

*Fear, hope and the aesthetic act:*  
*metafictional devices in Philip*  
*K. Dick's The man in the high*  
*castle*

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**Abstract**

Taking into consideration scenes that evoke either fear or hope in the novel *The man in the high castle* (1962), this paper argues that Philip K. Dick's strategy involves the metafictional device of the book-within-the-book precisely because, in using such a foundational event as World War II, he allows for a critical look into different levels of history. These meta-movements that propel multiple readings are mimicked in the two dimensions of the story, by the circulation of objects that hold historicity, which are taken here as an example of how the aesthetic act is crucial to resist in totalitarian times. The apparently paradoxical forces that emanate from artifacts (the power of metaphors resides both in the fictional *The Grasshopper lies heavy* and the jewel) give room to the construction of different, and imaginative mechanisms to escape a univocal existence.

**Keywords**

Metafiction. Totalitarianism. Alternate history.

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In 1950, in an inspired essay about books and walls (BORGES, 2018, p. 189), Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges inquired about the latency of the aesthetic act – but not only the one pertaining to works of art. For him, human practices as opposite as the burning of sacred books and the building of the Wall of China were concrete examples of pure form, full of meaning in their plain existence, despite all the speculation one could make about them. Phenomena operating with the imminence of quiet revelations, these acts touch on the implications of historicity and storytelling: by erasing past narratives, would an emperor own history? Would artifacts, bricks and buildings, be able to carry stories, and retain any meaning without context? In showing the confluence of architectonic, social and political practices within an astute literary frame (as a meta-author that he was), Borges wondered about the vital, human force behind writing, or, rather, creating stories. In addition to capturing the fluid relation between acts of construction and destruction (inasmuch as they reveal the character of the same emperor who ordered such actions), the text resorts to the metalinguistic device not long after the subject matter of banning books was reality in Nazi Europe.

Elaborating on a wounded, uncertain modernity, some writers have imagined futures, like Ray Bradbury did with *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), forging a dystopian scenario to speak of books thrown into the fire. Others accessed distant times: in the form of a letter, Marguerite Yourcenar created *Memoirs of Hadrian* (1951). One author, however, decided to go straight to the defining moment in history that encapsulated all the contradictions of a destructive ideal of progress and used it as the plot of his novel: that is Philip K. Dick, with *The man in the high castle* (1962). As we shall see in this paper, as important as the World War II events that turned into alternative history, is the diegetic formulation of a book: one that tells, itself, of a reality in which the Allies were the victors. These strained forces that create, on one hand, utopian futures when the world would have been liberated by Nazism, and on the other, a fearful reality that could have been true, are intertwined thanks to a rich meta-play. We aim to explore how the choice for this form and content paradigm, although brought to life through a different perspective than Borges, evokes, in Dick's novel, the same tension coming off the reconstruction of the past. The aesthetic act, particularly in times of ruins, and arranged by a structure of self-referentiality (in the literary and historical spheres), proves to be an ideal, if not the only possible inductor of these feelings of imminent, unproduced revelation.

### A third level to history

The dynamics created in *The man in the high castle*, representing a world ruled by the Germans and the Japanese, are essentially referential and postmodern, insofar as they take on an event that is, itself, foundational of new historical views. The blurring of boundaries that characterizes sci-fi novels from the 50's and 60's (PALMER, 2003) here presents transactions between histories and stories that are lively and dialogical for the choice of World War II alone. The storylines constantly look back at a de-nazified present by challenging the reader with a tangible, possible scenario where, for instance, populations of Europe and Northern Asia were reduced to the status of slaves, and the technological impetus of Nazis was a reason for pride (DICK, 1992, p. 92). However, once established, the internal truth of this alternative reality is able to operate via its fictional characters with relative transparency, incorporating elements of drama and spy genres to subplots like Juliana Frink's relationship with ex-husband Frank and the killing of Joe Cinnadella. What creates, then, the real force of the novel is the appearance of a third vector of commentary: the fictional book *The grasshopper lies heavy*, written by the isolated man from the title, Hawthorne Abendsen. Whenever this diegetic contradiction of the story happens (an alternative to the alternate history), we witness the full responsibility in playing "revisionist" games bouncing back to the author. Astutely, Dick posits a third reality in which Stalingrad is no more our Stalingrad (DICK, 1992, p. 64), and Britain goes on to become an even more powerful empire (DICK, 1992, p. 87), bringing to the fore the theme of authenticity that permeates the entire novel. That notion of unremitting awe in light of events that escape our factual existence returns to the reader immediately after questioning Dick's own creatures. If *The grasshopper lies heavy* offers solid questions to characters like Juliana Frink, who notices the *I ching* guidance in the writing of the novel, why would not *The man in the high castle* be a source of warnings about our construction of the past?

In order to magnify these metafictional potentialities, Philip K. Dick suggests a fluidity between his artificial realms: at some point, high-ranking official Nobusuke Tagomi asks himself: "Where am I? Out of my world, my space and time." (DICK, 1992, p. 222) The realization he and Juliana experience about "inner" truths originate precisely from the aesthetic act, when the Edfrank jewel produces a revelation for the Japanese man (DICK, 1992, p. 219) and the fictional book's engine finally aligns to tell Juliana that, in fact, Germany and Japan lost the war (DICK, 1992, p. 246). The exchanges between these

three levels generate an instability finely attuned to the novel's main topic, on someone or something not being what they seem to be. In that sense, Dick shows how the mediation that shapes our national identities and understandings of history (THRALL, 2018, p. 217) is simultaneously necessary and unreliable, be it through official documents or literature. For that same reason, the author gives hints that this meta-historical process of revelations constitutes a resistance, or a strong faith in human reinvention after bestiality was normalized.

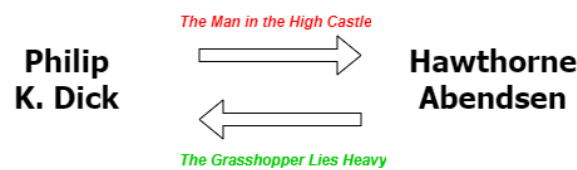


Figure 1: The constant exchange of histories, mediated by books.

The activation of clear vectors pointing in and outwards, by structuring writing and reading parameters that should conversely question each other's validity, ties into what Canadian theorist Linda Hutcheon described as a modern, "narcissistic narrative":

In diegetic narcissism, the text displays itself as narrative, as the gradual building of a fictive universe complete with character and action. In the linguistic mode, however, the text would actually show its building blocks – the very language whose referents serve to construct that imaginative world. That these referents are fictive and not real is assured by the generic code instituted by the word "novel" on the cover. (HUTCHEON, 1980, p. 28)

Interestingly enough, where one metafictional mode ends, related to Abendsen's remodeling of the post-WWII world, the other one starts, as it implicates Dick's own textual construction to a highly historicized, USA-centered making of (our) world. The effort in bringing, therefore, an Orientalized aesthetic force that fights against rigid endings, seems to work as a disclaimer: the author's part in fictionalizing an atrocious world-changing event will not leave him unscathed. By forging a "near equation of the acts of reading and writing" (HUTCHEON, 1980, p. 27), the novel sets the diegetic year of 1962 as an action-driven, seductive, but vacillating realm. As soon as the new revisionist vector is put into motion, the reader is invited to scrutinize their own written and definitive history, one Dick is part of and comments on.

In the moment Philip K. Dick creates a universe ruled by suspicion, brutality and institutionalized persecution with elements easily found not only during World War

II, but in human history, he certifies those attributes as foundational of our modern civilizations. When *The grasshopper lies heavy* tackles issues as horrendous as the “color problem” in 1950’s United States (DICK, 1992, p. 153), it is certainly showing through a fractured reflection that the “true history” of the Allies, too, was built upon inhuman acts. However, by pointing to the mere existence of a book that contradicts both worlds – one that has gone full Nazi; the other with the capacity to engage in a third global conflict – he points back at our reality with clear trust in better forms of life. Dick’s characters belong to a dark imagination that, page after page, is made possible, but as soon as some of them speculate about a parallel existence, we, components of the “absolute” reality, are forced to consider if Dick’s history and ours is monolithic, composed of hard facts, domination and war, or if there is room for agency, spirituality, art and individuality.

### **Feeling and filling the void**

A notable quality of the construction of fear in *The man in the high castle* is the ambiguity with which the author combines plot and characters. The frightful engine that institutes the diegesis somehow leaves many details for interpretation, so that an opposite, hopeful force comes to existence. The novel explores, for example, the loss of orientation in many situations, with a physical, visual perspective and with a historical one too. One morning, Mr. Tagomi wakes up in a rush, consults the *I ching*, and gets astonished by the physical effects of fear in his body once he learns about the Hexagram Fifty-one, which indicates a yet-to-come arrival (DICK, 1992, p. 157). The struggle to situate his own rationality in a situation that should not require such bodily response is summed up as the “dilemma of civilized man; body mobilized, but danger obscure.” That presage that manifests physically could very well be an expression of Tagomi’s ego’s instincts of self-preservation (FREUD, 1920), anticipating the fact that he is going to literally defend himself from a deadly attack and, worse, come to a late realization about the horrific state of the world under Nazi ideology. From real danger to a symbolic one, the man who starts to put together the pieces of a macabre system ends up feeling a true threat even in quiet times. The obscurity implicated in his political life, thus, is projected into a situation of despair comparable to a panic attack, like when he attends a session called upon the death of the Reich Chancellor (DICK, 1992, p. 90). He feels ill, disgusted

by the Nazi's tactics and personal goals. Tagomi's disorientation reaches a new peak after having a transcendental experience with the silver triangle forged by Frank Frink and sold by antique specialist Robert Childan. The sense of balance is gone (DICK, 1992, p. 223), and in spatial terms it is possible that the character does not belong anymore to the timeline he was supposed to. The aforementioned fluid realms are constantly remembered by this imminence of danger or revelation. More importantly, Dick describes Tagomi's epiphany as one surrounded by a "hopeless" environment, and while he "felt the void even more acutely" (DICK, 1992, p. 212). Considering the absence of trust in the political, metaphysical system in which he finds himself, the character is hit by a ferocious anxiety about the meaning of history-making in that time and space. This effect might illuminate the suspension created by Philip K. Dick, for the instability generated by those opposite meta-axes materializes in the character's bodies, and Tagomi is not the only case.

During a digression about the roots of the Nazi wickedness, Juliana Frink wonders about biological explanations that would render those German men "struck down by an internal filth" (DICK, 1992, p. 34), in a notably Nazi logic, defining degenerate people. Nonetheless, there is a possible angle of fear in that phenomenon, related to how the threat of contamination of minds and bodies by a Nazi disease affects Juliana's perception of the world. In jest or not, her thoughts associate rationality with good health – old Adolf, the origin of it all, would be in a sanatorium. The unreason is made visible to her, among other actions, in the persecution to Jews like her former husband, and rapidly takes shape as the terror of contagion that civilization should have tamed at least a century earlier (FOUCAULT, 1988, p. 202). It should be noted here that the turns observed as decisive by Michel Foucault predate the space and time described by Dick, but it is precisely a genealogy of madness that explains the association between the asylum and moral decay. The choice of isolating Adolf Hitler in *The grasshopper lies heavy* might be seen as a pure moral comment on the Nazi perversity, but also as an ironic take on the civilizational course, which, in order to establish Nazism as natural, had to render Hitler insane. Rudolf Wegener, who masquerades as Swedish businessman Baynes, is another one to reflect on the racial, genetic traits that would define the Nazi people. In his case, though, the "psychotic streak" that was common to those "madmen" (DICK, 1992, p. 38) induces a fear of his own character. As soon as he unveils his identity and does not need to pretend anymore, he feels he can "cease worrying", worrying about his "own skin" (DICK, 1992, p. 160). More than a character flaw, then, the Nazi menace,

devoted to ideas of superior races and eugenics, produces a wide range of fears, including one related to the body, cells, human heritage.

On the other side of the spectrum, some dread that their identity disclosure will send them to gas chambers, and that is the case of Frank Frink. He sees in the new jewelry venture a possibility to restore the faith in his own abilities, which, like his partner McCarthy advises, had been undermined by Nazi ideals that Jews cannot create (DICK, 1992, p. 46). The fear of failing, however, is immense. Frink's crippled personality is the result of years of suppression. The way out, for him, seems to involve filling the void, manufacturing metallic pieces that, not by chance, will have an "empty" quality, an "openness" subject to revelations. What later appears in *The man in the high castle* as a fascination with the jewel's unique presence goes back to this desire to retrieve the lost soul from the object, a Benjaminian aura (BENJAMIN, 2008) which, in this case, alludes to the reification, dehumanization of the creators themselves. In one point, Mr. Kasoura comments on the mass distribution of objects, inducing a "bug" in Childan's system. The sardonic comment on what is special and what is unique pervades the entire novel, and even if we are to believe that the jewels are authentic and carry a transcendental value, that is smartly contrasted between the East/West cultural construct, so that Dick's stance is ambivalent. Frink, accordingly, is afraid of never recuperating that full expressivity he was denied and, often, his nostalgia is linked to the old good times with Juliana.

The judo instructor, on her turn, engages in a relationship characterized by suspicion from both sides. Joe, besides cautiously trying to take advantage of Juliana's looks to approach Hawthorne Abendsen, fears the writer's capability to enter people's minds. The premise of killing the dissent, who under-disguise Joe simply considers a "wrong" author (DICK, 1992, p. 154), posits the importance of *The grasshopper lies heavy*. In this regard, institutionalized paranoia runs through the officials, corporations and the entire system, which is full of betrayals, alliances and surreptitious movements. Joe follows instructions to eliminate a danger turned real by estate propaganda. As symbolic as this process is, the plot and development in *The grasshopper lies heavy* find their way to appear as a real and concrete threat to the assassin. He did not imagine, however, that, through the *I ching's* tricks and secrets, the work of Abendsen's book would put Juliana in his way, to the point of taking his life. Ironically, the undercover agent did not fear the "right" person. Juliana Frink, at first attracted exactly by the Italian man's mysterious persona, is victim of an escalation of blind panic (DICK, 1992, p. 198) that mixes a quasi-autonomous reaction to an unprecedented desperation. Much like in

Tagomi's case, the act of killing to Juliana does bring a sense of dazzlement which comes after a long-lived, extreme uncertainty about the future. No pleasure or resignation, but an inkling that a (des)integration of this bizarre realm has just taken place.

"History is passing us by" (DICK, 1992, p. 112), thinks the resentful owner of an Americana antique shop, Robert Childan. The loss of control in the historical scheme is personified in this complex man: he shows signs of a colonized mind, yet keeps a romantic spirit, linked to North American's imperialism from the past (CARTER, 1995, p. 341). Encapsulating the could-have-been qualities of the USA as both a downgraded culture by the Japanese and a fanaticism for guns, Philip K. Dick offers a critical reading on the USA of his own period, as noted by some scholars (ROSSI, 2011, p. 85), for whom Dick's is essentially a Cold War novel. Not denying its own historical features, which do link to a specific proposal of America amidst Cold War events, we preferred to attain to the metaphorical qualities of the novel that tell of fear and hope mechanics. In that sense, Childan's submissive, sickened behavior reveals bigotry and a longing for times that were supposedly greater. The "anxiety and oppression" (DICK, 1992, p. 100) he feels, particularly in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Kasoura, evince how social relations are interwoven with cultural constructions imposed by historical events. The young Japanese couple with Western names humiliates the accultured Childan by showing off "refined" tastes and anti-racist arguments at a dinner. As acquainted as we might be with colonization processes throughout the globe, the idea of a North American man begging the acceptance of his colonizers, in 1962, is something else. Trembling with fear (DICK, 1992, p. 6), Bob Childan fails to calculate every step, as the Kasoura are as kind as they are enigmatic. These dynamics of suspicion and repressed hate are not contained to the mundane world of small sellers. What Dick explores here is, from top to bottom, a neurotic society, always prone to destroy reputations and subjectivities. Childan's self is frail, even childish at times: in a solitary go to the Nippon Times Building, he conjectures about an alternative reality where he would show his real feelings, "the side of a man which never comes out in public life." (DICK, 1992, p. 22). Such hindrance that impacts his life appears as a combination of anger, disgust, and envy (NUSSBAUM, 2018, p. 14), stopping him from experiencing interactions as he would like. That is to say, even the common man who is not in particular danger of being exterminated in that society suffers the process of lessening his own convictions, doubting every decision. Incapacity is enforced and framed by the government so that control over small and big situations does



not even seem possible. Even Frink's and Childan's imaginations are coopted by this logic, sabotaging scenarios with better prospects.

Another dimension of this world's fear-inducing culture is the one constantly bringing the past back. As mentioned, each segment of society is tainted with the genocide marks, with slavery traumas. Nazi bureaucrats, like Hugo Reiss, have to blindly follow orders that deal with these never-ending war afflictions. The constant conflict enforced by the Axis rulers (particularly against minorities) shows up in the internal quarrels for rankings and in the attitude of eternal expansion around the globe and to conquer the outer space. Severing ties with Earth (ARENDR, 1998) would, then, simply continue a tendency of shattering identities inside the planet, or not valuing life at all. The way Dick jokes about human errors repeating in outer space actually touches rather on continuation, but the logics of colonization and exploitation fundament the making of his Nazi world. Persecute Jews even in Mars (DICK, 1992, p. 73), if necessary, and a legion will come after, fearful of its own shadow. A perennial state of war, notwithstanding, is likely to cause fissures. It is not by accident that Reiss ponders: "Does it have to go on forever? The war ended years ago. And we thought it was finished then." (DICK, 1992, p. 123). The officer has started the reading of *The grasshopper lies heavy*, so the traumatic events he is responsible for will haunt him as soon as Abendsen's alternate reality points back at him, not with facts, but with a "truer", more resonant account about the war. As Juliana later realizes in her journey, truth is as terrible as death, but harder to find (DICK, 1992, p. 248). For those in charge of important decisions, in theory turning history's wheels, the daily events and orders that compose social and political fields naturalize certain assumptions of what is true or not. What those who get to know *The grasshopper lies heavy* end up perceiving is that some practices of the real world have been built on fragile grounds, to the point that an entire ruling system operates via inauthentic premises, which will hardly ever allow for "inner truths" to be accessed. What is that if not a parallel to the reading mechanism in which *The man in the high castle* is itself inserted?

### **Imperishable seeds**

The last chapter of the novel, when Juliana meets Abendsen and together they find out the hexagram Chung Fu/Inner Truth for *The grasshopper lies heavy*'s actions, sheds light to the intricate thread that constitutes *The man in the high castle*. The

redemptive feature that some objects and texts present weave into the historical fabric on a personal and collective level. That openness escapes the totalitarian mentality, distinctly for their inflexible telling of history erases identities and produces violent metanarratives. Trusting the capacity of a book to reveal something would actually be a leap of faith in its “face value” (DICK, 1992, p. 243), as the man in the high castle points out, and that is comparable to trusting human nature. From that we can see how the immanence of the silver triangle fits a perception of the aesthetic act as the salvation to a utilitarian world. Taken as absolutes within the Nazi, imperialistic logic, the book and the jewel would only be able to conform to categories of authenticity, like the weaponry of Childan’s store. However, the transcendentalism of fiction, affect, and fantasy surges as a disruptive element that can change the course of history. Way before this last encounter, which leaves Juliana Frink carefree, certain that she “won’t let certain things worry [her] no matter how important they are” (DICK, 1992, p. 248), we see throughout *The man in the high castle* several examples of either a relief to apprehension, guilt and rage issues or an inversion from fear to belief and hope.

Many of these moments are related to Mr. Tagomi, who has a deep connection to the *I ching* and learns the hard way about the vileness of the government he cooperates with. In theory, Tagomi is what bridges Philip K. Dick to the Oriental culture, as in the character that goes through a journey of better understanding the USA situation, while still possessing a mindset that does not match his environment. This becomes clear in the part about coded messages fooling the Nazis because they were poetic, metaphoric (DICK, 1992, p. 20). Beyond divergent world views, Dick is pointing to modes of apprehending reality. If literature is supposedly a safe place to exercise the potential of metaphors, the author makes *The man in the high castle*’s action, structure and characters an ode to the metaphorical reach, which is basically infinite – but always comparative, human-scaled. It should be noted that the option for evidencing the physicality of the redeeming objects (*I ching*, the jewel) might also infer a deeply non-metaphorical view on our relation to the world. This ambiguity, rather than solvable, makes for one more tension in the novel. Tagomi, circulating through different cultures and subject to a transformative arc, would be apt, for that matter, to decode ciphers, the most glaring example being the Edfrank workmanship. Sat down on a bench of an open park, the trade official scrutinizes the object in his hands, talks to it, wonders if something will come (DICK, 1992, p. 217), arrive, reveal. It is in all of its emptiness that the little metal awakens something in Tagomi, thanks to the sunlight hitting the piece. A “microcosmos

in [his] palm” (DICK, 1992, p. 220), the jewel conveys an experience of decay, the past, together with a full living force, as paradoxical as the pairing might look. A faithful description of the writer’s endowment, that moment interconnects characters and timelines to put forward the notion of integration. Not filled by mere accidents, nor fossilized decisions, the course of history in *The man in the high castle* presents cracks in a self-assured system.

Nobusuke Tagomi, in seeking in other realms (DICK, 1992, p. 218) the answers for deep concerns, opens up one more layer of convergence with the work of the writer. In a conversation with Mr. Baynes, he also speaks directly of book-oracles, books that are alive (DICK, 1992, p. 66). Again, an apparent contradiction, which is an object gaining life, goes well with the truth and fiction, accident and decision, form and content philosophical pairings. As we noted, instead of attributing fixed meanings or characters to these variables, Philip K. Dick opted to show how the interaction of contrasting elements (stemming from colonization, war and cultural phenomena) could indicate outs to our misery, as fanciful as they might sound. That does not lead to plain resolution, quite the opposite. Tagomi himself goes to show that complete disillusion could be the only answer in times of despotism. Still, out of hope for redemption, his own actions changed the course of Frink’s life, for instance. The same can be said about Juliana rampantly killing Joe and thus saving Hawthorne. The richness of Tagomi’s message to Hugo Reiss after his queasiness at the Nazi conference touches on that ambivalence: “We are all insects, groping toward something terrible or divine.” (DICK, 1992, p. 94). All at once, the character alludes to Hawthorne’s book title, to the dehumanizing Nazi mindset, to the delicacy of bodies and ideologies. Metaphors operating in full mode to, on one hand, escape brutality, on the other, to offer a counter-reality.

Two of the characters “in disguise” that survive in the end indicate possibilities to start afresh: Rudolf Wegener aka Baynes – “But as to the rest – we can just begin” (DICK, 1992, p. 160) – and Frank Frink, who at first is spooked by the *I ching* prospects for his new enterprise with Ed McCarthy: “War! he thought. Third-World War! All frigging two billion of us killed, our civilization wiped out. Hydrogen bombs falling like hail.” (DICK, 1992, p. 48), but later models the object that, ultimately, will lead to Tagomi’s epiphany and liberate him from prison. When the latter happens, the description resorts to figurative mode, as well: “New life, he thought. Like being reborn.” (DICK, 1992, p. 231). The fact that Frink’s metallic piece circulates (like *The grasshopper lies heavy* does) among the main characters and somehow operates small changes even on

Bob Childan's narrow mind – “This is the new life of my country, sir. The beginning in the form of tiny imperishable seeds. Of beauty.” (DICK, 1992, p. 215) – inspires a reading, once again, that places aesthetic practices as risk-takers to combating the fear-ridden stasis portrayed in the novel. As small as these inspiring pieces of human production or knowledge might be (SIMONS, 1985, p. 266), they carry historicity and dialog with present times, and escape the functionality that cannot restrain art; they escape, essentially, a totalitarian vision of the world.

Considering an important element ensued by those artifacts, that of imagination to resist, we can refer to Martha Nussbaum's claim that “imaginings and fantasies” are active assets in the determination of what actually is fear and what is hope (NUSSBAUM, 2018, p. 155). The American philosopher challenges the idea that hope might only be defined through its idle characteristics – and as we observed, the dynamics coming out and from the fictional books belong to a world of active imagination. In that regard, Childan's remark on “beauty” is the best description of the process of realization, differentiation between fearing and hoping: the long-awaited, hard aesthetic act startles the man precisely because it builds a future through words, images, metaphors. This self-assured “vision” is a practical step in the subversion of fearful worlds, it is an act that is capable of transforming entire societies. In using Childan as a vehicle for this flipping in social imaginations, Philip K. Dick makes visible the device he was going for all the way: mediated by books and human artifacts that hold historicity, his characters are constantly exchanging fantasies of fear and hope – in a metafictional effort that beautifully comments on our own history of war and resilience.

### **Final considerations**

The active negotiations between societies and the texts or objects that concurrently preserve the past and suggest a future can be strikingly emancipatory, especially in times of limited freedom. Aware of the potentialities inherent to the alternate history subgenre in literature, Philip K. Dick took a step further and created in *The man in the high castle* a book-within-the-book, a powerful generator of new tensions, countering the counter-history. The meta-play that works so tightly within the plot is responsible for bringing the reader's attention to this third layer in history, one that at first escapes our common cultural shared space, and is ruled by German and Japanese officials, then detours for a second alternative offered by *The grasshopper lies heavy*, to finally

arrive back at our own, transformed by the force of aesthetic experiences, including the one enabled by the book itself. By dramatizing the tensions (HUTCHEON, 1980, p. 150) lived by the readers inside his book, Dick forges the perfect space for a vastly self-reflexive act by us, active readers of *The man in the high castle*.

Owning to an intricate dynamic between the form and content that takes the subject of its own characters to build the story (writing a book about World War II; trying to find redemption in somber times; recognizing what kind of agency is possible in history-making), *The man in the high castle* operates fundamentally with ambiguous themes and descriptions: identity, spirituality, authenticity. They come to life through a constant movement along the novel between forces of fear and hope. Feelings that compel the characters to fight, manipulate, save others, find answers, hide motives, forge situations and objects, they speak of Dick's sagacity in making his own novel available in terms of a history-modifier, considered a critical reading of the period *The man in the high castle* was written.

The perception that even inside absolutist, dystopian realities, there are deities waiting to be awakened (DICK, 1992, p. 218) is neither too optimistic or fatalist: it suggests that interactions between realms, cultures and timelines are paramount to understanding history, from an individual, mundane perspective or a collective, governmental one. As impossible as it may sound, books and handicrafts, stories and histories, are actively waiting to tell us something.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude for the guidance of Professor Dr. Isabel Capelo Gil, in times of isolation and fear.

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## **MEDO, ESPERANÇA E O ATO ESTÉTICO: DISPOSITIVOS META-FICCIONAIS EM O HOMEM DO CASTELO ALTO, DE PHILIP K. DICK**

### **Resumo**

Página | 46

A partir de cenas a evocarem ora medo, ora esperança, na obra *O homem do castelo alto*, o artigo propõe que a estratégia de Philip K. Dick envolve dispositivos meta-ficcionais como o “livro dentro do livro” precisamente em função de sua escolha por um evento tão fundante como foi a Segunda Guerra Mundial, para então possibilitar visões críticas em diferentes níveis históricos. Tais meta-movimentos, que impulsionam múltiplas leituras, são então refletidos nas duas dimensões da estória, através da circulação de objetos a conter historicidade – algo tomado como exemplo da potencialidade do ato estético em meio a tempos totalitários. As forças aparentemente paradoxais a emanarem de artefatos (o fulgor das metáforas reside tanto no fictício *O gafanhoto torna-se pesado* quanto na joia) abrem espaço para a construção do diferente, e de mecanismos imaginativos que escapam a existências unívocas.

### **Palavras-chave**

Metaficção. Totalitarismo. História alternativa.

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Recebido em: 06/08/2020

Aprovado em: 18/11/2020