

Christian Strowa

Things Don't Like Me

Paranoia, McCarthyism and Colonialism
in the Novels of Philip K. Dick

Christian Strowa

Things Don't Like Me

**Paranoia, McCarthyism
and Colonialism
in the Novels of Philip K. Dick**

 Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

Strowa, Christian:

Things Don't Like Me –

Paranoia, McCarthyism and Colonialism

in the Novels of Philip K. Dick / Christian Strowa. -

Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2008

ISBN 978-3-86821-035-4

Cover Illustration: Sebastian Klement

Cover Design: Brigitta Disseldorf

© WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2008

ISBN 978-3-86821-035-4

No part of this book, covered by the copyright hereon,
may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means
without prior permission of the publisher.

WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

Bergstraße 27, 54295 Trier

Postfach 4005, 54230 Trier

Tel.: (0651) 41503

Fax: (0651) 41504

Internet: <http://www.wvttrier.de>

E-Mail: wvt@wvttrier.de

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank

Prof. Dr. Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp, for her kind help, inspiring thoughts and patient supervision during the writing of this publication and way beyond,

Prof. Dr. Eliot Borenstein, who taught a wonderful CompLit seminar on Paranoid Fiction at NYU in 2004 and brought Yuri Olesha's *Envy* to my attention,

Prof. Dr. Marion Gymnich, for always being available, helpful and patient,
Prof. Dr. Frank Kearful, for keeping me updated on all things PKD,
Dr. Michael Butter, for his thoughts on *The Man in the High Castle*,
the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), for giving me the opportunity to spend an invaluable year at New York University,
WVT publishing, for giving me the opportunity to let loose my thoughts onto a wider public;

For analyzing my paranoid textwork:

Shawn, who enabled much of my research by providing me with a place to stay – and my mind with places to go –,
and Katherina for being there when it mattered most – which, as Dick once wrote, is to say always.

Finally, for their continued moral (and financial) support, my father and my mother, who, way back in the early 90s, gave me a bent and battered book, awkwardly titled and discarded from our local library, thinking it might interest me because it had robots on the front cover and thus unknowingly sparking my interest not only in Sci-Fi, but literature in general. The name of the book was *Träumen Roboter von Elektrischen Schafen?*, and it is the reason why this publication exists today.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	9
2. Paranoia	12
2.1. Paranoia in Psychology	12
2.1.1. Freud on Paranoia	12
2.1.2. The Problem of Group Paranoia	16
2.1.3. Jung and the UFO Phenomenon	16
2.2. Paranoia in American Politics: McCarthyism	19
2.2.1. Political Background	20
2.2.2. The McCarthy Hearings	22
2.2.3. The Lonely Crowd	24
2.3. Paranoia and Postmodernism	27
2.3.1. Paranoia vs. Schizophrenia	27
2.3.2. Postmodern Theories of Paranoia	29
3. Colonial Paranoia in Philip K. Dick	33
3.1. Science Fiction and Paranoia	33
3.1.1. Paranoia in Art	33
3.1.2. Science Fiction and Colonialism	35
3.1.3. Paranoid Writing and Philip K. Dick	41
3.2. The Fear of Infiltration: <i>Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?</i>	43
3.2.1. Dick's Writing Technique	43
3.2.2. Man, Android, Machine	45
3.2.3. Mimicry	51
3.2.4. Hope and Mercerism	54
3.3. Invasions of the Mind: <i>The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch</i>	61
3.3.1. Hybridity	61
3.3.2. Two Kinds of Hell	64
3.3.3. Religious Imperialism	67

3.4. Schizophrenia and Breakdown: <i>Martian Time-Slip</i>	72
3.4.1. Periphery and Center in Paranoid Systems	72
3.4.2. Schizophrenia and Loneliness	76
3.4.3. Progress and Regress	78
3.5. Counter-factual History: <i>The Man in the High Castle</i>	81
3.5.1. Reverse Colonialism	81
3.5.2. Mirror Images	84
3.5.3. High Castles	86
4. Conclusion	90
5. Works Cited	93

1. Introduction

For the United States, the 1950s were a time not only of social and economic welfare, but also of Cold War paranoia, culminating in the Communist witch-hunt of the McCarthy era and the fear of a third World War. Government distrust, conspiracy theories and widespread paranoia found their expression in films and literature, although overall, the image of an intact family, neighborhood, and, ultimately, country led to a downplaying if not outright suppression of domestic concerns regarding race, gender and human interaction. It was arguably not until the 1990s, with authors like Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo gaining mainstream recognition and the TV-Show *The X-Files* becoming a mass phenomenon, that paranoia became a central part of Western pop-culture, while as of late, the events of September 11th have started a whole new wave of conspiracy theories and government distrust.

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that Hollywood has only recently begun to discover one of the most prolific writers of paranoid fiction in 1950s America, the Californian Science Fiction writer Philip K. Dick (1928 – 1982), on whose books and ideas such films as *Minority Report*, *Total Recall*, *Blade Runner*, *A Scanner Darkly* and, at least to some extent, *The Matrix* are based.

Despised as a writer of trash or pulp-literature at the time, Philip K. Dick, himself suffering from a constant paranoid fear of being watched by the FBI, turned to Science Fiction in a way maybe comparable to the way in which ancient Greek and Roman writers of fables turned to animal-stories to illustrate their points. The impossibility of saying what he wanted to say openly and directly led to a masking of meaning under a web of characters and topoi usually associated with a different, less harmful, less respected and in effect less read genre.

Philip K. Dick was not only a man of many ideas, but also of many publications (as of now, more than 35 of his novels and more than 130 of his short stories have been published, with still a few previously unpublished ones scheduled for release in the imminent future). While a lot of attention has been given to Dick's ever shifting realities and his quest for "the real", the focus here will be on his frequent use of another Science Fiction topos, namely that of paranoia in connection with colonization and imperialism.

The colonization of other planets (“space” itself being a problematic, since ambivalent term) as well as the colonization of Earth by alien invaders is an age-old element of Science Fiction literature, ranging from H.G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds* (and its 2004 cinematic remake) to highly successful contemporary movies and TV series such as *Independence Day* (1996), *Space: Above and Beyond* (1995-1996) and *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2008). With Dick, though, the idea of an alien invasion (or the invasion of a hostile, alien planet) is not a mere excuse for starship-battles and laser-fights, as is sadly so often the case in Science Fiction movies. Instead, colonization is deeply linked with paranoia and the changes Dick observed in the society around him.

Though the novels of Dick discussed here were all written in the 1960s, they are nevertheless deeply influenced by the (sub-)culture of 1950s California, in which Dick grew up. Jameson writes of “the America of the 1950s, in which Dick’s imagination is immobilized as in a time capsule” (2005, 381) and of “Dick’s [...] nostalgia for the American 1950s” (83). Thus, after the term “paranoia” has been defined in psychoanalytical terms through the writings of Freud, who popularized the term, and Jung, by whose writings Dick was deeply influenced, it will then be applied to an analysis of the political and social background Dick grew up in, culminating in the paranoia of Communism during the McCarthy era and the social change observed by Riesman et al. in *The Lonely Crowd*.

The first part will end in a discussion of paranoia in contemporary culture, including a look at the notion of schizophrenia, which recurs time and again in the writings of Philip K. Dick. Due to the problematic nature of the term “paranoia” and its relevance for American culture not only in the 50s but also today, the first part is devoted to a clarification of the term and presents an overview of the various ways in which it has been used and the manifold theories it has spawned. Since theories of paranoia can be found almost anywhere within Western culture, this first part will in itself link elements from different fields and epochs in order to create a “network of meaning” for the term.

The novels of Philip K. Dick which are discussed in the second part all exhibit traits of paranoia, the social side of which is in all four cases linked to ideas of colonialism. First, there is the fear of Earth (or, more specifically, America) being colonized by alien races, the colonizer’s fear of being colonized either in an open, imperial way as in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, or secretly, from within, as in *Do Androids*