

New Forms of Space and Spatiality in Science Fiction

Edited by

Shawn Edrei, Chen F. Michaeli
and Orin Posner

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE ANXIETY OF THE ‘HUMAN’ IN PHILIP K. DICK’S SHORT FICTION

NITYA DATTA

The genre of Science Fiction has always had strong associations with a journey into the fantastic and the imaginary. Often in early SF literature, “space” and spatiality are associated with a materialist and scientific empiricism in the form of the “fantastic” such as intergalactic (physical) space travel (Roberts 2006b, viii). This chapter will attempt to redefine the contours of space to include the psychological space inhabited by the individual (assumed to be human), examining the construction of the “human” in the interiority of subjectivity in Philip K. Dick’s short fiction. SF as a genre generally allows for a restricted transformation of the self and the Other, where the Other is constructed as a binary opposite in the form of an alien or a technological Other (machines, computers and robots) (Roberts 2006a, 5). The ontological binary between the self and the Other appears more defined in early SF because of what can be characterized by the codes of the genre (Roberts 2006a; Parrinder 2000; Suvin 1972). According to these codes, the “I” is characterized as typically human, and in many instances acts as a placeholder for the reader’s own subjectivity, while the non-human tends to be alien and the technological derivatives of the Other, often suggesting a racial difference and hierarchy. In turn, the alien and technological Other also define the constrictive ways of who is viewed as “human”, as well as what is constitutive of the human.

Deviating from this strand of criticism, I argue that the psychological space of the characters offers a unique site to interrogate the binary of the human and the technological Other. I suggest that they are not binary opposites, but rather are constitutive of each other’s existence. “Space” in this essay therefore predominantly suggests the psyche of the individual rather than a physical space, without foreclosing the many ways in which physical space contributes to the way the psyche is formed and functions. I explore the interstices of the psychological and the technological, and