

# International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies

ISSN: 2308-5460



## Shattered Realities: A Baudrillardian Reading of Philip K. Dick's *Ubik*

[PP: 107-116]

**Hoda Shabrang**

Department of English Language and Literature, Khatam University  
Tehran, Iran

**Yasamin Hemmat**

(Corresponding Author)

Department of English Language and Literature, Khatam University  
Tehran, Iran

### ABSTRACT

*Ubik* by Philip K. Dick shows a hyperreal society in which everything is simulated and virtual and even the demarcation between life and death is indistinct. Therefore, the world of *Ubik* depicts the violation of the ontological boundary. Characters in this novel live in a simulated and virtual life of the half-life which is the symbol of the ordinary situation of people in the actual life since media and proliferation of signs and information construct a new media reality which is even more real than real or "hyperreal". Although characters are in search of reality and a transcendental signified in order to maintain their identity, they are unable to achieve what they are searching for and they do not know whether they are undergoing the real or a simulation. Thus, they crave to fix the reality and their identities through the marketplace. Consequently, they purchase a product named *Ubik* which is a reality support, but the effect of this product is very transient; therefore, they have to keep buying it. The philosophical guide for the purpose of looking into Dick's novel is Jean Baudrillard's concepts of simulation, simulacra and hyperreality. The objective of this paper is to examine the commodified and simulated world of *Ubik* based on Baudrillard's theories to show that in the techno-capitalist world there is no objective truth since everything is reduced to signs and images and subject is dominated by the object; therefore, subjectivity is disappearing. Hence, in *Ubik*, it would be demonstrated that technology, proliferation of information and capitalism lead to disruption of all boundaries and generate the society of simulated realities.

**Keywords:** *Simulation, Hyperreality, Consumerism, Technology, Transcendental signified*

ARTICLE INFO	The paper received on	Reviewed on	Accepted after revisions on
	16/05/2019	25/06/2019	07/07/2019

#### Suggested citation:

Shabrang, H. & Hemmat, Y. (2019). Shattered Realities: A Baudrillardian Reading of Philip K. Dick's *Ubik*. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*. 7(2). 107-116.

### 1. Introduction

Philip Kindred Dick (1928-1982) is an American novelist, short story writer and essayist whose published works are entirely in the science fiction genre. Dick explores sociological, political and metaphysical themes in his novels dominated by authoritarian governments. In his later works, Dick's thematic focus strongly reflected his personal interest in metaphysics and theology. He often draws upon his own life experiences in addressing the nature of drug abuse, paranoia, schizophrenia, and transcendental experiences. Through his studies in philosophy, Dick believes that existence is based on internal human perception, which does not necessarily correspond to external reality. After reading the works of Plato and pondering the possibilities of metaphysical realms, Dick comes to conclusion that, in a certain sense, the world is not entirely real and there is no

way to confirm whether it is truly there. This question from his early studies persisted as a theme in many of his novels such as *Ubik*.

One of the reasons for choosing Dick's novels is that they are open to different interpretations. Accordingly, Dick's works have been scrutinized from different viewpoints, for example, in *Politics and Metaphysics in Three Novels of Philip Dick* by Eugênia Barthelme examines *Ubik* through metaphysical perspective. This work also investigates existential anguish and economic satire as a method of representation of the complex contingencies of the human situation. Additionally, *Worlds and selves falling apart* by Mag Markus Widmer discusses the science fictions of Philip K. Dick Such as *Ubik* against the background of postmodernism. She examines the ontological experiments and compares them to the reality of postmodern culture. In addition, Christopher Palmer in



*Philip K. Dick: Exhilaration and Terror of the Postmodern*, studies the fictions of Philip K. Dick and their relationship to postmodernism. In this context it scrutinizes several tensions in Dick's work; especially those between novelistic realism and Dick's desire towards fantasy and between the isolated individual and the social or transcend entities that dominate Dick's fictional worlds, between the political and the theological inferences of Dick's science fictions, and, above all, between Dick's humanist and ethical desires and the posthumanist conditions in his novels that unavoidably threaten them. Furthermore, in *How We Became Posthuman*, N. Katherine Hayles separates hype from fact, investigating the outcome of embodiment in an information age. Hayles relates three intertwined stories: how information lost its body, that is, how it came to be conceptualized as an entity separate from the material forms that carry it; the cultural and technological construction of the cyborg; and the dismantling of the liberal humanist "subject" in cybernetic discourse, along with the emergence of the "posthuman." Moreover, Mark Poster in *Information Please: Culture and Politics in the Age of Digital Machines*, theorizing the social and cultural effects of electronically mediated information. In his book, Poster shows a new relation of humans to information machines, a relation that avoids privileging either the human or the machine but instead focuses on the structures of their interactions. One of the chapters of this book is allotted to *Ubik* which is shown the dominance of broadcast media in consumer culture. Brian Aldis (1979) in *This World and Nearer Ones* asserts that, Dickian characters find themselves trapped in hallucinations or fake worlds, often without knowing it or, if knowing it, without being able to do anything about it. And it is not only worlds that are fake, but also objects, animals, people may also be unreal in various ways. As Warrick (1983) states, for Philip K. Dick, "the clear line between hallucination and reality has itself become a kind of hallucination" (p. 205). *Ubik* by Philip Dick is such a novel that concerns with the idea of reality against illusion. Throughout the novel, question about what is real and what is illusion engrosses the characters. Like so many of Dick's novels, *Ubik* focuses on the reality problem. Neither the characters nor the audiences are able to find out any final comprehensive meaning. The world of *Ubik* is completely

overwhelmed by commodities which are even more alive than human beings. Baudrillard (2009) proclaims "the disappearance of the subject is the mirror image of disappearance of the real. And in fact the subject\_ the subject as agency of will, of freedom, of representation; the subject of power, of knowledge, of history\_ is disappearing, but it leaves its ghost behind" (p. 26-27). Therefore, this novel shows a postmodern society where in the world of the objects, the subject is disappearing.

In *Ubik*, characters are searching for objective reality but they are unable to find a definite answer to what reality is since in a world where the lines between nature, technology, life and death are blurred, it is impossible for one to ascertain the difference between reality and illusion. Christopher Palmer (2003) declares that "Dick makes fictions of the disintegrations of the real in contemporary society: the action of perpetual change both on what previously existed, and on what is existing now but has no stable reality because it is already marked by its inevitable dissolution" (p. 32). This indicates that even in the world we live in, reality can be questioned.

*Ubik* also shows that in capitalist world, everything becomes commodified. "Ubik", a spray can, becomes the symbol of all commodities on the market. Most important thing in the novel is the endless bombardment of advertisement through the television and radio. Throughout the novel, each chapter is started by an advertisement for a multiplicity of products all called Ubik, an instant coffee, a brand of beer, an antiperspirant and other numerous product. Therefore, it becomes the sign of all merchandises on the market. As stated by Baudrillard (1994), "today what we are experiencing is the absorption of all virtual modes of expression into that of advertising" (p. 87). Thus, this novel shows how subjects are dominated by the system of objects; "the subject faces a world of objects which attract, fascinate and sometimes control his or her perception, thought and behavior" (Kellner, 1989, p. 8).

*Ubik* describes a condition where psionic powers - such as precognition and prognostication - invade privacy. Glen Runciter runs a company consists of "inertials"\_ individuals who can counteract psionic powers. He takes a group of ten inertials to Luna; there, he is drastically injured in an explosion. After the explosion, they find out they have been entered a world

which is being regressed. The surviving inertials experience a series of strange events: things such as food and cigarettes go stale, and machines transform into earlier models. Some of the inertials die and their bodies quickly decay. The regression of their environment from 1992 to 1939 is the fault of Jory, a teenage boy who feeds on the life of the others, causing them to decay. So in this paper, we want to correlate the Baudrillard's ideas to the work of *Ubik* by Philip K. Dick to indicate the slippery nature of the reality in the world of the novel.

## 2. Approach and Methodology

In this research, *Ubik* by Philip Dick is to scrutinize under the light of Jean Baudrillard's perspective. Baudrillard's philosophy focusing on the two concepts of hyperreality and simulation. These concepts refer to the unreal nature of the contemporary society in the era of mass communication and mass consumption. It is demonstrated that how characters affect by hyperreal world in their everyday lives.

Baudrillard is a postmodern philosopher who has written philosophical treaties called *Simulacra and Simulation*, which is the best known for discussion of images and signs. Baudrillard (1994) claims that "society has replaced all realities and meanings with symbols and signs" (p. 3). Human experience is more a simulation of the reality than the reality itself. He believes that society has become dependent on simulation, and it has lost its contact with the real world" (p. 6). Simulacra have been replaced by original and the distinction between reality and representation of reality has broken down. Baudrillard names this situation hyperreality in which the distinction between copies and original is impossible and everything in society appears as a copy. He argues that postmodern culture has become a culture of hyperreality, where "real" has been replaced with the "hyperreal". The hyperreal world is dominated by the object, and "instead of the human subject being in the world, it is now the object that is in the world, while the human subject has become an idle spectator" (Lane, 2008, p. 35). Hence, we encounter with the "commodity fetishism" and all "fetishistic activity is based upon fascination of signs" (p. 38).

Another term to take into consideration is the term "simulacrum" which goes back to Plato, who applies it to refer to a false copy of something. Leitch (2001) stated that "Baudrillard chooses the term simulacrum, a word that denotes

representation but also carries the sense of a counterfeit, sham or fake. Simulacrum seems to have referents (real phenomena they refer to), but they are merely pretend representations that mark the absence, not the existence, of the objects they purport to represent" (p. 1730). Baudrillard has established theory of media effects and culture around his own notion of the simulacrum. He argues that "in a postmodern culture dominated by TV, films, news media, and the internet, the whole idea of a true or a false copy of something has been destroyed: all we have now are simulations of reality, which aren't any more or less "real" than the reality they simulate" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 22). Baudrillard's posits that the media images do not merely represent reality; they are reality, because their meaning generates from their position within a system of signs, not from some referents in a real world outside that system.

According to Baudrillard, there are three levels of simulation: "the first one is the copy of reality. The second one is a copy so good that it blurs the boundaries between reality and representation. The third is one which produces a reality of its own without being based upon any particular bit of the real world. The best example is virtual reality" (Lane, 2008, p. 30). It may be relevant to associate this to the levels of simulation established by Jean Baudrillard (1994), in his book, *Simulacra and Simulation*, relates the postmodern era with the third order of simulacrum where the simulation precedes the original, breaking down the distinction between representation and reality (p. 8). Simulation never represents its reality but only the codes, signs and images (p. 25). Baudrillard (1994) claims that the present age of simulation is characterized by the "liquidation of all referentials" and the substitution of "signs of the real for the real" itself. He conjectures that the sign and the real are "equivalent". So the sign can be "exchanged" for meaning.

Baudrillard also discusses the idea of God's representation as the simulation and, at the same time, he declares that if God had been represented in pictures, portraits, paintings, etc. as a simulacrum, it meant that he had never existed as real in real time and space; "that ultimately there has never been any God; that only simulacra exist" (p. 169). So he believes in the "death of the divine referential".

## 3. Discussion



### 3.1 Technology and Media

*Ubik* is narrated from the viewpoint of Joe Chip. He works for Glen Runciter who owns an anti-psi organization. Psi powers are kinds of powers that are employed to read the future. Runciter Association employs “inertials”, individuals who, for example, make it impossible for those who see the future to decide which future is to happen. So *Ubik* demonstrates the collapse of privacy that today is attained through technology. No one is safe from the intrusive minds of the psis. According to Mark Poster (2005), “the psis substitute easily for computerized databases hooked into networks, listening devices, global positioning systems, satellite photography, and the rest, culminating in a society where nothing can be hidden or secret” (p. 29). Moreover, as Baudrillard maintains, in hyperreal society “everything is public, transparent and hyperreal in the object world” (Kellner, 1989, p. 159). Hence, in hyperreal world of the novel, there is no such a thing as privacy and the boundary between public and private has been blurred.

Glen Runciter is encountering with the problem of a missing psi, Melipone who is one of Ray Holis’ people, the man in charge of a group of psis who have a tendency to use their powers for malevolent purposes, but Melipone cannot be found anywhere. And because of this reason, Runciter decides to take counsel from his wife, Ella, who has been in half-life for years. Half-life is an existence between life and death in which the body of the dead person is packed in cold-pac, and mental functions are maintained through technological innovation.

When he is speaking to his wife, Runciter is interrupted by Jory, a 15 years old boy in half-life beside his wife. Jory is displeased with his existence in half-life and he desires to live in the “real” world. Whilst Runciter is talking to his wife, Jory substitutes by Ella and talks to Runciter instead of her. The half-lifers are well-maintained for communication with living in institutions named moratoriums and the holder of the half-life moratorium explains that “after prolonged proximity ... there is occasionally a mutual osmosis, a suffusion between the mentalities of half-lifers” (Dick, 1991, p. 17). This cold-pac technology causes a tension between reality and simulation. In this novel, the violation of the boundary between reality and illusion is achieved through the invention of the cold-

pac technology. Hence, on account of technology, characters face the state of hyperreality. Baudrillard uses the term hyperreal to refer to the procedure through which the image or simulation and reality breakdown and become the same. Hyperreality is a postmodern condition, a virtual world that offers experiences more real and involving than everyday life and in this condition the boundary between real and unreal is blurred. Moreover, in this story, the boundary between life and death is no longer recognizable. The existence of this perplexing condition results in the confusion and uncertainty of characters, as a result they find themselves wondering whether they are alive or dead or rather in half-life, and whether they are undergoing the “real” or only a simulacrum. Half-life is the first model of natural life which is interchanged with the technology and in this kind of life, people can have their mental functions maintained by technology though their body is dead. Thus, everything has been overwhelmed by technology; everything is simulated and has been dominated by the virtual. According to Baudrillard, in hyperreal world even in death, the virtual interferes. Baudrillard (2000) asserts, “it’s common to speak of the struggle of life against death, but there is an inverse peril. And we must struggle against the possibility that we will not die” (p. 5). Therefore, in the postmodern society, physical immortality seems feasible.

In addition to the half-life condition, another thing which is disturbed reality is Pat Conley’s negative talent. She is able to destroy the present and replace a new one for it. This ability is destructive since it thwarts another psychic ability, that of foreseeing the future. “The anti-precog makes all futures seem equally real to the precog” (Dick, 1991, p. 28). Pat Conley “can cancel out the precog’s decision after he’s made it” (p. 30). Moreover, she can “change the past”. She can create a different present in the way that other characters are hardly aware that there is something wrong with the “present” they are experiencing. As Scott Bukatman (1993) points out, “Pat’s ability to manipulate the past implies the existence of myriad presents, none finally more than any other” (p. 94). Therefore, Pat’s talent indicates the possibility of existence of multiple presents. Hence, in a world where multiple presents are possible, it is impossible to determine what is reality and what is illusory.

Pat and a team of Runciter's anti-*psis* go on a trip to Luna for business. When they arrive, they become aware that something is not right about the operation, and when a bomb explodes, they know that Hollis is behind the operation and employs Runciter's team of inertials in order to kill them. But nobody is fatally injured in the explosion except Runciter, who is quickly brought into cold-pac in hopes of maintaining in half-life because he is dying. Therefore, the blast apparently killed Glen Runciter, whilst his agents, including Joe Chip and Pat Conley, stay alive. But how can they be certain that they are alive and Runciter is deceased? The inertials ask Pat to use her ability to alter the past so Runciter was not killed, but she claims that she has lost her talent since the blast.

Almost instantly after the blast, Joe Chip starts to notice that the commodities around him are no longer fresh but decayed and ruined: moldy coffees, stale cigarettes, outdated coins, tape recorders, and antiquated elevators. Stale and outdated things are the indication of regression. The speed of decay rapidly increases, and eventually, the characters experience the United States of 1939. However, as Joe Chip notices, "we haven't gone anywhere, we're where we've always been. But for some reasons [...] reality has receded; it's lost its underlying support and it's ebbed to back to previous forms" (Dick, 1991, p. 137). This explosion can be related to what Baudrillard believes as "implosion"; since "postmodern society is the site of an implosion of all boundaries, regions and distinctions between appearance and reality, and just about every other binary opposition maintained by traditional philosophy and social theory" (Kellner, 1989, p. 68). Hence, as has been seen, after the explosion, all binary oppositions are undermined, even the characters do not know if they are alive or dead.

After all these incidents, Joe Chip faces with Runciter's manifestations and messages in various ways, for example through the proliferation of his images in advertisements or strange graffiti scribbled on the bathroom wall. But if Runciter attempts to communicate with them, then he must be alive, and if he is alive, this means that they are dead: "Jump in the urinal and stand on your head. I'm the one that alive. You're all dead" "So now we know the truth." Joe said, "But we are not dead. Except for Wendy. We are in half-life, after the explosion that killed us. Killed us not

Runciter" (p. 106 & 109). However, nothing is certain in the reality experienced by Joe Chip and other characters. Baudrillard conjectures that "an immense uncertainty remains from the sophist action of networks of communication and information- the undecidability of knowing whether there is real knowledge in there or not" (Clarke, 2009, p. 9). Hence, thanks to the proliferation of information in postmodern era, nothing is certain. Here, in this story, although the news of Runciter's death is announced on the television, and the broadcast displays his body in the funeral in Des Moines, which seems to confirm the Runciter's death, Runciter then appears to them on TV, as a commercial salesman for the product called "Ubik":

"... 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" (Dick, 1991, p. 114).

What is important here is that Runciter mentions the decaying objects permeating Joe Chip's world. He explains all these signs as "world deterioration" which is a "normal experience of half-lifers": "A sort of lingering universe is retained as a residual charge, a pseudo-environment, highly unstable" (p. 114-115). So Runciter seems to answer Joe Chip's question but soon this one also turns out as an illusion: "Of course, I'm dead! Didn't you watch the telecast from Des Moines?" (p. 115). As can be observed, characters live in a high-tech society where media largely shapes what they see. What they know to be true, authentic, or real is informed by their perceptions portrayed in mediated form. The media is now performing without having to make any necessary reference to reality. Thus, Joe Chip now encounters with a situation where there is no relation to any reality. Baudrillard interprets the media a "key simulation machines which reproduce images, signs and codes which in turn come to constitute an autonomous realm of hyperreality" (Lane, 2008, p. 68). Baudrillard (1994) also of the opinion that when we are watching TV, TV is actually watching us "TV alienates us, manipulates us, TV informs us [...] a perspectival information with the horizon of the real and of meaning as the vanishing point" (p. 53). So here, TV generates the manipulative truth which is that of the hyperreal.



It seems that characters in this novel encounters with alternative worlds: One in which Joe Chip and the other agents survived the bomb explosion, and Runciter is dead and in the other world, Runciter's agents are dead and they are in half-life and Runciter is alive. These two possible worlds are equally true. Nevertheless, at the end of the book, it is revealed that the inertials are, in fact, in half-life and Runciter is alive. Jory, the boy who interfered with Runciter's communication is killing the inertials to gain their strength. Thereby, the things fade away because Jory cannot sustain them, and it is Jory who is killing Joe's companions. He is eating them, absorbing what remains of their lives to feed his own, and he can do this because of having died young, he has more vitality and thus power. Furthermore, everything is the projection of Jory's mind and even half-life is the product of his mind. Thus, the whole world they find themselves in is not an objective reality, but the projection of a fifteen years old boy's mind: "Dr. Francis is a product of my mind! Like every other fixture in this pseudo-world" (Dick, 1991, p. 174). He admits that he has constructed the "phantasmagoric counterpart", the simulacrum, of the world of his own time and this explains the regression and decay that characters have been experiencing. Henceforth, Jory can be interpreted as the evil power of capitalism that creates a hyperreal world in which everything is a projection of the constructed realities of capitalism.

### 3.2 *Animate Objects and Inanimate Humans*

Money is very pivotal in this novel; it even makes the objects have dominance over human beings. Even when Joe is stuck in half-life and the objects are regressing into earlier states, one of the first things to regress is money and at the same time, Runciter's face appears on their money.

In *Ubik* we find commodification and objectification as one of the major issues. Objects and technology which are designed to make life easier for human beings, become harsh towards them. Joe finds things around him become adverse. His apartment is grubby and messy, and will not be cleaned until he pays what he owes to apartment's cleaning robots. He even cannot pay for his shower, and cannot manage to pay the door to let him out. When he argues with the door, the door becomes irritated and asks Joe to read the apartment purchase contract, but Joe starts to loosen the door's hinges with a knife; consequently, the door

threatens to sue him. As can be seen, in this novel objects are alive. Kathrine Hayles (1999) postulates that, "one of the most Dick's deep-seated fears is that as things became animate, people tend towards the inanimate" (p. 62). The objects in Joe's apartment possess a willpower of their own and act against him. Freedman argues that the argumentative door, coin-operated coffeepot and stubborn cleaning robots do not act as commodities with an exchange-value, but they act as participants in economic system, offering services and labor in exchange for money. As aforementioned, after the blast a process of destabilization begins and at first, mostly objects are affected. Commodities originating from their stable world which now all of a sudden demonstrate signs of old age and decay and soon, characters are affected as well. The inertial Wendy Wright, another of Runciter's employees, at first feels old; nonetheless, shortly after that not only dies, but also becomes a "huddled heap, dehydrated, almost mummified" (Dick, 1991, p. 99). Dick describes her from Joe Chip's view point like an object:

... Her eyes, those green and tumbled stones, looked impassively at everything; he had never seen fear in them, or aversion, or contempt. What she saw she accepted. Generally, she seemed calm. But more than that she struck him as being durable, untroubled and cool, not subject to wear, or to fatigue, or to physical illness and decline. [...] she would never look older. She had too much control over herself and outside reality for that (p. 59).

So she does not display any emotion, she does not seem "subject to wear", a sentence which would apply for object instead of a person, and she has control over herself not to look old, whereas the human circumstance is usually different since we do not have any control over what happens to our bodies; therefore, she becomes object-like. "Baudrillard argues that just as young boy who grows up among wolves becomes wolf-like, people in postmodern society, growing up in a world of objects- become more object-like" (Powell, 1998, p. 45).

Another point is that these "half-lifers" are kept in moratoriums and, although in some sense they are still alive, they kept as objects. When the owner of the Beloved Brethren Moratorium in Zürich is asked by Glen Runciter's, to find his dead wife Ella, he "made his way back to the cold-pac bins to search out number 3054039-B (Dick, 1991, p. 5)". Consequently, human beings

are decreased to codes. Even, when half-lifers die, they are “expired” instead of simply dead (p. 7). This is a very palpable blurring of the borders between human and thing. According to Hayles (1999), as things become more animate, people become more inanimate. Consequently, as things become more animate in the capitalist society, Joe finds himself forced into the more inanimate role (Kellner, 1989, p. 18). Henceforth, in this society, objects dominate subjects. As a result, “human beings become dominated by things and themselves become more thing like, come to dominate social life” (p. 19). Hence, “the subject becomes transformed into an object as part of a nexus of information and communication network” (p. 71). Another example is about Runciter mentioning that when he chuckles, “it had an abstract quality; he always smiled and he always chuckled, his voice always boomed, but inside he did not notice anyone, did not care; it was his body which smiled, nodded and shook hands” (Dick, 1991, p. 7). Examples like these are various, and through them it is inferred that in this world there is a tendency to consider humans not solely human. As Dick (1995) himself proposes in an essay:

What we are seeing is a gradual merging of the general nature of human activity and function into the activity and function of what we humans have built and surrounded ourselves with... As the external world becomes more animate, we may find that we -the so-called humans - are becoming, and may to a great extent always have been, inanimate in the sense that *we* are led, directed by built-in tropisms, rather than leading (p. 183-187).

Hence, if humans are like machines, then machines are like humans. Therefore, the boundary between human and machine is undermined. In the world of *Ubik*, household appliances, doors, nearly everything requires money to be functioned; moreover, they are able to talk. From all these cases it is apparent that machines show characteristics which only exclusive to humans and for this reason these characteristics generate even more vitality. Baudrillard argues that these postmodern processes produce the disappearance of the subject. Accordingly, subject is disappearing in postmodern culture. What is left is a mediated person, fragmented and de-centered selves and identities. Thus, in *Ubik*, characters turn into an objects so the subject is disappeared.

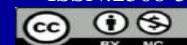
### 3.3 Consumerism and Ubiquity of Objects

The only way to stop the world from regressing is the Ubik spray that Joe has bought from a drug store in Jory's simulated world. The word Ubik appears to be attributed to a mass produced commodity like razor-blades, instant coffee and pop-tarts, etc. Carl Freedman (1984) describes Ubik as “the ultimate and universal commodity and the symbol of the ubiquity of the commodity structure (p. 21)”. So *Ubik* illustrates a consumer society and in this society, to live means to consume. Everything is prepared for consumption and life is arranged around commodities. In Baudrillard's view, effect of consumption has increased through all aspects of life, from culture to human relations. Baudrillard (1998) writes:

There is all around us today a kind of fantastic conspicuousness of consumption and abundance, constituted by the multiplication of objects, services and material goods, and this represents something of a fundamental mutation in the ecology of the human species. Strictly speaking, the humans of the age of affluence are surrounded not so much by other human beings, as they were in all previous ages, but by objects (p. 25).

As long as Chip has Ubik, he will be safe from Jory; however, he must keep buying it because its effect diminishes after a few hours. Ubik establishes reality for Chip as the same way as commodities establish reality for consumers. According to Bukatman (1993), “Ubik appears again and again throughout book, usually through the medium of advertising. Advertising generates anxieties and makes the subject aware of lacks (perhaps in *self-image* or personal *appearance*). In becoming a consumer and acquiring a commodity, the subject fixes the lack, repairs appearance, becomes an image (p. 114). Joe has a lack in the appearance of reality as consumers have lacks in their identities or personal appearances.

The ads use Ubik to replace goods that are commonplace and ubiquities, indicate that advertising is a ubiquitous feature of capitalist society. Thus, Ubik functions as a commodity since it creates a transitory pseudo-satisfaction. As Bukatman states, “[commodity] confirms one's relation to and position in the world, but only by constructing a temporary state of pseudo-satisfaction which lasts only until the can is empty or the next commercial is viewed” (p.97). Also Baudrillard (1994), believes



that “what we consume is not so much objects, but signs. In order to become object of consumption, the object must become sign” (Kellner, 1989, p. 25). In this situation, consumption does not satisfy our needs. The needs are, indeed, not real; they are constructed by simulations:

In consumer society, natural needs or desires have been buried under desires simulated by cultural discourses (advertising, media, and the rest), which tell us what we want. We are so precoded, so filled from the very start with the images of what we desire, that we process our relation to the world completely through those images. Furthermore, capitalist production in our time proceeds by first creating a demand through marketing and then producing the product to meet that demand. There are no longer natural needs that human work strives to satisfy. Rather, there are culturally produced “hyperreal” needs that are generated to provide work and profits. The world is remade in the image of desire (Leitch, 2001, p. 1730).

Hence, in consumer society the consumers have to buy more to satisfy their needs but their needs are that of the hyperreal and instead of buying products, they are buying signs and images to gain identity. Baudrillard also postulates that people are commodified, because everything has become accessible to everyone, and because of mass production, today’s generation is desperately in search of identity. As a consequence, in this novel *Ubik* epitomizes the commodity marketplace which fixes Joe Chip’s environment and his identity; however, it is a short-lived product and he must buy more when it is finished. Therefore, products are never able to satisfy the needs of consumers.

### *3.4 Ubik as an Illusion of a Transcendental Signified*

*Ubik* is a product which is seen as a God-like entity. This image is demonstrated by the epigraph to the final chapter, which is not an advertisement for *Ubik*, but it makes *Ubik* analogous to God:

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, 1991, p. 207).

The ad for *Ubik* now sounds much like the voice of God in the opening of *Genesis* (Poster, 2005, p. 30). As a

consequence, Philip Dick calls this product *Ubik* to illustrate the ubiquity of the advertisement in society. As Mark Poster (2005) argues, *Ubik* is not supposed to signify God, but the God-like qualities of the commodity advertisement. It would appear that, in the world which is made by Dick, people no longer pursue for divine validation through God, but through the marketplace. As Baudrillard (1994) claims, “God never existed, that only the simulacrum ever existed, even that God himself was never anything but his own simulacrum” (p. 3). Hence, Baudrillard announces “the end of transcendence” (p. 3). Thence, people in this Godless world are in search of something to replace God; therefore, they find this transcendental signified in the marketplace. Moreover, Poster postulates that, “the half-lifers are understood to represent the general population of consumer culture, living in the hyperreal world of mediated information, their identities persist through that culture” (p. 32). Thus, here we can associate the commodity with God, and hence read *Ubik* as a condemnation of “commodity fetishism” (Bukatman, 1993, p. 97). So *Ubik*, becomes the work of commodity fetishism, presenting a product whose purpose is only to uphold the illusion of unity and a transcendental signified,

On the other hand, one could emphasize the element of logos, and read *Ubik* as a metaphor of the transcendental signified, the notion of a world of fixed ideas following Plato. In a thoroughly commodified world, the human desire for stability must be realized as a commodity [...] commodities are an expression of the human desire for a transcendental signified (Widmer, 2000, p. 7).

So the characters crave for a transcendental signified in order to be able to maintain their sense of reality and immutability and they can only achieve them through consuming commodities. The important thing to take into consideration is that although *Ubik* is seen as a God-like entity, it is created by the man. Therefore, the identity of the creator and created combined into a single entity; likewise, the boundary between creator and created is subverted. So *Ubik* in this novel is the emblem of all objects that establish the utmost assurance of pleasure and satisfaction of any desire in the capitalist culture.

### *3.5 Shattered Realities*

The last chapter of *Ubik* shows Runciter in the world of the living, in the



Swiss moratorium, who encounters with Joe Chip in the simulated world. But Runciter's reality becomes inverted this time. When he takes some coins out of his pocket to give to an attendant at the moratorium, he notices something odd about the money: it has Joe Chip's face on it, reflecting the event when Joe Chip found money with Runciter's face on it: "...I wonder what this means, he asked himself. Strangest thing I've ever seen. Most things in life eventually can be explained. But- Joe Chip on a fifty-cent piece? It was the first Joe Chip money he had ever seen. [...] this was just the beginning" (Dick, 1991, p. 191). Thus, Runciter's seeing Chip's face on a coin outside the half-life world, reflects Chip's early discovery that reality is disrupted. Appearance and reality are not the identical thing in this novel, and yet one cannot determine which reality is real, or which reality is just appearance. So the boundary between real and unreal becomes blurred. Henceforth, characters experience something called "the death of the real". According to Baudrillard, we live our lives in the realm of hyperreality, involving more and more profoundly to things like television or virtual reality games and shows which are purely simulate reality. He argues that:

In a postmodern culture dominated by TV, films, news media, and the Internet, the whole idea of a true or a false copy of something has been destroyed: all we have now are simulations of reality, which aren't any more or less "real" than the reality they simulate. We have entered an era where third--order simulacra dominate our lives, where the image has lost any connection to real things (Mann, 2019, p. 3).

Accordingly, the world of the novel due to the technology and media is the simulated world. Christopher Palmer (2003) of the opinion that "by analogy to the previous proliferation of Runciter's images in the hyperreality generated by Jory, Chip's portraits on the coins are the sign of his acquiring the power to manifest himself in the external reality, penetrating the boundaries of the simulated world of the cold-pac condition" (p. 26). Thence, we can conclude that the division between these two worlds are illusory and the real outside world of Runciter and the simulated world of Joe Chip are both simulations. Ruciter and Joe Chip live in their separate simulated worlds and both are detached from reality. Thus, Dick wants to show that there can be no certain truth in this story. Even there is no certainty in the ending of the novel; "the

ending of the *Ubik* is the false ending, which is also explicitly a beginning, reveals the plot as only another appearance, again producing an infinite regression with which the reader must be satisfied (Bukatman, 1993, p. 112). Therefore, the ending of this novel is very subjective. According to Peter Fitting (1975) *Ubik* "refuses any final, definitive interpretation" (p. 51). In doing so, it prevents reading *Ubik* as "opening onto a transcendental meaning," and *Ubik*'s extremely subjective ending generates the insight that "the position of the observer is an extremely subjective perspective from which to deduce universal laws; that 'reality' is a mental construct which may be undermined at any time". Fitting also claims "for Dick there can be no single, final reality" (p. 52). Hence, we can reach to conclusion that the world of the novel is hyperreal and simulated world in which the line between illusion and reality is broken down, as Baudrillard argues, postmodern culture has become a culture of hyperreality, where real has been replaced with the hyperreal.

#### 4. Conclusion

*Ubik* demonstrates the breakdown of reality. In this story the boundaries between self and other, living and dead, public and private, creator and created and reality and illusion are disrupted. *Ubik* shows the impossibility of differentiating the authentic from the fake and reality from illusory. The events in the novel are divided into two phases. First, the events that lead to an explosion, and second, the events that succeed the explosion. This explosion is external aspect of what Baudrillard believes as implosion which means that due to the proliferation of signs and information in the media all distinction and boundaries between reality and illusory and every other binary opposition are obliterated. After the blast, characters experience process of regression. They begin to regress into the year of 1939. They discover objects and people around them in the process of regression. Gradually, Joe Chip understands that it is he who is actually dead and he lies in cold-pac. It is revealed that the survival of the half-lifers is endangered by a boy named Jory who is the symbol of evil power of capitalism. So characters are trapped in a techno-consumerist society which is that of the simulation and hyperreality. Their world is dominated by the objects which are even more vital than the human beings and characters are given an Inanimate role since as maintained by Baudrillard in the world of



the objects, subjectivity is disappearing. Though they are still in search of a transcendental signified to give meaning to their life and sustain their identity and their reality; however, since in hyperreal world the God is himself a simulacrum and he is not real, they replace him with Ubik which is the emblem of commodity fetishism. Hence, someone like Joe Chip has to keep buying it in order to fix his identity and not to be vanished. Thus, Joe Chip is seeking Ubik to sustain the state of world, self and identity.

Accordingly, in this novel, the technological innovation of half-life, as well as constant advertisement of the market, make it impossible for the characters in the novel to determine where objective reality exists. Characters are inundated in the culture of advertising. They are able to maintain their sense of reality only by imbibing commodity culture. As a result, Dick repudiates that consumption is what identifies the subject rather it threatens the identity of the subject. In the end, it is cleared that both the worlds of Runciter and Joe chip are simulated and they are living in a world in which the divine referential is dead. So there is no escape from this consumerist hyperreal society where commodities are ubiquitous and the scared is a simulacrum itself.

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