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The Great National Disaster:  
The Destruction of Imperial America in Philip K. Dick's  
*The Simulacra*

Considered as a literary theme or motif destruction is maybe too common an element to discriminate among texts (even if we limit ourselves to U.S. literature.) Yet there is at least one specific field of fiction where the extreme form of destruction, i.e. the disaster, has delimited a specific subgenre: the field is Science-Fiction (or SF), the subgenre catastrophic SF. In Clute and Nicholl's *Encyclopedia of Science-Fiction* we have a DISASTER entry which reassuringly tells us that "Cataclysm, natural or man-made, is one of the most popular themes in sf" (Clute-Nicholls, 337); and cataclysms are undoubtedly the festivals of destruction. But the fascination of U.S. culture with disasters/catastrophes is represented more by SF films<sup>1</sup> than by books. David Pringle and Peter Nicholls, the authors of the entry, tell us that U.S. disaster novels are fewer in number (Clute-Nicholls, 338) than those written by U.K. authors; when it comes to the printed word, the British tradition is much older and stronger than the American, and we should not forget that it includes two of the greatest poets of catastrophe: John Wyndham and James G. Ballard.

The list of U.S. SF disaster novels is shorter, and shows a distinct obsession with disease (Clute-Nicholls, 338). From Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* (1915) to Stephen King's *The Stand* (1978, but re-published in a larger version in 1990) the most prestigious American SF writers — including Algis Budrys, Richard Matheson, and Michael Crichton — have dealt with disastrous epidemics, leaving other kinds of disasters to less famous practitioners, with the only exceptions of Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* (1963), a masterpiece in its own right, and Thomas M. Disch's bleak and masterful *The Genocides* (1965).<sup>2</sup>

However, I think Pringle and Nicholls have neglected a very interesting example of U.S. disaster novel, maybe an atypical one, but worth reading and discussing at length: *The Simulacra*, by Philip K. Dick. The reason for this omission is, I suspect, the fact that the catastrophic component of the novel is not in the foreground, but lies in its background. Dick's narrative technique always focuses on a single character or a group of characters, and whatever happens around him/her, or them, is always filtered through brilliantly crafted, powerfully subjective points of view (a fine specimen of this process is the description of nuclear holocaust as experienced by Bruno Bluthgeld in *Dr. Bloodmoney*.) Readers are thus struck more by Dick's characters<sup>3</sup> than by collective events — and the science-fictional disasters listed by Pringle and Nicholls are always collective.

But there might be a more important reason for omitting Dick's novel from the DISASTER entry: while the cataclysms depicted by Ballard or Wyndham, or their U.S. counterparts, are more or less natural, the disaster Dick told in *The Simulacra* is political; it belongs to the realm of human history, not to the field of meteorology, astronomy, or biology. It does not even belong to that vast group of SF works which deal with nuclear wars/disasters, where politics, biology and physics intermingle. And it might be argued that nuclear war stories, though based on a man-produced destruction (nuclear weapons can't obviously be said to be natural), are often based on a weak version of human agency: in those books and films the holocaust is often triggered by casual events (mistakes, malfunctions, misunderstandings, etc.), not by deliberate (or rather pondered) decisions. As in purely natural disasters, nuclear destruction is not started by human agency, but simply happens (and this is arguably suspect from a political point of view.) In Dick's novel, as we shall see, it is a series of deliberate actions (most of them purely political) which triggers an entropic process of destruction which gradually gets out of control. Consequently, the stress on human agency distinguishes *the Simulacra* from other disaster stories.

There is a third aspect of the novel which may have led readers and critics to overlook its catastrophic nature: there are vast differences between the

world depicted in the first part of the novel and the world that Dick's readers inhabited in 1964 (and inhabit today.) Typically disaster novels and films are set in a world which is as close to ours as possible: the characters of those stories are usually ordinary people living in an ordinary world, and that heightens the impact of the extraordinary event (the disaster) thus making the ensuing destruction more shocking and heart-rending. Being shown the destruction of a world which is so similar to ours we may easily believe it is immediately our world (thus forgetting it is a fictional world); so we may easily identify with the protagonists, which should lead us to think that what menaces the people in the book or on the screen menaces us too.

However, the world devised by Dick is not our world, and this means we shall start the analysis of the text by describing the political and sociological features of the country *The Simulacra* is set in, that is, the USEA, the United States of Europe and America.

It should be noticed that the basic idea behind Dick's act of fictional creation had already been expressed by somebody else, that is Robert Ley (1890-1945), one of the defendants at the Nuremberg trials. Ley is not a very famous Nazi leader, surely not so famous as Himmler or Goebbels; nonetheless he was the Minister of Labor of the Nazi regime. He also created the *Deutsches Arbeitsfront*, a corporative organization which included employers and employees, and the *Kraft durch Freude* (lit. "power through joy"), the institution which organized workers' free-time activities (after the fashion of the Fascist *dopolavoro* in Italy.) But what is more important is his third creation, which still survives: Volkswagenwerk AG, the producer of Volkswagen cars, founded in 1937 by Ley, with the cooperation of Ferdinand Porsche.

The "grandfather"<sup>4</sup> of the VW Beetle (the best-selling car ever made and first car to outsell Ford's Model T) hanged himself in his cell in October 1945, but before committing suicide he sent a letter to President Truman where he foresaw the annexation of defeated Germany to the United States under an American National Socialist regime. He also sent a letter to Henry Ford, asking to be employed in the motor corporation because of his experience as the creator of Volkswagen AG (Mayda, 111).

Ley was an alcoholic (though forced to forsake liquor after his capture in May 1945), and mentally disturbed to boot. Yet the clarity with which his letters anticipate the fictional world of *The Simulacra* is surprising. But the relationship between Ley's delirious letters and Dick's novel might be turned upside down: we know for sure that the American novelist had read several histories of Nazi Germany and World War II before writing his most famous novel, *The Man in the High Castle*; classics of Nazism historiography, such as William L. Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, can be found in the Acknowledgements (Dick 1962, 7). Shirer mentions Ley's suicide in a footnote to the Epilogue (Shirer, 1481), though he does not talk about the letters; but Dick might have found them (or a description of their content) in other texts he may have consulted.

It is anyway remarkable that in *The Simulacra* we find the two concepts Ley expressed in his letters: a political union between the USA and Germany, and a transfer of Nazi know-how (technical and political) from Germany to the USA. In fact the novel is set in the (then) remote future of 2040, at which point Germany has entered the Union as its 53rd State (25). As previously stated, in 1994 the name of the nation changed to "United States of Europe and America." The President of the USEA at the beginning of the novel is a German, worn and colorless Rudolf Kalbfleisch, called *der Alte* ("The Old One") due to his advanced age; he is the successor of the first President of the USEA, Konrad Adenauer (47). Dick connected Germany and the USA in two other novels, *The Man in the High Castle*, written two or three years before *The Simulacra*, and *The Penultimate Truth*, written soon after it; but the connection is much stronger in *The Simulacra*. In *High Castle* a counterhistorical victory of Nazi Germany and Japan in World War II leads to the division of the USA into three puppet states: one of them is strictly controlled by the German Reich, though formally independent. In *Penultimate Truth* both the USA and Germany belong to the *Wes-Dem* (Western Democracies), an international organization born when the U.N. split. But in *The Simulacra* we have the entrance of Germany into "'our tent', our federal union" (26), as one of the characters muses.

There are several consequences of this apparent annexation. Some of them are quite superficial, such as the adoption of a few German expressions in U.S. English: Dick didn't devise a whole German-American language similar to other fictional creations, such as Orwell's Newspeak or Anthony Burgess's "Russian" English in *A Clockwork Orange*. He just dropped a few German words here and there to add an exotic spice to his text. But when it comes to the description of the relationship between the two components of the USEA, Dick's insights are more interesting. Vince Strikerock, one of the characters, remarks: "The tail wags the dog, he said to himself (...). We in *Nordamerika* are the dog; the Reich is the tail. What a life" (28). What Dick is suggesting through Vince's thoughts is the Germanization of the USA.

Such a process is not very different from the Japanization of the West Coast Dick had already described in *High Castle* (where California and other western-seaboard states, called Pacific States of America, are under the influence of victorious Japan.) Both novels, by means of the narrative devices proper to science-fiction, stage an alternat(iv)e history which enables Dick to present readers with the loss of identity of American society, with an *alienification* (which is a typically science-fictional form of alienation) of the nation. The difference between *High Castle* and *The Simulacra* is that the former is a counter-historical novel (also called counterfactual, alternative/alternate world, or parallel universe novel), while the latter may respect our version of world history and stage the Germanized USA in a more or less remote future.

The strong connection of the USA and Germany should not surprise us if we take into account the fascination with Germany of several post-World War II U.S. novelists: one might mention such (post)modern classics as John Hawkes's *The Cannibal* (1962) and Thomas Pynchon's *V.* (1963);<sup>5</sup> it can be also noted that when *The Simulacra* was published Vonnegut and Pynchon were busy writing *Slaughterhouse 5* (1969) and *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) respectively. In 1964 however, nobody had gone as far as Dick, and we might wonder whether Vonnegut's and Pynchon's subsequent exploits are not indebted to Dick's "German" works." Such a fascination is probably more or less loosely based on a parallel between Nazism and the U.S. segregation system. The Nazi

totalitarian regime based on pseudoscientific racist theories had waged a ruthless racial war against other European countries; the U.S. segregation system, a political racist structure still active in Southern States in the 50s and the 60s, survived in the background of widespread racial prejudices (and practical discriminations) which haunted the whole nation while it was proposing itself as a world-wide model of democracy.

The ethical foundation of the American Empire (in Dick's times and today) is the exportation of an efficient and morally sound socio-political system; but if at the heart of the "Land of the Free" there exists an irrational inequality so similar to the principles of the racist state theorized and founded by Hitler, the American Empire becomes just a matter of power and money, like Milo Minderbinder's "syndicate" in Heller's *Catch-22*.

Such a deep and disquieting connection between U.S. segregation and Nazi racial warfare has not anyway been suggested only by a bunch of more or less iconoclastic avant-garde writers:

Among the U.S. troops who liberated the Jewish prisoners at the Dachau concentration camp were some black soldiers. One of them recalled the sickening sensation he experienced as he scanned the horror — the survivors looking like ghosts, the ovens still warm. "Why Jews?" Paul Parks [one of the Afro-American soldiers] asked. "It doesn't make sense. Why were they killed?" A prisoner explained: "They were killed because they were Jews." Parks commented: "I understand that." Then he added: "I understand that because I've seen people lynched just because they were black." (Takaki, 376)

The comparison between the two forms of racism/inequality was a very important turning point in the history of interethnic relations and desegregation in the USA, and it is discussed at length in Ronald Takaki's history of multicultural America (Takaki, 375-7), which also focuses on the discrimination of American citizens of Japanese ancestry during World War II. And the Germanization of the USA in *The Simulacra* is fundamentally a matter of carefully planned and enforced inequality (though, as we shall see, it is based on knowledge rather than ethnicity), which may be easily grasped if we out-

line the socio-political structure of the USEA, as it can be inferred from the elements Dick offers us in his novel.

The basis of the USEA society is the discrimination between those who own the truth and those who do not. The population is divided into two formally-defined groups: the *Ge* élite, i.e. the *Geheimträger*, lit. "bearers of the secret," and a vast majority of citizens who lack the "exoteric" knowledge of state secrets and are thus mere "bearers of orders" (from the ruling élite): *Befehlsträger*, shortened as *Be*.

Those who do not belong to the privileged élite are aware that the *Ges* share very important secrets. They would like to access those forbidden truths, whatever they may be, and this leads to grotesque scenes such as this:

'Must be a change in govpol,' the woman on Ian's left said.  
 "'Govpol,'" the man echoed, puzzled.  
 'A *Ge* term,' the woman said haughtily. 'Government policy.' (...)  
 'I knew a *Ge* term once,' Ian said (...) 'The term I knew (...) was *allost*.'  
 'What's "allost" mean?' the man beside him asked.  
 'All's lost,' Ian said. (145)

Obviously, if "govpol" or "allost" really were "*Ge* terms," neither the woman nor Ian Duncan, low-level employee of a big multinational cartel (54), would be aware of their meaning, indeed, of their existence. The *Bes* know that there is a secret; but they naively identify it with this fantastic jargon, arguably derived from Orwell's linguistic inventions in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The overall result is highly ironic, because the reader is told what the fundamental secret is at the end of Chapter 3 (and is informed of the second, accessory secret before half of the story has been told.) The desperate attempts by the *Bes* to "be like the *Ges*" link this novel to the earlier production of Dick, rooted in the sociological science-fiction of the Fifties," where the theme of status and status-symbols was pre-eminent. In *The Simulacra*, knowledge determines everybody's status and secrets (real or bogus) are status-symbols.

The two secrets pertain to the vertex of the USEA, that is, the President and the First Lady, Nicole Thibodeaux. Their marriage is purely formal: Nicole has been the wife of all the Presidents of the USEA (and will be the wife of the

next), and is unnaturally young and gorgeous, while the Presidents (all of them German) are elderly and decrepit. Nicole represents the real power, in that she is endowed with a crushing, subjugating charisma which relegates her husbands to an almost ancillary role. Nicole is beautiful, sophisticated, fascinating, and — above all—eternally young. Presidents change, she is always the same: USEA citizens "voted, each four years, for a new *Der Alte* — for the man they thought Nicole would like best" (19). This is the result of a gradual process started in 1990: "Each year *der Alte* became more obscure, the First Lady became better known, more liked, by the public which brought it about" (20).

Besides, a vast majority of the population — notwithstanding the entry of Germany into the federal union — feels *der Alte* is a stranger; this is confirmed by these thoughts of Vince Strikerock, another character of the novel, an ambitious young employee of a big German corporation, Karp und Sohnen (27): "You Prussian bastards, (. . .). We never should have admitted you into what I like to phrase as 'our tent', our federal union, which should have been confined to the Western hemisphere" (26-7).

But the fundamental reason why Nicole is the actual ruler (and this is the first state secret owned by the *Ges*) is that president Kalbfleisch, *der Alte* —like Hempel before him, like his designed successor Dieter Hogben—is not a human being, but a programmed android, or *simulacrum*.

Curtly, in his usual brisk tone, Garth McRae said, 'Shut it off.'

The Kalbfleisch simulacrum stopped. Its arms struck out rigid in their final gesture, the withered face vacuous. The simulacrum said nothing and automatically the TV cameras also shut off, one by one; there was no longer anything for them to transmit, and the technicians behind them, all of them *Ges*, knew it. They looked to Garth McRae. 'We got the message across,' McRae informed Anton Karp. (35)

We might now quote Hazel Pierce and say that "the secret which they [i.e. the *Ges*] bear is power and the tools with which to sustain that power" (Pierce, 125): because *der Alte* is just a tool, under the control of Nicole and the *Ges*. Kalbfleisch, like its predecessor Hempel and his successor Hogben, is a simulacrum, that is, as dictionaries explain, an image or a representation: a



mass-mediatic entity that lives only when it is on air (as soon as the simulacrum is turned off, the TV cameras are shut off too.) TV rules.

This should help us to understand the sources of Nicole's ascendancy over Americans, which is more powerful than the charisma of any traditional politician. We are told in the text that the young woman embodies an archetypal figure, "the image (...) of the Bad Mother. Overpowering and cosmic" (98). Since Nicole is thus described by a psychoanalyst, Dr Egon Superb (another of Dick's onomastic puns), Dick seems to hint at a psychoanalytical interpretation of the "national neurosis" (98), the psychological weakness felt by males in the novel in relation to Nicole: "I'm terrified of her and that's why I'm scared of Julie, I guess in fact of all women (...) It's because of weak-fibred men like me that Nicole can rule (...) I'm the reason why we've got matriarchal society" (98), says Chick Strikerock, Vince's brother and a patient of Dr Superb.

The phrase used by Dick through the psychoanalyst, "Bad Mother," is connected to another expression subsequently used by him, when he explains the feelings of another patient — psi-empowered, schizoid pianist Richard Kongrosian — towards Nicole. "She's a Magna Mater figure to him. As she is to all of us. (...) The great primordial mother" (184). The Magna Mater was a nature goddess of ancient Phrygia, one of the many embodiments of this Mediterranean divinity: her counterparts include Greek Rhea, mother of Zeus, and Roman Ops, sometimes considered a goddess of plenty. The Magna Mater was also called Cybele, Dindymene, Great Mother, and Mater Turrita. Such a mythical figure was recycled by Carl Jung as one of his archetypes, and that is probably where Dick, an avid reader of psychoanalytical literature in the 50s and the 60s, took it from.<sup>8</sup> And this might explain the power structure of the USEA and Nicole's ascendancy: something imported from Nazi Germany, where the dominating figure was the Führer, surely a fatherly authority figure, while in the USEA there is a totalitarian matriarchy which requires "spiritual-moral emasculation (...) a present day pre-requisite for participation in the *Ge* class, in the ruling circles" (36).

The society of the USEA is imprisoned by this Great Mother figure, which is Dick's ironical reading of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*,<sup>9</sup> inasmuch as she

lectures Americans via TV and is the actual holder of power. But this figure should not be read on a psychoanalytical basis only. We might for example connect her to Dick's real mother, Dorothy Hudner, described by Dick's biographers (Lawrence Sutin first and foremost) as a harsh, castrating figure who often accused young Phil of being weak (and a potential homosexual.) Nicole might then belong to a series of several other negative, aggressive female characters, which Andrew M. Butler labelled with the — maybe politically incorrect, but rather effective— term "Bitch wife" in his guide to Dick's oeuvre (which also carries out a lightweight, albeit useful, thematic analysis.) Another possible reading of the First Lady is historiographical, since we might read her as a satirical portrait of Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis, John F. Kennedy's widow, who was the First Lady while Dick was writing the novel (completed by August 28, 1963, before JFK's assassination.) Nicole and Jacqueline Kennedy have much in common, e.g. beauty, a French surname (Nicole's is Thibodeaux), upper class background, sophistication, high education (Jacqueline attended the Sorbonne, in Paris), interest in the arts (when John F. Kennedy met Jacqueline, she was a photographer and a pen-and-ink artist for a Washington, D.C., newspaper; one should not forget that she was a tireless patron of the arts and launched a program to redecorate part of the White House, appointing a Fine Arts Committee to assist her.) We might describe at length Nicole's activity as the main national promoter of arts and entertainment in the USEA, but what I think is really interesting is her role as a premier TV star.

Carlo Pagetti suggests that Nicole is a "figura televisiva osannata dai cittadini inconsapevoli" [a TV figure worshiped by unaware citizens] (Pagetti 2002, 8). And if we read this presentation of a TV program hosted by Nicole, we can understand what the real roots of her charisma are:

Have you even wondered what it would be like to descend to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean? Nicole has, and to answer that question she has assembled here in the Tulip Room of the White House three of the world's foremost oceanographers. Tonight she will ask them for their stories, and you will hear them too, as

they were taped live, just a short while ago through the facilities of the Unified Triadic Network's Public Affairs Bureau. (20-1)

As I said before, Nicole lectures Americans, and seems determined to improve their education by means of cultural programs, as we can see in her introductory speech for a bizarre concert:

...and at our musical tonight (...) we will have a saxophone quartet which will play themes from Wagner's operas, in particular my favourite, *die Meistersinger*. I believe we will all find that a deeply rewarding and certainly an enriching experience to cherish. And, after that, I have arranged to bring you once again an old favourite of yours, the world-renowned cellist, Henri LeClerc, in a programme of Jerome Kern and Cole Porter. (168)

This grotesque mix of highbrow and lowbrow culture is typical of Nicole's artistic events and programs.<sup>10</sup> It is well represented by Ian Duncan and Al Miller's jug duo, which uses a typically popular musical instrument<sup>11</sup> to play Beethoven's late sonatas and Bach's *Goldberg Variations* (22), and strives to be selected for the White House musicals hosted by Nicole; but we might also say "emceed," and I think this is the keyword.

Nicole is an archetypal mother figure, a political figure, but more than anything else she is a TV emcee, an entertainer of a very peculiar kind, a TV star whose charisma relies on her beauty more than anything else. That is what makes all male USEA citizens fall in love — consciously or unconsciously — with the First Lady. That is what happens to Kongrosian (97), but also to Ian Duncan, since there are remarkable amorous undertones in Ian's inner monologue upon meeting Nicole at the White House (161). And this mix of good looks, charm, media and politics may reflect the Kennedy age, but it is so interesting to us because it foreshadows more recent figures on the U.S. scene — one cannot help thinking that Nicole Thibodeaux is a prefiguration of, say, Hilary Rodham Clinton.

Yet this "overpowering and cosmic" presence, who dominates USEA male - albeit "emasculated" - citizens such as Chick Strikerock, Richard Kongrosian, or Ian Duncan, is no less an artifact than *der Alte* (and this is the second secret of *Ges.*) This is what she reveals to dumbfounded Ian Duncan e Al Miller:

"I'm not Nicole. (...) I'm Kate Rupert, the fourth one to take her place. I'm just an actress who looks enough like the original Nicole to be able to keep this job, (...). I have no real authority, in the ultimate sense" (166). This is the solution to a riddle previously introduced by Loony Luke, the owner of the used-spaceship marketing chain who is also one of Nicole's main opponents (Luke thrives on people who emigrate to Mars, while Nicole strives to stop emigration to other planets, see the scene on pp. 144-50):

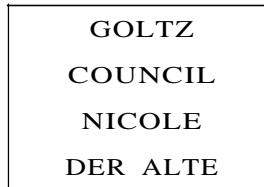
She's been in office for seventy-three years; didn't you know that? (...) She's a really old woman, now. Must be. A grandmother. But she still looks good, I guess. You'll know when you see her. (...) On TV she looks around twenty. But go to the history books... except of course they are banned to everyone except *Ges*. I mean the *real* history texts; not the ones they give you (...) Once you look it up you can figure it out for yourself The facts are all there. Buried down somewhere. (117)

Orwellian manipulation of history books<sup>12</sup> goes here hand in hand with (post-modern?) manipulation of massmediatic events (we might also talk of "production of events," a concept which is definitely not science-fictional any more), and this explains why people in the novel can believe they have been unofficially ruled for 70 years by the same unaging woman, hosting unexciting TV shows.<sup>13</sup> The key word is here "TV host," because Nicole's role is that of a political emcee who presents a variety of "entertaining" materials: the fact that the educational aspect is stressed" is actually not so important, since we have seen that highbrow "products" — e.g. Wagner — are adapted to pop combos — the sax quartet — and that "serious" musicians must play Jerome Kern and Cole Porter, and even scientific programs — dealing with oceanography — are turned into talk shows. And the First Lady, the woman who should manage the massmedia apparatus, the Oprah Winfrey of the USEA, is an actress impersonating a dead celebrity, a replica, like a Marilyn Monroe or an Elvis double. Again, TV rules.

We may now outline a sort of progression of the simulacra, because the denouements of *der Alte* and Nicole are not the only ones which take place in the complex plot of this not-so-long novel. When Nicole tells the truth

to Al and Ian<sup>15</sup> she also informs them that "there's a council that governs... I never see them" (166). The secret council summons Kate/Nicole at a critical moment (195), that is, when both the state secrets are disclosed in the hectic finale and the people of the USEA learn that its rulers (*derAlte* and Nicole) are bogus. Kate then finds out that the chairman (and puppeteer) of the secret council is Bertold Goltz (196), the leader of a paramilitary militia, the Sons of Job,<sup>16</sup> which has championed the cause of *Bes* against the privileges of the *Ges* throughout the novel (one might consider what Goltz tells Nat Flieger earlier in the story, 75-6).

What we have is a semiotic process. We can formalize it by means of a simple scheme:



In this progression (or ladder) of the simulacra each stage hides what is immediately above; at the same time it might be seen as standing for it. It is a semiotic relation in its own right: each simulacrum is a mask and a spokesperson for the person or group it represents. From the point of view of characters *in* the novel and readers *of* the novel, each rung of the ladder is first a power figure, an agent in the complex political game of the novel, where conspiracies, revelations, and secrets abound; then we readers and/or the characters understand that the power figure is just a simulacrum, a mere mouthpiece of the real power figure which is above (or behind) it (or her, or them.) We thus have a theatrical structure of the novel, where every major political figure is no more than an actor who plays a part somebody else has written; the only exception being Goltz, who seems to be an opponent of the regime, but is in fact the chief puppeteer, the ultimate ringmaster of this massmediatic circus. One cannot deny that Goltz plays the part of the *Be* who wants to destroy the privileges of the *Ge* elite and unveil the secrets the structural inequality of the USEA is pivoted upon, so we might think that he is an actor just like

Kate Rupert; but he is at the same time actor and playwright, and is the only simulacrum who is able to decide what he says and does.

However, once we have discovered that the real policymaker, so to speak, is Bertold Goltz (196-9), we have *not* discovered a political bedrock of sorts that may sustain all the system of power depicted by the novel. Just when we readers are finally told that the real ruler of the USEA is Bertold Goltz — so that we have the political Ascension (in the Christian sense of the term) of a character who seemed to be one of the oppressed<sup>17</sup>— Goltz is abruptly slaughtered by Wilder Pembroke, the ambitious and ruthless NP executive; and this is not just one of those plot twists Dick happily placed in his novel every given number of words.<sup>18</sup> Goltz's elimination is Dick's fictional way to tell us that we will not be given any political (and narrative) *ubi consistam*; that Goltz, the simulacra manipulator, is a simulacrum himself, somebody who only *believed* he could control the massmediatic state. An actor who has suddenly ceased to strut and fret his hour upon the political stage.

And since we are talking of simulacra here one cannot avoid discussing, however briefly, Jean Baudrillard's appreciation of Dick's oeuvre: first because he adopted the term "simulacra" in his sociological analysis of post-modern society and culture, then because he mentioned Dick in a short essay whose title is "Simulacra and Science-Fiction." I think many postmodernist readings of Dick's works might have been caused by the title of the novel we are dealing with, that is, *The Simulacra*: resisting the temptation to couple that novel with Baudrillard's seminal essay *Simulacre et simulation* (1981) is quite difficult. Then we should not forget that the U.S. edition of that essay, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), became immensely famous because a copy of the book appeared in Andy and Larry Wachowsky's blockbuster *The Matrix* (1999); and here we have a sort of massmediatic loop, since many have read the film by the Wachowsky Bros. as inspired by Dick or loosely based on Dick's oeuvre, thus strengthening the connection between the American writer and the French sociologist.

Besides, Baudrillard's essay explicitly mentions the novel we are dealing with: "Like the Civil War in Philip K. Dick's *The Simulacra*; like a gigantic

hologram in three dimensions, where fiction will never again be a mirror held to the future, but rather a desperate rehallucinating of the past" (Baudrillard, 310). What should strike anybody who has read Dick's novel is the fact that the Civil War with capital C and W (1861-1865), or War Between the States, is not dealt with in *The Simulacra*,<sup>19</sup> but is a quite important issue in Dick's *We Can Build You* (1972, but already completed in 1962), where we have android replicas of President Lincoln and Edwin Stanton, plus plans for the reproduction of Gettysburg with armies of androids.

Here we might simply reprove Baudrillard for his careless quotation, though it should be said that the mistake is partly justified by Dick's use of the term "simulacrum" in *We Can Build You*, a lexical peculiarity which connects the two novels (in other texts he talks about androids or robots) — besides, we must forgive the author of such a brilliant sentence as "fiction will never again be a mirror held to the future, but rather a desperate rehallucinating of the past," which captures the spirit of *We Can Build You* (and *The Man in the High Castle* and several other Dickian novels and stories as well) much better than other po-mo critical nonsense — and manages to quote Shakespeare to boot.

Moreover, there are quite interesting ideas in the essay that we should take into account in our analysis. When Baudrillard posits the idea of "simulation simulacra: based on information, the model, cybernetic play," and adds that "their aim is maximum operationality, hyperreality, total control" (Baudrillard, 309) he is (maybe unawares) describing the political/massmediatic system of the USEA. The total control of TV networks — that's what the bureaucratic expression "Unified Triadic Network's Public Affairs Bureau" (21) probably alludes to — allows the control of information that the simulation simulacra are based upon; simulacra such as Nicole/Kate, who is not just the reproduction of a lost original (the "historical" Nicole Thibodeaux), but more than anything else a hyperreal (an adjective Baudrillard obsessively uses in his essay) entity endowed with a power and a fascination (we might also say "seduction," and here is another typically Baudrillardian term) potential which does not relate to the lost original, but is explained by the position she occupies in the massmediatic system, by her being the "hyper-emcee" of the USEA — plus

her glamorous beauty which is not tied to anything else, but can be seen as a televisual immanence of sorts. So most of what Baudrillard says in his article applies to Nicole and even more to *der Alte*, the "real" android, who isn't a copy of some human politician, but is designed and built according to the political needs of the moment. This is why Nicole can describe the new *der Alte*, Dieter Hogben, before it is completed: "Old and tired, she thought to herself. A worn out stringbean, stiff and formal, full of moralizing speeches; a real leader type who can drum obedience into the Be masses" (143). In Baudrillard's terms "to put in place "decentered" situations, models of simulation, and then to strive to give them the colors of the real, the banal, the lived" (Baudrillard, 311). Which is the rationale of the android presidency in *The Simulacra*: to use socio-political models to build a President which is then given the colors of the real.

Baudrillard's idea of models of simulation also applies to the *famnexdos*, one of Dick's wildest ideas in the novel. People who emigrate to Mars may feel terribly lonely in such a desert place; but they may buy a group of simulacra which reproduce a typical American family — and that's the meaning of the term *famnexdo*: *family next-door*.

Four simulacra seated in silence, a group: one in adult male form, its female mate and two children. This was a major item of the firm's catalogue; this was a *famnexdo*. (...) A man, when he emigrated, could buy neighbours, buy the simulated presence of life, the sound and motion of human activity — or at least its mechanical near-substitute — to bolster his morale in the new environment of unfamiliar stimuli and perhaps, god forbid, no stimuli at all. (57-8)

Any comment is superfluous. I might as well quote Baudrillard again: "Models no longer constitute an imaginary domain with reference to the real, and thus leave no room for any kind of transcendentalism" (Baudrillard, 310). The journey to Mars does not carry the USEA citizens Elsewhere, perhaps to meet some unthinkable Other; it takes them to a hyperreal neighbourhood where their neighbours have surely been given "the colors of the real, the banal, the lived." They go to another planet just to get exactly what they had at home, nuisances included (58). Baudrillard again: "SF of this sort is



no longer an elsewhere, it is an everywhere: in the circulation of the models here and now, in the very axiomatic nature of our simulated environment" (Baudrillard, 312). Dick: "Communication with them [i.e. the simulacra of the famnexdo] was in essence a circular dialogue with oneself; the famnexdo (...) picked up the covert hopes and dreams of the settler and detailed them back in an articulated fashion" (59).

The interaction of the Martian settlers with the famnexdos might be read as a sort of small-size, comedic mirror image of the greater interaction of the citizens with simulacra such as der Alte or Nicole. Isn't that a circular dialogue? While decisions are made in secret places, people are given what they want via TV: a fascinating maternal figure that may interact with the incestuous drives of male citizens, a figure which is at the same time overpowering and reassuring. Nicole is a perfect emcee also because she is (obviously) an object of sexual desire. This is why she must be periodically replaced: she must be always young and attractive. Today's TV stars partially achieve this with plastic surgery and beauty farms. Anyway, what is at stake is always the same force: seduction.

We might also say that, by imagining that an "almost grotesquely, unnaturally beautiful" (219) young woman might be the appropriate leader of the USA once they—having been contaminated by Nazi politics—have lost their inbred democratic character, Dick foresaw the massmediatic state. But the verb "foresee" might be out of place in a Baudrillardian perspective: Dick simply assembled whatever massmediatic materials that were within reach—Konrad Adenauer, Jacqueline Kennedy, the popularity of the Kennedy clan, TV's increasing power to grant substantiality to collective imagery, pop Americana, quiz shows, everyday life in suburbia, cabals against the young and charismatic President, advertising, whatever. The result of this hyperrealistic assemblage is the USEA, the inequalitarian United States based on lies, fakery, unconscious manipulation, ruthless plotting, and demented hi-tech military projects.

Since the traditional U.S. parties have been merged in the Democratic-Republican Party (19), thus voiding the official elections of any meaning, it is then no surprise that in such a TV-based state the only form of representation is the selections of performers held in every conapt. Those amateur talents

hope to be noticed by White House talent scouts and sent to Washington to be auditioned by Nicole herself (like Ian Duncan and Al Miller, though their audition ends in tears, 160-7). Ultimately, if the First Lady likes them, they might be hosted in one of her TV programs. That is the only viable form of representation in the USEA, the only one which may grant a temporary and partial access to the space of real power: not the White House in its physical solidity, but Nicole's TV spaces, the Presidential entertainment (the term "edutainment" might better describe her shows.)

This is why the story of Al and Ian, these post-modern jug-playing Bouvard and Pécuchet, had to be included in this polyphonic novel, maybe the most crowded that Dick ever wrote. It is the story of two ordinary men who strive to achieve success, to be elected (in the etymological sense of the verb, from Latin *eligere*, "to select"), to be chosen not by other citizens but by the charismatic First Lady, the TV goddess — but fail. When they are finally auditioned by Nicole, the android *papoola* (another simulacra, faithfully reproducing an extinct Martian species) attacks her (164) and the two jug players discover (1) that their access to the White House had been masterminded by Loony Luke, in an attempt to kill Nicole, and (2) that Nicole is an actress, thus a fake goddess. These two twists utterly void their achievement of any meaning.

The destruction of Ian Duncan's and Al Miller's memories of their unlucky audition is a harbinger of a much greater destruction that closes the novel. It is now time to get back to our initial hypothesis, i.e. that we should read *The Simulacra* as a SF disaster novel, and prove it. In order to do that we should focus on another thread in the texture of this multiple plot, that is, the demented hi-tech military project of the von Lessinger time machine. This highly Sfnal device should allow the *Geélite* to correct such historical mistakes as the extermination of the Jews in Nazi Germany, a stain on the apparently spotless facade of the USEA. "Days of Barbarism — that was the sweet-talk for the Nazi period of the middle part of the previous century, now gone nearly a century but still vividly, if distortedly, recalled" (27); once Germany has been phagocytized by the U.S., the ruling élite feels that those (not presentable) days must be erased by changing the course of history. The

time machine brings Hermann Goering back from the past, so that the *Ge* may put a "simple enough proposition to him" (45): the USEA will exchange the military technology of 2050 — which will allow the Nazi armies to defeat the Allies — for the life of all the Jews imprisoned in the extermination camps (48). If the operation succeeds, the *Ge* will add a total control on the past to the total control on reality assured by the massmedia technology (the management of simulacra such as *der Alte* or Nicole.)

Obviously this is a fictional embodiment of a famous slogan from a famous novel, one whose influence on Dick has not been fully measured yet: George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The Party slogan there was: "Who controls the past controls the future, who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell, 197). In Dick's novel the control of the past is not enforced by means of the daily, painstaking editing of historical sources by the *Minitrue*; it is to be achieved through a daring negotiation between Hermann Goering and the First Lady (121-4), a science-fictional chronological short circuit (or shortcut.)

The operation is opposed by Bertold Goltz, the leader of the Sons of Job, who, as we know, is a Jew. We know that Goltz is the mastermind behind Nicole, who receives orders from him through the secret council; but the assassination of Goltz tells us that before the final disaster there are competing conspiracies well inside the White House and the *Ge* oligarchy (one of which is led by Wilder Pembroke, the man who will kill Goltz.) Goltz opposes the deal between the USEA and Nazi Germany because he thinks that the Nazis will exterminate the Jews anyway. One cannot negotiate the life of the Jews with the creators of Auschwitz, because "(...) the objective in the war for the Nazis was the extermination of World Jewry; it was not merely a by-product" (124). The irrational element in Nazism is not a secondary aspect; it is deeply ingrained in Hitler's Reich. The *Ge* oligarchy cannot understand this because it has been infected from the start by inequality, authoritarianism, and an intellectual arrogance preventing it from perceiving the deep nature of Nazism, something Dick had already captured in another novel.

One cannot omit here the searing illumination that strikes Mr Tagomi, one of the protagonists of Dick's most successful "German" novel, *The Man in the High Castle*, after listening to a detailed description of Nazi nomenklatura:

There is evil! It's actual, like cement.

I can't believe it. I can't stand it. Evil is not a view. (...) All our religion is wrong. It's an ingredient in us. In the world. Poured over us, filtering into our bodies, minds, hearts, into the pavement itself. (Dick 1962, 97)

But *Ges* like Wilder Pembroke or Nicole cannot see this "elemental" evil because they have accepted it when they entered the simulacra management. They cannot see it because it is business-as-usual to them; because they have accepted the basic tenets of Nazism, which are a radical form of inequality and collective manipulation. Actually they are manipulated as well as manipulators, and that is the fundamental reason why they cannot see the irrationality at the heart of Nazism. They do not operate their system of simulacra, but are operated by it. The system is out of control. The attempt to strike a bargain with Goering and the Nazi hierarchy proves this: its real purpose is to make the German part of the USEA presentable by removing its past atrocities— as we can infer from Nicole's conversation with the Prime Minister of Israel (44-50) — rather than saving the victims of the Holocaust. And its final result would be the triumph of the Nazi Reich.

The USEA and the Reich are specular images. Both states discriminate among their citizens, both states are based on a massmediatic manipulation which soon engulfs everything and everybody in the progression of simulacra, which knows no time and space limits (we have seen that Mars and the past are no real "elsewhere" but, thanks to technology, can be reduced to easily-reachable "peripheries" of the USEA); both states aim at world domination, both states are utterly corrupt and out of control; both states are doomed to destruction. We might also suspect that the USEA and Nazi Germany are the two "visible" vertices of a triangle which includes another state, another nation: the historical USA of 1964. That is what Carlo Pagetti suggested more than 20 years ago in the first Introduction he wrote to this novel:

Lo stato apparentemente utopico sorto dalle ceneri dell'olocausto atomico, "una società stabile e pacifica" a cui "ognuno, per legge, apparteneva" è, infatti, l'America dei portentosi tecnologici e delle grandi concentrazioni monopolistiche, rese ancora più forti dalla fusione politica dei due centri del capitalismo mondiale —gli antichi U.S.A. e la Germania occidentale—, ma anche l'America degli intrighi politici e della violenza che avrebbe travolto lo stesso presidente Kennedy e i suoi sogni di rinnovamento, l'America che è, diventata addirittura erede della cultura nazista, tanto da trattare direttamente con un Goering redivivo e da invocarne i metodi criminali di lotta politica. L'America del futuro è, l'America del passato, un'immagine metaforica (...) dell'America del presente e della società del presente, vista sotto forma di un melodramma televisivo (...) (Pagetti 1980, v)<sup>20</sup>

The negotiation with Goering triggers the disaster, notwithstanding the warning the Ge oligarchy had received: "Von Lessinger was right in his final summation: *no one should go near the Third Reich*. When you deal with psychotics you're drawn in; you become mentally ill yourself" (46). In fact the Ge oligarchs are drawn in: competing conspiracies struggle to take over the massmediatic state, the Karp family (great German industrialists) against Nicole, Pembroke against Goltz - the destructive forces which tore Nazi Germany apart.<sup>21</sup> are unleashed again. Consequently, the ominous contact with Nazi hierarchy via Goering is at the same time the highest technological achievement of the USEA and their point of no return.

Pembroke reveals the secret of Nicole (184), Karp und Sohnen Werke reveal the other (186). Here begins the dismantling of the chain of simulacra, a crescendo of what had been defined "Nazi thuggery" in *The Man in the High Castle*: Goltz is killed by Pembroke, who has the other members of the council hastily executed by his NP henchmen (200); Pembroke is telekinetically sentenced to death by Kongrosian, who shuts off one of his vital organs (202); and Kongrosian dismembers himself by introjecting external objects (such as Pembroke's gun) and expelling parts of his body (202-3).

This gruesome scene reveals the madness which has taken hold of the Ge intelligentsia. In fact Kongrosian, who is one of the most sophisticated and accomplished pianists in the world, telekinetically capable of playing Brahms and Schumann piano music, a superman in his own right, is first psychically

and then physically destroyed by his own madness, an almost metaphysical inability to distinguish between I and non-I. One might wonder if Scott Durham was right when he read this scene as the staging of a post-modern "death of the subject" (Durham, 189-90); maybe we might also read it by means of classic German idealism, the Fichtian dialectic of I and non-I (explicitly recalled in the passage: "You're part of the I-world, not the non I" says Kongrosian to the piece of his lungs he telekinetically expelled, 203), or consider the whole schizophrenic process that affects the pianist as a fictional embodiment of Hegelian/Marxian alienation. Whatever reading we may adopt, Kongrosian's self-dismemberment does not seem to lead to Durham's purported "attempt at reconstruction [of subjectivity] on a new basis" (Durham, 189); it is a personal disaster mirroring the "great national disaster" (216) surrounding him, the self-destructive struggle which is tearing apart the USEA.

What should be noticed is one of Kongrosian's final statements before he uses his psi powers to move Nicole away from the White House: "As Mr Pembroke said, I haven't really learned the political uses of my ability, even after all these years. But anyhow now I'm in politics" (203). Since these are the words of a madman, we might ask ourselves what their political value really is; but in the final part of the novel the actions of other characters are not psychologically sounder than Kongrosian's. Here are Goltz's last instructions for Nicole:

A number of army generals, three or four at least, should be sent to the main Karp installations in Berlin; they should arrest the Karp family personally; Have the Karp family taken to the nearest military base, have them tried by a military tribunal and executed immediately, also before tonight. Now, as to Pembroke. I think it would be better if the Sons of Job sent commando assassins to get Pembroke; we'll leave the military out of this aspect of the situation. (198)

Though Goltz has rejected the accusations of being a neo-Nazi, he has learned Nazi political tactics quite well. In the quoted passage what he is ordering is a classic putsch, with subsequent liquidation of his political opponents. Goltz, though, is not much worse than Pembroke. When Nicole finds the corpse of her secretary and go-between Janet Raimer, who has just been killed

by the NP executive himself: Pembroke comments: "We found ourselves in a position where we were coerced into doing that (...) Or rather — let's face it — we wanted to do it. Let's be honest with each other, finally. No, I don't have to. Taking care of Miss Raimer was an act of pure, enjoyable volition" (200). This cold-blooded, unnecessary murder could also be labelled "Nazi thuggery." A frantic lust for slaughter takes hold of the conspirators; one by one they kill — or plan to kill — and then are killed.<sup>22</sup>

Even the great industrial cartels are destroyed, in a most catastrophic way:

In the sky, to the north, an immense, grey, mushroom-like cloud all at once formed. And a rumble stirred through the earth, jarring Chick and making him jump. (...) An explosion, perhaps a small, tactical A-bomb. Now he inhaled the reek of ashes and knew definitely what it was.

A soldier, striding past him, said over his shoulder, 'The local branch of Karp und Sohnen Werke.' (...)

Maury said in a soft voice, 'They blew it up. The army blew up Karp.' (209)

Shortly after another nuclear bomb annihilates the A.G. Chemie plant. Here is the dissolution of Eisenhower's military-industrial complex. The well-ordered structure of the massmediatic state collapses once its foundation (the system of secrets, the progression of simulacra) has been shattered. What is left is not a new order, but sheer chaos, broadcast live on all TV sets in the nation: "The set showed a street scene, downtown Reno; an army barricade had been hastily erected, and police snipers were firing at it from the windows of the nearby buildings" (214). Survivors are unable to make sense of the events: "I can't make out exactly what's going on, what the issues are or who's fighting whom" (219), says Nat Flieger.

At the end of *The Simulacra* we are left with the ongoing destruction of the civil war (with lowercase initials) and a handful of bewildered characters: Kate Rupert (who has lost her charisma, thus becoming a small young woman who needs to be protected by her former subjects, 219) and the three EME employees (once *Bes*), stranded in a bar in Jenner, CA. The TV shows "a smoking, virtually disintegrated ruin, the remains of buildings, an industrial installation of great magnitude that had been all but obliterated. It was (...)

unrecognizable" (213). Such a bleak view depresses the humans, but it cheers the *chuppers*.

The *chuppers* are probably one of Dick's most impressive achievements in this novel. They are the result of a previous war of the USEA against communist China: deformed semi-human beings born of genetic mutation.

A hunched man with a huge deformed jaw and teeth faced him (...). The man, elderly, mumbled, 'Hig, hig, hig.'

Or so it sounded to Nat. (...) And Nat, at last, thought he made out real words; he strained to understand, (...) while the great-jawed old man mumbled on, anxiously, still gesturing. (...)

'I can eat vegetables pretty good (...) I can't eat meat (...) I am a *chupper*' the elderly man said. (102)

These strange creatures are protected by a specific association; one of them is the son of Richard Kongrosian. Apparently they are unfit for life:

The *chuppers* (...) looked weighed down, and by an impossible task, that of survival itself. Jim was absolutely correct; they just were not equipped for that task. Meek, small and hunched, apologetic, shuffling and mumbling, they lurched along their meagre life-track, getting nearer each moment to the end. (211)

The reasons for this inability to cope with survival probably derives from their being out of their time. This is what Jim Planck understands when he recognises them: "Neanderthal. They're not radiation freaks; they're throw-backs" (105). The *chuppers* are the return of an immemorial past, or rather a form of the "supremacy of the past" (104) which is the hidden meaning of the whole novel. The ultimate evolution of human society collapses, and the pre-humans, the Neanderthals, are ready to come back, so that in the last pages the few survivors cannot say if they are "forefathers" or "progeny" (220); what is sure is that the *chuppers* "dance their monotonous dance" (220). This is their way to celebrate the self-destruction of the USEA, the most advanced and evolved society on Earth; a self-destruction which, in the ending of Dick's novel, does look like a world catastrophe, humankind's apocalypse. Once



*Homo Sapiens* has committed suicide, it will be the time of the choppers. Neanderthal strikes back.

We might now ask ourselves what Dick was aiming at. Is this simply another chapter of the American jeremiad? Was Dick satirizing the Kennedy administration and its myth of a new Frontier, so that now this novel can be said to be a bit obsolescent, maybe in need of footnotes that tell readers who and what Dick is poking fun at? My personal hypothesis is that this novel is indeed deeply rooted in the historical moment Dick found himself in. And Baudrillard's small mistake might be a *felix culpa*, after all, because Chick Strikerock's words might be revealing of the not-so-hidden source of *The Simulacra*: "The destruction, the great national disaster, was still there. That was the terrible thing about civil war; no matter how it came out it was still bad. Still a catastrophe. And for everyone" (216). Can we downplay the importance of the Civil War centenary (1961-1965) which took place while Dick was busy writing *The Simulacra* and *We Can Build You*? While the latter overtly staged Baudrillard's desperate rehallowing of the past (the simulacra of Lincoln and Stanton), the former resurrected the war itself, the great national disaster, in a bewildered and bewildering science-fictional remake of the most rending conflict in the history of the United States.

But Dick achieved more than this. His deranged rendering of the Civil War creates a short circuit between racism and Nazism, between the limits of American democracy and the manipulation of the mass unconscious, between Goebbels' scientific propaganda and PR in the age of TV politics; and, last but not least, it connects the past of the United States with its imminent future. *The Simulacra* was published in 1964; can one pretend not to foresee the Watts race riot that would blow up just a year later? The racist bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, had occurred in September 1963. Vietnam was raging, year after year, sending more and more images of destruction to the screens of American TV sets. Those were, to quote Todd Gitlin's history of the Sixties, years of discord. Before the ghettos of major U.S. metropolises blew up, before Vietnam became a national emergency, before political figures such as Malcom X, Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy (and his elder brother)

were slaughtered, before Chicago and four dead students in Ohio, before the conspiracies and counter-conspiracies of the Nixon era, Dick perceived the oncoming destruction, the great national disaster ahead.

We might also ask ourselves whether TV and simulacra had a role in preventing that disaster, or rather, in rebuilding Imperial America after the disaster. One might notice that the idea of Kate Rupert impersonating Nicole is, after all, a cautious version of what actually happened when an actor became Governor of California and then President of the United States. In fact Ronald Reagan never hid his past career, though his limited success as a western movie actor cannot be said to have paved his way to the White House; his acting experience may instead have been crucial in winning the TV war of presidential elections (it has surely helped him to stay afloat during his two terms of Presidency.) But Arnold Schwarzenegger's new political career might be a case of reality surpassing (science-)fiction, if Baudrillard hadn't admonished us that "the real could never surpass the model, for the real is only a pretext of the model" (Baudrillard, 310). Governor Schwarzenegger is in fact a German (we might perhaps consider Austria today as a periphery of Germany) who rules Americans, like *der Alte* — and I wonder whether Dick's (and Baudrillard's) deconstruction of simulacra in a massmediatic society couldn't be applied to him.

#### NOTES

1. Such as *Soylent Green*, 1973; *The Towering Inferno*, 1974; *Airport* 1975, 1974; *Earthquake*, 1975, but a remake is underway; *The Day After*, 1983; *Jurassic Park*, 1993; *Dante's Peak*, 1997; *Armageddon*, 1998. And this is just a tentative, far-from-complete list.

2. Another novel by Disch with a very important catastrophic component (which, being based on ecology, is closer to the British catastrophic tradition) is *On Wings of Song* (1979), a text I analysed in depth in my article "On a Background, Catastrophic, the Story, Ironic." It is one of the few U.S. science-fiction novels Harold Bloom included in his idiosyncratic Western Canon.

3. We might quote Mr Nobosuke Tagomi, one of the protagonists of *The Man in the High Castle*, praised by Ursula K. LeGuin.

4. The "real" father of the Beetle was Heinz Nordhoff, who led Volkswagen after World War II and distanced it from former Nazi associations.

5. The theme of identification with Nazi Germany can also be detected in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961), though it is more clearly expressed in the film based on the novel (*Catch-22*, dir. Mike Nichols, 1970), where there is a deliberate, ironic imitation of Nazi cinema (especially the political documentaries by Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will* and *Victory of the Faith*.)
6. A question I have explored in my essay "The Harmless Yank Hobby," on the relations between Dick and Pynchon.
7. There are at least four novels by Dick that may be included in the current of sociological SF: *Solar Lottery* (1955), the first novel he managed to sell, based on the idea of a lottery which selects the President of the Solar System (called *Quizmaster* in the novel); *The Man Who Japed* (1956), which satirizes the conformism and the moralism of the Fifties; *The World Jones Made* (1956, but already completed in 1954), a bitter satire of Cold War xenophobia and paranoia; *Vulcan's Hammer* (1960, but based on a homonymous novella published in 1956), depicting a computer-controlled society.
8. When Ian meets Nicole in the White House he is evidently starstruck, but also subtly scared by the First Lady, whose semi-divine status is revealed by an involuntary pun by Ian, who — after hearing Al Miller say "We ate, Mrs Thibodeaux" — thinks "*We ate Mrs Thibodeaux*," thus hinting at the Christian Eucharist, where believers eat God. But then he adds "Doesn't she, sitting here in her blue-cotton pants and shirt, doesn't she devour *us*? Strange thought..." (162). Not so strange if we think that there were human sacrifices to pagan gods, so that those deities might well be seen as devouring gods. Once again, Nicole is seen as a voracious Magna Mater.
9. The connection between these novels has been noticed also by Carlo Pagetti, who mentions "la tradizione anti-utopica di Orwell, recuperata parodicamente (al posto di Big Brother c'è il mummificato Der Alte (...))" [Orwell's anti-utopian tradition, recovered in a parodic way (Big Brother being replaced by mummified Der Alte)] (Pagetti 2002,8). Such a mummified, devitalized paternal figure is just an ironic reminder of Orwell's dictator: the real power figure is the Big Mother, that is, Nicole.
10. Kern is the u.S. composer who wrote the musical comedy *ShowBoat* (1927) with Oscar Hammerstein II.
11. Jug band music flourished in Louisville, Kentucky, at the beginning of the 20th century. Though derivative of Appalachian country music it was performed mostly by African-Americans in urban areas. Jug bands united Appalachian folk with blues, ragtime, and very early jazz; they are best known, of course, for their novel, do-it-yourself instrumentation. The jug in question was usually a whiskey jug, and a player blew across the mouth of the jug to produce pitches in the bass register.
12. Which includes banning subversive texts, e.g. those "by the twentieth-century sociologist C. Wright Mills" (40).
13. This is an answer to Christopher Palmer's objection that "Dick is a writer who challenges the reader's capacity for belief" (Palmer, 272), and that "readers and characters undergo a similar severe test of their powers of belief in the course of the novel, and readers may note here that the

author is (to exaggerate only a little) himself embroiled, risking disorientation, if not humiliation" (Palmer, 272). Like other critics, here Palmer seemingly aims at pointing out "internal" inconsistencies in Dick's plots, thus proving his aesthetic limits: "neither reader nor author is set at aesthetic distance," Palmer goes on to say. But there is a question Palmer does not ask, one which I believe is the fundamental question Dick's readers and critics should ask themselves: how much do the massmedia system and its operators challenge our capacity for belief? This is a question Dick's characters ask themselves and each other, as we can see in Loony Luke's challenging Ian and Al's powers of belief. Dick's aim in endlessly staging simulation and forgeries is not just the author's wish to see how far he can go with his narrative confidence game; it is his own way to fictionally depict an age of mediatic confidence games in a nation where the con man is a national hero (one should then reconsider Melville's *The Confidence-Man* as the foundation act of a typically North-American aesthetics of fakery which culminates in Orson Welles' *F for Fake* and in DiCKS oeuvre.)

14. One of the characters thinks that "the TV had become educational, not entertaining" (17), but the descriptions of the programs exceeded by Nicole render doubtful the meaning of the adjective *educational* in that sentence.

15. A harmless truth from her point of view, since she knows their memories of the meeting can and will be erased by a surgical intervention; so Dick may introduce one of his favourite themes, i.e. artificial amnesia, which is central in such novels as *Time Out of Joint* and *A Maze of Death*.

16. There is a denouement also in the first appearance of the Sons of Job. Nat Flieger, a Jewish sound engineer, thinks that the Sons of Job are neo-Nazis who, "like the Nazis of the past, [feed] on disappointment" (72); but when he meets Goltz during a street demonstration, the leader of the movement tells him "I'm a Jew, too, Mr Flieger. Or more properly, an Israeli" (75). Nat's misconception about Goltz may just be Dick's way to prepare a small *coup de théâtre* when Goltz discloses his Jewish descent, or may hint at disinformation campaigns organized by the *Ge* ruling élite.

17. Goltz had told Nat Flieger: "You're not a *Ge* (...) You're like me, (...) me and my people. You're forever on the outside" (76); yet in chapter 14 we discover that Goltz is well inside; indeed, he occupies the center of the *Ge* system.

18. Here I refer to John Huntington's hypothesis of Dick following Van Vogt's alleged technique of a new idea every 800 words (Huntington, 172).

19. There is a slight mentionâ but only as a historical reference point - when a minor character talks about "jug bands surviving the u.S. Civil War" (160).

20. [The apparently utopian state which rose from the ashes of nuclear holocaust, was typified as being "a stable and peaceful society (...) everyone, by law, belonged to." It was, in fact, the America of technological portents and great monopolistic cartels, which was strengthened by the political fusion of the two centers of world capitalism— the old U.S.A. and West Germany. It was also the America of political conspiracies and violence that would overwhelm President Kennedy and his dreams of renewal. This America becomes an heir to Nazi culture, so much so

that it negotiates with Goering once he has been brought back to life, and invokes his criminal methods of political struggle. The America of the future is the America of the past, a metaphoric image of present-day America and present-day society, seen as a form of soap opera].

21. A dismal picture of the Nazi leaders can be found in *The Man in the High Castle*, where Mr Tagomi takes part in a meeting where the "contending factions in German political life" (Dick 1962, 93) are described in detail (Dick 1962, 93-6). Tagomi's moral/physical reaction is so strong that he feels sick and must leave the room. The contending factions in USEA's political life are not very different.

22. This process of (beguiling) triumph and subsequent destruction has already been noticed by Carlo Pagetti, who divided it into three phases of apparent powerlessness, revelation of one's real power, and sudden fall (Pagetti 1980, viii-ix). The scheme applies perfectly to Pembroke and Goltz, but it doesn't seem to fit Nicole; one might also wonder why it was not applied to other figures of power in the novel: for example, the Karp family, or Kongrosian, considered as a "wild card" by Pagetti, though its diegetic trajectory in the novel is remarkably similar to that of other conspirators.

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