

**Crisis of Shared Affect in Human-Animal Relationship in Philip
K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?***

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Abstract

Background: Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* critiques humanity's failure to achieve intersubjective transformation and highlights the breakdown of shared emotional connections. The narrative delves into human characters' obsession with owning pets, revealing their motivations as less empathetic and more rooted in reinforcing human centralism.

Objective: This study investigates the human-animal relationship and human characters' fixation with animals in the novel, employing posthumanist perspectives to explore interspecies relationality and the concept of companion species.

Methods: The study employs a qualitative research design and textual analysis method to examine the primary text. It draws theoretical insights from posthumanism, particularly the works of Donna Haraway and other leading scholars on interspecies relationality. Secondary sources, including books, journal articles, and critical reviews, are utilized to scrutinize the crisis of affect in human-nonhuman interactions.

Findings: The analysis reveals that human characters in the novel aspire to keep animals primarily out of social obligation and moral duty. However, their motivations lack genuine

emotional connection, underscoring a crisis of affect in their interactions with nonhuman beings.

Conclusion: The study concludes that the human-animal relationship depicted in the novel reflects a superficial and obligation-driven dynamic, failing to achieve authentic interspecies relationality.

Novelty: This research contributes to the study of human-animal relationships and interdependence by offering a posthumanist critique of affect and interspecies relationality in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*.

Keywords: affect, human-animal relation, interspecies, posthuman

Introduction

The dynamic of human-animal relationship finds wider representations in literary texts. In a techno scientific world, where human dependencies on non-human entities are pervasive, the human's centrality confronts many challenges. In their endeavor to complicate human-animal dichotomy, critical scholars celebrate the texts that represent animals as a vital partner of interspecies relationality and critique the works that uphold human supremacy over animals. Looking into a zone of human-animal encounter as reflected in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, this paper examines the crisis of shared affect and critiques human failure to envision a companionable relationship with animals and a subsequent intersubjective transformation. It argues that since humanity lacks affective connection with animality, a tendency of othering animal remains intact. Thus, Rick Deckard and other human characters' obsession with pets does not sound truthfully empathic but surfaces as a strategy of endorsing human exceptionalism. Bound merely by social requirement and moral righteousness, the human characters dream of keeping animals. However, their fascination with the critters lacks affective attachment.

The novel represents animals, both genuine and electric, as muted and non-interactive objects to their human counterparts. In both cases, humans treat the animals as the inferior creatures. It indicates that humans do not accept a companion relationship with both animals and machines. Dick spotlights the dysfunctional relationship between humans and non-humans, particularly animals and machines. He questions the intersubjective and interspecies connectivity. Both forms of animals, living and electric are not accorded any agency. All animals exist emotionally isolated from humans. Whatever the form—alive or lifeless—humans exhibit only their proprietorial claim over the critters. Negating the agency of the beasts and denying their intrinsic value, human characters establish relationship with the animals on the basis of their market price and their sign value. The fetishization of the beasts only reinforces the politics of othering them.

Literature Review

The publication of the novel in 1968 has drawn worldwide critical responses concerning human-android-animal relationship. Observing how the text blurs the boundaries between the human and nonhuman, Huebert (2015) states, "Humans, androids, and electric and 'genuine'

animals do not exist in isolation. . . . On the contrary, they occupy shifting positions on a series of spectrums; where human, animal, and machine bleed into one another in a network” (p. 245). Huebert asserts the co-existence of human, animal and machine in the novel. However, he fails to specify the crisis of affective connectivity between people and critters. Vinci (2015) has studied the binaries— “human/android, authentic/fake, real/simulacra—in relation to . . . trauma and ethics” (p. 92). Vinci only explores the politics of othering in relation to the traumatic ethics while keeping the human-animal drama aside. Analyzing the role of affect that justifies human authenticity in human-machine relationship, Wheale (1991) argues, “*Do Androids Dream?* employs this idea of ‘affect’ to distinguish between a ‘person-Thing’ and a human entity: humanity experiences affect (and affect-ion), robots don’t” (p. 299). Wheale discusses about the idea of affect in relation to man-machine relationship. However, he has not investigated the absence of human affect towards beasts.

Analyzing the novel from the Lacanian perspective Moghadam and Porugiv (2018) point out, “how the technological advances in the narrative of the novel create, shape, and sustain the reality for controlling the mass as well as for commercial purposes, and how different characters perceive this reality in the course of the story” (p. 11). They highlight the technological advancement and its impact that is depicted in the novel. Kucukalic (2009) sees the reality of the novel “as a system of messages, the uninterrupted communication between humans and a variety of mechanical devices such as empathy box, Penfield mood organ, and TV announcement” (pp. 73-74). Kucukalic focuses on the smooth communication of man and machine. This communication has newly defined man-machine relationship.

Our survey of the existing scholarly debate on the novel has unfolded the interest of critics shown to it. Huebert points the co-existence of man, machine and animal and Vinci explores the politics of othering in the novel. Similarly, Wheale discusses the idea of affect in man-machine relation. Moghadam and Porugiv highlight the technological advancement and its effect and Kucukali the smoothness of man-machine communication. Despite the growing interest in the posthuman field, the current scholarship lacks the research focusing on the crisis of human-animal relationality in this novel. Considering this gap, this paper finds it worthwhile to investigate how Dick highlights the lack of affective companionship between humans and beasts in the post-apocalyptic world devastated by nuclear war, termed as World War Terminus.

Methodology

This research paper follows qualitative research design based on the library study. Textual analysis is the primary method used. Different scholarly publications specially books and journals are consulted in the process of data collection. Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* is the primary data under scrutiny. This text is analyzed from the posthuman perspective using the critical ideas of Donna Haraway to see how the novel presents the crisis in interspecies relationality.

Interspecies Relationality and Posthumanism: Theoretical Modality

For this study, we bring in the posthuman theoretical modality that focuses on interspecies relationality. Particularly, we bring in Donna Haraway's concept of companion species to analyze the crisis of affective relationship between humans and animals. Haraway argues that companionship occurs with "the implosion of nature and culture in the relentlessly historically specific, joint lives of . . . [animals] and people, who are bonded in significant otherness" (2003, p. 16). Animals and humans live together almost as a single being with bonds of shared purpose, understanding, and concern. She advocates a co-constitutively evolved relationship, which Dwyer (2007) terms as "the emotionally rewarding reciprocity" (p. 117). This association between two species dramatize how humans and beasts affect and get affected by one another. Highlighting the transformative goal of human-animal association, Braidotti (2013) calls upon "the interrelation human/animal as constitutive of the identity of each and . . . [as] a transformative or symbiotic relation that hybridizes and alters the 'nature' of each one and foregrounds the middle grounds of their interaction" (p. 79). Braidotti emphasizes on the symbiotic relationality through which species transform one another. But Dick depicts a scene of non-companionable relationship among the species. The human characters fail to experience the joint lives with the animal counterparts and significant change in their behaviors.

For the study, we use the notion of affect as a conceptual parameter to look into the relationship between humans and (especially pet) animals represented in the novel. Considering affect as a critical lens to examine the contact, Nyman and Schuurman (2016) state, "Relationships between humans and animals, especially those living within human society, may be scrutinized from the viewpoint of affect" (p. 2). They assert that affect can function as a catalyst in their association. Sara Ahmed defines affect as an emotional "experience of being affected by the other both bodily and emotionally, an aspect of the human-animal encounter that cannot always be comprehensively understood through language (as cited in Nyman & Schuurman, 2016, p. 2). Both people and critters get affected by the others and change their behavior accordingly through the shared emotion. But the novel depicts the absence of such affect and empathy in their relationship. Consequently, the participants fail to transform in their living patterns. It is only their necessity that forces Dick and other humans to take interest in animals. In a sense, humans' obsession for animals reflects their use for utility purpose: the goal to justify human position in the social and moral grounding.

Results and Discussion

This is the major part of this research work. It is a detail presentation of the textual analysis of the primary text using the critical insights of different theorists. In the discussion part, an attempt is made to show how the novel the author presents interspecies crisis or the crisis in the mutual relationship between human and animal.

Crisis of Shared Affect in Human Animal Relationship in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

The human characters associate the obsession for pets with their social positionality, moral responsibility and commodified mentality. Thus, their relationship is deprived of an emotional

disassociation with the critters. They reject animal agency for an interaction with them without considering them as fellow beings. Represented as silent, passive and emotionless creatures, animals nowhere in the novel engage in any mutual activity and interaction with humans for experiencing transformation. In this connection, Jürgens (2017) argues, “Intersubjectivity across species boundaries is the experiential stuff from which relationality is made (p. 27). Both animal and human characters such as Rick, Barbour and salesmen fail to experience the intersubjective relationality. In the opinion of Altola (2022), “how we value and treat other animals depend partly on how we emotively conceptualize them” (p. 84). Since humans lack genuine empathy for the animals, they treat the latter as the other without acknowledging the existence of animals as fellow species. The following discussion focuses on how the novel illustrates human motive of maintaining social status, fulfilling moral responsibility and commodifying animals denies animal agency for an intersubjective relationship.

Social obligation drives Rick and his neighbors’ motive of keeping animals for confirming their economic status. They do not intend to maintain an emotional bond with the pets. Their relationship lacks interspecies connectivity. Haraway (2008) posits that “both, human and . . . [animal], are cause and effect of each other’s movements. Both induce and are induced, affect and are affected. Both embody each other’s mind” (p. 229). Neither the real animals nor the electric types are assigned any role to influence and be influenced by people. In reality, human “owning and caring for an animal is a sign of the one’s social and economic status and also an expression of one’s humanity” not of reciprocity (Vint, 2007, p. 112). Humans tend to use animals just as status symbol. From the beginning, Rick, the main human character, is anxious about replacing his electric sheep with a genuine one. He plans to buy a real animal from the salary he gets for retiring the androids who have run away to the earth from the new human settlement in another planet, Mars. He longs for purchasing a genuine animal to impress his neighbor, Barbour who questions his status, “You poor guy. Has it always been this way?” (Dick, 1968, ch.1). Barbour boasts that his horse is an unmatched superior. Rick realizes that keeping a fake animal becomes a matter of shame and humiliation in the neighborhood. “To say, ‘is your sheep genuine? Would be a worse breach of manners than to imagine that to inquire whether a citizen’s teeth, a hair, or internal organs would test out authentic” (Dick, 1968, ch.1). More interestingly, the larger the animal one owns, the higher status one will earn. So, Rick tells Barbour, “I don’t want a domestic pet. I want what I originally had, a large animal. A sheep or if I can get the money a cow or a steer or what you have; a horse” (Dick, 1968, ch.1). Rick’s fetishization of animals does not arouse any affect but indicates the desire for fulfilling the social obligation and maintaining economic status.

The incident of the goat deal also demonstrates how Rick uses the beast just as a medium for locating his social and economic positionality. At a pet store, persuading Rick, who actually asks the price of rabbits, to buy the goat associating it with his social class the salesman replies, “The thing about rabbits, sit, is that everybody has one. I'd like to see you step up to the goat-class where I feel you belong” (Dick, 1968, ch.15). Keeping a goat signals a higher status than the one in owning a rabbit. After signing the deal, the triumphant Rick talks to himself, “I own

an animal now. A living animal, not electric. For the second time in my life. . . . We couldn't go on with the electric sheep any longer; it sapped my morale" ([Dick, 1968, ch.15](#)). His happiness reaches no boundary at purchasing a genuine goat, which will uplift his social position. But, his encounter with the beasts cannot generate an empathic effect on the goat. Necessitating the role of affect in relationship, Cheryl Nosworthy comments, "affect and emotion are not solely the property of humans but the animal is also affected by the human" ([as cited in Nyman & Schuurman, 2016, p. 2](#)). Neither Rick nor the goat affect nor do they, thereby, transform each other. The author represents the goat as a silent and mute object, deprived of emotional communication with her master. Rick's company with the goat lacks emotional affiliations and tends to fulfill a social value. Barbour changes in his attitude towards the Deckards when he greets them, "Hey, that's a nice-looking goat you have, Deckards. Congratulations. Evening, Mrs. Deckard. Maybe you'll have kids; I'll maybe trade you my colt for a couple of kids" ([Dick, 1968, ch.15](#)). Now Barbour considers the Deckard family as equal to his in the social rank. Hence, the urgency of the social need, forces Rick to have obsession with the pets and to uproot himself from the companion relationship.

Nowhere in the novel does Rick's concern for real animals evoke any empathetic feelings for them. He simply wants to acquire animals for achieving a social recognition. Even the killing of the goat does not arouse in him any empathy for the beast. Without losing hope for buying the next real animal, he ponders: "I still have my electric sheep and I still have my job. There'll be more andys to retire; my career is not over" ([Dick, 1968, ch.21](#)). He demonstrates his confidence about owning a real pet. As he finds a supposedly real toad after Rachael, an android, killed his goat, he becomes overjoyed. However, once the wife discovers that it is synthetic one, his face fell by degrees. He accepts the existence of electric animals. Though he acknowledges the life of synthetic beings, he does not change fundamentally in his motive of using animals for validating his social position. He still does not realize the value of interspecies communication, interaction and collaboration for the well-being of both. After losing the real goat, he prepares to define the social status even through possessing the electric one. Having no money for the real animal until he receives the bounty money, he consoles himself that he can manage with electric animals. Regardless of its type and nature, Rick's obsession for animals lacks empathy and emotions.

Humans' moral responsibility as a form of moral righteousness indicates yet another form of othering animals. In fact, humans use moral righteousness as a weapon to justify their superiority over the beasts. Morality is a constructed value that finds no place in the natural world of beasts. The novel portrays how humans link their moral responsibility with fetishization of animals. Human characters have a fixed set of attitudes towards the animals just as a means for fulfilling moral obligation: a responsibility which indicates that to be a human, one should keep animals. The moral righteousness does not propel a symbiotic relationship. Keeping a pet does not promote the "intentional connection'. . . from which arises a 'shared apperception' of one world shared by all subjects" ([Jürgens, 2017, p. 36](#)). Human subjects are supposed to interact with animal subjects through this connection. In a

world where animals are nearly extinct, humans are required to keep at least one animal as their moral duty. Claiming that it makes a difference when one does not possess at least one animal, Barbour reminds Rick of the moral pressure of having an animal: “But they'll look down on you. Not all of them, but some. You know how people are about not taking care of an animal; they consider it immoral and anti-empathic. I mean, technically it's not a crime like it was right after W.W.T. but the feeling's still there” (Dick, 1968, ch.1). The moral obligation forces the individuals to be humans distinguished from the animals by owning them. Apart from having moral responsibility of keeping pets, Rick and other humans, at heart, do not worry about the animals' affairs and sufferings. The incident of the death of the cat also evidences how humans treat animals just a means for fulfilling moral and social purpose. After being informed on the vidphone about the death of her cat, Mrs. Pilsen expresses her pain. But her tone immediately changes when Isidore mentions about the insurance policy and proposes to replace the cat with the exact electric replication. She agrees with a condition of “an electric replacement of Horace [dead cat] but without Ed [her husband] ever knowing; could it be so faithful a reproduction that my husband wouldn't be able to tell?” (Dick, 1968, ch.7). It reveals that her concern is only about the replacement, being almost untouched by loss of the cat which they had for a long time. Although this incident also merges the real animal with electric one it illustrates how people look indifferent to the beasties. Since, the moral righteousness creates hierarchy between the humans and animals, it becomes just a tool to justify the othering process that further pushes the humans out of the world of animals.

Human alienation from the animals becomes more intense as the people treat them as commodified objects. Every animal available, either real or fake, becomes a market good for sale. Braidotti (2013) considers how human-animal relationship turns into a matter of market economy: “major manifestation of the problematic and contradictory familiarity between humans and animals is linked to the market economy. . . [where] animals of all categories and species have been turned into tradable disposable bodies” (p. 70). People trade animals as commodities and judge their worth within the capitalist parameter of their market price. The following conversation between Rick as customer and the salesman about the goat deal demonstrates how the animals are treated as the objects of commodification in the novel:

“I've got three thou cash. . . .”

“How much,” he asked, “is that family of rabbits over there?”

“Sir, if you have a down payment of three thou, I can make you owner of something a lot better than a pair of rabbits. What about a goat?”

“I haven't thought much about goats,” Rick said. (Dick, 1968, ch.15)

Though Rick inquires about the price of rabbits but the salesman persuades him to buy a goat mentioning the advantages of investing in the beast. Buying animals means purchasing commercial products in the market. Rick entirely lacks “cognitively and emotionally interbeing with other life worldly creatures” (Jürgens, 2017, p. 34). He does not consider the goat as his partner, in the entanglement of the relations. Similarly, in response to Iran's worry about the death of the goat, he assures her, “I think there's a guarantee in the contract . . . If it gets sick

within ninety days the dealer” (Dick, 1968, ch.20). Without feeling any loss of the goat as his companion, he diverts his attention to the potential scheme of guarantee resulting as “the alienating effects of the commodity fetish” (Vint, 2007, p. 118). Associating the value of animal with market price ultimately leads to human-animal detachment.

Isidore stands as the only character who exhibits empathy for animals. Greenblatt (2016) identifies him to be “the most empathic (and empathetic) character, . . . empathizing even with mechanical animals” (p. 44). He invokes empathy for animals’ suffering. When Pris, an android girl, cuts off the four legs to test if the spider can walk on the remaining four legs, he requests her, “Please. . . Don’t mutilate it” (Dick, 1968, ch.18). In ultimately finding the spiders’ four legs being cut off, he gets depressed feeling “his mind, his hopes, drowned, too . . . [a]s swiftly as the spider” and utters, “I-don’t feel well” (Dick, 1968, ch.18). But his social positionality places him below the human category as a special: a person who mutates due to the radioactive fallout and gets a lower status. Most of humans look down upon the specials with disgust and accord no agency to them. As himself a victim of othering, his empathy for the beasts does not represent that of humans.

Finally, the novel also presents android-animal relationship in crisis. Machinic species victimize animals too. Haraway’s (2008) proposition of co-constitutive entanglements across “the machinic, human, and animal beings” does not operate in the novel (p. 261). Thus, the interspecies relationship turns dysfunctional not only between humans and animals but also between animals and androids. Despite having human qualities, the synthetic beings also exhibit cruelty to animals. For instance, upon the advice of her android friends, Pris cuts the spider’s legs for an experimentation to know whether it can move with only four legs. Similarly, another android Rachael kills Rick’s goat out of her revengeful motive against Rick who as a bounty hunter retires humanoid androids. In both incidents, animals become the target of machinic species like androids. Animal-machinic relationship projected in the novel challenges interspecies collaboration.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Philip K. Dick’s novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* represents a world of human-animal encounter with a crisis of intersubjectivity and mutuality. Human characters do not develop a symbiotic relationship with the non-human animals and thereby fail to experience a transformation necessary for the well-being of both the species. Functioning throughout the novel, the doctrine of speciesism and anthropocentrism disassociates humans from animals. No matter how much obsession human characters have with pets, they only attempt to justify human exceptionalism and othering of beasts in one or the other way. Humans overlook the human-animal bond as a one-way street not according agency to the animals other. By negating beastly agency, they retract from companionship with the animals and subsequent transformation in thoughts and life. Thus, fetishization of animals only represents the human motive of establishing social status, fulfilling moral obligation and endorsing commodified mentality, rather than developing an interspecies relationality grounded on the feelings of affect. By depicting a relationship that lacks the symbiotic bond

and shared affectivity between the humans and the beasts, the novel rectifies the politics of othering animals. This research recommends for the change in the anthropocentric love of human beings to animal. There should be compassionate love far from human centered mentality. This work has only examined the human-animal relationship in the novel from the perspective of posthumanism. This work opens ample opportunities for other researchers to explore the issues such as gender and human-machine relationship using other critical theories and conceptual parameters.

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