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Posthumanism, Transhumanism and Trauma: How Changes in Paradigm Explain the Differences between Philip K. Dick's "Exhibit Piece" (1954) and Ronald D. Moore's "Real Life" (2017)

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RESUMEN

En la literatura norteamericana del s. XX es clave el auge y desarrollo del género conocido como ciencia ficción, dentro de la cual podemos catalogar la obra de Philip K. Dick, uno de sus máximos exponentes. Dick es conocido tanto por sus novelas como por sus relatos. Además, varios de sus textos han sido adaptados al campo audiovisual, como lo es el relato “Exhibit Piece” (1954), llevado a la pantalla por Ronald D. Moore en 2017, en el episodio “Real Life” de la serie *Electric Dreams*. Como bien afirma el propio guionista, la versión cinematográfica solo mantiene la idea principal de la historia, la exploración de la(s) realidad(es) y sus límites. El propósito de este trabajo es demostrar que la mayoría de cambios encontrados en el episodio responden a un cambio de paradigma que afectó enormemente a las áreas de estudio del Posthumanismo y los Estudios de Trauma durante la década de 1990. A diferencia de la historia de Dick, la versión de Moore incluye el elemento del estrés post-traumático y sus efectos, todo ello dentro de una atmósfera de Realidad Virtual. De este modo, el episodio se ve afectado por los avances en estudios de Posthumanismo y Trauma y explora las realidades del presente sin dejar de lado la esencia de la historia original.

ABSTRACT

The peak and development of the science-fiction genre is a key event in North-American literature of the twentieth century. The work of Philip K. Dick, one of its most relevant authors, can be classified as belonging to this literary genre. Dick is known for his novels as well as for his short stories. Furthermore, several of his texts have been adapted into the audiovisual field. For instance, his short story “Exhibit Piece” (1954) was taken to the screen by Ronald D. Moore in 2017, as the “Real Life” episode in the *Electric Dreams* series. As stated by the screen writer himself, the cinematographic version keeps only the main idea of the story, the exploration of reality (or realities) and its limits. The purpose of this paper is demonstrating that most of the changes found in the episode are explained by a change in paradigm that remarkably affected the areas of Posthumanism and Trauma Studies during the 1990s. In contrast with Dick’s story, Moore’s version includes the element of PTSD and its effects in a Virtual Reality environment. This way, we can see the influence of the advances in Posthumanism and Trauma Studies in the episode, which explores the realities of the present without discarding the essence of the original story.

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INTRODUCTION

Philip Kindred Dick (December 16, 1928 – March 2, 1982) was one of the main science fiction authors of the 20th century. He and his twin sister Jane had a premature birth, but she died six weeks after. This marked the author's writing, since he includes the motif of the phantom twin in several of his works. To add to his tragic childhood, Dick's parents divorced when he was five and he was raised by his mother. His passion for science fiction and his abilities for writing started to appear at this time in his life.

The author developed an attraction towards politics, philosophy and theology when he was at university. The main topics of his writing stem from these fields of knowledge, such as reality, perception or illusion. Furthermore, he experimented with drugs and attempted suicide by overdosing. He suffered from mental illnesses, most probably schizophrenia, since he had hallucinations regularly and he came to a point in which he was not able to distinguish between the 'parallel lives' he claimed to live (which proves that one of the main topics in his literature, the nature of reality, has actually an autobiographical essence). Nevertheless, Dick always denied that his paranormal experiences were related to drug abuse. He finally passed away from a stroke in 1982.

During his lifetime, he mostly wrote short stories and novels. Concerning short stories, it was very common for them to appear in science fiction magazines, especially during the fifties. His most well-known novels are *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). Both of them are evidence of the author's incredible influence on audiovisual culture, especially the latter, since it was the source of inspiration for Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). However, the motion picture was released some months after the author's death. *The Man in the High Castle* was also adapted into a TV series by Frank Spotnitz in 2015 (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, n.d.).

Despite the fact that the author's most famous contribution to film was the idea for *Blade Runner* based on his novel, his short stories have also recently met the screen. Sony Pictures Television's 2017 *Electric Dreams* anthology series offers the viewer ten independent episodes, each inspired by different short stories by the author and screen written by various British and American writers. Regarding the TV series' reception, it has a score of 7'2/10 on Internet Movie Database (*IMDb*, 2018a), the same score it has in the Rotten Tomatoes website (*Rotten Tomatoes*, n.d.). Spanish journalist Álvaro Pérez Ruiz de Elvira (2018) compares it to Charlie Brooker's incredibly successful series *Black Mirror* (2011), stating that in *Electric Dreams*, emotions, wishes and metaphysics (topics which are typical in Dick's works) are given more prominence than technology and its dangers. Popular culture writer Jen Chaney (2018) declares that "[w]hile, overall, it is not as consistently compelling as *Black Mirror*, *Electric Dreams* is a worthy addition to a genre — the anthology series — that is in the midst of a renaissance".

The following lines of this paper will aim to analyze one of the series' episodes, "Real Life", and the 1954 short story by Philip K. Dick it is based on, "Exhibit Piece". The audiovisual version was written by Ronald D. Moore, known for

having worked in *Outlander* (2014), as well as in several *Star Trek* productions. Even though the setting, characters and plot in “Real Life” completely differ from “Exhibit Piece”, anyone who is familiarized with Dick’s literature would be capable of recognizing its heavy influence on it. Moore affirms that “very little remains of this story in the show, but the heart, and perhaps more importantly, the *brains* behind the episode originate in this tale.” What he did was basically taking the core of the short story, which is the topic of the blurring of reality and its shifting nature, and integrating it into a contemporary setting. He explains that he was “attracted to the underlying theme of losing one’s self in another reality” and that he had already worked on that field. He saw an opportunity in centering the episode on virtual reality, a new technology that was arriving to the consumer market. This is proof of how Dick’s “interesting and provocative themes […] are still relevant to our lives many years after they were originally written” (Moore & Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017, p.1-2).

The episode’s ratings range from 6’2 (*FilmAffinity*, n.d.) to 7’2 (*IMDb*, 2018b). Drama Editor Eleanor Bley Griffiths (2017) agrees with the screen writer of the episode, expressing that “[v]ery little of the original story remains in the show, but you can see how the central idea of this Philip K. Dick story inspired Moore's new narrative.” Film blogs’ users point out that the adaptation is ideal for contemporary society and spectators, and that “*Real Life* shows what a good writer, with and understanding of Philip K. Dick, can do and this has led to an excellent piece of sci-fi” (Villordsutch, 2017).

As many critics believe, the episode perfectly maintains Dick’s essence topic-wise, although it resonates more with the contemporary viewer than the original piece. Apart from developing it in a 21st century setting with characters the spectator can more easily identify with and with devices he/she knows (mainly VR), we could declare that the drastic modifications of the episode are primarily explained by a change in paradigm related to the development of posthumanism and trauma studies in the 1990s, which explains the adaptation of a fifties short story into a contemporary context to which the current viewer can feel closer to.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The main elements that will be used to frame the comparison between the short story and the TV series episode in the following pages will be two areas of study that experienced a boom in literature studies during the 1990s. On the one hand, posthumanism stems from humanism and explores what it is that makes us human and the boundaries of humanness; on the other hand, trauma studies is "a constantly evolving, multidisciplinary field [that] has grown to great proportions" and that deals with the psychological and psychiatric concept of traumatic memory as applied "to the analysis of culture, history and politics" (Traverso and Broderick, 2010, p. 4). Despite the apparently different nature of these fields of study, they both share common ground that will be recognized in the analysis of the two works since it is especially useful to understand Moore's adaptation of Dick's original text.

POSTHUMANISM AND TRANSHUMANISM

In order to understand posthumanism, it is crucial to know that this concept is rooted in humanism. Humanism met its peak during the Renaissance period. It is an anthropocentric philosophical posture, i.e. it is human-centered in a way that it tries to determine what makes us human and, by definition, superior to what is considered non-human. Posthumanism and transhumanism are two different approaches that explore what it is that makes us human. However, they are often confused.

In regard to transhumanism, it seeks liberating humans from their biological limitations by making use of scientific and technological developments. It takes from humanism the dichotomy of mind and body, privileging the former over the latter. Moreover, its goal is improving the human being.

More (1990) defines transhumanism as philosophies of life aiming to develop intelligent life beyond its present human restrictions thanks to science and technology taking into account life-promoting standards. Later, the British philosopher also argued that transhumanism does not despise the human body or human nature; it just sees it as flawed and subject to improvement thanks to technology. It is "just one point along an evolutionary pathway" (More et al., 2013, p. 4). Nick Bostrom (2005) highlights the fact that by responsible use of present and future science and technology, humans will become posthumans (beings with enhanced capacities). Although one of the reasons why transhumanism is widely seen with apprehension is because of its elitist features, Bostrom maintains that "[t]he full realization of the core transhumanist value requires that, ideally, everybody should have the opportunity to become posthuman. It would be sub-optimal if the opportunity to become posthuman were restricted to a tiny elite" (p. 10).

Nonetheless, critical posthumanism criticizes the universalist and exceptionalist ideas that humanism entails; it involves a rupture with humanism. Vint (2007) complains about how the emphasis on universalism by liberal humanism is timeless and revolves around some kind of 'essence' that implicitly excludes

everything which is not male or European. She argues that the "emphasis on individualism and isolation evacuates our model of society from any ethical sense of intersubjectivity and collectivity" (p.13).

One of the earliest uses of the term "posthumanism" can be found in Ihab Hassan's "Prometheus as Performer" (1977), where he states:

> [T]he human form – including human desire and all its external representations – may be changing radically, and thus must be re-visioned. We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthumanism (p. 843).

Critical posthumanism denounces the way humanism privileges the rational mind over the body, and what is considered human over what is considered non-human according to its parameters. Braidotti (2013) defines 'Man' as "the representative of a hierarchical, hegemonic and generally violent species whose centrality is now challenged by a combination of scientific advances and global economic concerns" (p. 65). Braidotti criticizes the notion of 'Man' as white, male, abled, young and healthy and how this definition relegates every other form of life –animals and humans who do not possess those characteristics- to an inferior position in the hierarchy. She elaborates on the problems of negative differentiation: "[a]ll these 'others' are rendered as pejoration, pathologized and cast out of normality, on the side of anomaly, deviance, monstrosity and bestiality" (p.68).

Transhumanism, as has already been mentioned in the previous lines, is closely linked to technological advances. These scientific developments not only challenge the figure of the human, but also the reality humans live in. As represented in the "Real Life" episode that will be analyzed in the following sections, the limits of reality can be blurred because of technology. And although what happens to the characters in the episode may seem overly-futuristic and far-fetched, the truth is that we already live in a kind of limbo between two different realities: the physical one and the one inside our devices. Floridi (2014) refers to this state of in-betweenness as the "onlife state", a "new experience of a hyperconnected reality within which it is no longer sensible to ask whether one may be online or offline" (p. 1). In the *Manifesto*, ICTs are not seen as sheer tools, but rather as environmental forces that alter our concept of self, our interactions, and our concept of and interaction with reality. Although "filters of many kinds continue to erode the illusion of an objective, unbiased perception of reality", they also "open new spaces for human interactions and new knowledge practices" (p. 10).

Floridi also explores the concept of 'hyperhistory'. According to the Italian philosopher, we usually divide human life into prehistory and history, which are differentiated by the invention of writing in the fourth millennium BC. All technology has been made possible thanks to the *recording and transmitting* infrastructure provided by the first ICTs. However, he says that ICTs are undergoing such a drastic transformation that we are entering a new age called hyperhistory, in which humans are totally dependent on them. In addition,

information is the central resource in hyperhistory, which is not exempt from risk since “[o]nly a society that lives hyperhistorically can be vitally threatened informationally, by a cyber-attack. Only those who live by the digit may die by the digit” (p. 52). Moreover, this accelerated and radical progress in technology is separating upcoming generations from ours, even though there is still continuity, both backward (hyperhistory is brought about by history) and forward (historical societies have the prospect of living for a long time). Nonetheless, Floridi puts an emphasis on the fact that “[d]espite globalisation, human societies do not parade uniformly forward, in synchronic steps” (p. 53). That is to say, most societies nowadays live in history, although some others may be still living prehistorically and some others already live in hyperhistory. Undoubtedly, it would be senseless to deny the importance of power and economy in determining these societies’ place in history, which is directly determined by capitalism.

TRAUMA STUDIES

Another crucial field of studies that flourished in the nineties is that which explores trauma and how it is represented in cultural products such as literature or cinema. In 1995, Cathy Caruth already claimed: “[i]n the past several years, public interest in the suffering entailed in trauma, as well as professional research in the field, has grown considerably” (p. VII). Michelle Balaev (2014) precisely points to Caruth and her *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1995) and Kali Tal’s *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (1996) as the catalyst for the boom in trauma studies in literary criticism.

It is crucial to know what trauma really means, although, as Balaev argues, the history of the notion of trauma is full of contradictions and debates. This accounts for the numerous definitions of trauma and its effects. The *Cambridge Dictionary* (n.d.) defines trauma as “severe and lasting emotional shock and pain caused by an extremely upsetting experience, or a case of such shock happening”. A central concept in the study of trauma is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD. The American Psychiatric Association coined the term in 1980 to refer to a mental illness suffered by people who have experienced “actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a physical threat to the physical integrity of the self” that cannot be considered to belong into the range of normal experience. However, the symptoms of PTSD can be classified into three disparate categories. On the one hand, the traumatic event can constantly haunt the patient by means of dreams or flashbacks. On the other hand, the sufferer may completely avoid stimuli related to the traumatic event. These symptoms can fluctuate from avoidance of thoughts or emotions linked to the trauma to total amnesia about it. Finally, patients can also suffer from loss of temper control, hyper-vigilance or “exaggerated startle response”, symptoms which are classified under the category of “increased arousal” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 467-8). Caruth (1995) explains that PTSD and its symptoms had previously been referred to as “shell shock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome, and traumatic neurosis […]” (p. 3).

Paul Valéry explained the first set of symptoms as the way in which "[o]ur memory repeats to us what we haven't understood" (in Felman, 1990, p. 76). Nevertheless, his understanding has met disagreement among scholars, since "[o]ur memory repeats to us what we haven't yet come to terms with, what still haunts us" (Erikson & Caruth, 1995). This points to the importance of 'healing' (although this may not be the most appropriate word, as it will be explained in the following lines) from trauma, which can be understood as a two-step process:

Firstly, the person suffering from PTSD undergoes a process called 'acting out'. This first process entails some of the symptoms that had already been mentioned above. LaCapra (2014) considers 'acting out' is "the near fixation on enacting […] post-traumatic symptoms" (p. xxxi). Following on, there is a second mechanism which has been given the name of 'working through'. It involves a process of assimilation and verbalization (being able to talk about the traumatic event). LaCapra recognizes how closely related these processes are, since "[w]orking-through itself should be understood as an open, self-questioning process that never attains closure and counteracts acting- out without entirely transcending it, especially with respect to trauma and its aftermath" (p. xxiii). Moreover, he complains about seeing it "in terms of a notion of cure, consolation, uplift, or closure and normalization [since] one need not simply dismiss or denigrate acting-out, which may be necessary in processes of working-through […]" (p. xxiii).

LaCapra also includes the concept of 'fidelity to trauma'. It is a feeling some victims of trauma may experience in which they feel they must be faithful to trauma and therefore resist working through. This feeling can be related to "the melancholic sentiment that, in working through, the past in a manner that enables survival or a reengagement in life, one is betraying those who were overwhelmed and consumed by that traumatic past" (p. 22). This can also be associated to Freud's notion on 'survivor guilt'. He described it as "that tendency toward self-reproach which death invariably leaves among the survivors" (Freud, 1896/1985; as cited in Masson, 1985 p. 202).

Robert Jay Lifton, in an interview carried out by Caruth (1995) relates survivor guilt to responsibility. For him, it is essentially paradoxical, since "carrying through the witness is a way of transmuting pain and guilt into responsibility, and carrying through that responsibility has enormous therapeutic value." Its therapeutic value lies in the fact that responsibility is vital for self-integration. That is to say, "the only way one can feel right or justified in reconstituting oneself and going on living with some vitality is to carry through one's responsibility to the dead" (p. 138).

As mentioned above, however, there is a second cluster of symptoms of PTSD which are characterized by avoidance of the traumatic event. These symptoms can take the form of elusion of thoughts and feelings, mental evasion or even complete memory loss of the trauma. One of the most relevant ones, especially in contemporary literature and cinema, is that of escapism. Psychotherapist Amanda Perl (2016) defines escapism as "a way of attempting to make negative feelings dissipate, without working through the necessary steps in

order to come to relief through mental resolution." Her negative view makes her compare it to "a false economy, a quick fix, a crutch, a placebo." Although the deliberate use of escapist devices (such as the 'holidays' in "Real Life") opens an interesting debate concerning whether it actually helps trauma survivors or simply displaces the problem, we should take into account that the processes undergoing PTSD and its symptoms are mostly subconscious. That is to say, we could make a distinction between self-inflicted conscious escapism and unconscious escapist techniques a trauma survivor can experience in the form of PTSD symptoms.

ANALYSIS

In order to compare the two works that are the object of this paper, "Exhibit Piece" and "Real Life" are going to be analyzed respectively in terms of context, plot and themes. Special attention will be given to the episode's portrayal of posthuman and transhuman elements, as well as its treatment of trauma, since they are the richest contributions to the story in terms of thematic features.

PHILIP K. DICK'S "EXHIBIT PIECE" (1954)

Regarding the political context of the publication of the short story, the president of the US in 1954 was Dwight Eisenhower, a member of the Republican Party. Taking this historical context into account is crucial for understanding the story and its textual implications, since it was a time of capitalist and consumerist ideas. Furthermore, we have to situate the publication of the story within the context of the Cold War since the text makes a reference to it in its last paragraph.

The short story was firstly published in the year 1954 in the science-fiction magazine *If*. Magazines were a crucial element in the evolution of the science-fiction genre and many of Dick's short stories were published for the first time in this kind of magazines. Clute and Nicholls (1995) argue that science-fiction as a genre did not appear until the 19th century, although, naturally, some of its ingredients had already appeared in previous works which could be considered proto science fiction. Cheap magazines started to appear in the 1880s, and some of them contained science-fiction stories. A decade later, the expansion of pulp magazines contributed to expanding the market for magazines and to create an audience for science-fiction. The first magazine totally dedicated to science-fiction in English was Gernsback's *Amazing Stories*, created in 1926. Science-fiction stories and magazine boomed for the second time in the 1950s, at the same time science-fiction cinema boomed for the first time. *If* magazine was founded in 1952 by the Quinn Publishing Co. The title was sold to Digest Productions in 1959 and *If* merged with *Galaxy Science Fiction*.

The short story takes place in a future America, around the year 2150. The main character, George Miller, works at the History Agency, in which there are exhibits which depict life at different times in history. Miller is specialized in the 1950s, and he takes his job so seriously that he even talks and dresses like the

people in the 1950s, an attitude which is constantly criticized by his manager, Fleming. Although he cannot stand his superiors, he loves his job because he idealizes the historical period he works with. Once in the office, Miller hears a noise inside his exhibition and decides to enter, thinking it may be a member of the Board. Without really knowing how it has happened, he quickly finds himself immersed in a new reality, the one depicted in the exhibit, the America of the 1950s. In that life, he is a member of the prototypical 'perfect' family of that time: he lives with his wife and their two kids in a suburban home from where he goes downtown to work every day in his car. Although he feels completely lost and confused at first, he progressively remembers details about his life there. However, he still feels worried and decides to go see a psychiatrist, Grunberg. The doctor tries to help Miller understand why and when he started to feel disoriented, suggesting that there can be only one reality and that he may be suffering from stress because of his job. Contrarily, Miller reaches the conclusion that both worlds are equally real, and he remembers the exact place where he appeared when he came from the 'other reality', the railing in his house. He goes there and sees Fleming and Carnap, the office director. They tell Miller to leave the exhibit and he is threatened with euthanasia and with the destruction of the place. Nevertheless, Miller is convinced that it would not destroy his life and reality there; it would just close the time gate. He compares both worlds and decides to stay in the 1950s, so he goes back inside the house and reads the newspaper, whose headlines forecast global destruction because of a bomb developed by Russia.

The central topic of the short story is the question about the nature of reality and the blurring of parallel realities. As has already been mentioned, this constantly appears in the author's fiction. It may be sensible to connect this wide use of the topic with Dick's own experience. According to Josh Ozersky (2013), Dick recurred to drug use in order to be productive enough in terms of writing. He needed to publish a great number of texts so he could live from his literature, since "[w]riting pulp sci-fi novels in the 1950s and 1960s earned him barely enough to eat." Dick's drug consumption has never been a secret, for the author himself confirmed it. In an interview for *Rolling Stone*, Dick said: "I believed there was a direct connection between the amphetamines and the writing. I attributed my speed of writing, my high productivity and my pushing myself to the amphetamines. I really used to think that if I didn't take 'em, I couldn't write." (Williams, 1975). When asked if the rumors about the fact that every novel by him from 1953 until 1973 approximately had been written on speed, he said it was correct, not an exaggeration. According to HealthDirect (n.d.), "speed can make people feel 'pumped' and happy. They may have an energy boost, feel more alert and be more talkative." This means that Dick's writing under the influence of this drug is not directly related to hallucination. Paul Williams specifies that the hallucinogenic nature of reality in Dick's writing most probably stems from his internal chemistry and not the chemicals he has used. Although it is not officially verified whether the writer was diagnosed with schizophrenia, it is true that he suffered from paranormal experiences and hallucinations during his life, to the point that he was sure of living two parallel lives. Therefore, the autobiographical quality of this topic in his work is undeniable.

The topic regarding reality (or realities) is explored in two different but complementary directions. On the one hand, it is the central theme, the spine, of the story, and therefore, it is mentioned explicitly. Miller enters the second reality, the one of the 1950s, without using any devices apart from the time gate of the exhibit itself. He is shocked and puzzled at first, and as we can read in the story, "[h]e searched for words, but his mind was a maze of disjointed thoughts" (Dick & Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017, p. 11). The incapability of verbalizing the shocking event is one of the symptoms of trauma, as it has been explained in the theoretical framework section of this paper. Another manifestation of trauma is the recurrence of flashbacks, as we see in the story "the observation flashed through his mind that the boy looked familiar […] like somebody he knew, only younger" (p. 8). Even though Miller does not experience a flashback *per se*, the verb 'flashed' and the reminiscence of his son to someone he already knows without exactly knowing who he is point to disturbance and confusion, as if it was a memory of a traumatic experience. Memory also appears when Miller's wife asks him if he remembers something the kids had done in the past, in "[b]ut you remember that time they wanted to drive the car […], you'd think they had got your okay. And they hadn't, of course" (p. 9). Although the usage of the verb 'remember' may seem accidental or formulaic, it gains relevance if we take into account the relationship between the story and its representation of trauma. Additionally, a worth-mentioning figure in the story is psychiatrist Grunberg. He represents the humanist and western tendency towards dichotomies and the act of definition through differentiation, for he is completely sure that only one of the realities can be true. For him, the one he is part of is real, so the 'other' must be imaginary, and he attributes it to job tension. Notwithstanding, Miller represents the integration of those two realities. In the beginning, he also thinks only one of the worlds can be real:

> And in addition to this general feeling of insubstantiality, there are specific projected memories of persons and places beyond this world. Another realm in which this one is contained. Perhaps I should say, the reality within which this is only a sort of shadow world. (p. 13)

He also utters "[e]ither this is an exhibit […] or I'm a middle-class businessman with an escape fantasy" (p. 15). It would be interesting to note that both the notion of the 'shadow world' and the escape fantasy also appear in another story by Dick, "The Commmuter" (1953), and especially in its homonymous adaptation in the TV series, since it revolves around a man who becomes obsessed with a city which is a 'shadow world' of his own city because he needs to escape his crumbling life. Nonetheless, Miller finally comes to the conclusion that his binary paradigm was wrong and that "[t]hey [the two worlds] are both real" (p. 16).

On the other hand, formal elements also contribute to the development of the alternate realities topic. The story reads that "[t]he three dimensional projected backdrop was utterly convincing; or was it the projected backdrop? How could he be sure. *What was happening?*" (p. 9). The oxymoron built by 'projected' (i.e. not real) and 'convincing', preceded by the intensifying adverb 'utterly' highlight the ambivalent and indefinite nature of reality. Furthermore, the continual usage

of free indirect speech immerses the reader into the story and accounts for identification with the protagonist who is experiencing the upsetting situation.

The topic of schizophrenia and hallucination has been connected to capitalism and consumerism. For Freedman (1984), paranoia emerges from commodification:

> If we are economically constituted as capitalists and workers who must buy and sell human labor that is commodified into labor-power, then we are physically constituted as paranoid subjects who must seek to interpret the signification of the objects-commodities-which define us and which, in a quasi-living manner, mystify the way that they and we are defined. (p. 18)

In spite of the fact that Dick was not politically committed in an overt manner, we can infer some of his ideological ideas from his work. For instance, his alternate history novel *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) openly highlights the writers' unfavorable attitude towards totalitarian policies. Moreover, his view regarding the capitalist and consumerist values that were at peak during his lifetime was not positive. Lecturer James Peacock (2017) mentions that "Dick's work critiques consumer capitalism and authoritarian institutions, and reflects and predicts technological advances, not all of them benign." Concerning his skeptical perspective towards technology and its risks, stories such as "Autofac" (1955) could serve as an example. "Exhibit Piece" not only includes subtle but powerful criticism of the socio-economic system of the 1950s, but also about the possible future it could lead to.

Criticism of the author's contemporary present is progressively made more explicit towards the end of the story. It is set in the twenty-second century but the main character works with and enters the middle twentieth century, the time Dick published the work. That is to say, assessment of society and values of the 1950s in the fictitious reality serve as criticism of the author's present. Miller's excessive idealization and the use of irony are the main devices used by the author to subtly criticize the ways of life in the 1950s.

The values and lifestyles of the American 1950s can be seen in various aspects. For instance, gender roles in the 1950s relegated the female figure to the domestic sphere. Here, Miller's wife, Marjorie, is normally in the kitchen or shopping. Her boudoir (symbol of physical appearance) is described in detail and she acknowledges her husband's authority when the kids ask for permission. Moreover, she tells George to "come on back and finish [his] coffee" (p. 8), which points to her caring and warm attitude, as if she was Miller's mother. Another female figure in the story (although collective and not deeply explored) is that of the secretaries in Miller's office, who are described as bright-eyed and wearers of tight sweaters and perfume (also elements related to physical appearance). Other elements which characterize the values and ideal life of the 1950s in the USA are the suburban house the family lives in, their car, and the family itself, since when comparing both worlds, Miller points out how pleasant the 1950s are because marriage and divorce are permitted and because the State has no custody over their children. The values of competition

and hard work represented by Miller's job are also a key element. However, when talking to Fleming, Miller recognizes that his "position is better than average" (p. 17), so there may be people whose life in the 1950s is not so favorable. Other elements that help us dismantle the illusion of the 1950s as perfect are the problems Miller faces in his workplace, which emphasize a clear lack of complete freedom (epitomized in the figure of Miller's boss, Davidson), extreme competition and hierarchy, and stress derived from work. Sentences such as "[t]he exciting age of virility and individuality, when men were men…" (p. 5) when talking about the 1950s make perfect use of irony in a way that they highlight the absence of correspondence between Miller's idealization of the period and how they really were. Moreover, the headline in the newspaper (which is a symbol of information) reads "Russia reveals cobalt bomb/total world destruction ahead" (p. 20), which makes prominent the preoccupation with the Cold War when the story was written and leaves the reader with a sense of anguish and uncertainty.

Although textual implications make it clear that the 1950s were by no means perfect, in comparison with the future the story describes, it was certainly a better period than the twenty-second century depicted in it. This way, Dick elaborates a sort of reflection or presumption about how life could be if the workings of economy and society of the 1950s did not change. We could argue that, in that way, the story is not only a critique of contemporary society but also a warning. In the text, oblivious Grunberg utters: "It would be nice […] to live in the world of tomorrow. With robots and rocket ships to do all the work. You could just sit back and take it easy. No worries, no cares. No frustrations" (p. 15). He thinks that technological advances would mean freedom, but it is actually the contrary. Fleming also says that times change and society progresses, but the direction of this progress can be questioned. The twenty-second century is actually characterized by extreme hierarchy and government control over a number of aspects such as dress, marriage, family and even life itself. Miller is considered a psycho by his superiors and is threatened with euthanasia. This may point to the bleak future for mentally ill citizens if the course of history and psychiatry does not suffer a transformation. Finally, although Miller realizes that the 1950s are not as splendid as he had imagined them, he decides to stay in that world because the future is even more disheartening.

RONALD D. MOORE'S "REAL LIFE" (2017)

As has been previously mentioned, Moore's radical adaptation of Dick's story into the TV series *Electric Dreams* (2017) has met both positive and negative opinions from critics and the public. Even though the core idea is maintained, for both works explore the nature of reality and show us the mental processes and dilemmas of a character that is suddenly unable to discern between two worlds, many changes have been made in Moore's version.

The most obvious alteration comes in terms of plot. The episode displays the story of Sarah (Anna Paquin), a police officer living in the future with her girlfriend Katie (Rachelle Lefevre). After an incident in which some of her

colleagues are killed, Sarah shows symptoms of trauma and emotional exhaustion, so Katie convinces her into taking a kind of 'holiday' by using a device that immerses her into the life of another person. In that new life, Sarah is actually George (Terrence Howard), a wealthy and successful game designer living in our contemporary present. George is also traumatized because of his wife's murder. The realization that George and Sarah's partner is actually the same, Katie, marks a disruption in their minds. It also adds to the incremented sense of blurring of limits between realities. After a series of arguments and dilemmas, the main character decides she must stay in the present, as George, leaving Sarah to die.

In the episode, in contrast with Dick's story, the blurring of realities is actually made possible thanks to a virtual reality device. Moore explains he took the basic idea of the story to explore "both VR and the nature of reality itself" (Moore & Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017, p. 1). The inclusion of VR is clearly an attempt to bring the story closer to the contemporary viewer, since it is a recent development we are starting to get familiarized with. Moreover, it is a frequent element in the science-fiction produced in the latest years, as it appears in other works such as *Black Mirror* (Charlie Brooker, 2011), *Ready Player One* (Steven Spielberg, 2018) or *Upload* (Greg Daniels, 2020). LaMotte (2017) explains that VR already entails physical risks such as myopia, headache or nausea. Nevertheless, VR is not mainstream yet, at least the kind of VR that completely immerses the user in every sense, so the problems depicted in the episode could serve as a warning for a near future. Something similar to what Floridi called the 'onlife' state, a present state in which the limits between our online and offline life are not so clear.

Another crucial change in the episode is that it presents us with two different physical characters, Sarah and George, while "Exhibit Piece" only revolves around George. It is interesting to note that from a humanist perspective, both Sarah and George would be considered the 'Other', the abject: Sarah is a lesbian woman and George is a black man. The incorporation of this type of characters clearly accounts for a critical posthumanist understanding, since voices that had been silenced in the past are now given a voice. Moreover, the uttering of the sentence "doesn't it seem like some kind of male fantasy, what they used to call science fiction?" is an example of metafiction and could be considered a subtle criticism about the patriarchal and male-centered quality of traditional science-fiction. Another line of dialogue that adds to this criticism is uttered by Paula (Laura Pulver), George's doctor and friend, who says "you could end up in a permanent coma, at least you would be having hot lesbian sex in some sci-fi paradise" in an overly-ironic and even humorous tone. Amy Chase (2017) pushes this critique further and explores the relationship between science-fiction and sexism in terms of cyborgs, male objectification of women and consensual sex.

Additional evidence of posthuman elements included in the episode is the clear-cut distinction between mind and body. In "Exhibit Piece" Miller despises Fleming because he has "no soul" (p. 4). Although the phrase may seem formulaic at first, it actually hides a humanist perspective in which the soul or mind is inherently superior to the physical body, which is enhanced by the fact

that Miller only occupies one body in the story (that of a middle-class white man). In “Real Life”, it is made clear that mind and body are tightly connected, since their body in terms of gender and race is a determinant factor in their identity. Moreover, their bodies physically react to what happens in their minds (for example, when George throws up in the conference room).

This physiological reaction to mental problems is also connected to trauma, a key element in Moore’s audiovisual adaptation. Both characters are haunted by traumatic experiences. Sarah, on the one hand, suffers from survivor guilt and is constantly reminded of her colleagues’ death. She truly thinks she does not deserve the ‘perfect’ life she has. On the other hand, we learn that George cheated on her wife with Paula and that she was brutally murdered and recorded because he refused to give her kidnappers the prototype for his VR device. Therefore, he also feels guilty of her wife’s death. The characters’ symptoms are formally represented by means of actual flashbacks, highlighting how effective video can be to show the haunting memories produced by PTSD. Moreover, George desires the second type of symptoms of PTSD, that related to amnesia, since he says that he does not think he wants to remember everything.

Escapism, as explained before, can also be a coping mechanism used by traumatized people. The episode makes reference to George’s drug or alcohol problems, which could be totally linked to his longing for escapism. Psychiatry and neuroscience professor Sinha (2008) claims that “[t]here is a substantial literature on the significant association between acute and chronic stress and the motivation to abuse addictive substances” (p. 107) and that “[t]he findings indicate that the cumulative number of stressful events was significantly predictive of alcohol and drug dependence in a dose-dependent manner, even after accounting for control factors.” (p. 108). Furthermore, both Sarah and George use the VR device so they can “escape the real world”.

Nonetheless, although the use of VR as a way of escapism may look utopian, Katie explains that the new life or reality is actually based on the subconscious of the user. This way, if the character’s mind is tormented, the VR will be based on that trauma, so the utopian ‘vacation’ becomes a dystopian punishment originated by the survivor guilt of the characters. When Sarah chooses to stay in her life as George, Katie comes to the conclusion that "she chose that life because she wanted to be punished for her sins, real and imagined. Surviving, being happy". When someone tells her that "being happy is not a sin", she utters the last sentence of the episode: "we're all sinners and we all think we need to be punished, even if our sins don't exist". This incredibly powerful last reflection wraps up the main point of the episode: she chooses to punish herself because she is haunted by survivor guilt and cannot assimilate the traumatic event, she is unable to work through it. Furthermore, although it is not explicitly evoked in the episode, we could make a connection between Katie’s meditation about guilt and sin and the Judeo-Christian belief and prevalence of the concept of sin.

The episode’s careful and profound exploration of the effects of trauma and PTSD completely contrast with the short story’s basic and superficial treatment

of traumatic events and its side effects. This is unquestionably explained by the developments in psychology and trauma studies that took place in the years between the publishing of “Exhibit Piece” and the production of the series.

Finally, although Dick and Moore’s versions of the story are totally disparate, it is true that there are some elements which both stories share. As Moore claims, the core idea (the blurring of realities and what it implies in the person’s mind) is maintained. In addition, there are other minor elements is common, such as the presence of a contemporary and a future world in both works, as well as references to dreams.

In regards to setting, “Exhibit Piece” offers an insight on a technologically advanced but totalitarian future and a critique of the historical times in which it was written. Similarly, the future in “Real Life” is also characterized by the ubiquity of technology in a cyberpunk scenario (comparable to what Floridi coined as ‘hyperhistory’) in which there is still crime, economic interests and inequality. Concerning the contemporary times portrayed in the episode, they account for a skeptical attitude towards VR and the problems this technology can lead to. This way, both stories’ usage of two alternative realities in the present and the future serve to build criticism about the former and to warn about what it can lead to if there is no change.

In terms of dreams, they are a useful device in many science-fiction works because they can perfectly portray the faint limits of reality. Productions such as *Falling Water* (Henry Bromell, 2016) deeply explore this topic, although in the works that have been analyzed in this paper it is only mentioned. In “Exhibit Piece”, Miller and Grunberg argue about the possibility of being in a dream; in “Real Life”, the following claim is made: "when you are in a dream you're essentially living another life. You're in another world with another set of rules that you accept as reality".

CONCLUSION

As discussed before, Philip K. Dick’s short story “Exhibit Piece” and Ronald D. Moore’s adaptation of it in the 2017 *Electric Dreams’* “Real Life” episode are completely different. Despite the differences, which will be recapitulated in the following paragraphs, both works still keep some aspects in common. The basis of the short story, which is the thematic study of reality and its definition and limits, can still be appreciated in the audiovisual piece. Secondary aspects such as the fact that the character of George appears in both texts and the dreams are also part of the stories’ similarities. Together with the presence of the topic of reality, the most relevant parallel we find in the works is their critical element. That is to say, both plots take place in a contemporary (be it the 1950s or our present time) and a future setting. The present described and illustrated is in both cases criticized, and the future functions as a warning against the problems we could encounter if life in the present continues developing without changes in those aspects that have been criticized.

Nonetheless, there is an incalculable number of disparities between Dick and Moore's versions. Even the aspects which appear in both stories are explored in completely different ways. For instance, although the character of George is preserved, it is an utterly different George: white middle-class businessman in "Exhibit Piece" and a black millionaire in "Real Life". Moreover, George is the counterpart of Sarah, a lesbian woman. The blurring of reality is also given a completely different treatment in "Exhibit Piece" and "Real Life" not only in terms of features but also in the fact that the series includes the element of virtual reality. Even though Moore simply explains that he wanted to maintain the spine of the story but adding VR into the equation, most of these changes are explained by a change in paradigm related to posthumanism, transhumanism and trauma studies in the 1990s. The screen writer may not have taken these aspects into account deliberately, but it is obvious that he (just as everyone, since we are social beings whose way of thinking cannot completely escape context) has been affected by these changes in thought and perspective. This is clearly observed in how the series thoroughly explores PTSD and its consequences in comparison with "Exhibit Piece"'s depthless analysis regarding mental concerns, to mention an evident example. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assert that the bulk of changes made to the original story in the TV series' episode are explained by the innovations that the fields of Posthumanism and Trauma Studies underwent during the 1990s.

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