite sources that overtly discuss the book's posthuman elements. Rhee provides an "alternative reading of the uncanny valley as a site of entanglement" for the human and nonhuman (302), calling upon the android that elicits in the human feelings of eerie likeness that challenge a rigid and unalloyed sense of self. Cloyd also offers insight arguing that the novel attends to "human presence within the environment," highlighting their interactions and involvement rather than their separation (88). Both Rhee and Moosavi cite Jill Galvan's article, "Entering the Posthuman Collective," from 1997. It would appear that posthuman analysis irrevocably influences academic views on the novel.

Critical analysis of the posthuman, however, overlooks or lightly covers the novel's deep engagement with humanism. Space colonialism and discriminatory practices are some of the details that can be explained in relation to humanism. So rather than just imply humanism in a literary discourse about posthumanism, I engage them both, as I see them both occurring in the novel. There are obstinate definitions about the human being that are forced upon the species, then there are other forms of life and novel ways of construing the human. I associate the perpetuation of the former and the resistance to the latter with

humanism. I also delve into the intimate aspects of being, such as sexuality,⁶ and link them to the ecological context. In this way I hope to exercise due diligence with the novel's exploration of humanity and posthumanity. The context and the personal involvement of characters, I believe, greatly inform such exploration.

In the second chapter of my thesis, "The World Between Humanism and Posthumanism," I dedicate the first section to establishing that there is a humanism in the novel. This humanism is partial to regular humans, and discriminates against androids and people disabled by radiation. I show how humanism is built on observing difference. The second section argues that this humanism is in crisis because we can find numerous faults and contradictions in its line of reasoning and its human application. In other words, humanism is struggling to be maintained in these postapocalyptic times. It is during the crisis that we glimpse features of posthuman reality. This reality is teeming with life that does not fit into the humanist box of acceptable existence.

The third chapter, "The Pairing of Econormativity and Radioactivity on Earth," unsurprisingly zooms in on Earth. In the first section, I present the concept of econormativity, inspired by Giovanna Di Chiro's coinage and use of the term. The term suggests that the transformation of Earth into a radioactive planet influenced social patterns as well as private and personal matters. I peer more closely at what it means to be human and find a heteronormative answer that is closely tied to the radioactive environment. I then relate econormativity to humanism as they work to the same end: demarcating humanity. In

⁶ By which I mean sexual feeling, expression, and activity. But I am also suggesting that aspects of human sexuality are managed and delimited in the novel.

the second section, I flip the coin to show how the radioactivity carried by dust challenges people's conformity with a humanist and econormative order. I argue how confronting dust opens up a posthuman outlook. Overall, I am examining how econormativity and radioactivity interact in the novel's characters.

The fourth chapter, "The Planetary Perspective Gained from Radioactivity on Earth," moves from characters on Earth to the entire planet. I inquire about the things we learn from interpreting radioactive dust on Earth at the macro level. I find that we acquire a planetary perspective, one that chases humanity and humanism with criticism about its practices to other planets.

Along the way, I offer commentary about themes of animal reverence, space colonialism, fallout, and otherness that I have extrapolated from the epigraph. I fit them into the framework that I have detailed with the chapters above. This framework is an attempt to grasp the particulars of the expansive sf world that Dick builds in *Do Androids Dream?* My project allows us to better envision humanism out of these particulars and read it in relation to the posthumanism that is widely studied in the novel. This thesis is critical of the humanism in the novel and accounts, especially, for how ecology relates to the order that humans preside over.

CHAPTER II

THE WORLD BETWEEN HUMANISM AND POSTHUMANISM

In this chapter, I identify in *Do Androids Dream?* an equivalent to the movement, stance, outlook, ideology, philosophy known as humanism. It appears in the novel to be shaping norm and law at the level of persons and institutions. Imbued with humanist values are characters like Rick Deckard, a regular whose job it is to dispose of robot outlaws, and organizations such as the UN that has considerable influence over international, even interplanetary, laws and affairs. Humanism also negotiates human traits and boundaries, and asserts human relevance and centrality in a critical sf setting that harbors existential threats to him. I make clear that humanity feels especially threatened by radioactive disablement and android simulacra. Space colonialism and systemic discrimination are carried out as answers to these threats. After identifying humanism in the novel, I argue that there are cracks in its foundation, which are indicative of a crisis. Posthuman realities and identities are rendered visible from between the cracks. Disability and technology in the novel are some of the things reevaluated via posthuman theory.

A. Humanism Entrenches Difference with Its Definition of Humanity

It is apparent from the early moments of the novel that there is a humanism acting as the arbiter of acceptable thought, behavior, and action in the novel's fictional universe. This humanism makes the human the measure against which to determine right from wrong.

Deckard, aroused from sleep by a “mood organ” and filled with optimism about the day, clashes with his wife over her somber somnolence (1). Their argument, which begins the first chapter, alerts us to Deckard’s humanist mindset. “You’re a murderer hired by the cops,” Iran accuses her husband, to which he responds, “I’ve never killed a human being in my life” (1). In face of the accusation, his first instinct is to say that he has never killed a human being, whereas, his occupation as a bounty hunter requires that he dispatch androids that have escaped the space colonies to Earth. His omission of the android detail communicates that the human is a figure upon which conscientiousness and law are contingent. In the bounty hunter’s case, murder and guilt apply to the situation if the target is human.

If humanity is to be given a central and determinant role in the abstruse world of the postapocalypse, then there needs to be a subtle understanding of what it means to be human. This is no truer than in a universe filled with humanoid robots and human divergence in ability and intellect as a result of exposure to radiation. In one scene, Deckard tries to reason the distinction between androids and humans through empathy, which “he once had decided, must be limited to herbivores or anyhow omnivores who could depart from a meat diet” (26). He conflates a meatless diet with religious communion to arrive at the conclusion that the human is a “herd animal” with group instinct, and is therefore empathetic, while the android is a “solitary predator” with little regard for other life-forms (27). The android’s dietary habits are not engaged, nor is the irony of Deckard’s solitary, predatory profession made obvious to him. Nonetheless, the distinction he makes reassures him about his line of work, which in light of this distinction “did not violate the rule of life laid down by Mercer,” the novel’s messiah figure (27). In other words, there are qualifications to being human. Those that bear

a resemblance but do not (or no longer) qualify as human are met with violent discrimination. This discrimination is justified in the mind of the perpetrator.

To better understand how it emerges in the details of the text, we need to first evoke an understanding of humanism. The term *humanism* is traced back to the nineteenth century, which saw serious intellectual rumination about antiquity. It was used as early as 1808 by German educationalists (as *humanismus*) to refer to a curriculum that gave precedence to ancient Greek and Latin, and to the literature written in both languages (Davies 9; Graf 111). A humanist education was meant to impart more than the “practical knowledge and skills” that had concerned educators prior to the German reformation; it was meant to enable the “development towards true humanity” by studying the examples set in “the knowledge, aesthetic ideals, and ethical theories of classical antiquity” (Graf 111). To note is the concern over “true humanity” at the core of the educational system. Humanism as such began in the nineteenth century as a classically-inspired educational system that championed humanity.

Soon after the educationalists, historians began locating humanism in the European Renaissance. They located it, especially, in the Florentine revival of classical studies that began to replace medieval scholasticism. Not only was medieval pedagogy shunned, so was the whole of the medieval era. As of the Renaissance, humanists turned to antiquity to help “repair the damage wrought by the barbaric and corrupt *medium aevum* that had followed the fall of the Roman Empire” (Hankins 32). Humanism marked a shift in focus towards the humanities, open-ended intrigues, and proper Latin usage. It also rebuked medieval prescriptions of human life as an interim between birth and death, substantial only in its relation to the afterlife. Instead, humanists saw value and prospect in the lives led by human

beings. In brief, humanism looked to a glorified past that seemed interrupted by a contemptible era to learn, teach, and better humanity.

Meaning was abstracted from the accumulation of nineteenth-century reflections upon Western history: humanism became a purveyor of human dignity, agency, reason, and progress. The Swiss-German historian, Jacob Burckhardt, for example, located humanism in the Renaissance's expression of the individual as "a free-standing self-determining person with an identity and a name that is not simply a marker of family, birthplace or occupation but is 'proper' – belonging to you alone" (Davies 16). To Burckhardt, Renaissance individualism was the harbinger of "the modern nation state" that put distance between "individual citizens" and the medieval "aggregations of nameless, unselfconscious subjects" (Davies 17). We witness with Burckhardt an interpretation of the human being—dignified and autonomous—that is based on his historical inquiry into the Renaissance. He uses this interpretation to argue a difference between people across time.

Similarly, the specifics of the postapocalyptic setting in the novel directs people to find meaning in reason, empathy, and dignity. This meaning is used to distance humans from the "aggregations" of robots and disabled individuals. Consider, for example, Deckard's antagonization of robots for transgressing human parameters:

For Rick Deckard an escaped humanoid robot, which had killed its master, which had been equipped with an intelligence greater than that of many human beings, which had no regard for animals, which possessed no ability to feel empathic joy for another life form's success or grief at its defeat – that, for him, epitomized *The Killers*. (27)

Deckard provides a list of reasons that can be ascribed to humanism even when they appear to be inspired by Wilbur Mercer's dictum, *Kill only the Killers*, an ambiguous direction that leaves open to interpretation the meaning of "Killers" to the "Mercerite" (27). Deckard locates the Killers' "nebulous presence" in robots for the *nonempathic, cerebral* manner in which they are *capable of violating humanity* (27).

The novel asserts the degree to which reason is an important indicator of humanity that is not to be infringed upon by androids and specials. In one scene, Deckard's secretary follows him into his office at the police department and informs him that "The Nexus-6 brain unit they're using is now capable of selecting within a field of two trillion constituents, or ten million separate neural pathways" (24). She is warily describing the boundless intellectual potential of androids produced by the Rosen Association, one of which was capable of outsmarting and wounding a senior bounty hunter on his trail. After consulting the information sheet about the Nexus-6, Deckard recalls that "intelligence tests hadn't trapped an andy in years" (25). That same morning, John Isidore reflects on his yearlong status as a "special" since having failed "the minimum mental faculties test" (15). His thoughts then wander over to his boss at the "Van Ness Pet Hospital" who would often repeat the expression, *Mors Certa, Vita Incerta*. The mentally challenged Isidore struggles to recall the meaning of the expression before it occurs to him that "if a chickenhead could fathom Latin he would cease to be a chickenhead" (15). His belief that a knowledge of Latin is an undisputed proof of intelligence appeals to humanistic sentiments about the classical languages. Placing the scenes side by side illustrates the two trends that undermine

humanity's monopoly on reason and intellect: the corporate manufacture of increasingly smart androids and the radioactive dumbing down of people.

Tests are implemented to detect these trends that offset human-associated reason. They end up facilitating discrimination against the other. Monthly checkups are required to differentiate "regular" from "special" status on Earth. Once one is classified a special, they are "abruptly classed as biologically unacceptable," "dropped out of history," and "ceased, in effect, to be part of mankind" (13). Humanity is thus responding to the effects of radiation by expunging from human records and shunning from human societies people with corroded mental faculties. Conversely, android intelligence and appearance are uncannily close to that of humankind, which proves to be an inconvenience for the latter group. Although acknowledged in the android, intelligence is made out to be an unnerving quality in the organic robot. When Deckard encounters an android posing as an opera singer he notes an inexplicable coldness about her. "That other cold, which he had encountered in so many androids," he contemplates, is "Always the same: great intellect, ability to accomplish much, but also this. He deplored it. And yet, without it, he could not track them down" (86-87). Androids are admittedly intelligent, but they are of an intelligence thought to be spoiled by a lack of empathy, which contributes to the off-putting coldness that they exude. The test used by Deckard to identify androids defers to empathy as a way of skirting the problem of android intelligence approaching that of mankind. Tests and probes become a means to segregate the "chickenhead" and the "cold" android from the measured regular.

Moreover, the human logic arguing for difference between human and other takes on a scientific appearance. We recall Deckard's herd/predator conjecture and find that it echoes

Darwin's theories in *The Descent of Man* (1871). Compare Deckard's opinion that "A herd animal such as man would acquire a higher survival factor" while "an owl or a cobra [or an android] would be destroyed" (27), to the tidbit, taken from Darwin's voluminous work, about how the animals "that cared least for their comrades and lived solitary, would perish in greater numbers" (qtd. in Osborn 30).⁷ Rick then claims that this rationale "made his job palatable" (27), i.e., he is able to justify killing androids with some semblance of scientific reason.

Here, I digress to discuss the transition of a racist variety of humanism into Nazism and to show how, historically, "science" was used to justify horrible discrimination. French Aristocrat, Arthur, Comte de Gobineau, reified a "scientific" racism that sought to prove with misguided reason the superiority of the Teutonic bloodline of Germanic tribes. He saw Germanic blood coursing through the veins of the ancient Greeks, which gave greater power to his claim of superiority because it appealed to humanistic idealizations of ancient people. The ideas that he transcribed into the now infamous *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1853) would inspire Third Reich Nazis and Nazi sympathizers to intellectualize their anti-Semitism.⁸ Likewise, humanism in the novel is an "ideological smokescreen"⁹ for oppression that seeks to intellectualize, validate, and systematize intolerance.

⁷ See Osborn's chapter, "Dignity After Darwin," for a treatment of human dignity via Darwin's theories that reads them alongside humanism.

⁸ See Davies 17-19 for Gobineau's racist interpretation of humanism; See Chapoutot for more on Gobineau's reception among members of Richard Wagner's inner circle of Nazi sympathizers, particularly, Houston Stewart Chamberlain on whom the author focuses.

⁹ A phrase used to describe how humanism has been misappropriated in the past (Davies 5).

The book does not reimagine Nazism in its plot, but systematic oppression is pronounced in the science-fictional depiction of colonialism.¹⁰ We are told that “A meager colonization program had been underway before the war but now that the sun had ceased to shine on Earth the colonization program entered an entirely new phase” (13). The program has reached a point where regulars dissociate themselves from android and special categories by immigrating to space colonies. They place lightyears between themselves and Earthbound specials by moving to space settlements, and other androids by inserting them into a colonial system that crowns the human master over them. While humanity seeks solace in space, specials and androids fall victim to the oppressive colonial system. One is unable to seek new life in the colonies and the other is not allowed to escape them.

In the colonies, the organic robot performs the roles of supplanted native and black slave, recalling a racial and racist history that expounds on difference and otherness. We are informed that the advanced Nexus-6’s manufacturers legally “operated under colonial law, their parent auto-factory being on Mars” (24). The assumption is that other manufacturers follow suit in housing android production on colonized planets. We also learn from a television advertisement that the space program “duplicates the halcyon days of the pre-Civil War Southern states!” where androids are put to work as “body servants or tireless field hands” (14). Here, I humor the idea that androids are built and worked on offshore planets in a way that reenacts historical “operations that pronounce colonial divisions of humanity”

¹⁰ Relevant is Klinger writing about postwar, anticolonial reflections on the relationship between Nazism, colonialism, and humanism.

from “settler seizure and native removal, slavery, and racial dispossession” to “racialized expropriations” that, according to Lisa Lowe, are “imbricated processes” (7).

Once again true to history, colonialism in the novel is sponsored by governments and intergovernmental organizations. Immigration to outer space is facilitated by a United Nations (UN) that otherwise makes it “difficult if not impossible to stay” on Earth (13). This organization—based on a real-life counterpart that pledges itself to peace, freedom, tolerance, and progress in the preamble to its 1945 charter—is an accessory to robot enslavement, the dehumanization of disabled individuals, and colonial enterprise. The novel’s depiction, however, is not necessarily opposed to how the real UN is thought to operate. Despite the UN’s efforts at international peacemaking and its championing of human rights since its formation in the aftermath of the Second World War, it is criticized for having failed in its foundation to properly address the issue of colonialism. Kate Manzo mentions that the “1944 commitment to racial nondiscrimination that underpinned the UN charter guaranteed only ‘just treatment’ for colonized peoples within an international trusteeship system administered by colonial powers” (382). Like its historical counterpart, the novel’s UN is experiencing a moment of complicity with colonialism.

Organizations such as the UN advocate humanity according to the presiding humanist definitions of it. Manzo likens the real, peace-promoting UN to an arena “where clashing conceptions of morality and ethics are contested” (384). She concludes from revising UN history that human rights are open to interpretation, and that “so, too, is modernity’s conception of the *human* in whom rights are vested” (384). This seems to be the case with the novel’s UN that interprets the human and his rights according to humanist principles.

Given the postapocalyptic stress on human reason, dignity, and empathy, the UN excludes robots and specials as beneficiaries as well as aggressively promotes space colonialism because it is believed to be in the best interest of humanity.

We turn to a postwar appendage to human rights: robot ownership upon relocation to space colonies.¹¹ In the novel, the UN dictates by law that “each emigrant automatically received possession of an android subtype of his choice” (13). Dignity justifies robot ownership as a human right where it should instead be recognized as slavery. Ronald E. Osborn points our attention to Eleanor Roosevelt’s exposition on “rights” and “dignity” during the UN’s 1948 drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Osborn reiterates the First Lady’s view on dignity as “the necessary belief underlying the claim that humans have any rights to begin with” (24). We turn to the episode where Isidore listens from another room as a television announcer interviews a recent immigrant to the New America settlement on Mars. He asks her how life on Mars compares to life on Earth and she responds, “I think what I and my family of three noticed most was the dignity” (15). She continues that it is hard to explain the feeling, but that she is reassured in “Having a servant you can rely on” (15). Instead of indignantly toiling under the weight of an overwhelming toxic environment, her dignity on Mars can rest upon the shoulders of the colonized robot. By comparison, specials on Earth are physically and mentally compromised, endure “the contempt of three planets,”¹² and are stripped of their right to emigrate. We once again

¹¹ Although I do not outright tackle the issue of human rights as either inherent or conditional, it should be noted that the right to own robots is overlooked in *regulars* that remain on Earth. This might be because androids are used as an incentive to emigrate. See Miller; while he does not engage the novel immediately, his assessment of human rights under various circumstances seems pertinent.

¹² A line attributed to Isidore that can be generalized to include all specials (Dick 15).

encounter the humanist face mobilizing oppression to deliver “dignity” and “rights” to whoever qualifies as human, at the expense of others.

The humans of the novel define their existence with humanist flair and vigor. I have identified certain parameters of humanity around which individual opinions and actions, and collective efforts revolve. Empathy, reason, and dignity are such parameters that are thought to distinguish humans. However, androids and specials are othered in relation to them. We begin to see how humanism entrenches difference with its definition of humanity. Bounty-hunting, tests, colonial enterprise in space, and organizations such as the UN are evidence of this entrenchment. They are guided by difference and create discrimination.

B. Crisis in Humanism and Posthuman Redefinition of the World

In this section, I argue that the novel’s humanism is in a state of crisis for constantly battling forces that destabilize any clear, sustainable definition for the human, and that, therefore, undercut the system in place to identify and gratify him. Writing in the same year that *Do Androids Dream?* was published, Abraham Edel intimates a twentieth-century crisis in humanism. He attributes the crisis to moments where “the basic theory of humanism” is proven to be inconsistent, unclear about its central concepts, or refutable in some fundamental way (285). Comparably, the humanist assumptions about reason, empathy, and dignity are contradicted on numerous occasions in the novel. Definitions of the human that rely on these assumptions eventually yield.

Crisis in the book extends from a humanist ideology to structures and programs that are built on its rocky foundations. “[Crisis] may lie,” Edel adds, “in the combination of elements out of which a social program has been fashioned, so that the achievement of one would frustrate another” (285). He gives the example of “the alleged incompatibility of achieving both liberty and equality” in the socialist milieu where “every movement towards liberalization is met as a threat of the restoration of capitalism,” and with it inequality (291). Likewise, in the novel, there is obvious frustration within the process of producing advanced robot subtypes for colonial purposes. This frustration, once noted within humanism, allows us to see how technology and nature make room for posthuman realities.

Immigration to space and how people respond to it is one indicator of crisis. Firstly, there is the question of whether abandoning Earth for space is on some level an abandonment of what it means to be human. On the etymology of the word *human*, Tony Davies writes, “The root-word is, quite literally, humble (*humilis*), from the Latin *humus*, earth or ground; hence *homo*, earth-being, and *humanus*, earthy, human” (125). The word appears to be linked to proximity to soil, ground, and earth, and perhaps in the larger scheme of things, a residency on Earth. Aside from etymology, conditions in space differ drastically from those on Earth. Escaped android, Pris Stratton, says of Mars, “nobody should have to live there. It wasn’t conceived for habitation, at least not within the last billion years” (130). This raises the question of whether the interplanetary emigrant will be redefined by the harsh extraterrestrial conditions. On Mars, does the migrant retain his humanity or might we begin to think of him as Martian/alien? Merely asking these questions exposes the precariousness of the human as a category of being.

Moreover, some people's response to emigration goes against reason and prompts a reevaluation of reason as an absolute human quality. When the only two options are "emigrate or degenerate!" (6), we are told that "Logically, every regular should have emigrated already" (13). In actuality, regulars by the thousands choose to remain on Earth because, "Perhaps, deformed as it was, Earth remained familiar, to be clung to. Or possibly the non-emigrant imagined that the tent of dust would deplete itself finally" (13). During their morning argument, Iran declares that "everyone who's smart has emigrated" (3). Soon after, when heading to the rooftop to tend to his electric sheep, Deckard explains his choice to remain with his wife on Earth. He exclaims, "I can't emigrate...because of my job" (6), which is a dissatisfying answer for its brevity, lack of depth, and potential insincerity. Two things strike us at once: first, that it is without reason to choose to remain on Earth, and second, that the choice to remain is related to an attachment to Earth that overpowers reason.

Another indicator of crisis in humanism is the system of tests in place to distinguish the human that fails as measures grow inexact and inaccurate. The Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test, for example, is an apparatus that records the eye-muscle and capillary reactions of the testing subject when confronted with a series of hypothetical situations that call for empathy. The police force rely on this test to differentiate humans from androids since the latter reportedly lack empathy. The test's accuracy is brought into question when we learn from Deckard's superintendent, Harry Bryant, that Leningrad psychiatrists believe schizoids and schizophrenics—"a small class of human beings" with "diminished empathic faculty"—would fail the test and be mistakenly classified as androids (32). We infer from Harry's

remarks that empathy is not inherent and cannot be generalized to include the whole human species.

Another worry is that androids are being made in a bid of corporate competition to be as humanlike as technologically possible. The concern is that androids could one day cheat or pass the Voigt-Kampff Test. Deckard is sent to Seattle to conduct a study into the accuracy and pertinence of the test. His first and only test subject is Rachael Rosen, introduced to him as the niece of the head of the Rosen Association. She fails the test and the senior Rosen interjects with the explanation that “Rachael grew up aboard *Salander 3*. She was born on it; she spent fourteen of her eighteen years living off its tape library and what the nine other crew members, all adults, knew about Earth” (45). In other words, Rachael is not properly educated in postapocalyptic human norms, such as animal empathy. This explanation pokes a plausible hole into the accuracy of the test until Rachael betrays that she is an android of the latest kind. Were she human, the test would have become obsolete for its negatable assumptions about human empathy. In the end, Deckard admits that the Rosen group “came awfully damn close to undermining the Voigt-Kampff scale, the only method we have for detecting [androids]” (52). However, there is still the threat that the test might no longer work on the next generation of androids. The feeling is that the system of identification, which Voigt-Kampff is a crucial part of, is on the precipice of collapse. This is in part due to the unbridled corporate ambition to make “progressively more human types”¹³ of androids.

¹³A phrase used to describe new android subtypes, which is excerpted from Eldon Rosen’s justification of corporate activity (Dick 46).

“We produced what the colonists wanted,” is Eldon Rosen’s response to an indignant Deckard in which he portrays a symbiotic relationship between colonies and corporations (46). Instead, I argue that colonialism and android production are working incongruently within the humanist whole. It is stated that “the manufacture of androids, in fact, has become so linked to the colonization effort that if one dropped into ruin, so would the other in time” (38-39). The association between robot production and space colonialism is due to the strong incentive for robot ownership, which then creates a high demand for robots that is to the advantage of corporate businesses. Both structures need each other to operate. However, a threshold is crossed and the relationship is frustrated when robot production grows so innovative so as to unsettle the identification system upon which colonialism is built. Therefore, if tests fail as a result of corporate innovation and the category “android” is reconsidered to warrant empathy, dignity, or rights, it might erode the colonization program enslaving robots and securing settlers. Even if the colonies withstand, there remains the very likely threat that advanced androids will rebel and kill their masters to acquire freedom. Here, we recall Edel arguing about the incompatibility of humanist elements within a milieu as a sign of crisis.

Edel engages the human, nature, and technology in discussions about crisis in humanism. He writes of “basic categorical cuts” that are “tried out for interpreting the world,” such as “matter and spirit, body and mind, universal and particular, intelligible and sensory,...and so on” (286). Humanism, he explains, “weighed those cuts in which the human was one of the categories” (286). The “man-nature cut,” which served as the front for nineteenth-century disputes over man’s place in the natural world and within its evolutionary

scheme, is where “the signs of crisis in humanism seem more serious” (288). However, what concerns Edel from his position within the twentieth century is that “There are some signs of crisis in the forebodings that man will, on a scientific view, turn out to be a complicated machine” (289). He concedes that “the very concept of a machine is being transformed so that the question whether man is a machine changes its meaning now over the decades” (289). According to Edel, crisis follows challenges in defining the human against his technological and ecological surroundings.

I infer from Edel’s writing that posthuman realities are implicated in the crisis in humanism. He is anticipating posthumanism when he touches on categorical cuts straining as they confront discourses on human integration with nature and technology. Kay Anderson describes posthumanism as “a disparate body of ideas calling into ontological question the meaning and integrity of ‘the human’” (2). She continues, “Conceived as an entity entangled with rather than separated from nature, ‘the human’ is problematised in relation to societal/technological change and the assumptions of a long tradition of western humanism” (2). Posthumanism, thus, takes issue with humanism’s purist visions of humanity. It also imposes upon human integrity a Harawayan¹⁴ irreverence for boundaries.

In the novel, humanity is being renegotiated alongside technology and nature, which signals the crisis in humanism and the emergence of the posthuman. We are introduced to a peculiar type of technology within the text, the previously mentioned Penfield “mood organ,” which is used by humans to dial complex emotions. For example, one can dial “481” for an

¹⁴ See Haraway’s essay, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” first published in 1985. She uses the myth of the cyborg to critique traditional notions of boundaries and categories. A revised version of the essay was most recently published in 2016.

“Awareness of the manifold possibilities” (3), or “888” for a “desire to watch TV, no matter what's on it” (4). The device can be used to create a schedule of moods for its user, and evidently for Deckard, it proves useful for braving the world of the apocalypse. Consider in parallel the scene where Deckard concedes that the radioactive dust “filtered in and at him,” slowly mutating him into a special so long as he stayed on Earth (6). The technology and nuclear nature of Earth appear to potentiate posthuman realities. This is so because there is a problematization of the human—in this example, Deckard—and his relationship to nature and technology in a humanist setting that implements rigid categories.

Another technology, the “empathy box” that allows people to “participate in fusion” (57), seemingly serves humanist ends. It is assembled with twin handles and a screen that shows “random colors, trails, and configurations which, until the handles were grasped, amounted to nothing” (17-18). The box allows for “physical merging” then “spiritual identification” with Wilbur Mercer and everyone who at the same moment “clutched the handles, either here on Earth or on one of the colony planets” (18). The collective, as Mercer, experiences the overwhelming emotions of all those connected to the box superposed upon visualizations of a laborious ascent up a hill. The experience is meant to bring about the empathy for which the box is named after as well as congeal a human collective. Hence, it is a technology that is enlisted to create experiences that authenticate humanist ideals. But as Galvan instructs us, the box acts as “the long arm of the government” to satisfy the need for connection, sedate the masses, and quell the threat of rebellion (418). In other words, the box “recuperates the citizen’s transgression into bounds where it can have no consequences”

(417). We recall that setting boundaries is a humanist endeavor in the case of the novel, as is reinforcing empathy as an inherent human quality, whether or not it actually is.

Upon further inspection, the empathy box accomplishes the opposite of what it appears to do. Galvan argues that such technology encourages the separation of individuals, each taking to an empathy box rather than to each other. “This rupture proves,” she argues, “especially ironic in the case of the empathy box, which despite its name more undermines than facilitates the experience of emotional community” (418). The irony extends onto empathy, “the purported marker of humanity,” and questions empathy’s legitimacy in distinguishing the human from the android when such “natural affective interconnection” fosters separation (418). Isidore tells us that the 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” (57; emphasis added). We note a posthuman admission in Isidore’s exclamation, which otherwise holds what Galvan calls “the fallacy of a cohesive fraternity of autonomous human subjects” (418): technology has become integrated with the human so that boundaries between them begin to disappear.

Posthuman identities proliferate in realities shaped by advancements in technology and radioactive nature. The most recognizable posthuman identity in *Do Androids Dream?* is that of the android, itself a technology. We should note, however, that while a technology, the android is an organic being without mechanical parts. Deckard later admits as much to Rachael, “Legally you’re not [alive]. But really you are. Biologically. You’re not made of transistorized circuits like a false animal; you’re an organic entity” (171). To contrast with the human becoming more integrated with technology is the android of organic constitution.

Galvan argues that “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” (414). The android blurs categorical distinctions between organism and technology, living being and artificial creation, human and nonhuman.

Disability in the book, which is ultimately incurred by the long-term residents of radioactive Earth, can also be read as a posthuman identity. Goodley et al. claim that disability, in posthuman fashion, forces us to reinterpret such ideals as agency and autonomy (345). The crisis of humanism, which they parenthetically annotate as “the realization...that we all fail to dance to the ableist drum” of an idealized “man,” exposes “structural others of the modernist humanistic subject” (346).¹⁵ Such others include disabled individuals who have “historically been excluded from the category of the human” (343). Stressing heteronomy, “disability necessarily demands and affirms *interdependent* connections with other humans, technologies, non-human entities, communication streams and people and non-peopled networks” (348). The most interconnected character of the novel is perhaps Isidore who we recall to be a special. “I don’t think Isidore can tell the difference,” Milt Borogrove surmises after Isidore mistakes a live cat for an ersatz, but indiscriminately empathizes with it and fumbles trying to repair it (67). His empathy appears to extend onto all life-forms without distinction and he soon harbors a group of fugitive androids with the intent of becoming their friend. He is also the character most reliant on technologies, such as

¹⁵ Goodley et al. heavily rely on Rosi Braidotti in their approach to critical disability. Terms and concepts about the posthuman are frequently borrowed from her work and expanded on.

the television and the empathy box. A disabled Isidore, therefore, highlights the interconnectedness of a posthuman identity with all that is around it.

I write with guidance from Edel about a crisis in humanism taking place in Dick's sf universe. Reason and empathy are contested as absolute human qualities since a number of regulars choose to remain on Earth despite it being framed as the unreasonable option, and since empathy is admitted to be lacking in at least a small psychiatric group of people. Androids that are being made to resemble mankind are also a source of worry. Corporations commissioning advanced robots threaten to disrupt the colonial system when they are meant to service the colonies' demand for robot slaves. I then put forward a posthuman redefinition of the world, one which plucks the human from its center and integrates him into the greater context. Within the context of radiation and advanced technologies, such as the mood organ and the empathy box, posthuman identities flourish. The android, the special, and even the human who utilizes new technologies can be thought of in posthuman terms.

CHAPTER III

THE PAIRING OF ECONORMATIVITY AND RADIOACTIVITY ON EARTH

Humanism in *Do Androids Dream?* underwrites an econormativity that means to settle what is normal and what is queer within the broader quest to delineate who is human and who is not human on postapocalyptic Earth. I discern econormativity in the novel's presentation of habits, tests, laws, language, and relationships that interpret society heteronormatively in reaction to the toxic ecology. For example, codpiece fashion, pronoun usage, and animal integration into the family unit can be explained with econormativity. Econormativity is met with radioactivity in the form of dust. Radioactive dust not only transforms regulars into specials, it disturbs the sexual order, questions human ontology, and overall challenges set boundaries and expectations. I specifically read Deckard's turbulent experiences throughout the dusty day of the novel, during which his judgment is beclouded, as undoing his humanist, econormative conditioning.

A. Econormativity Is Intimately Concerned with Humanity

The term *econormativity*¹⁶ is coined by Giovanna Di Chiro to describe the complicity of environmentalism with heteronormativity, whether intentional or not. She finds residues of econormativity in environmental discourse's appeal to "pre-existing cultural norms of

¹⁶ Di Chiro styles the term with a hyphen as *eco-normativity*. The term is also a contraction of *eco(hetero)normativity*, which she uses in alternation.

gender balance, normal sexual reproduction, and the balance of nature” (224). She examines “anti-toxics discourse,” with specific focus on the popular and alarmist discourse combatting chemical pollution and toxic contamination. This strand of “anti-toxics environmentalism,” Di Chiro argues, professes “laudable and progressive goals” but “mobilizes the knowledge/power politics of normalcy and normativity” (202). For example, much of the “scientific and news media” report on wildlife findings in connection with toxic exposure in people, but Di Chiro warns:

While the news of rising incidences of fish tumors, clam and mussel lesions, Beluga whale breast and ovarian cancers, and disappearing amphibians have attracted a following in environmentalist circles, the documentation of gender-bending, homosexual, and emasculated frogs, fish, birds, and alligators has caught the attention of the mainstream media and the blogosphere. (203-04)

She does not deny that there is “good reason for alarm” with regards to the chemically-induced sexual and reproductive changes observed in the so-called “lower species,” but criticizes where the media’s “critical attention lies” (210). She is targeting the type of sensational coverage that “participates in a sexual titillation strategy summoning the familiar ‘crimes against nature credo’ and inviting culturally sanctioned homophobia” (211). This “selective storytelling,” as she calls it, also normalizes “the many other serious health problems associated with POPs [Persistent Organic Pollutants], which are on the rise: breast, ovarian, prostate, and testicular cancers, neurological and neurobehavioral problems, immune system breakdown, heart disease, diabetes, and obesity” (202). Such careful

considerations allow Di Chiro to extend the critique of heteronormativity into the ecological sphere where it concerns environmentalists.

I employ Di Chiro's econormativity to address the complicated socio-environmental world of *Do Androids Dream?* Econormativity affirms that there is ecological context for heteronormative practice. In other words, I acknowledge that there is a relationship between the toxic ecology, the effects it has on the human, and the dictation of what is normal/natural amid all the mutation. Additionally, I find that the novel's econormativity is aligned with humanism. Both are attempting to define humanity, although econormativity deals more explicitly with matters of sex, sexuality, gender, and reproduction. While humanism is seen as having heteronormative tendencies,¹⁷ econormativity is an adjunct that fully explores them in the book. They are also both driven by fear for humanity in the postapocalyptic world, but econormativity is more directly linked to the radioactive ecology of Earth. In the novel, humanism and econormativity are involved with one another. Econormativity allows us to enter ecology into the discussion about the human as well as address certain quirks, such as codpiece fashion.

Early in the novel, residues of econormativity manifest in men's habit of wearing codpieces over their genitalia within the irradiated spaces of Earth. The codpiece is marketed as protection against dust and points to what people think need most protecting. The codpiece emphasizes the external reproductive organs, as opposed to organs as vital as the lungs, or

¹⁷ Davies speaks of the "paradigmatic 'man' enthroned at the heart of all the discourses of humanism" (59); Rosi Braidotti describes him as "able-bodied" and "heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit" (qtd. in Goodley et al. 343); while Anderson condemns an idealized human "who arrogated to himself the power to speak on behalf of all people" (10).

the upper respiratory tract that would be immediately agitated by dust. This recalls Di Chiro's criticism of where "critical attention lies" in the midst of contaminated spaces. By habiting the codpiece, people in the novel let it be known that they pay special attention to issues of fertility and reproduction that arise in the radioactive setting.

Moreover, the codpiece showcases that not only is attention moved away from vital organs, but it is directed with specific focus on male genitalia. This anatomical focus reflects concern over the male in a gendered society afflicted with dust. Aside from being organs of reproduction, male genitals traditionally determine sex and gender. From then on the male is burdened with gender roles. The novel's gender roles put the man in dust's path. It would seem that women are confined to their households, or limited to secretarial positions/desk jobs, while men venture into the open and earn a living on behalf of a heterosexual pair: "I notice you've never had any hesitation as to spending the bounty money I bring home," Deckard says to his wife before leaving for work, revealing her financial dependence on him (1-2). The targeted need for protective wear can be explained by a man's more frequent encounter with dust in a gender coded society.

The codpiece, however, is more normative than protective. It is clung to despite its obvious inutility. Iran mentions silencing "that awful commercial" for "Mountibank Lead codpieces" (2). Mountibank is a play on *mountebank*, a word derived from Italian to mean swindler or false advertiser. The choice in name communicates that the brand is aware of selling a false product that can do little to service protection against the dust. More so, Mountibank is ill received by some audiences and consumers, as with Iran who declares her aversion to the commercial and her husband who finds the codpiece useless against the dust.

Later, broadcasting on Isidore's television, is the announcer asking the new immigrant on Mars, "—your husband felt little protection...in owning and continually wearing an expensive and clumsy radiation-proof lead codpiece, Mrs Klugman?" (16). Sentiments align over the product's shortcomings. Men, nonetheless, abide its impracticality and inconvenience, and continue to wear it. Wearing a codpiece takes hold as a man's habit on Earth not because it offers physical protection, but because it is the correct way to dress given the circumstances.

Upon further inspection, the codpiece is seen as having a humanist import. Ajax is the name of the Mountibank codpiece model that Deckard owns, and is an allusion to Greek warriors, Ajax the Greater and Ajax the Lesser, most famous from Homer's *Iliad*. The name Ajax, thus, alludes to tutelary warriors with impressive masculinity, but is also a nod to Greek heritage. The novel's codpiece leaves an unmistakably humanist imprint, considering that codpieces were also the pinnacle of male fashion in Renaissance Europe, where there was a revived interest in Greco-Roman scholarship and ideals.¹⁸ The Mountibank swindle is a sign of society's humanism. It also makes sense alongside the Martian denouncement of codpieces within the context of an interview promoting emigration. The codpiece might be serving its purpose, not of protection, but as a daily reminder of vulnerability on the dusty planet. Deckard, for one, wears the codpiece then thinks of the "befouling filth" that continues to filter through him, bypassing Ajax, *lest he emigrated* (6).

¹⁸ See Persels for a connection between Renaissance thought and codpiece fashion, accessed through a parody scene in Rabelais's *Pantagruel* (1532), and meant to exemplify humanism's masculinity and well-founded ideas over scholasticism's effeminacy and irrelevance. That masculinity and potent rhetoric are related is described as a Roman inheritance in thought.

The novel's codpiece is a product of the socio-environmental circumstances. It is a daily signature of reproductive concerns and is an encumbrance of gender roles following the dust. It leaves the impression of an econormative society, one that meets the toxic ecology with gender binary, heterosexual, and reproductive values. It is also a product working to achieve humanist ends, such as emigration from Earth. The codpiece is the first of many manifestations of the involvement of humanism and econormativity in the novel. As we shall see, this involvement is reiterated in almost all aspects of organized society, such as tests, laws, language, and family life.

Econormativity is embedded in the humanist test in place to distinguish humans from androids. While conducting the Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test on Rachael, Deckard presents her with the following scenario: "In a magazine you come across a full-page color picture of a nude girl," but as he pauses, she quips, "Is this testing whether I'm an android...or whether I'm homosexual?" (42). Robert Yeates calls upon the same exchange to argue that the "heterosexual norm" and empathy—a human trait, its lack considered "immoral and incriminating"—are together implicated in the test's framework (67). Deckard carries on with the test, which reads like a heterosexual correction to Rachael's homosexual interpretation of the scenario. "Your *husband* likes the picture," he begins again, restoring the narrative's heterosexual order by placing Rachael in a marriage with a man and transferring to him the voyeuristic interest in the photo (42; emphasis added). However, by emphasizing the "major element" of the scenario, the "large and beautiful bearskin rug" that the model poses on, Deckard reminds us that he is testing for Rachael's empathetic response to the bear's fate in order to judge whether she is human or not (42). Entwined with the test

for empathy, which is designed to differentiate humans from androids, is a concern over the animals of nature. Within the same empathy test is an insistence on heterosexuality and an evasion of queer possibilities.

The interrogation sequence with Rachael shows that laws that govern humans in the novel spare little private detail from legal judgment. I have argued that laws rely on exclusive definitions of the human using the parameters of empathy, reason, and dignity. Laws move from these parameters to people's reproductive affairs. Deckard proposes a hypothetical situation where Rachael is impregnated by a man who has promised to marry her, only for him to elope with another woman. In response, he tells her, "you get an abortion and—" but she interrupts him saying, "I would never get an abortion...Anyhow you can't. It's a life sentence and the police are always watching" (43). Deckard himself admits to being "a man who could reproduce within the tolerances set by law" (6). It is quickly made obvious that conception is a sensitive subject that law and law enforcers choose to handle with severity, making any impediment to conception or termination of pregnancy a punishable offence.

Ecological conditions in the book lead to an obsessive focus on straight human reproduction, which is reflected in the legal system. The laws are guided by an awareness of the low human population density since the ecologically devastating war. Many have died since, while others have immigrated to previously uninhabited territories in space where they will need to repopulate, leaving Earth sparsely populated. The situation on Earth is such that "a one-half occupied conapt building rated high in the scheme of population density" (3). Of those remaining on Earth, many are mutating into an unacceptable version of humanity, one that falls short of the human ideal. These people are placed under the category special and,

like Isidore, “cease[], in effect, to be part of mankind” (13). It would seem that specials are not counted towards the total population. They even dwell at the outskirts of humanity “in the virtually abandoned suburbs” (13), or are so incapacitated that they are put in “custodial institutions” (16). Whichever way you look at it, there is a human population issue instigated by the dust where *human* numbers are a concern. Laws that sift through private matters, prohibiting abortion and penalizing infertility, are ways of coping with the issue.

Contrasting with the small population is a growing robot presence. As such, robots bear the brunt of resentment in language as elsewhere. Notably, the plot reveals a detail about pronoun usage that is tied to a prejudiced humanism. In one episode, Phil Resch partners with Deckard to retire Luba Luft. Together, they discover that Luba is an android protected by the illegitimate and robot-infiltrated police station where Resch worked as a bounty hunter. While discussing the plan to return to the San Francisco Opera Company where Luba is a singer, Resch uses the pronoun *her* to describe Luba, but quickly corrects himself with the word *it* (108-09). Resch’s mistake prompts him to wonder whether Deckard thought of the android as an “it” as well. *It* is a pronoun that indicates an impersonal relationship to what is being referred to. The first inference is that using *it* to refer to the android objectifies, distances, and dehumanizes the organic robot—a humanist effort that now infiltrates grammar and language. There are also gender connotations for *it* since the pronoun is gender-neutral and is used in instances where the speaker is ignorant, neglectful, or dismissive of gender in the singular referent. The second inference is that Resch is perhaps wondering whether Deckard uses *it* to further alienate androids by placing them outside of the traditional gender order (male/female), which is expressed in language using gender-specific

pronouns.¹⁹ In brief, there are moments in the novel where language used by human characters reflects humanist efforts at disenfranchising androids. The same type of language reveals an awareness of gender and gender norms, and the power of relation through gender.

Meanwhile, it is necessary for humans to think and speak of animals in gender-specific terms. Such practice is auxiliary to animal empathy, therefore, humanism. After confusing the Voigt-Kampff results for Rachael, Deckard concludes that she must be an android when she uses the wrong pronoun to refer to a female owl in the custody of the Rosen Association: “*She keeps calling the owl it. Not her*” (50). We should point out that Deckard’s conclusion is likely a matter of luck since the owl is revealed to be ersatz in the end, a fact that Rachael was always aware of and may have let slip. Not to mention that Deckard is fooled by Eldon Rosen into thinking that Rachael is a human who is inadequately educated in postapocalyptic norms. Rosen’s justification, albeit false, should have made Deckard consider improper pronoun usage as consistent with Rachael’s upbringing aboard a spaceship. Nevertheless, we learn that ascribing gender to animals is a social expectation and norm that expresses empathy, which in turn expresses humanity.

Gendered pronoun usage when referring to animals, that specific expression of empathy, is an econormative feature of society. The projection of gender onto animals is an attempt through language to control the sexual order in a setting threatening people with extinction. Deckard reflects on how “it had been discovered that species upon species had

¹⁹ To note is the tendency in recent years to use pronouns (they/them/their/theirs/themselves) in recognition of gender identities outside of the traditional binary. See Bjorkman; Indhiarti and Rizki, for an introduction on the subject. In comparison, the pronouns (it/its/itself) remove the referent’s choice in developing an identity, including the gender aspects of an identity.

become extinct and how the 'papes had reported it each day – foxes one morning, badgers the next, until people had stopped reading the perpetual animal obits” (36). Mass extinctions are a result of nuclear fallout and are at the root of animal empathy. Engaging with the novel, however, Simon A. Cole is suspicious of people’s empathy for animals since they themselves are “faced with the choice between extinction or self-imposed exile,” and are not “in any position to pity other creatures” (183). He suggests that “The tragedy that humans project onto animals is their own,” and implores us to turn to the late twentieth century “where animal extinctions are metaphors for reproductive anxiety, and for concerns about human extinction and genetic purity” (183). Like Cole, I attribute norms about animals, which range from empathizing with them to assigning them gender, to mankind’s anxieties surrounding survival and continuity in a toxic space.

The animal is not only empathized with and found relatable, but is included in the nuclear families that form on the radioactive planet. Family units seem to comprise of three essential members: the husband, the wife, and the animal. “You know how people are about not taking care of an animal,” Deckard’s neighbor reminds him on the “rooftop pasture” of their building, “they consider it immoral and anti-empathic. I mean, technically it’s not a crime like it was right after W.W.T. but the feeling’s still there” (10). Transitioning successfully from law to norm, owning an animal becomes the social obligation of every family. Deckard’s preference to buy a “large animal” instead of a “domestic pet,” coupled with the elaborate rooftop menageries that permeate the urban landscape, seem to suggest that the bigger and wilder the animal, the better (10). Real animals are also preferred to electric imitations, which are cheaper and bought to keep up with appearances. “To say, ‘Is

your sheep genuine?’ would be a worse breach of manners than to inquire whether a citizen’s teeth, hair, or internal organs would test out authentic,” and so neighbors never pry (5). Society on Earth is moved by its ecological predicament to adopt and care for animals, usually in the context of family.

The animal goes as far as to function as the “child” and befits the novel’s atmosphere of infertility, declining population, and animal extinction. The child, Lee Edelman tells us, “is not to be confused with the lived experiences of many historical children” (11). Instead, the child is a figure utilized in discourses about the future that privilege heteronormativity. The child “has come to embody for us the telos of the social order...as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust” (11). The novel substitutes the child for the animal. The effect is that regulars, such as Deckard and his wife, constantly strive for a future where the animal is present in their lives. Even Deckard’s bounty hunting is tied to the prospects of being able to afford a real animal in place of his electric sheep, which gives depth to the otherwise shallow proclamation, “I can’t emigrate...because of my job”(6). Deckard eventually deposits money for a black Nubian goat, claiming that he had to buy her despite the acquired debt. He then explains to his wife that “It wouldn’t have been possible for me to go on without getting an animal” (148). Their neighbor later congratulates Deckard and his wife by saying, “that’s a nice-looking goat you have, Deckards. Congratulations,” then turns to Iran before he continues, “Maybe you’ll have *kids*; I’ll maybe trade you my colt for a couple of *kids*” (149; emphasis added). The word *kid* conveniently carries the double meaning of young goat and child. I also note that the neighbor’s congratulatory remarks are akin to those uttered to

new parents. Anxieties about the future appear to be mitigated by integrating the animal into the nuclear family as a placeholder for the human offspring.

Men wearing a codpiece everyday; people using *he* or *she* when speaking of animals, but *it* when speaking of androids; people's obsession with owning and including an animal in their family characterize the humans that live on Earth. These humans are part of an order that is invested in managing humanity against the threats of the radioactive ecology down to the minutest details. In the chapter before, I discerned a humanism that manages people along the parameters of empathy, dignity, and reason. Here, I take a look at an econormativity that is intimately concerned with humanity. It parses human details with heteronormative conviction. People are, thus, conditioned to wear certain things according to gender, to be paired heterosexually, to understand the world in binary terms. These are ways to make sense of the reality that thoroughly accosts the human. For example, when humanity is challenged with infertility, lack of progeny, and the general extinction of species, the econormative response is to make buying an animal the solution.

B. Radioactivity Carries Transgressive Insight

In *Do Androids Dream?* econormativity and radioactivity interact on Earth. They are forces that struggle with one another. Econormativity is society's reaction to toxic ecology, while radioactivity is an inseparable and inescapable part of that ecology now that it binds to dust. On the one hand, humanity tries to build social order from the toxic and dusty ruins around it, and in the process attempts to control the most intimate details of personhood. On

the other hand, dust strains that order by suspending in the air a feeling of imminent mutation and presenting personal challenges to those routinely exposed to it. Radioactive dust heightens insecurities about the future, specifically, worries about infertility and extinction. In response, people try to reorient sexual matters and interests as a means to gain control over the threat of dust. This response excludes sterile specials and androids, not just from humanity, but from what is considered a normal sexual order. In this section, I look to the other side of order, from a perspective embracing radioactive dust as an instigator and transgressor. I find that embracing the dust opens up a new worldview, one where the normal sexual order is disturbed by queer expression, the ontological formula of humanity is questioned, and borders are crossed.

Struggles between econormativity and radioactivity take place within human characters as they affect them personally. Deckard is arguably the human character whose inner struggle is most developed in the novel. He alternates between his reservations about all that does not fit into econormative society and his transgressions that align themselves with dust. His inner turmoil reaches a boiling point when Rachael, having been scorned by Deckard, retaliates by pushing his newly purchased Nubian goat off the rooftop of his building. She had been perceptive when she said, “You love that goat more than me. More than you love your wife, probably” (175). By killing the goat she pokes at the heart of his econormative ascriptions. The goat would have represented his future, his virility, his child, his ability to carry on working and living—his life purpose. Deckard’s life purpose is jeopardized by the goat’s death. In a scene that I will return to at a later time, an anguished

Deckard retreats into a desert over the state border and glimpses life from a perspective thick with dust, away from the order that had held sway over him.

Before it reaches its peak, the struggle between what I have dubbed econormativity and radioactivity builds within Deckard as the plot progresses. It is precipitated by an incident with a female-type android when he unexpectedly empathizes with her despite all his unsympathetic conjectures on robots. Deckard is able to perform his duties with the police without issue until he and Phil Resch set out to retire Luba Luft. Soon after completing the task, Deckard unexpectedly mourns Luba who had shown in her last moments a propensity for art and music, which he admired. Trying to make sense of this unsettling reaction, especially in contrast with the indifferent Resch, he self-administers an empathy test and takes note of the empathic “magnitude” (123). He concludes that he is “capable of feeling empathy for at least specific, certain androids,” the female types, while noting that “There is nothing unnatural or unhuman about Phil Resch’s reactions; *it’s me*” (123). Deckard is asserting that it is normal and human to feel detached from androids, and is confused about his own feelings for female-looking robots.

Resch intercedes abating Deckard’s concerns and restoring the grip of the order over him: “You wanted to go to bed with a female type of android – nothing more, nothing less” (124). The empathy that Deckard was experiencing is nothing more than the desire to have sex, according to Resch. He is implying that this confusion is to be expected within their line of work because it stems from the bounty hunter’s—standing in for the human male’s—attraction to human females. Resch reconciles the empathy norm, which excludes robots from conveying or receiving empathy, with the heterosexual norm that necessarily attracts males

to females. He even aligns them by suggesting that Deckard consummate his sexual attraction before killing the female types, thereby satisfying his sexual urges all while fulfilling his duty as bounty hunter. Resch's suggestion makes Deckard realize that his partner exemplifies a "good bounty hunter" (125; emphasis added). The normal, human, and good bounty hunter, Resch, successfully navigates normativity, while managing to stand "between the Nexus-6 and mankind" as a "barrier which keeps the two distinct" (122).

Deckard then takes part in a queer act of sex with an android, which leaves him shaken once more. He acts on Resch's advice and sleeps with Rachael en route to retiring three androids. As they are about to become intimate, Rachael wonders if it is a loss that "Androids can't bear children" (168). In doing so, she links the impending act with infertility. Deckard avoids the question and continues undressing her until he "expose[s] her pale, *cold* loins" (168; emphasis added). Robot coldness, thought to be a result of high intellect and low empathy, is attributed to Rachael's genitalia. Coldness here acquires a new meaning for robots as inhospitable to life. Thus, the genital attribute, "cold loins," reminds us of the robotic entity they belong to as well as her infertility. It also suggests that sex with her, an infertile robot, is queer and unnatural, and not only illegal as we are informed. Rachael seems to affirm the queerness with the precoital disclaimer, "*I'm not alive!* You're not going to bed with a woman. Don't be disappointed; okay?" (168). With Rachael, he would not be having sex with a real, live woman who stands the chance of bringing life into the dusty, barren world. Sex with her would be a transgression. After having sex anyway, the empathy that was seeded in him during the encounter with Luba takes hold. "I love you," he announces to Rachael before thinking to himself, "This is my end...As a bounty hunter. After the Batys

there won't be any more. Not after this, tonight" (171-72). The queer act of sex with Rachael takes him out of the conformist mind frame that had dominated his life and work.

Deckard, however, quickly and dizzyingly lapses back into the econormative order. Rachael explains that the sex was a ploy to prevent him from killing androids again, something she had accomplished with other bounty hunters: "This seemed to work...for reasons which we do not fully understand" (173). She had disarmed Deckard of his humanist, econormative sensibilities through intimacy until she gave away her strategy. On learning that Resch was once her paramour he says, "I understand now why Phil Resch said what he said. He wasn't being cynical; he had just learned too much. Going through this – I can't blame him. *It warped him*" (174; emphasis added). In his lapse, he falls back into the habit of using the pronoun *it* in reference to Rachael: "She – or rather it – nodded" (173). This is despite Deckard having earlier told Phil that he no longer found the habit necessary to detach from androids before completing a job. He goes on to kill the three escaped androids hiding in Isidore's apartment. In his daze, he hallucinates about Mercer aiding him in retiring the androids. However, he is no longer certain about the righteousness of the job. "What a job to have to do," he reflects, "As Mercer said, I am required to do wrong. Everything I've done has been wrong from the start" (197). Deckard's movement into the order sees him resuming old habits, but not without him admitting the wrong in doing so.

The final chapters search for answers to ontological questions in the dust. As stated earlier, Rachael finds out that Deckard retired the androids and exacts revenge by killing his goat, and with it kills his life purpose. In distress, he retreats to the California-Oregon border, described as "the uninhabited desolation to the north" (199). "Maybe I'll go where I can see

stars,” he says, knowingly heading in the direction of thick dust (199). Starry nights symbolize unclouded clarity and navigation, so it is provocative that Deckard would instead travel into the heart of the dust to make sense of the day’s experiences. There, in the desert, he realizes a truth about himself: “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” (201). Having experienced haywire empathy, confusion and unreason, a queer act of sex, and suffered the sacrilege of an animal’s murder, he dissociates from the conditioned understanding of himself as human. *What is human? What is natural to the human? Am I human?* are some questions that he implicitly poses amid the dust’s radioactive and symbolic bombardment to his being.

In the desert, he is prompted to reevaluate what counts as a living being by an electric toad, which he at first mistakes for a real one. He barely discerns the bulge in the ground next to his parked hovercar: “The toad, he saw, blended in totally with the shade and texture of the ever-present dust” (207). It is as if it had been conjured by the dust in a moment of critical reflection. We are told that the toad is an extinct species and happens to be “The critter most precious to Wilbur Mercer” (207). It is, therefore, meaningful that the toad should appear in the desert where it has little chance of survival. If it had been a real and sacred toad—or any real animal for that matter—it would have meant receiving “a star of honor from the UN and a stipend” (208). He would have been awarded for the discovery of a creature that matters to humanism and sustains it. However, that promise quickly dissolves. Jubilant, Deckard takes the toad home to San Francisco and shows it to his wife. Iran quickly discovers a tiny control panel in its abdomen, revealing it to be an electric animal. His joy dissipates at the discovery

she makes but then he realizes, “it doesn’t matter. The electric things have their lives, too. Paltry as those lives are” (211). Deckard set out to find validation in the desert, thinks he has received it with the toad, only to end up validating the “paltry” life of an otherwise undervalued and overlooked mechanical being.

Emerging from the dust, therefore, is an ontological shift in focus away from the human of humanism. “Do androids dream?,” Deckard asks himself, “Evidently, that’s why they occasionally kill their employers and flee here. A better life, without servitude” (160). Thoughts on dreaming androids and electric animals with paltry lives recall the titular question, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Despite all the human problems that the novel addresses, the title chooses to dwell on other life-forms. It only implies the human in the word *Dream*. This might be a suggestion to look beyond what is being thought of as human in this world of dust. It asks whether dreams and consciousness can occur in other creatures. “A bildungsroman for the cybernetic age,” Galvan writes, “Dick’s novel describes an awakening of the posthuman subject” (414). The novel, she argues, “interrogates a fixed definition of the human subject and at last acknowledges him as only one component of the living scene” (414). We witness this with Deckard, who has to go overboard with his actions, across the California-Oregon border, and into the dust to accept seeing things from a different perspective.

Deckard moves back and forth from the familiar and normative to the unfamiliar and transgressive. In the end, he succumbs to dust’s transgressive insight, scoping life outside the box of conformity. He experiences empathy for one female-type android and has sex with another. In associating closely with androids, he starts pushing past institutionalized and

internalized fears of infertility, inhumanity, extinction, and irrelevance, among the extensive list of fears. He, thus, tests the limits and bounds of the order he belongs to, but not without experiencing dissonance. In a state of distress, he finds himself confronting the dust. He emerges from the dust with an inkling of posthuman reality.

CHAPTER IV

THE PLANETARY PERSPECTIVE GAINED FROM RADIOACTIVITY ON EARTH

In this chapter, I move with the dust from the little worlds that characters of the novel inhabit to planets, nations, and gross structures. The shift in scale comes with a shift in perspective. Joseph Masco describes radioactive fallout as an awakening, its toxicity a “planetary force” (144). In other words, it uncovers the connectivity of the different life-forms and systems of activity on the planet, and is understood as long-lasting and far-reaching. By 1960, experts tracking radioactive flows grew to understand fallout as such, a planetary force (Masco 151). This seems to resonate with the novel given its portrayal of radioactive dust, which I will return to in detail. A “planetary force,” radioactive fallout is also “a realization that requires new critical theory as well as different concepts of the political” (Masco 144). Likewise, the radioactive dust of the novel forces us to be percipient and critical of human concepts and practices that were employed during the war and in its wake.

Do Androids Dream? portrays radioactive dust as spreading over Earth’s surface. This dust is the result of wartime activity and persists years after WWT’s conclusion. It endures while the exact reasons for the war slip into obscurity: “no one today remembered why the war had come about or who, if anyone, had won” (12). The plague of dust, we are told, “had descended from above” (12). This implies that an unfortunate number of nuclear warheads befell the planet, blasting earth and objects into the atmosphere that fell back down

as dust. Dust has since become a meteorological phenomenon that envelops Earth and overwhelms life on the planet. However, its toxic “potency” is said to have decreased from the initial stages of fallout where exposure to radioactive particles meant almost certain death (5). Fallout now inflicts a “slow violence”²⁰ upon Earth’s survivors so that it seems like it “only deranged minds and genetic properties” (6). Dust is portrayed as an enduring, ubiquitous, slow-acting product of war that permeates the body and its surroundings

I frame the book’s portrayal of dust as a commentary on nuclear warfare, which is the source of dust. Dust contrasts with how we think of war as a temporary, geographically contained conflict that is marked by violent spectacle. The first image to come to mind in relation to nuclear warfare is, perhaps, that of the mushroom cloud—a brief yet powerful display of atomic force captured over nuclear test sites or enemy territory. Dust, which we encounter frequently and at every turn, which delivers its violence slowly, is instead associated with nuclear warfare in the book. It is described as the “legacy of World War Terminus” and forces us to reckon with the aftermath of nuclear conflict (5).

The book’s portrayal of dust also provides commentary on humanist responses to fallout. The radioactive aftermath of manmade war is incurred by the entire planet as environments are forever altered, species grow extinct, and life on Earth is stunted. The anthropogenic effects of war, therefore, clash with an anthropocentric worldview that focuses on the human. Dust draws attention to the world around the human being and measures him

²⁰ “Slow violence” is a term used by Nixon to mean an inconspicuous form of violence that unfolds gradually over time and space. See his chapter, “Ecologies of the Aftermath: Precision Warfare and Slow Violence,” in which he counters narratives of a short-lived Gulf War (1990-91) by discussing the slow violence of depleted uranium that is carried by desert dust.

against it, as part of it. In reaction, humanist institutions retreat into narrow-minded understandings of the human as a form of self-preservation. Clamoring in the dust, humanism responds by discriminating against specials, persecuting humanoid robots, and promoting life in space colonies where robot enslavement is legitimate practice. Dust is a criticism of making the world's point of reference human, highlighting instead a planetary perspective.

Radioactive dust invalidates the war that divided nations by elucidating that all of Earth is at stake. This dust that "contaminated most of the planet's surface" is said to have "originated in no country" (12). It could be that no one country is culpable for the dust because it is a product of complicated military interactions, or that it is unclear from where the dust began to scatter, but it is just as likely that the notion "country of origin" is dismissed seeing how dust spreads without fealty to country or recognition of borders. The omnipresent dust questions nationalisms, patriotisms, and other divisive *isms* that stir global conflict, when toxicity is felt by the entire planet. As Masco puts it, "Fallout positions the citizen less as a national subject than as an earth dweller," because risk of physical contamination is not so much a matter of national identity as it is a matter of breathing (142). We recall for a third time how dust "filtered in and at" Deckard for simply residing on Earth (6), regardless of any other information about him, such as his nationality or affiliation to a geopolitical bloc. Hence, geopolitical divisions do not register with dust and are not justified from a planetary perspective.

In the interlude to the war, however, Earth is yet to be considered as a whole. Nations persist and when they unite, it seems that they hold an international rather than planetary position. This position is exemplified by the UN, which organizes around its nation members

to protect their interests. The novel makes several mentions of nations including Canada, the Soviet Union, the US, and on one occasion mentions “the government in Washington” (14). Meanwhile, the setting on Earth is such that people are compromised by radioactivity and territories are claimed by the dust. This leads us to consider that nations have a weakened foundation of community and territory on their mother planet. The UN is driven to resettle people to space colonies for safety purposes, but exports with them the influence of its nation members. Such influence can be exerted in the colonies without hindrance from dust. Isidore listens from the bathroom as the presenter on the nationalized television channel announces the occasion to be “the fifth (or sixth?) anniversary of the founding of New America, the chief U.S. settlement on Mars” (14). New America is one of many satellite settlements with ties to a remote nation and organized with aid from the UN.

Dust foils the UN that organizes around nations and that promotes space colonialism. Affording new territories that are unbequeathed to dust and welcoming healthy migrant communities, it is not hard to imagine the ways in which the seeds of nationalism might grow in colonized soil. For example, colonies such as New America could one day claim independence and sovereignty, or hold the seats of government instead of the weakened nations on Earth. An impassioned Isidore helps us realize that it is conceivable for a war to start in the colonies when he says, “I hope a war gets started there – after all, it theoretically could – and they wind up like Earth” (17). Now that the colonies grow in strength, they might forego planetary consciousness and compete to consolidate power, which could lead to war

and then to a state of dust.²¹ From a distance, dust casts a shadow over the colonies and on the UN's efforts to promote colonization.

In foiling the UN, dust foils what at its core is humanist and instrumental to humanism. When Isidore is entertaining the idea of a war on Mars, he ends with the thought, "And everybody who emigrated turns out to be a special" (17). He reminds us that the UN is an organization that is humanist as well as international. People who receive UN beneficence and relocate to space colonies are those who have been classified as regulars. Regulars, as we recall, are people who meet human standards in areas such as reason and empathy. However, as Isidore suggests, humanity remains vulnerable to dust. There is a chance that regulars who escaped to space might one day be changed or disabled like the specials on Earth because of war or some other reason. Dust not only makes up the radioactive particles from which "new specials came into existence" on Earth (6), it also portends a dystopic future for the colonies and opposes obstinate notions about humanity. As dust proliferates in meaning and function, so too do the ways in which it undermines humanism against all measures.

Finally, the planetary perspective gained from dust on Earth is applicable to other planets in the novel. The sf trope of escapism through space travel is thwarted in Dick's novel because his dust is a confrontational force. Masco writes:

²¹ Isidore's theory about war on other planets is vague and open to interpretation. A war of nations is one way to imagine war in the colonies and is based on precedents on Earth. I imagine there are a myriad of ways in which a war could start there.

The escape pod to Mars has a long history in science fiction and as an imaginative project is intellectually stimulating, and often quite entertaining. But this idea rehearses the American modernist story of self-invention, of the ability to start over somewhere else, to break with the past and begin anew, to escape fallout by simply relocating to a new frontier. (162)

The “escape pod to Mars,” and indeed to other planets in Dick’s novel, consists of a faulty hatch unless a planetary perspective is adopted. That is to say that “self-invention” is not possible unless humans make a lesson of the radioactivity on Earth and realize that it is a situation that can be replicated on other planets. Already the situation on Mars suggests that the planet is headed to a catastrophic end. Radioactive dust on Earth is a cautionary tale for other planets. Hence, Dick’s novel is not an escapism because space travel is not so simply depicted as a clean escape from the situation on Earth.²²

The novel accesses a planetary perspective that is derived from its depiction of radioactivity as dust-infused and engulfing Earth over long stretches of time. This perspective allows us to observe with a critical eye the nuclear warfare that prefigured the apocalypse, its long-term effects, and the geopolitical divisions that played a role in the war and may still play a role in future wars on other planets. Furthermore, dust offers criticism over humanism’s mode of function, whether be it the myopic focus on the human or the way in which it and its institutions export its operations from one planet to another. Dust is a

²² In a moment of genre awareness, Dick’s characters discuss “pre-colonial literature,” which stands in for sf. Pris relays to Isidore the dismal conditions on Mars, and her enjoyment of escapist stories about space travel and futuristic Earth, “Where there’s no radioactive dust” (131). Here, Dick’s novel sets itself apart from the stories that Pris describes.

confrontational force rather than an escapist one. It allows us to face human actions in the novel and to draw connections between the different planets that they inhabit.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

On my copy of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Brian W. Aldiss is quoted giving his opinion on the book: “A marvelous and complex book, simply written but leaving all kinds of resonance in the mind.” The starting point of my thesis is the need to understand the dynamics of this novel that first Aldiss, then I, describe as compellingly complex. I make the realization that humanity and the way it conducts itself is the major issue of the novel. But I also recognize that the human is not made to be the entire point of the novel. There are androids, specials, both electric and real animals sharing the world with the human. To complicate things further is the postapocalyptic setting that includes a radioactive Earth. The human’s great concern over defining himself against such surroundings hints at an active humanism in the novel. I add a thorough investigation of humanism to the body of academic work equally invested in studying the novel’s complexities.

Humanism in *Do Androids Dream?* establishes human parameters to be empathy, reason, and dignity. Androids and people disabled by radioactive dust are excluded from humanity for lacking one quality or the other. Humanism appears to influence everything from the so-called regulars to space expeditions that establish colonies on different planets. However, this humanism is unstable and is in a state of crisis because it can no longer support its own human-centered logic and practices. Alongside humanism I discuss posthuman elements within the novel. Substantial work has already been done in this

regard, but here I complement it with the study of humanism. I, therefore, navigate both humanism and posthumanism in the text. Technological and environmental conditions in the novel, which create specials and androids, challenge human exclusivity. Reality is more imbricated than it is perceived to be by humans.

I then rely on the concepts of econormativity and radioactivity to examine human complexities on Earth as depicted in Dick's work. They are two sides to understanding what is going on with humans living in a toxic ecology. They also parallel humanism and posthumanism, but are more focused on the ecological and personal implications of the text. These lead to different worldviews about existence. Radioactivity as dust, especially, makes clear a planetary perspective to contrast with the nearsightedness that characterizes humanity in the novel.

There is the sense that humanity needs to take responsibility for its actions and relinquish its stubborn resistance to the complex reality. Although Deckard is awakening to this reality, there is no real indication that overall humanity is on the same path. Androids, however, are exhibiting signs of rebellion not just in escaping Mars to Earth, but with Buster Friendly shocking his human audiences by revealing their religion, Mercerism, to be a sham. We never learn whether this shock is enough to create a change within humans. What we can be sure of is that human resistance and stubbornness can lead to another war elsewhere, violent confrontation with what was once their technology, and more or less history repeating itself. Worse yet, humanity might be added to the list of species to go extinct.

The novel is a point of departure for various academic investigations. Some things that I have touched on without going into great detail about include the sf tradition that the novel falls into. One specific point is the pessimism in the depiction of space travel as opposed to the escapism that characterizes similar sf stories. It allows us to confront such themes as war and the failure to escape its consequences. No doubt the novel informs its sf with concerns about the historical time period it belongs to. I also touch on the field of queer ecology with econormativity without delving into the specifics of it. Queer ecology combines ecocriticism with queer theory. Queer ecologists have much to work with in the novel as much connection is made between body and land, and there are descriptions of injustices befalling both. As we can see, the research potential of *Do Androids Dream?* is boundless owing to its poignant complexities that both Aldiss and I celebrate.

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