

**OPPONENT'S REPORT**  
**MA THESIS**  
**Mental and Ontological Simulacra:**  
**Non-Rationality and Non-Reality in Works by Philip K. Dick**  
Bc. David Kudrna

According to the abstract, the thesis “offers a model for the underlying architecture of the narrative reality in science-fiction works by Philip K. Dick, arguing that Dick’s fictional worlds are grounded in the pervasive metamorphosis—the overarching perception of the *shifting*—of the narrative fabric operating under the conditions of *non-rationality* and *non-reality*” (6, original emphasis). Rather than utilizing “the seemingly natural dichotomizing oppositions and hierarchies of the real/unreal and the rational/irrational” (6), David Kudrna aims to explicate “the instability of PKD’s narrative realities” (6) through Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy of difference. To this end, Kudrna coins the expressions Non-Ra and Non-Re. He discusses three novels: *We Can Build You*, *The Martian Time-Slip* and *Clans of the Alphane Moon*.

Following the introduction, the second chapter intends to present the criticism of Philip K. Dick’s works by Fredric Jameson, Umberto Rossi, Douglas Mackey and Jennifer Simkins, with additional references to possible world theory (Marie Laure Ryan). Unfortunately, Kudrna’s engagement with these critics’ work is rather superficial. Further critical studies and collections of essays on PKD’s work are listed in the bibliography (Dunst & Schlensag, Kucukalic, Palmer, Sutin, Umland) but it is not clear how they were utilized in the thesis as there are no references to them. This is true also of other works mentioned in the bibliography, namely Carl Freedman’s monograph on science fiction (which includes a discussion of PKD), R. D. Laing’s *The Divided Self* and Branimir Rieger’s collection *Dionysus in Literature*. Not being a Deleuze scholar, I cannot comment well on the third chapter; however, in my view it does not engage with Deleuze’s work in much meaningful depth either. Again, although the bibliography mentions four major works of Deleuze (and Guattari), the thesis itself for the most part relies on Todd May’s *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction*, with the exception of three very brief quotes from *Difference and Repetition* and *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Could Kudrna explain how he used the critical works listed in his bibliography? Could he elaborate on the reasons why he decided to coin the expressions Non-Ra and Non-Re instead of building on other critics’ considerations of PKD’s fictions of “ontological instability”?

Regarding the actual analysis in chapter four (which constitutes about a half of the thesis) and the conclusion, my first question concerns the choice of these particular (early) works of PKD. Does Kudrna see any development of PKD’s fictions of “reality shifting” in his later work? What, in his view, are the reasons behind PKD’s production of “ontological uncertainty”? And finally, what is achieved through this instability of PKD’s fictional worlds and his characters? The conclusion argues that the novels illustrate how “we can tear ourselves away from a static, deadlocked reality” and “creat[e] for ourselves a vision of the universe as multiplicity and of being itself as becoming” (64) which I take to mean that according Kudrna, PKD’s objective was postmodern pluralism and undifferentiated perspectivism. How could this conclusion be contrasted for example with the argument that PKD’s fiction “depicts the lived discovery of ideology” and is “an eloquent testimony to the force and loneliness of his refusal to accept ‘reality’ as something given and of the hope which led him to dream the transformation of the world” (Peter Fitting, “Reality as Ideological Construct: A Reading of Five Novels by Philip K. Dick”). For me, perhaps the most troubling aspect of the thesis is that it practically avoids the question of how these novels relate to extra-textual reality, the fact that they are science fiction (or perhaps meta-science fiction, as some critics suggested) and that science fiction does not produce estrangement for estrangement’s sake.

**Proposed grade:** Dobře (3)

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