

**UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL
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UNIVERSES THAT FALL APART: THE REALITY CONFLICT IN *UBIK*

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LAURA GABRIELA SILVEIRA PIRES

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Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso apresentado ao Instituto de Letras da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul como requisito parcial para a obtenção do título de Licenciada em Letras.

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“Because when time ends, the birds and hippos and lions and deer at Disneyland will no longer be simulations, and, for the first time, a real bird will sing.”

Philip K Dick, “How to Build a Universe That Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later”

APOIO DE FINANCIAMENTO EM PROJETOS DE PESQUISA

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RESUMO

A presente monografia analisa o conflito entre realidade e simulação como apresentado no romance *Ubik*, de Philip K. Dick. A obra, publicada em 1969, é ambientada em uma América altamente tecnológica, em 1992, na qual a vida cotidiana inclui habilidades psíquicas, viagens espaciais e o armazenamento dos mortos em um estado de "meia-vida" em moratórios onde podem ser consultados pelos vivos. O enredo gira em torno de um grupo de pessoas que trabalham para uma organização de prudência, Runciter & Associados, e para seu patrão, Glen Runciter. Após sofrerem um atentado, os funcionários escapam ilesos de uma explosão, exceto por Runciter, que morre. A partir desse ponto, os funcionários começam a perceber alterações em sua percepção da realidade e a receber manifestações de seu falecido patrão através de anúncios e mensagens que surgem em locais inesperados. Esses acontecimentos fazem com que comecem a se perguntar se estão de fato vivos. O objetivo da pesquisa é investigar a zona nebulosa que divide o reino dos vivos e o reino dos que estão nesse estado de meia-vida. Como lastro teórico, lanço mão dos conceitos de Hiper-realidade e Simulacro desenvolvidos pelo filósofo Jean Baudrillard. O trabalho se estrutura em duas seções. A primeira contextualiza a discussão, trazendo informações sobre a temática da realidade na obra de Dick, e sobre o romance *Ubik*; também apresenta os conceitos usados na análise e sua relevância para o estudo da obra e para o nosso entendimento sobre o tempo em que vivemos. A segunda seção traz a minha análise dos conflitos envolvendo a realidade mostrados no romance, com foco em três elementos: o consumismo, a mistificação e as inconsistências. Com esta monografia, espero contribuir para os estudos sobre Philip K. Dick e para avaliações da atualidade sobre o que vem a ser a realidade.

Palavras-chave: Ficção científica. Philip K. Dick. *Ubik*. Hiper-realidade. Simulacros. Baudrillard.

ABSTRACT

This monograph analyses the conflict between reality and simulation in Philip K. Dick's novel *Ubik*. The work, published in 1969, is set in a highly technological 1992 America, in which everyday life includes psychic abilities, space travel, and storing the dead in a state of "half-life" in moratoriums, where they can be consulted by the living ones. The narrative revolves around a group of people who work for a prudence organization called Runciter Associates, and for their boss Glen Runciter. After suffering a bomb blast, the organization workers escape unharmed, with the exception of Runciter, who dies. However, from that point the workers start experiencing alterations in their perception of reality, and to receive manifestations from their deceased boss through ads and messages set in unusual places. These facts make them wonder if they are in fact alive. My aim in this research is to investigate the blurring in the lines that divide the realm of the living and the realm of those who are in that half-life state. As a theoretical support, I resort to the concepts of Hyperreality and Simulacra developed by the philosopher Jean Baudrillard. This work is structured in two sections. The first contextualizes the discussion with information about the author's investigation on reality through his literary work, and about *Ubik*. It also presents the concepts used in the analysis and their relevance to fiction, as well as to our experience as people living in the 21st century. The second section presents my analysis of the conflicts involving reality in the novel, focusing on three elements: consumerism, mystification and inconsistencies. With this monograph, I intend to contribute to the studies about Philip K. Dick and to the discussion about present-day assessments to the concept of reality.

Keywords: Science fiction. Philip K. Dick. *Ubik*. Hyperreality. Simulacra. Baudrillard.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	10
2	CONTEXTUALIZATION.....	13
2.1	PHILIP K. DICK’S INVESTIGATION ON REALITY	13
2.2	ABOUT <i>UBIK</i>	16
2.3	THE ERA OF SIMULACRA.....	20
3	THE REALITY CONFLICT IN <i>UBIK</i>.....	24
3.1	SAFE WHEN TAKEN AS DIRECTED.....	24
3.2	I’M THE ONE THAT’S ALIVE	28
3.3	THIS WAS JUST THE BEGINNING	33
4	CONCLUSION.....	38
	REFERENCES.....	41

1 INTRODUCTION

Being an avid reader from a very young age, I found in different literary genres the opportunity to live in distant places and realities. I cannot remember exactly when my fascination with science fiction stories began, but they always made me travel further. I could go to space, to the future, to parallel universes. This genre played a significant role in my life as I grew up. I started watching the British TV series *Doctor Who* in a harsh time in my teenage years, so these stories about time and space travels brought me comfort and triggered a desire for the future: to study Literature and foreign languages.

My first contact with works by Philip K. Dick is also due to a TV series, *The Man in The High Castle* (2015 - 2019). The story plays with the “what if...” idea that I later came to know as a usual practice of the author, and is set in a parallel reality in which Germany and Japan won World War II. A book circulates among the citizens of this world telling a story set in a fictional reality in which the Axis lost the war. The argument of the story was so intriguing that I decided to read the book before watching the series. In the final pages of the book, the main characters find out they are living in a fictional reality, and that the plot of the book stands for the real world. After reading *The Man in The High Castle* (2012) I wanted more of this science fiction that meddles with our understanding of the world and our concept of reality. I read many other short stories and a couple of novels, and then I found *Ubik*.

I did not know about the plot when I started reading *Ubik*, but it took me only a few pages to be entrapped in the story. The main topic of the plot seemed to be different in each new chapter. First, it was about a rivalry between organizations. Then, it was about Joe Chip fighting against time regression. Finally, it is revealed that the characters are dealing with a sort of afterlife experience. It was almost as if the book was being written as I was reading it. I had no clue who the villain was, what was going to happen next – and apparently neither did the narrator. After solving the puzzle presented in the story, the narrative brings it back in the last chapter, indicating that everything we learned as a truth was, actually, false. As Eugenia Barthelmess points out in her master’s thesis, *Politics and Metaphysics in Three Novels of Philip K. Dick* (1987), I was indeed “deprived of an ultimate interpretation for the events narrated” (BARTHELMESS, 1987, p. 209) and ended up having more questions after reading the novel than before. This made me read *Ubik* for two, maybe three times more; and, on each

occasion, I found a new layer of the plot. That is why I found, in this monograph, the opportunity to offer my reading of this complex science fiction novel.

After reading the book for the second time I shifted my questioning from “Who is alive and who is not?” to “What is real in this novel?”, noticing that many important elements of the story point to a conflict bigger than real life versus half-life. The second reading of the novel added the possibility of taking the events of the first half of the story as part of an afterlife experience. In such case, the characters are taken to a twilight zone between the world of the living and the world of the dead, although they do not realize that. Therefore, I decided to concentrate my analysis in this line of understanding of the plot, and in the question raised about the meaning of the words “real” and “reality”. For the sake of this monograph, whenever these words are used, it is in the sense proposed by Baudrillard, to whom “reality”, our presence in the actual world with its implications, contrasts with the notion of “hyperreality”, more related with representation and simulation, to the point in which it becomes difficult to separate what is physical and what is virtual, facts from opinions or what is actual from what is fiction.

Ubik, with its doubling realities, also poses a harsh criticism on the increasing consumerism of the post-war US society. In the author’s words, “fake realities will create fake humans” (DICK, 1995, n. p.). In the novel we encounter fake realities, fake villains and a fake hero. Fourteen years after the first publication of *Ubik*, Jean Baudrillard presents in his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994) an analysis of how media and technology take a new step towards creating simulated realities, manipulating history and culture, while replicating them. It is from Baudrillard that I take the two concepts used in my reading, ‘Simulacra’ and ‘Hiperreality’. The first term refers to copies that have been made so many times that they eventually lose their referent. The second is the name given to the state in which we find ourselves not able to distinguish what is real and what is simulation, due to the lack of limits between them.

This monograph is structured in two parts. The first part is dedicated to the contextualization of the discussion, in which I present information about Philip K. Dick and his work, along with comments about *Ubik* and an explanation of the concepts used in the analysis. In the second part I present my reading of the novel, dividing it in three sections. The first analyses the hold of consumerism on the characters’ lives, and how this contributes

to the fabrication of a fake reality. The second section focuses on Glen Runciter, who is believed to be a hero in the story by those stuck in this half-life state, when he is just another piece of this puzzle. In the final subsection I comment on smaller elements of the novel that corroborate the hyperreal effect it conveys.

In the past, science fiction was considered more of an entertainment than standard literature. But things are different now. In our time, practically every great author has tried a hand at sci-fi, probably because of its symbolical power, of its capacity to provide metaphors that help us address important questions about our place in the world. That is why, with this research, I hope to contribute to the discussion, by reflecting about this fictional work and the metaphors it posts. I believe that this novel reflects Philip K. Dick's keen understanding of what was to come in the near future, and shows how relevant his concerns and his investigation about reality were, especially in his concern about and what it means to be human.

2 CONTEXTUALIZATION

2.1 PHILIP K. DICK'S INVESTIGATION ON REALITY

This section starts with the presentation of some selected facts related to the life of Philip K. Dick that I consider relevant either for the reading of *Ubik* that will follow, or to the understanding of the author's ideas about science fiction and the concept of reality.

Philip Kindred Dick was born in 1928 in Chicago, in the United States. He had a twin sister, Jane Charlotte. What followed their birth were six weeks of desperate crying caused by starvation because their mother, Dorothy, did not have enough milk for both babies. Their father was away working most of the day, so Dorothy had to deal with the babies on her own. Her lack of experience and knowledge made her incapable of identifying how dangerous the twins' condition was. In the sixth week they were finally taken to hospital, but it was too late for Jane. The loss of his sister deeply affected Dick throughout his life. He blamed his mother and himself for what happened. Growing up, he could not help imagining how life would have been if his sister had not died, how she would look and how her personality would be. Dick's idealization of Jane echoes in his female protagonists, and the twin motif appears in many of his stories.

Dick's parents got divorced when he was five, and from then on he was raised only by his mother. They moved a few times and eventually settled in California, where he spent most of his life. As an adult, Dick had a number of troubled relationships, including five complicated marriages. He considered himself partially schizophrenic and believed to have a paranoid personality, having many issues with it. These characteristics, along with drug addiction, conferred him a reputation of being a "mad genius" in SF critical circles. According to Sutin, because of this image some critics did not take Dick's ideas seriously. (SUTIN, 1995, n.p.)

Dick's first science fiction short story was sold in 1951, in one of the many magazines that published SF stories at the time. The pulp magazines, as they were called, were popular between the 1920s and the 1960s. Philip Dick read his first pulp magazine when he was twelve, and was much struck by the stories it contained. However, he left science fiction aside

for some years into his adolescence, when he was more interested in classical music and modern literature classics. He went back to reading SF and started writing stories of the genre only in his early twenties, when he met Anthony Boucher, writer and co-founder of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Boucher held writing classes in his apartment, which Dick attended and was encouraged to improve his short stories. With the experienced author as his mentor, Dick sold the story “Roog” and then decided to fully dedicate himself to writing.

After some years selling short stories for magazines, Dick noticed that those were not paying so well anymore. He was not satisfied with the quality of the editions either, so he took a risk and started writing novels. In the 1968 autobiographical text “Self Portrait”, published in a Danish magazine or a fanzine, according to Sutin’s research (SUTIN, 1995, n.p.) he considers the novel *Eye in The Sky* (1957) his genuine breakthrough. His first acclaimed novel was *The Man in The High Castle*, published in 1962, which granted him the Hugo Award for Best Novel in the succeeding year. More successful novels came next, but those did not bring him financial security, and money was always an issue. Nonetheless, he never thought of abandoning the field, as he loved science fiction so much.

From the first stories to the most famous novels he wrote, Dick was deeply interested in investigating the questions “What is reality?” and “What constitutes an authentic human being?”. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), he explores the human condition through the narration of a world in which androids were created to be obedient to humans. After rebelling against this condition, they represent danger to the people and have to be caught. Rick Deckard, a bounty hunter responsible for this task, starts questioning himself about what makes him more human than the androids, who express more feelings and empathy than the real people he knows. The mark of humanity in Deckard’s time depends on having a real animal – they are very rare –, using devices to control emotions and connecting to an empathy box to experience the sufferings of a religious symbol.

The advent of technology’s role in fabricating realities deeply affected Philip K. Dick. Firstly, he believed that each person experiences things in a different way. In the speech “How to Build a Universe That Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later”, which was never delivered, but was published in 1985, he comments:

And then I began to think, Maybe each human being lives in a unique world, a private world, a world different from those inhabited and experienced by all other humans. And that led me to wonder, If reality differs from person to person, can we speak of reality singular, or shouldn't we really be talking about plural realities? And if there are plural realities, are some more true (more real) than others? (DICK, 1995, n.p.)

Later, in the same speech, he argues that as being a person responsible for creating universes, he should be aware of those pseudo realities created by sophisticated mechanisms and their power over people. In Dick's lifetime, television was seen as the main tool for manipulation. In a reference to George Orwell's novel *1984*, the author says that in order to control people's minds one has to control their perceptions. Dick experiments with the same principle while writing his stories, by building universes that fall apart and challenge the characters to cope with the chaos.

Although he explored serious topics and offered innovation to the field of SF, there is not an agreement on the part of literary critics about where Dick should be placed, or if he belongs in the American New Wave circle of authors. This movement started in the 1960s, and its main concern was to focus on stylistic innovation and the incorporation of social and political themes that were in discussion at the time. The New Wave authors were less concerned with scientific accuracy in their stories than with writing SF that would meet higher quality standards. Barthelmess argues that Philip Dick's writing goes even beyond the New Wave's efforts, because his style does not aim at reaching those standards, but at disturbing them:

Dick's science fiction is the diametric opposite of the "scientific," unspeculative, stylistically obsolete mode of traditional science fiction, but then it does not belong in the New Wave adherence to an all too sanctioned vanguardism either. Rather, beneath its apparent disregard for stylistic virtuosity the Dickian narrative operates on its own set of technical innovations, which are employed to convey concepts and situations which are again unique. (...) By his revolutionary but understated handling of profuse and extraordinary plots and by his employing of traditional science-fiction material for extremely unorthodox uses Philip K. Dick drives with his novels not only at the unsettling of the conventions of science fiction, but also at those of general fiction as a whole." (BARTHELMESS, 1987, p. 17)

As time went by, Dick was having more and more intense hallucinations caused by drugs, by his own mind, or by divine interventions, as he sometimes believed. The "2-3-74", as he often referred to, was a series of hallucinations he had throughout February and March of 1974, after the extraction of two wisdom teeth. While recovering from the extraction, a

pharmacy attendant went to his house to bring him some medicine for his pain. When he saw her necklace with a gold fish pendant, Dick had a vision. He felt as he remembered that she and him were early Christians living in fear in ancient Rome. After this episode, and the many other episodes that followed, he was convinced that his life in 1974 was a kind of illusion, and that time is not linear. He was living in different periods of time but had a filter that permitted him to see only one of them. (DICK, 1995, n.p.) He described these events in a eight thousand pages journal called the *Exegesis*, and retold some of them mixed with fiction in his novels *VALIS* (1981), *The Divine Invasion* (1981), and the posthumously published *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* (1982) and *Radio Free Albemuth* (1985).

In February 1982, Philip K. Dick was found lying on the floor of his apartment. He had a stroke, one which he could recover from, according to the doctors that attended him. But unfortunately, while in hospital further strokes followed and he passed away at age of fifty-three. His father took his ashes to be buried next to his sister, where his name had been inscribed in the tombstone since Jane's death.

In his last months, Dick was involved in the production of *Blade Runner*, a cinematic adaptation of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* The movie was released four months after his death. *Blade Runner* was not so acclaimed at the time it was released, but the importance of this movie kept increasing, to the point it is now considered a cult classic. Other movie adaptations of Dick's works were made later, like *Total Recall* (1990), *Minority Report* (2001) and *A Scanner Darkly* (2006). Recently, *The Man in The High Castle* got a TV series adaptation in 2015 and an anthology of short stories was also adapted into series, *Philip K. Dick's Electric Dreams* (2017). These productions have granted the attention of a new generation of science fiction readers to Dick's vast production. This indicates that today we understand his work better than in his lifetime.

2.2 ABOUT *UBIK*

The story, which was originally published in 1969, takes place in the fictional near future of 1992 in the North American Confederation. Some people have psychic abilities and use them as work tools, being employed in espionage agencies. Others have anti-psi talents,

meant to block the effects of those who are psychic. This is a time of natural restoration of ecological balance (DICK, 2004, p. 30) and anti-*psis* have the opportunity to work with their abilities, providing their services to “prudence organizations”, whose function is to keep people without any psychic gifts safe from the influence of the *psis*, who might for instance read their minds. Wealthy people who die can be preserved in a state of “half-life” and talk to people who visit them. This is the universe Philip K. Dick presents to us in *Ubik*, published in 1969. Each chapter of the novel opens with a different ad of a multifunctional product called “Ubik”, many of them finishing with the enigmatic slogan “Safe when taken as directed”.

The story begins introducing Glen Runciter, the owner of a prudence organization called Runciter Associates. His organization is going through a crisis, and to help solve it, he goes to Switzerland to consult his dead wife. She is stored in cold-pac (a cryonic technology in which the dead are put into a state of hibernation) in the Beloved Brethren Moratorium. At a certain moment, Ella’s connection with her husband is interrupted by a strange young man named Jory. In despair, Runciter calls the manager of the moratorium, who explains to him that this interference is caused by the prolonged proximity of the half-lifers, and because Jory has more vitality than Ella, due to his premature death, at the age of fifteen. It is a well-known fact that the teenager has caused the same kind of trouble with other half-lifers too.

The first two chapters set the tone of the novel and provide the background information required to understand the main issues the characters of the book face. However, it is easy to forget them when we move on with the reading and receive a whole new package of content and a plot that seems to have nothing to do with the introductory chapters of the story – at least until we are able to connect all the thematic lines.

Later, we meet Joe Chip and Pat Conley. Joe is a technician of the company, charged with the testing of new recruiters. He managed to buy the apartment where he lives, but he still has to pay for every electronic appliance he uses, all of which are coin-operated. This fact makes the character feel frustrated. He lives in debt and often has to borrow money from other people. When the scout G.G. Ashwood takes Pat to Joe’s apartment to be tested, the technician does not have money to pay for his door to open, and Ashwood has to use his own money. Ashwood and Pat are there because he says she is very powerful and could be useful to the company. She has the ability to change past facts, thus altering the future. This way she can prevent the action of precogs, people who can predict future events.

The fifth chapter of the novel opens with an enigmatic dream Tippy Jackson has. She is also one of Runciter's workers, or inertials, as they are called. In the dream, Bill and Matt, two brothers with psi talents, talk to her and recite a part of a poem from *Richard the Third*. She wakes up with a phone call but feels very puzzled with the dream, mostly because she does not remember having read the play. In the following chapter we hear from another two inertials that they had the same dream Tippy had. One of them, Francesca Spanish, says "It wasn't a dream; it was an authentic visitation. I can distinguish the difference." (DICK, 2004, p. 70) but she is not taken seriously.

A woman representing the financier Stanton Mick requires from Runciter Associates a team of eleven anti-psi to inspect his research base in Luna (the Earth's moon) looking for psi activity. The eleven inertials – Pat included – along with Joe Chip and Glen Runciter arrive in base. It does not take long till they realise they are being caught in a trap. But when they do it is already too late. Mick is there to welcome them, but the man they meet is not real, is a humanoid self-destruct bomb that explodes as soon as they find this out. After the explosion, none of the inertials get seriously hurt, but Runciter is found lying on the floor, unconscious. All of them are able to escape without any difficulties and take Runciter to the moratorium his wife is in, hoping he would have a chance to be installed there in time.

Wendy Wright is the first inertial to feel strange sensations after the explosion. She says she feels "old" right after Joe takes a cigarette and sees it breaking apart between his fingers. Joe finds Wright in an advanced stage of decomposition in the closet the next morning. Deterioration of organic matter is the first phenomenon the characters start experiencing after the explosion. The second, time regression, is shown right after, when Joe takes a two year-old phone book in the brand new spaceship the company has. Later, two more phenomena are seen: an ad on a matchfolder mentioning Glen Runciter's name and money with their boss' face stamped on it.

The time regression gets faster after Joe Chip separates from the group and tries to find them at Runciter's funeral. Runciter's attempts to communicate start to happen. He sends messages through graffiti on bathroom walls, telling he is the one who is alive (DICK, 2004, p. 130) and a commercial of a spray can called *Ubik* starring him is exhibited while Joe is watching TV, in which he says

One invisible puff-puff whisk of economically priced Ubik banishes compulsive obsessive fears that the entire world is turning into clotted milk, worn-out tape recorders and obsolete iron-cage elevators, plus other, further, as-yet-unglimpsed manifestations of decay. You see, world deterioration of this regressive type is a normal experience of many half-lifers, especially in the early stages when ties to the real reality are still very strong. A sort of lingering universe is retained as a residual charge, experienced as a pseudo environment but highly unstable and unsupported by any ergic substructure. This is particularly true when several memory systems are fused, as in the case of you people. But with today's new, more powerful-than-ever Ubik, all this is changed! (DICK, 2004, p. 134)

One by one, the inertials have the same fate as Wright. Joe depends on Ubik to not be the next victim, because according to the TV ad, the spray reverses the effects caused by half-life. At this point, everything is leaning towards the version that they are the ones who are dead, and Runciter's manifestations are his attempts to make contact with them in the Beloved Brethren Moratorium in the living world. A great importance is given to Ubik and Runciter in the novel, both being seen as the only forces that can save Joe. Although Ubik is not free from suffering the regression – it returns to what can be considered as its previous formats, the Elixir of Ubique being one of them, a couple of times in the novel; and Runciter demonstrates little knowledge of what he is really trying to prevent happening.

Pat's role as the villain grows throughout the story, having its peak in chapters twelve and thirteen. After supposing she is working for Ray Hollis, Joe feels the first effects of deterioration on himself and she watches him in pain and does not offer help. However this is soon forgotten when, after Pat leaves Joe in a hotel corridor, almost dying, another villain is revealed. Jory, the boy who interrupted Ella's contact at the beginning of the novel, shows up and tells that everything that has been happening since the explosion was caused by him. When asked about his identity, he states that besides being called Jory, he calls himself Bill or Matt, just as the psi brothers in the inertials' dreams. He built the world Joe and his colleagues were in and having so many people sharing the same reality, Jory did not have enough energy to keep things in the same year they were before they were killed. He did all of that only to devour each of them and grow stronger.

It is stated that two forces are acting against each other in the novel. Jory, who is consuming everything, and Ella, who creates Ubik with other half-dead people to fight him, as we learn later. The novel ends with Joe being able to escape from Jory, but he needs to keep running away and using Ubik to survive. Then comes a final twist. In the last chapter we see Runciter at the moratorium, giving several fifty-cent coins to a worker, who then asks "What

kind of money is this?”. Runciter looks at it and sees Joe Chip’s profile on it. *Ubik* ends with the sentence “This was just the beginning.”, putting in check everything we were made to believe while reading it.

Until the end, Dick keeps us in doubt about every step Joe Chip takes in the new reality he is in. And instead of providing answers to the questions he presented throughout the novel, he challenges us to reflect and find our own solution to this puzzle. A second, more attentive reading is required to check these questions. In summary, *Ubik* is a novel rich in content and open to many different interpretations. There is room to focus on philosophical questions, economical anxieties, social relations of power, among other relevant topics coming from Dick’s reality in the 1960s to our present time.

2.3 THE ERA OF SIMULACRA

In this section I present the concepts that helped me with my analysis of the conflict of realities in *Ubik*. As mentioned in section 2.1, Philip K. Dick dedicated his life and work to the investigation on the nature of reality and humanity. The universes he built are his laboratories, his characters the research subjects, and he would create custom-made chaos for them as a form of experiment. Humanity went through innumerable changes between the 1930s and 1980s and Dick carefully observed them. He was especially concerned with the technology’s role in these changes and how this was going to evolve in the next decades. I have found in Jean Baudrillard’s work the same concerns, and the concepts he presents in his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) are well fitted for the analysis of *Ubik*.

In his book, Baudrillard takes examples from different areas to explain why we do not live in a real world anymore. According to the philosopher, the original meanings of things were replaced with symbols – often products – by society with the advancement of capitalism and consumerism. Representations of reality that we see in movies and publicity are no longer mirrors of our lives and our needs, they are responsible for creating the imaginary that envelops our experiences. There are four stages of the Simulacra:

it is the reflection of a profound reality;
it masks and denatures a profound reality;
it masks the absence of a profound reality;
it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.”
(BAUDRILLARD, 1994, p. 6)

Bringing Baudrillard's words to the 21st century for a better understanding, we can think about social media. In the beginning, social media was meant to facilitate communication between people who knew each other. Posting pictures was a way people had to share interesting things that happened in their life with the ones they cared about, this would be a reflection of their lives. Then, having contact with constant updates from others, they start to be unsatisfied with their own life and try to mask some things, like posting pictures of a trip or changing some details about it. The attention to self-image rises as more people create profiles on the websites. Digital influencers emerge in this space, people who profit from posting their routine online, transmitting the idea that they have everything a person could wish for. Finally, regular people try to model themselves after these influencers, buying the products they promote, copying their style and resourcing to virtual filters or picture editing programs to look as good as the influencers do. These are people trying to be like others who do not really exist outside social media. Now think about a child born in the last ten years or so, growing up in this simulacrum, how will they tell the difference? In this case, for not being able to tell apart the real interactions from their simulacrum, this child is in the state Baudrillard calls Hyperreality.

This example does not need to be that extreme either, these new communication systems are so sophisticated that they deceive even older generations. Take fake news for instance, the constant sharing of hoaxes and manipulated images proved decisive for elections in many countries. During the Covid-19 pandemic, health workers and researchers have to put themselves to the task of denying fake news every day, denouncing fake cures, non-effective drugs, anti-mask and anti-vaccine movements. Millions lost their lives because of these "fabricated narratives".

Besides *Ubik*, many works of fiction have represented what Jean Baudrillard formulated, the most famous being the acclaimed movie *The Matrix*, released in 1999. The directors, Lana and Lilly Wachowski, depict this theory, even making some direct references to *Simulacra and Simulation*. Nonetheless, Baudrillard declared in an interview for the French magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur* that he believes that the central conflict of *The Matrix* do not quite match with the concepts that he developed, since it is visible that there is a line dividing the real world from the matrix and the characters can transition from one to the other. In this sense, what the movie depicts is more of a modern version of Plato's cave rather than

Hyperreality (BAUDRILLARD, 2004). Curiously, the works that were more successful in doing so were made before or while Baudrillard was writing his theory. The philosopher dedicates a whole chapter of his book to discuss science fiction, which he opens presenting three orders of simulacra the genre contains:

simulacra that are natural, naturalist, founded on the image, on imitation and counterfeit, that are harmonious, optimistic, and that aim for the restitution or the ideal institution of nature made in God's image; simulacra that are productive, productivist, founded on energy, force, its materialization by the machine and in the whole system of production - a Promethean aim of a continuous globalization and expansion, of an indefinite liberation of energy (desire belongs to the utopias related to this order of simulacra); simulacra of simulation, founded on information, the model, the cybernetic game-total operationality, hyperreality, aim of total control. (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, p. 121)

The first would be utopian narratives, the second is science fiction produced at the time, that added to utopia more possibilities of alternative universes. Whereas the third, he had not found a perfect representation of it yet, since for him “The most likely answer is that the good old imaginary of science fiction is dead and that something else is in the process of emerging (not only in fiction but in theory as well).” (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, p. 121). He argues that fiction belonging to the third order is no longer fiction, is an anticipation of the real. And ourselves being caught in a fictional realm, the truth has become our utopia. Baudrillard mentions that Philip K. Dick’s 1964 novel *The Simulacra* and his short stories are good examples of this emerging phase of science fiction.

And not because Dick speaks specifically of simulacra-science fiction has always done so, but it played on the double, on doubling or redoubling, either artificial or imaginary, whereas here the double has disappeared, there is no longer a double, one is always already in the other world, which is no longer another, without a mirror, a projection, or a utopia that can reflect it-simulation is insuperable, unsurpassable, dull and flat, without exteriority-we will no longer even pass through to "the other side of mirror," that was still the golden age of transcendence. (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, p. 125)

Furthermore, I add *Ubik* to this list of third order simulacra within science fiction. I borrow Baudrillard’s concepts to analyse the conflict of the novel that involves the characters’ experiences in two realms, that of the living and that belonging to the dead. In my analysis I relate this conflict with elements that make part of the society presented in the novel, such as extreme exposure to publicity ads that creates a false necessity of products and services;

mystification, as in creating a simulacrum of a regular person in order to elevate them to a leadership position; and inconsistencies in the characters' experience that are unnoticed by them.

3 THE REALITY CONFLICT IN *UBIK*

3.1 SAFE WHEN TAKEN AS DIRECTED

I begin my analysis discussing the role consumerism plays in the novel. The presence of publicity ads and concerns with money are key elements to understand the society within it. It seems ironic that a story that carries the name of a product and in which capital is an important feature has as one of the main characters a man that is always struggling with money. Joe Chip's condition is rather dubious, however. In the beginning of the story we learn that everything in his apartment is coin-operated and he does not have enough coins even to open his own door. Not much is said about how much he earns in Runciter Associates, the only thing we know is from a dialogue between Pat and G.G. Ashwood in chapter three. When Joe gives Pat a cup of coffee, she seems surprised because he can afford real coffee. Ashwood answers: "Joe gets paid a hell of a lot. The firm couldn't operate without him." (DICK, 2004, p. 29). It sounds like Ashwood is just mocking Joe for his money problems, which he responds with shame. But after the bomb blast Chip keeps talking about how important he is in the company and he puts himself in charge of it, in a way confirming what was said by his colleague.

Thus, it is not stated if Joe is not well paid or if he is just in debt. We just come to know that he does not have enough to survive in a system that requires money in exchange for every basic need. He has mixed feelings about that. First, also in chapter three, Pat tells him that everything is free in the community she is from. In shock, he says that this is not "economically feasible" (DICK, 2004, p. 35). And later, in the moratorium, when fighting with a coffee machine for not having the one poscred to pay for the coffee, he angrily reacts

'One of these days,' Joe said wrathfully, 'people like me will rise up and overthrow you, and the end of tyranny by the homeostatic machine will have arrived. The day of human values and compassion and simple warmth will return, and when that happens someone like myself who has gone through an ordeal and who genuinely needs hot coffee to pick him up and keep him functioning when he has to function will get the hot coffee whether he happens to have a poscred readily available or not.' (DICK, 2004, p. 87)

From his first appearance till the end of the novel, Joe Chip depends on people willing to lend him money or giving him things for free. In its conclusion, Joe receives a certificate that guarantees a lifetime supply of Ubik cans from Ella, and she mentions having knowledge of his financial issues. Although the story is told by a heterodiegetic narrator, there are a few changes of point of view throughout it. We follow Glen Runciter in some chapters and other characters in other moments, but we keep up with Joe Chip most of the time. By sharing Chip's perspective the reader has a special attention to these details regarding costs of living – and half-living – that would not be possible if another character was in this privileged position.

The practice of keeping the dead in cold-pac, experiencing the half-living state, is shown in the book as something only the most wealthy could have. The maintenance of the dead in the moratorium requires high costs and each person in half-life has an expiration date, depending on how much they are consulted by their living relatives. When Herbert von Vogelsang, the moratorium manager, is introduced in the first chapter of the book, he reflects about how he would like to be revived one day a century, but that would be too expensive for his family and soon they would take him out of the cold-pac to be buried. To him, “Burial is barbaric.” and “Remnant of the primitive origins of our culture.” (DICK, 2004, p.10). Going through these facts we can see that half-life has replaced the meaningful and ritualistic figure death once had, giving place to an artificial prolongation of life. Not everyone wished for it or approved the practice. Joe and Al Hammond once comment

‘The UN ought to abolish half-life,’ Joe said. ‘As interfering with the natural process of the cycle of birth and death.’

Mockingly, Al Hammond said, ‘If God approved of half-life, each of us would be born in a casket filled with dry ice.’ (DICK, 2004, p. 84)

Having the possibility to revive people after their death is crucial to this society's relationship with life itself. For the living, there is not a sense of loss and mourning, the departure becomes a fake death. For the dead, there is no peaceful resting, they are destined to live a fake life. Baudrillard blames capital when discussing the main factor that establishes this rupture with reality by simulation, just as it is observed in the novel.

Because in the end, throughout its history it was capital that first fed on the destructurement of every referential, of every human objective, that shattered every ideal distinction between true and false, good and evil, in order to establish a radical

law of equivalence and exchange, the iron law of its power. Capital was the first to play at deterrence, abstraction, disconnection, deterritorialization, etc., and if it is the one that fostered reality, the reality principle, it was also the first to liquidate it by exterminating all use value, all real equivalence of production and wealth, in the very sense we have of the unreality of the stakes and the omnipotence of manipulation. (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, p. 22)

So, this is the first point I take into consideration when observing the elements that break down this wall dividing the realities in which Runciter and his inertials are. How this is not purely a science fiction's parallel universes motif, but a sociological topic being put in discussion. Money is as important and ubiquitous as Ubik is in the novel. Barthelmess (1987) sees Ubik as a representation of God, due to its omnipresence and how fundamental this is for the characters' survival. There is also a similarity that *Ubik* shares with *VALIS* (1981), these being the only novels Dick gave a single word name for. Likewise, VALIS stands for Vast Active Living Intelligence System, a view of God he had during the 2-3-74. (BARTHELMESS, 1987, p. 162) However, connecting Ubik with consumerism in the novel's society, I distance myself from the religious symbolism interpretation of it.

As we discover in the second half of the novel, Ubik is a word that does not exist in the English language. However, there is a Latin word very similar to this one, *ubique*, that means 'everywhere'. This causes shock in the characters, but not in the readers. Because each chapter of the novel begins with an ad, presenting Ubik with a different function every time. Electronic devices, beer, coffee, salad dressing, shaving blade, medicine, etc.. The list goes on till the last chapter makes a different announcement.

I am Ubik. Before the universe was, I am. I made the suns. I made the worlds. I created the lives and the places they inhabit; I move them here, I put them there. They go as I say, they do as I tell them. I am the word and my name is never spoken, the name which no one knows. I am called Ubik, but that is not my name. I am. I shall always be. (DICK, 1994, p. 223)

This is right after everything about Ubik is revealed. Ella tells Joe that she created it with other half-lifers, to prevent themselves from Jory's attacks. A God-like spray that heals everything was something created by humans. A cult around a product is perceived here, something that happens with many brands and products in the world outside the novel's pages. Much importance is given to the name of a brand, that a product is sold only because it carries the brand's name on it. Therefore, in capitalism the product comes before the need for it. Publicity advertisements play a fundamental part creating this. They create discourses

meant to convince people that they will not be satisfied if they do not buy the latest product of a certain brand. It is not only a satisfaction matter, but also safety, beauty, and so on.

Ubik is permeated by advertisements, not only those from the epigraphs, but there are many within the narrative. These serve a special purpose to the plot. In the beginning of the novel, the solution Runciter finds to his company crisis, the disappearance of psis his inertials were responsible for tracking, is to put more ads on TV. As simplistic as it seems, the company attracts many clients with these ads. They are described in the narrative as having actors simulating everyday situations, like a man arriving home and when talking about his day, tells his wife he has been having the sensation of having his mind read by a telepath. This creates a sense of insecurity in the spectator, who may think “what if I’m being watched?”, making them contact the organization.

Later on, while Joe Chip and his colleagues already believe their boss is dead, it is through ads that Runciter finds a way to communicate with them. With only a few exceptions, like the message Joe and Al come across in chapter nine, when they go to a bathroom in the organization room and find a graffiti on the wall with a rhyme saying Runciter is the one who’s alive. Al believes it and then says “That’s how graffiti is; harsh and direct. We might have watched the TV and listened to the vidphone and read the ‘papes for months – forever, maybe – without finding out. Without being told straight to the point like this.” (DICK, 2004, p. 128). Two observations come in hand with Al’s thought. Firstly, as mentioned in section 2.1, in a 1975 speech Dick wrote, he talks about TV’s power to influence people through the excess of information it transmits.

The bulk of the messages elude our attention; literally, after a few hours of TV watching, we do not know what we have seen. Our memories are spurious, like our memories of dreams; the blank spaces are filled in retrospectively. And falsified. We have participated unknowingly in the creation of a spurious reality, and then we have obligingly fed it to ourselves. We have colluded in our own doom. (DICK, 1995, n.p.)

What Al says fits with this information. TV’s information is subliminal rather than straight to the point, this facilitates the process of creation of necessity through ads as it was previously mentioned. Secondly, for Baudrillard the increasing quantity of information media propagates is equivalent to the decreasing of meaning contained in them. While staging communication, media exhausts itself staging meaning instead of creating it. It can be seen in

Runciter Associates' ads how the attempt to recreate real life interactions take the company services closer to the people watching the ads, in a way that they can see themselves in these. Making the public participate in every level, medium and reality start to merge.

Finally, the medium is the message not only signifies the end of the message, but also the end of the medium. There are no more media in the literal sense of the word (I'm speaking particularly of electronic mass media) - that is, of a mediating power between one reality and another, between one state of the real and another. (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, p. 82)

With that being said, alongside money, mass media blurs and at the same time controls those limits between realities. The intention behind choosing Joe Chip as the character followed by the narrator most of the time shows how any ordinary person can find himself in this position. The lack of money is the main characteristic of this guy who does not look like he has any special attributes. He is just a regular employee of the organization, not even having psychic abilities as his colleagues have. Money is the rule where he lives and he cannot cope with it. His life is saved by a product, but he has to keep going to stores to spray Ubik on him for the rest of his days.

3.2 I'M THE ONE THAT'S ALIVE

The second point I'm analysing is how Glen Runciter is portrayed in the novel, often from his employees' point of view. The organization owner is the first character introduced in the novel. He is an elderly man, over ninety years old, and he is presented as having a professional face expression and way of speaking. When talking to his wife, he gets more spontaneous but still direct. It is not mentioned in the novel if he has any psychic abilities. Before the blast, Runciter is a character whose main concerns are related to his business and he does not seem to have any emotional connections to other people besides his deceased wife.

However, contrasting the character's personality before the blast and after results in two Glens Runciters. It has to be taken into consideration that in the second part of the novel he communicates most of the time not speaking, but sending messages from another realm. Whereas in the first part the reader meets Runciter through rather neutral lenses, in the second

every information about him comes from another character's perspective. The serious, professional businessman becomes a savior, someone who would do anything to guarantee his employees' well being, "[...] a man greater than all of us put together." (DICK, 2004, p. 91).

Indeed, Runciter could have more traces in his personality that the reader is not aware of in the first part of the story, since not much is revealed about him apart from how he behaves at work. But Runciter's frigid action when he finds out that Ella's communication is being threatened by Jory does not match with the "most life-loving, full-living man" (DICK, 2004, p. 89) Joe Chip has ever met.

'She may not like being isolated, Mr Runciter. We keep the containers – the caskets, as they're called by the lay public – close together for a reason. Wandering through one another's mind gives those in half-life only -'
 'Put her in solitary right now.' Runciter broke in. 'Better she be isolated than not exist at all.'
 'She exists.' von Vogelsang corrected. 'She merely can't contact you. There's a difference.'
 Runciter said. 'A metaphysical difference which means nothing to me.' (DICK, 2004, p. 22)

More than being seen as a better person than he was while alive, Runciter acquires a mythic aura, that of someone who died to save others. All of this happens while Joe and his colleagues still believe that their boss is dead and they are the ones who survived. In this first phase of adoration, the Runciter they met in life is replaced by a leadership symbol. Baudrillard's analysis of power figures has as central character former United States president John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated. According to the philosopher, all the presidents that succeeded him were haunted by this idea that true power comes from leaders who promise to sacrifice themselves. In order to assume this compromise, they simulate attacks against their own lives. It is significant that this does not belong to the political sphere only, celebrities from the same era, like James Dean and Marilyn Monroe also detain this mythic aura due to their premature deaths. One excerpt of said analysis summarizes this central idea and it perfectly fits with *Ubik*:

For a long time now a head of state-no matter which one is nothing but the simulacrum of himself, and only that gives him the power and the quality to govern. No one would grant the least consent, the least devotion to a real person. It is to his double, he being always already dead, to which allegiance is given. This myth does nothing but translate the persistence, and at the same time the deception, of the necessity of the king's sacrificial death. (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, p. 26)

In chapter eight, after the group have already experienced some phenomena that made them suspicious about their current status, Al and Joe go to a supermarket in a city chosen at random, to see if they were the only ones who were affected. They see a woman complaining about the flowers she bought at the supermarket, that were dead when she got home, which then proves that this was shared by people who do not belong to their group as well. Then, they buy a carton of cigarettes, which contains a note inside with a message from Runciter. In the message, he says that he needs to talk to them urgently because the situation they are in is serious and it will get worse, he also apologises for Wendy Wright's death, saying he did all he could – though referring to third person singular form in this last sentence. This is the shifting point from “Runciter died to save us” to “Runciter has a great power in this reality and he is using it to save us”. After taking a cigarette from another carton, which crumbles between his fingers, Al is the first to reflect about how powerful his boss might be at that moment. “And yet, here, too, the pair of opposing forces were at work. Decay versus Runciter, Al said to himself. Throughout the world. Perhaps throughout the universe. Maybe the sun will go out, Al conjectured, and Glen Runciter will place a substitute sun in its place. If he can.” (DICK, 2004, p. 120).

Runciter assumes a higher status now, as an omniscient character whose amount of power to influence the events in the half-life state is still unknown. Not only what he is capable of doing, but also what he really needs to do for the group is beyond the reader's knowledge. As his messages' frequency increased, the more controversial they started to get. The first opportunity Runciter has to talk to Joe is through the enigmatic Ubik television ad, right after Al's decay and death. He advertises Ubik as a product capable of reversing the phenomena Joe and his colleagues are experiencing, which he says are normal of half-life, especially in the beginning, when the ties with the other reality – cited as ‘real reality’ – are still strong and their memory systems are fused. After a demonstration reversing an old fridge to one from their own time, Runciter addresses Joe. Startled, Joe asks questions and Runciter answers, but making clear that the ad is a recording he made before his death, and he knew this was going to happen because he consulted a precog. He declares that the graffiti in the bathroom wall Joe and Al had seen just before, which said “JUMP IN THE URINAL AND STAND ON YOUR HEAD. I'M THE ONE THAT'S ALIVE. YOU ARE ALL DEAD.” (DICK, 2004, p. 127) was written by Al to fool Joe and it was, therefore, a lie.

Joe, faced with such controversial information, reflects about the different possibilities he might be encountering. The precog information Runciter had could have been inaccurate and he mistakenly recorded the tape with the right intention of helping his employees, Chip considered as the only explanation to what was happening. But then, just like Al, he questions the range of Runciter's power.

Unless Runciter was playing a sardonic game with them, trifling with them, first leading them in one direction, then the other. An unnatural and gigantic force, haunting their lives. Emanating either within the living world or the half-life world; or, he thought suddenly, perhaps both. In any case, controlling what they experienced, or at least a major part of it. Perhaps not the decay, he decided. Not that. But why not? Maybe, he thought, that, too. But Runciter wouldn't admit it. Runciter and Ubik. Ubiquity, he realized all at once; that's the derivation of the made-up word, the name of Runciter's alleged spray-can product. Which probably did not even exist. It was probably a further hoax, to bewilder them that much more. (DICK, 2004, p. 137)

When Joe goes to his apartment to get the free sample of Ubik he was told in the ad that was delivered there, he finds all of his appliances regressed to their past versions. In his bedroom, he finds several photographs of Runciter, from different phases of his life. Then, he checks his wallet and finds snapshots of Runciter as well. As ubiquitous as Ubik. At this point, everything revolves around the clues given by the company owner. Joe, believing what his boss said, thinks that he and his colleagues are in fact alive and someone is being responsible for the time regression. He arrives in Des Moines to attend Runciter's funeral and to find the rest of the group. While talking with Pat, he starts to find her attitudes suspicious and soon another message from Runciter appears. The message tells that Pat is hiding the fact that she had not used her power to alter the past after the blast and the deaths that happened since. Because of that, Joe believes Pat is the one causing the regression, working for the company's biggest rival, Ray Hollis.

After Joe starts to feel the regression effects on his body, Pat follows him while he is trying to go up the hotel stairs. Having fun with his suffering, she waits till he looks completely weak and incapable of doing anything to save himself and then goes away. Joe makes it to the hotel room and he finally finds Glen Runciter. The conversation they have is expected to answer all the questions of the novel, however, Runciter has as many questions as Joe. He finally reveals that he has been lying to Joe about being dead, the graffiti told the truth, and he had only done so with the intention of keeping Joe fighting for his existence in

half-life. Insisting on the idea that Pat was causing the regression and the definitive deaths of his employees, he is questioned by Joe about the purpose of it, because the blast would be simply enough for Ray Hollis to defeat them. Then, Runciter reconsiders his theory and, as the conversation goes on, he states once again that regression is just a common effect of half-life and there is nothing to be done about it. Joe notices how confused the one who was meant to save him is and finally confronts him.

‘You made up answers; you had to invent them to explain your presence here. All your presences here, your so-called manifestations.’

‘I don’t call them that; you and Al worked out that name. Don’t blame me for what you two-’

‘You don’t know any more than I do,’ Joe said, ‘about what’s happening to us and who’s attacking us. Glen, you can’t say who we’re up against because you don’t know.’

Runciter said, ‘I know I’m alive; I know I’m sitting out here in this consultation lounge at the moratorium.’

‘Your body in the coffin,’ Joe said. ‘Here at the Simple Shepherd Mortuary. Did you look at it?’

‘No,’ Runciter said, ‘but that isn’t really-’

‘It had withered,’ Joe said. ‘Lost bulk like Wendy’s and Al’s and Edie’s - and, in a little while, mine. Exactly the same for you; no better, no worse.’

‘In your case I got Ubik-’ Again Runciter broke off; a difficult-to-decipher expression appeared on his face: a combination perhaps of insight, fear and - but Joe couldn’t tell. ‘I got you the Ubik,’ he finished.

‘What is Ubik?’ Joe said.

There was no answer from Runciter.

‘You don’t know that either,’ Joe said. ‘You don’t know what it is or why it works. You don’t even know where it comes from.’

After a long, agonized pause, Runciter said, ‘You’re right, Joe. Absolutely right.’ (DICK, 2004, p. 195)

It is shocking for Joe to find out that he does not know what he is fighting against and all the clues he has had until then lead him nowhere. Since the blast, he has not lost a single opportunity to say how great Glen Runciter was and what he would do if he were in his place. Seeing Runciter everywhere in this realm was a contribution to the mythic aura his deceased boss had now. The use of his image along with Ubik, the equally enigmatic product he advertised, made their influence surpass the doubts Joe had after watching the television ad. The first time he is able to actually talk to Runciter frustrates his expectations, the ‘real’ Runciter is not the same he pictured in his memory, he was nothing but a myth.

From this conversation on, Joe Chip does not see or hear from Runciter anymore. However, the narration changes its focus from Joe to Runciter in two fundamental parts of the novel. First, right after they finish talking, Runciter is shown in the moratorium, frustrated

with the apparent loss of his employees and dealing with bureaucratic matters. He wants to talk to Ella before leaving, and asks himself if they will be interrupted by Jory once again. This part introduces Jory as the real villain, and when the focus goes back to Joe and this is what he finds out. The idea that can be captured here is that the most obvious answer was not considered by Runciter, who was so immersed in this commercial competition with Ray Hollis that he thought that external influence would be the only answer to what the group was going through in half-life.

The second part is the last chapter of the novel, in which we see Runciter leaving the moratorium. He gives a tip to one of the workers, who questions what kind of coins were those. The coins had the face of Joe Chip, just like his own face was stamped on Chip's coins. The narrative reverses, and then ends. Now it is up to the reader to come up with an answer. Multiple interpretations can arise, mostly based on Runciter's last actions in the reality his workers were in. I will comment on two considered by me. Theory number one relies on the fact that the suspicion Runciter has over Pat only shows up after Joe talks to her in Des Moines and feels the same. Going back a few chapters, every message Joe receives can be compared to the way he is feeling at the moment. His will of living, refusing the fact that he might have died, could transpose to these messages from the one he admired the most. He found in Runciter's image comfort to move on and try to find answers, but when it seemed that there was no way out, Runciter too could not help him anymore.

Another possibility is that Runciter died and is in half-life state just like the other ones. In the conversation between him and Joe, he keeps trying to prove that he is alive, or he is either trying to convince himself of that. The appearances he makes in the other realm are caused by the interference we learn all of them have due to the proximity of the cold-pacs. As it is mentioned by Ella in the first chapter, everything in this reality feels like a dream, so there is not a pattern in what they might go through in half-life. Both possible interpretations can also merge and make sense together, everything is possible where there are no boundaries between real and simulation.

3.3 THIS WAS JUST THE BEGINNING

In the last chapter of the book, after battling with different villains and with every possible theory of what is happening, the reader is invited to come back to the beginning of the novel to assemble the puzzle all over again. Such a task is quite challenging since many details seem contradictory as the story goes on. After concentrating my analysis on characteristics that are present throughout the whole novel, I focus now on these details, which compose the third point of my reading: inconsistencies within *Ubik*.

Some of them have already been mentioned in the previous sections, like Joe Chip's money problems and how important his role in the company is are not fully clarified to the reader, so there is only Joe's word to rely on; along with Glen Runciter's relationship with the half-life reality and how much he knew about what was happening inside it. However, alongside Joe and Runciter's names, three other characters had great influence in the development of the novel, Ella Runciter, Pat Conley and Jory. In the end, Ella and Jory are the characters who decide the fate of the two protagonists, while Pat is a great source of diversion in the story.

Ella, the twenty-year-old wife of Glen Runciter maintained in cold-pac, is close to being reborn. Since her signal is so weak due to the time she has been kept in the moratorium, it is easy for Jory to interfere in her communication, as it happens in chapter two. Although not being so strong, there is something special about her that keeps Jory away from her, and she is one of the few people in half-life that he cannot consume (DICK, 2004, p. 214). Just like Glen, Ella, when talking to Joe, seems to know everything he went through while in half-life, also acquiring this omnipresent status. Another curious aspect about her are the three different descriptions the novel offers of how she looks. First, Runciter tells Vogelsang Ella has brown hair and eyes (DICK, 2004, p. 12), then, just four pages after the first description, the narrator says her eyes were "bright and luminous blue" (p. 16), and finally when Joe meets her, he sees a blond girl with blue eyes (p. 211). One could choose trusting in the narrator's description rather than the one offered by the elderly husband who does not see his wife's eyes open for a long time or by a man who never saw her outside half-life. Whatever color her hair and eyes were, Ella is the archetype of female hero present in Dick's novels, the same way he used to imagine how his sister would be like.

Totally opposite to Ella is Pat Conley, the anti-psi whose powers and actions are too suspicious, leading the protagonists and the reader to believe she is the villain of the story.

She is introduced by G.G. Ashwood as an innocent young woman who did not know what she was capable of doing till she met the scout. When she describes the first time she used her ability, she says that she made a statue she broke turn back to normal by changing the event months after it happened (DICK, 2004, p. 33), but she was not sure of how she had done it. The sudden shift in her personality when being alone with Joe Chip makes him fear her and obey her orders. She demonstrates her ability twice while being in his presence, one in the same event of their introduction to each other, and later when she meets Runciter and the other inertials. She moves them to a different timeline, in which she is married to Joe, and takes them back to their previous one, but keeping the wedding ring.

Right after the bomb blast in Luna, Joe asks Pat to go back in time and reverse Runciter's death. She answers "Too much time has passed. I would have had to do it right away." (DICK, 2004, p. 78), contradicting her first story, since she altered the event of the broken statue a month after it happened. Altogether, having a powerful ability for an anti-psi, and the way she acts, make Joe and Runciter believe she was working for Hollis along with G.G. Ashwood.

‘The start,’ Runciter echoed bitingly. ‘What’s that mean? It started months or maybe even years ago; god knows how long Hollis and Mick and Pat Conley and S. Dole Melipone and G. G. Ashwood have been hatching it up, working it over and reworking it like dough. Here’s what happened. We got lured to Luna. We let Pat Conley come with us, a woman we didn’t know, a talent we didn’t understand - which possibly even Hollis doesn’t understand. An ability anyhow connected with time reversion; not, strictly speaking, the ability to travel through time... for instance, she can’t go into the future. In a certain sense, she can’t go into the past either; what she does, as near as I can comprehend it, is start a counter-process that uncovers the prior stages inherent in configurations of matter. But you know that; you and Al figured it out.’ (DICK, 2004, p. 192)

This could have been their plan, but the puzzle is never solved. When Joe meets his colleagues in Des Moines, he is informed that another member of the group has died some hours earlier. The group questions Pat why she did not use her ability, and she responds revealing that she cannot do that anymore after the blast and she does not know why. This reinforces the possibility that they are in a half-life state, and she cannot use her power because it has no effect in this new reality. However, another message from Runciter appears, and he says she is lying. As it was mentioned before, what follows this event is one chapter in which it is stated that Pat is the one causing everything, but this changes with the return of Jory.

Joe, after being followed by Pat and having the confusing conversation with Runciter, is in the hotel room by himself when Don Denny arrives with a doctor to check on him. Joe gives the can of Ubik to Don Denny and when he sprays it on himself, Jory appears. While talking to Joe, he says that he was pretending to be his colleague since Joe found his group in Des Moines. Actually, Denny was the second inertial he consumed, right after Wendy Wright. Joe then realises “It was you who started me dying, down there in the lobby.” (DICK, 2004. p. 204) and Jory confirms that he ate Pat before the events in chapter thirteen, when she was calling for the elevator for Joe, therefore it was Jory, not her, who was watching Joe climbing the stairs in pain. This demonstrates that even Pat was not sure about her own influence in what was happening in that reality – at the end, it did not matter what was her initial plan and what were her actual lies, she had the same amount of questions as Joe Chip.

Joe learns that Jory is the one causing all the phenomena he experienced in half-life, with the exception of Runciter’s appearances. To entrap his victims, the teenager would construct a whole reality to misguide them, but he had some limitations. That is why time kept regressing, this was out of his control. Ubik was the only thing that could stop him from eating his victims, he had to wait for the spray effect to wear off so he could attack. And Joe, having recently been sprayed by Runciter, could therefore escape from him. Later, Ella explains to Joe why Jory is kept in the moratorium even though he is so dangerous to the others,

‘Herbert is paid a great deal of money annually, by Jory’s family, to keep him with the others and to think up plausible reasons for doing so. And - there are Jorys in every moratorium. This battle goes on wherever you have halfifers; it’s a verity, a rule, of our kind of existence.’ [...] ‘It has to be fought on our side of the glass,’ Ella said. ‘By those of us in half-life, those that Jory preys on. You’ll have to take charge, Mr. Chip, after I’m reborn. Do you think you can do that? It’ll be hard. Jory will be sapping your strength always, putting a burden on you that you’ll feel as-’ She hesitated. ‘The approach of death. Which it will be. Because in half-life we diminish constantly anyhow. Jory only speeds it up. The weariness and cooling-off come anyhow. But not so soon.’ (DICK, 2004, p. 215)

So, Jory’s existence seems to be clarified and the answer the reader gets is that he is inevitable. Until that moment, Ubik was the only tool to fight him but keeping the efforts that had been made, soon something better could be created. However, going back in the narrative a major inconsistency in Jory’s character can be found. When he reveals himself to Joe, Jory says “Sometimes I call myself Matt, and sometimes Bill, but mostly I’m Jory.” (DICK, 2004,

p. 204). Matt and Bill are the brothers Tippy Jackson dreams about in chapter five. Matt is a telepath and Bill is a precog. In the dream, they quote *Richard III*,

“-deformed, unfinished, sent before my time into this breathing world, scarce half made up,” Matt the squirrel-like telepath said, scratching meditatively at his pelt. ‘Oh, yeah.’ Bill the precog nodded. ‘I remember. “And that so lamely and unfashionable that dogs bark at me as I halt by them.” From Richard the Third,’ he explained to Tippy. (DICK, 2004, p. 52)

Before she wakes up, they threaten her saying that they were going to get her. She feels uneasy, especially because she does not remember having read the play before, thus the dream could have been an actual contact made by psis. Tito Apostos, before the group goes to Luna, tries to tell Joe he dreamt about the same brothers, describing them as Hollis’ inertials. Not much later, Francesca Spanish tells the group she had a visitation, in which the brothers “quoted poetry and languid prose from oldtime books” (DICK, 2004, p. 69). If Jory holds so much power but only in the half-life realm, why and how would he threaten Runciter’s inertials while they were still alive? These earlier appearances threaten the limits dividing the real and the half-life experience. Said detail casts a doubt in the reader bigger than the last chapter could have done.

Whereas the topics previously analysed are reflections of the novel’s society, the inconsistencies within the story point to a conflict of their own, with no external references to justify them. These inconsistencies go unnoticed by the characters, therefore the existence of a line dividing life and half-life still belongs to their imaginary. The same cannot be said about the reader, who is able to identify that reality and simulation merged to the point of reaching hyperreality.

4 CONCLUSION

As a final word about *Ubik*, I return to the observation made along the discussion about the fact that the topics presented in *Ubik* are not restricted to fiction, they also refer to our society and several issues we are going through. One of the objectives of this research was to stress that science fiction is not a genre made for escapism. SF authors have the sensibility of putting into words how they feel towards the problems they face. Philip K. Dick spent his lifetime trying to answer questions related to the nature of reality and humanity. These questions were also shared by many thinkers of his time, who were also exposed to the multiple changes that took place in World War II and in the Cold War. Being so aware of what was happening, he depicted his vision of the present in his writings. And the best genre for him to do that was science fiction, a genre in which time and space have no boundaries, and a range of topics can be explored, “from the ray gun stage into studies of man in various types and complexities of society” (DICK, 1995, n.p.).

To successfully build a reality conflict, Dick uses common features of the current economic system as tools. Money is the first point put into observation. The importance given to it, even when the characters are dead, is a crucial part to comprehend the relationship between Joe Chip and his half-life experience. Capital, as Baudrillard points out, is responsible for the replacement of symbols for meaning. Anything can be turned into a product and be sold to people who are in search of status. Necessity is created through advertisements and brands; once they are well known, they can sell anything carrying their name on it. *Ubik*, the miraculous spray made to keep people in half-life away from Jory, is presented in the novel as more than just this. To the readers, as its very name infers, *Ubik* is everything everywhere.

Another important aspect of the novel which capital greatly influences is death itself. With the invention of prolongation of life, death becomes nothing more than a passage to a second phase of life. This is a common belief among many religions and cultures across the world, but here death is commercialized, and the dead are kept in cold-pac at a very high cost, serving more the livings' needs of communicating with their deceased than for the well-being of those who are dead. As it is seen, half-life experience is often threatened by internal and external factors, being as challenging as being alive.

The advertisement language employed in various plot points is one more factor that can be highlighted by Baudrillard's discussion in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994). The use of media to fabricate fake narratives in a subliminal way opens a path that connects the fictional world in the novel and the non-fictional world. Advertisement plays an important part in the novel, particularly in moments when people are trying to influence one another. The constant repetition of images and messages makes the characters believe in solutions for their conflicts without enough evidence that such solutions in fact work. For this reason, the presence of the ads transcends the messages they contain. Media and message merge, becoming a mediating power between reality and simulation. But in the end, the ads have no power to save Joe Chip, they only misguide him and are used for distraction, just as Baudrillard evaluates media influence in real life: "It is useless to dream of revolution through content, useless to dream of a revelation through form, because the medium and the real are now in a single nebula whose truth is indecipherable." (BAUDRILLARD, 1994, p. 83).

The heterodiegetic narrator tells the story mostly following Chip's perception of things. Because of that, the reader sees the half-life experience through his eyes. Comparing Chip's and Ella's perceptions of the events that take place in half-life, we see that his visions come closer to the perception of those who are alive than hers, which she describes as resembling dreams mostly. This fact raises questions about the other characters in the novel, whether they are sharing this new reality with Joe, or are just a projection of Joe Chip's interpretation. Alongside, the roles of other characters were analysed, Glen Runciter, his wife Ella, Pat Conley and Jory. The owner of the prudence organization is the one we hear from the most. His importance in the story is clear. As for the other ones, each has a specific function in the novel, although their personalities are no further explored in the narrative.

The existence of two images for Runciter was pointed out, one existing before and another after the bomb blast. The Runciter of the second half of the novel is a simulacrum of the first one that was created after his death. In hierarchy matters, Runciter was the leader when he was alive. But things were not doing so well in his organization, as they were facing the crisis referred to in the first chapters. In Chip's eyes, his boss became, after his death, the greatest person that ever lived, and represented the one who always knew what to do in difficult times. It was with this conviction, that Runciter would do much better if he was in Chip's place, that the employee follows all the messages sent by his boss. But these messages

frequently contradict themselves, as if Runciter himself is not sure if he is to convince Joe that he is dead or alive. The only thing not to be argued is that *Ubik* has the power to solve anything.

Just like the presence of advertisement, Runciter's image means more than what he says. Not only his messages keep constantly appearing in Chip's reality, there is also a moment when several pictures of Runciter were displayed in Joe's room with no explanation whatsoever. When both of them have an opportunity to have a conversation in half-life, the myth is dismantled. With no mediating power between them, Joe is able to see how little Runciter knows about what is happening, and he can finally follow his own beliefs and make choices for himself.

While examining the inconsistencies in the novel, I found the connection between its reality conflict and the actions of the secondary characters. Ella and Jory are fundamental for the ending of *Ubik*, since they offer an explanation of what is happening to Chip and he seems to accept it. However, as it can be observed in sections 3.1 and 3.2, the story is so much more focused on Joe and Runciter that Ella and Jory's participation does very little to the development of the novel. Both half-lifers are introduced at the beginning and we are only reminded of their existence in the end. Instead, the plot is contrived so as to give the impression that Pat is the enemy, and even she seems to believe in it. The main function of these characters is to offer answers to Joe's questions, but their actions do not add up when put side by side. This is why so many mysteries remain unsolved to the reader.

There is a key moment in the novel, which detracted me from the considerations of whether the main conflict was about who is alive and who is not. It has to do with Jory's presence before the bomb blast. With the teenager appearing in the inertials' dreams before they were dead, therefore out of the scope of his powers, the barriers of reality and simulation are taken down and what first was seen as simulation versus reality is replaced for hyperreality.

In conclusion, through this complex novel Philip K. Dick demonstrates the power technology and media have in controlling people's perception about the world around them. Through this science fiction story, we enter the field of philosophy as we follow Dick's extrapolation of his own views of reality. Today, Philip K. Dick is considered an author ahead of his time for noticing things that people have started to pay attention to only decades after.

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