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# *Coin-operated doors and pirated toasts: reflections on capitalism from Philip K. Dick's Ubik to Cory Doctorow's Unauthorized Bread*

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### 1. Introduction

Fredric Jameson once wrote that it is easier for us to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism<sup>1</sup>. This quasi-ubiquitous statement has by now achieved an almost axiomatic status among scholars of utopias and dystopias, as they set to analyse seemingly endless versions of the future and end up smashing into the impenetrable wall of capitalism. This socio-economic system survives in idealised, collapsing and, at times, post-apocalyptic societies, signalling that not even the end of the world might make away with it. Yet, as Ursula K. Le Guin countered in one of her last public appearances, «We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art—the art of words.»<sup>2</sup> Although Le Guin certainly inspires hope for change, one that can take us beyond the constraints of capitalism as we know it today, for the time being we are without a doubt still trapped within it. More precisely, we are deep into what has been called *late capitalism*.

Unfailingly, literature has recorded critiques of the many ills of a form of economic and social system that seems on the verge of collapse—and yet does not die. As capitalism evolved in the last century, so did the criticisms that literature expressed, more or less overtly. In what follows, thus, two texts written fifty years apart will be analysed to see what criticism they extend to the economic system of their time and whether they validate Le Guin's abovementioned claim of literature as the herald of change. The first is Philip K. Dick's *Ubik* (1969), one of the most well-known texts in science fiction, and the second is Cory Doctorow's novella *Unauthorized Bread* (2019).

Set in 1992, *Ubik* follows a group of Runciter Associates employees, most of them 'inertials' (people with psychic powers who can negate the powers of 'precogs'<sup>3</sup> and telepaths), as they embark on a corporate mission to the Moon. Once there, they are caught in a blast which kills Glen Runciter, who is placed in a cryogenic pod ensuring he continues to exist in a state of 'half-life', much like his long-deceased wife Ella. Once back on Earth, the others start experiencing inexplicable changes in reality, with objects reverting to older phases of their existence and the characters shrivelling away and dying as they travel back in time. Only *Ubik*, a mysterious aerosol spray, seems to counter the devastating effects of this collapse of reality. Eventually, it is inferred that all the characters apart from Runciter have actually died and they are being drained by an evil entity known as Jory as they exist in half-life.

Set in an alternate version of contemporary Boston, Doctorow's *Unauthorized Bread* focuses on Salima, a refugee who lives in a Dorchester Towers subsidised flat, as she deals with her kitchen appliances refusing to accept 'authorised' products (i.e., those sponsored by their producers) because their corporations have gone bankrupt. Salima, unable to use her toaster, dishwasher, and washing machine, becomes a self-taught hacker and jailbreaks (i.e., unlocks) her and her neighbours' appliances, granting them the freedom to choose whichever product to use and angering the Dorchester Towers management, as they used to receive a cut of the profits from the appliance companies. The novella ends with Salima befriending an employee of Boulangism—one of the (resurrected) corporations—thus receiving the inside information that allows her to stay one step ahead of the corporate hounds trying to frame her for corporate theft.

Dick's *Ubik* has been the subject of a plethora of studies, and interest in its author's life and works has only grown with time, as his exceptional impact on the science-fictional imagination has become apparent. New studies such as *Philip K. Dick: Essays of the Here and Now*, edited by David Sandner (McFarland, 2020) or *Il mondo secondo Philip K. Dick* by Carlo Pagetti (Oscar Mondadori, 2022) attest to the perduring fascination of SF scholars towards Dick and his oeuvre. Regarding the novel under analysis, I point here only to Peter Fitting's essay "*Ubik*": *The Deconstruction of Bourgeois SF* (1975)<sup>4</sup>, which remains one of the most acute investigations of the novel despite its age. Fitting centres his analysis on the «reality problem»<sup>5</sup> — that is, on the interpretation of the chaotic, schizophrenic tangle of events, settings, and consciences that make up the text. He remarks on its metaphysical elements, one of Dick's recurring themes (think, for instance, of *The Man in the High Castle* [1962] or *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* [1964]), and on the form of the novel, which exemplifies beautifully the postmodern need to deconstruct. In what follows, his analysis will be expanded to include a more explicit criticism of the economic system portrayed by Dick, and of the stylistic choices Dick made to express it.

Doctorow's novella is less concerned with ontological takes on reality; rather, it attempts to

dramatize two of the ills of our contemporary western society: the overbearing power of mega-corporations and the inhuman treatment of refugees. As such, it remains as rooted in reality as possible for a work of speculative fiction. Published precisely fifty years after *Ubik*, *Unauthorized Bread* is symptomatic of a bigger change in the genre, which has steadily been drawing closer to reality (and to realism) since the second half of the twentieth century.

## 2. A few notions on the diachronic evolution of capitalism

Capitalism is not a monolithic economic system – much like any other human invention, it changes as societies (d)evolve. In the Fifties, right after the end of the second global conflict, the West was characterised by the mass production of goods.<sup>6</sup> In the past seventy years, however, capitalism has shifted away from manufacturing as its main driving force and has moved towards services, entering its so-called post-industrial phase. Service economies are based on «knowledge-intensive industries and services in economic production, well-educated workers in the occupational market, and innovating firms in business.»<sup>7</sup> As of 2022, we are entrenched in a service-centred economic system at the global level, with huge service-based corporations controlling large swathes of the national and international markets. Even companies whose core business is purportedly a product have fallen down the rabbit hole of servicing—resulting in goods surrounded by a constellation of add-ons consumers cannot opt out of.

The shift away from tangible goods towards intangible services was noted as early as the Fifties<sup>8</sup> and throughout the rest of the twentieth century, as it became more and more evident.<sup>9</sup> The turning point, though, is traditionally identified with the advent of the Information Age in the Seventies, as described by Alain Touraine (1969)<sup>10</sup> and Daniel Bell (1973)<sup>11</sup> in their theorisations of the post-industrial society. Per Bell,

«[t]he infrastructure of industrial society was transportation—ports, railroads, highways, trucks, airports—which made the exchange of goods and materials possible. The infrastructure of post-industrial society is communication [...]. An industrial society, from Ricardo to Marx, is based on a labor theory of value, and the development of industry proceeds by labor-saving devices, substituting capital for labor. A post-industrial society rests on a knowledge theory of value. Knowledge is the source of invention and innovation. It creates value-added and increasing returns to scale and is often capital-saving in that the next substitution (e.g., fiber optics for copper in communications cables) uses less capital and produces a more than proportional gain in output. Knowledge is a collective good.»<sup>12</sup>

With the advent of the internet, information has become well and truly ubiquitous. If knowledge is the currency of our post-industrial time, then, the socio-economic power dynamics revolve around who gatekeeps it, who produces and manipulate it, and who, ultimately, can contribute to turning information into profit. As we will see momentarily,

Doctorow's novella problematises the commodification of knowledge, staging a strong critique of the post-industrial society, while Dick's novel ridicules the obsessive consumerism of the Fifties and Sixties. At times profoundly funny, these texts exploit their ironic value to make the ills of their respective socio-economic contexts emerge, ensuring that readers of all backgrounds can access their critiques. This in no way invalidates the acuteness of their socio-economic commentary; literature has long been an untapped source of reflection on the state of our societies. Indeed, speculative fiction—which arguably derives from Thomas More's 1516 *Utopia* and retroactively includes utopian fiction<sup>13</sup>—developed around the notion that denouncing the failures of one's society through imaginary scenarios is easier, and at times slightly safer, than headbutting with the powers that be in the real world. Adding a degree of separation between the lived experience of oppression, mistreatment, and injustice and their explicit condemnation grants the audience the perspective to grasp the meaninglessness and futility of several human social constructions and their fragile foundations. The fictional imagination can show a path to dismantle seemingly unshakeable social systems and inspire change in real life as well. This, far from being an opinion—or rather a wish—relegated to the literary circles of academia, is remarked upon by renowned economist Thomas Piketty, in one of the fundamental works on capital in the twenty-first century:

«it would be a mistake to underestimate the importance of the intuitive knowledge that everyone acquires about contemporary wealth and income levels, even in the absence of any theoretical framework or statistical analysis. Film and literature [...] are full of detailed information about the relative wealth and living standards of different social groups, and especially about the deep structure of inequality, the way it is justified, and its impact on individual lives.»<sup>14</sup>

Without further ado, then, let us see what two authors at the extremes of a fifty-year time span understood to be the ills of their socio-economic context, how they dramatized them, and whether they tried to inspire change through their narratives.

### 3. Philip K. Dick's *Ubik*

Dick's novel stands out, among other things, for its use of epigraphs at the beginning of each chapter. They all describe different instances of *Ubik*, a protean product of unclear origins. It can be, for example, several types of food, a cleaning product, a body lotion, a financial product, a medicine, all safe to use «only as directed.»<sup>15</sup> Carlo Pagetti, in the introduction to the 2011 Italian translation for the publisher Fanucci, argues that *Ubik* should have a threefold interpretation, in line with the triune God of the Christian tradition: 1. *Ubik* as the Product, capitalised, the quintessence of American capitalist ideology; 2. *Ubik* as the divine substance with which some characters are anointed; 3. *Ubik* as the fleeting essence which makes up not only science fiction but literature more in general<sup>16</sup>. The focus,

in this essay, is mostly on the first two interpretations, leaving aside a more formal discussion on the metatextual, postmodernist elements of the novel. Dick seems to confirm Pagetti's take on the divinity of *Ubik* in the epigraph to the last chapter, which reads:

«I am *Ubik*. Before the universe was, I am. I made the suns. I made the worlds. I created the lives and the places they inhabit; I move them here, I put them there. They go as I say, they do as I tell them. I am the word and my name is never spoken, the name which no one knows. I am called *Ubik*, but that is not my name. I am. I shall always be.»<sup>17</sup>

This epigraph differs from all the others in that *Ubik* speaks in the first person and claims for itself the attributes traditionally associated to the Christian God—omniscience, omnipotence, and, of course, *ubiquity*. After the sixteen preceding descriptions that read as bombastic, overly promotional marketing copies, the Product becomes God. Despite the layered and nuanced ontological takes on reality constituting the narrative scaffolding of the novel, Dick's intent here is evident: the link between the Product and divinity is made explicit; the main driving force of late-twentieth-century capitalism is hailed as the one deity to whom (to which?) we are bound. Projecting God-like attributes onto the Product has clear repercussions on the diegesis: *Ubik* determines who lives and who dies; survival is dependent on a person's ability to acquire it. Joe Chip, the protagonist of the story, is chronically unable to manage his own finances and spends much of the final chapters desperately scouring his surroundings for *Ubik*, which is given to him at several critical conjunctures as a complimentary sample<sup>18</sup> or a gift<sup>19</sup>. In Chapter 16, Ella Runciter, the entity trying to save Joe and his Runciter Associates colleagues from Jory, presents him with a certificate from «the company that manufactures *Ubik*.» She explains:

«It is a guarantee, Mr Chip, of a free, lifetime supply, free because I know your problem regarding money, your, shall we say, idiosyncrasy. And a list, on the reverse, of all the drugstores which carry it. Two drugstores - and not abandoned ones - in Des Moines are listed. I suggest we go to one first, before we eat dinner. Here, driver. [...] Take us to this address. And hurry; they'll be closing soon.»<sup>20</sup>

Joe's last chance of survival is thus determined by Ella's generosity as the 'inventor' of *Ubik*, the opening hours of a drugstore, and the willingness of the pharmacist to serve him a genuine spray can of the substance, subjecting Joe to the total control of the Product, its producer, and the distribution infrastructure that commercialises it.

Joe's inability to provide for himself in a capitalist economic system is remarked upon throughout the novel also in smaller, less life-threatening instances. These vignettes read as humorous intervals that break the otherwise tense atmosphere of the novel, and as a parody of the overbearing power of the products on Joe's (and our) life. For instance, consider the exchange when Joe tries to convince the «homeostatic entity» of his building that he will pay his outstanding debt in order to have his flat cleaned:

«I'll charge my overdue bill against my Triangular Magic Key,' he informed his nebulous antagonist. 'That will transfer the obligation out of your jurisdiction; on your books it'll show as total restitution.' 'Plus fines, plus penalties.'

'I'll charge those against my Heart-Shaped—'

'Mr Chip, the Ferris & Brockman Retail Credit Auditing and Analysis Agency has published a special flier on you. Our receptor slot received it yesterday and it remains fresh in our minds. Since July you've dropped from a triple G status credit-wise to quadruple G. Our department - in fact this entire conapt building - is now programmed against an extension of services and/or credit to *such pathetic anomalies* as yourself, sir. Regarding you, everything must hereafter be handled on a basic-cash subfloor. In fact, you'll probably be on a basic-cash subfloor for the rest of your life. In fact—'»<sup>21</sup>

In this case, the product not only refuses Joe the service he requested but extends unsolicited moral judgement that configures Joe as a «pathetic anomaly» due to his inability to manage his own money. This stresses the fundamental importance of being able to acquire goods in order to fit into a consumerist society like that of the late Fifties and early Sixties. Similarly, a few pages later, Joe confronts his flat's door after having just given his last nickel to his coffeepot in exchange for some fresh coffee:

«The door refused to open. It said, 'Five cents, please.'

He searched his pockets. No more coins; nothing. 'I'll pay you tomorrow,' he told the door. Again he tried the knob. Again it remained locked tight. 'What I pay you,' he informed it, 'is in the nature of a gratuity; I don't have to pay you.' 'I think otherwise,' the door said. 'Look in the purchase contract you signed when you bought this conapt.'

In his desk drawer he found the contract; since signing it he had found it necessary to refer to the document many times. Sure enough; payment to his door for opening and shutting constituted a mandatory fee. Not a tip.

'You discover I'm right,' the door said. It sounded smug.»<sup>22</sup>

Dick's choice to rely on irony to illustrate the inflated power of the Product over people in the fictional near future of 1992 ties into a long tradition of speculative fiction (utopias and dystopias in particular), which finds its origins in satire<sup>23</sup>. As Krishan Kumar stated, satire «holds together both negative (anti-utopian) and positive (utopian) elements. It criticizes, through ridicule and invective, its own times, while pointing - usually implicitly but sometimes explicitly - to alternative or better ways of living.»<sup>24</sup> Positioning Dick's novel within a specific sub-category of speculative fiction is none too easy a feat—and one that exceeds the scope of this essay. However, *Ubik* does hold a strong critique of its times, expressed through ridicule and with the intent of highlighting the ills of one's society. This exaggerated take on the reification of human lives moves past the mere notes of hilarity in seeing Joe fight with his flat's furniture. In *Ubik*, people themselves become products, as evinced from several passages regarding half-lifers, the deceased currently suspended in a cryogenically induced state of twilight. Runciter, for instance, asks the manager of the



Moratorium hosting his wife Ella if he had «checked her out», to which the man replies that she was «functioning perfectly.»<sup>25</sup> The lexical choices pertaining to the semantic field of goods keep recurring: the manager describes 'spent' half-lifers as «expired»<sup>26</sup>, while Runciter thinks of Ella as needing to be «crank[ed] up»<sup>27</sup> or «activated.»<sup>28</sup> The overbearing power of the Product has thus permeated all areas of human existence: everything is a Product, is mediated by a Product, or decided upon by a Product which has, for all intents and purposes, replaced God.

Dick's distaste for the American capitalist system is evident; yet his novel stops short from suggesting an alternative form of social aggregation. Far from being a programmatic manifesto for socialism or communism, which Dick equally abhorred<sup>29</sup>, his novel stages and satirizes the deranged obsession for consumerism of the second half of the twentieth century without building on it. It is a *pars destruens* without a *pars construens*. Dick's novel certainly satisfies one half of satire's utopian/dystopian tension, as it makes the ills of society evident through irony; it is debatable whether the other half of the dichotomy is at all present. Although one might argue that the very existence of the text constitutes proof of a utopian impulse in Blochian terms, diegetically Dick's focus is less on depicting a dystopian society that we will make away with at some point in the future and more on communicating the impossibility of finding meaning to whatever exaggerated, extreme, diseased reality determined by one's purchase power we inhabit. Whether an alternative to it exists, that is wholly left to the reader to parse.

#### 4. Cory Doctorow's *Unauthorized Bread*

Doctorow's text is much less tormented and convoluted than *Ubik*. A straightforward novella of the twenty-first century, *Unauthorized Bread* does not hide its profoundly political message. It is the first of the four stories of the collection *Radicalized*, all dedicated to a different social issue of our time<sup>30</sup>. Doctorow, who is an activist supporting free access to online information, a socialist take on the economic system, and hacking<sup>31</sup>, condenses these values into a narrative with strong moral content and a clear intent to show a way to fight what he sees as a corrupted system.

His stylistic choices hold a rather striking resemblance to Dick's: firstly, Doctorow, too, relies on irony and satire to dramatize the current mammoth power of corporations which intrudes in our existence. This, alone, does not suffice to claim an especially strong link between the two texts, as irony and parody are widespread stylistic choices in several SF works. Nevertheless, Doctorow's choices align closely with Dick's specific brand of parody in *Ubik*, which centres around the personal, intimate sphere: thus, where Dick chose coffeepots, belligerent cleaning robots and stubborn coin-operated doors, Doctorow went with picky toasters, dishwashers, and washing machines. These products, in Doctorow's fictional (yet eerily familiar) twenty-first century, come with pre-installed features—the

services that characterize the post-industrial era—purportedly to enhance the user experience, but concretely to limit their choices and generate higher revenue for the manufacturers. Salima, who has only recently moved in her new subsidised flat and is describing the appliances that came with it and that she is forced to use, at the beginning frames their built-in apps and services as a way to make them more user-friendly and convenient:

«[The appliances] all started working once she'd input her debit-card number, and they presented her with menus of approved consumables: the dishes that would work in the dishwasher, the range of food that would work with the toaster, from bread to ready-meals. [...] The prices all included delivery, or she could shop for herself in approved stores, but there was always the risk that she'd pick up something that was incompatible with her model, so *it would be better for everyone concerned* if she'd do her shopping right there in her kitchen, where *it was most convenient for everyone*.»<sup>32</sup>

Yet, after Boulangism, the company producing her toaster, goes bankrupt and Salima is forced to jailbreak her own kitchen appliance to make it work, she starts to understand the extent of these corporations' hold on her life and living conditions. After unlocking her washing machine and being finally able to purchase and use whatever product she prefers, for instance, she realises that «shopping for detergent in the grocery store was a lot cheaper than buying it through her machine's screen, and [...] her persistent eczema was actually an allergic reaction to something in the authorized laundry soap.»<sup>33</sup> The greedy race to generate profit, then, goes well beyond impacting one's finances and spills over onto a person's wellbeing—much as it already happens in contemporary societies where the health of a citizen is secondary to the health of the economy.

*Unauthorized Bread* portrays well the shift to a service economy not only by depicting these 'satellite' services attached to a product, but by reframing the concept of product ownership. Much like in real life, in Doctorow's novella people do not own their appliances but *lease* them from their producers, essentially choosing a service (being lent an appliance) over a product (the appliance itself). Diegetically, this notion is entwined with the idea of customer choice: electing to lease a Boulangism toaster instead of buying a different one is framed as a conscious decision that implies one accepts all the conditions of use that Boulangism has set out in their leasing contract. This intersects with the other notable social issue raised by Doctorow in this story: the treatment of refugees. Salima and her neighbours did not have a say in what appliances to get for their homes: they came with the subsidized flats and the owners of the towers received a cut of the purchases made through them.

The idea of free choice—and thus, in a sense, free will—is distorted throughout the narrative. Hailed as the epitome of the service economy, granting the customer agency to tailor their user experience to their needs and removing any 'structural' impediment from



the equation, choice becomes the buzzword of our time. What looks like a rebellious form of severance from the ties of the Product, though, is but smoke and mirrors. The emptiness of the choices available to users in the service economy becomes evident in the following conversation between Salima and two employees of the newly resurrected Boulangism. They are trying to convince her to 'spy' on her small community of jailbreakers to give them insights on how to make more sellable options available to their customers:

«“I just don't feel right about it. I understand your idea here, that you're selling us more freedom. But that's only because our appliances take away so much freedom to begin with, and then sell it back.”

“But no one forced you to choose Boulangism. You chose a product that came with restrictions, and in return, you got a deal on your rent.”

“Do you have a Boulangism toaster?”

“No, I don't.”

“Why not?”

“It's not the choice we've made,” the white guy said. “We chose a different deal. That's the great thing about freedom: we all get to choose the proposition that suits us best.”

Salima managed a tight little smile. “You keep talking about choosing. This is the only place I could get into, and it took months. How is that a choice?”

“You were living somewhere before this place, right?”

“A refugee shelter.”

“You could have chosen to stay there, right?”

She wanted these people gone. “I don't think that is much of a choice.”

He shook his head. “The point is that you had a choice, and that's because appliances like ours made it economical for landlords to build subsidy units.”»<sup>34</sup>

Salima, here, not only represents the common user being deprived of the genuine possibility to choose for herself, but highlights the way in which our white-dominated capitalist society perpetuates racist and oppressive—if not all out segregationist—practices: while the 'white guys' are given a wide range of choices from which they can select the best fit for their needs—quite notably, *not* a Boulangism toaster—Salima and her neighbours at the Dorchester Towers have only one viable alternative to living in a refugee shelter. Yet, it is implied that she should show gratitude for having been granted a choice to start with; in other words, these representatives expect her to be grateful for having been given access to the very capitalist system that is profiting off of her.

Indeed, Boulangism's desire to offer more freedom of choice to their customers barely hides its aim to control every iteration of a product and its satellite services in order to reap a profit. Even for the most privileged of users, what is depicted as more freedom is, in fact, less of it—and with a price tag attached. Much as in *Ubik* everything was becoming a product, in Doctorow's novella everything is becoming a (marketable) service, the act of digital piracy included. When Salima learns that Boulangism is planning on offering a

«jailbreak daily subscription», because at Boulangism «they figure all those [jailbreaking] people could be customers, but instead of paying for food we sell them, they'd pay us to use food someone else sold them», Salima bitterly thinks: «It was a crime if she did it, a product if they sold it to her. Everything could be a product.»<sup>35</sup>

Faceless corporations and their endless greed for social control, in Doctorow's view, well represent much of what is wrong with the current late capitalist economic system. In true post-industrial fashion, though, their goal is less tied to traditional monetary profits—although increased revenue is *always* their endgame—and more to gaining and retaining the means for social control. In other words, what corporations are after is not money per se, but information that can be monetized. Knowledge has become a commodity, information the currency of the twenty-first century. Thus, Salima muses on the pros and cons of having it—specifically, knowledge on how to jailbreak her appliances—and sharing it with her neighbours, an act that, she later discovers, could land her in jail for «trafficking.» Similarly, she feels conflicted about trading information with her friend Wyoming, who works at Boulangism but is trying to help Salima from the inside, and with the official spokespeople of the company. The corporation, on its part, has very few concerns when it comes to acquiring commodifiable information: its appliances are continuously gathering data on their users and their environment and the company itself scans the web and tries to get insights from Salima to stay on top of potential new avenues for profit.

## 5. Conclusion

Doctorow's novella and Dick's novel both rely on irony and satire to dramatize what they perceive as dangerous trends of their socio-economic context. Dick's novel makes fun of the tendency to let the Product dictate one's life, choosing a protagonist that is unable to stay afloat in a late capitalist society due to his own shortcomings. Dick's caricatural product-managed society serves as the exaggerated backdrop through which Joe Chip moves, showing not only the hindrances of letting the Product rule over a person's life, but the potentially life-threatening consequences for those who cannot abide to the rules of the (late capitalist) game. Doctorow's work, conversely, focuses on a protagonist who, despite following the rules to the letter—Salima is the 'ideal' refugee, one that got educated, found a job and is extremely careful with her money—is forced to find an alternative way of life *because the system is designed to work against her*. Doctorow's novella manages to take his criticism a step further than Dick's, making not only the lack of meaning but the lack of justice of such overbearing capitalism emerge. In framing Salima as the victim of a system that seems impossible to be dismantled, *despite* her trying her best to fit in, he moves the readers to action in a way that Dick had no interest in. Doctorow's work, then, borrows—more or less consciously—from a rhetorical strategy that is as old as the speculative fiction genre. Much like Dick, he makes his text enjoyable, funny, at times even

light, but he does not let the levity of his novella subtract from the profoundly serious denunciation he is making. Whereas the reactionary potential of *Ubik* gets lost, in a way, in the ontological reflections that constitute the main body of his novel, Doctorow's story never loses its aim, showing that SF can, and should, show a way forward towards a time when the inescapability of capitalism will have been proven but a myth of our flawed human society.

## Note

1. Fredric Jameson, *Seeds of Time*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, p. xxi.
2. Ursula K. Le Guin, *Dreams Must Explain Themselves*, London, Gollancz, 2018, ebook, n.p.
3. Precogs are people who can see events in the future. They feature in several works by Dick, such as the short story *Minority Report* (1956).
4. Peter Fitting, "Ubik": *The Deconstruction of Bourgeois SF*, in «Science Fiction Studies» vol. 2, n. 1, 1975, pp. 47-54.
5. Ivi, p. 47.
6. Daniel T. L. Shek, Po P. Y. Chung and Hildie Leung, *Manufacturing economy vs. service economy: implications for service leadership*, in «International Journal on Disability and Human Development», vol. 14, no. 3, 2015, pp. 205-215.
7. Ivi, p. 205.
8. Cfr. Jean Fourastié, *Le Grand Espoir du XXe Siècle*. Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1952; Hollis B. Chenery, *Patterns of industrial Growth*, in «American Economic Review», vol. 50, no. 4, 1960: pp. 624-654.
9. Cfr. Simon Kuznets, *Economic growth of nations - total output and production structure*, Cambridge, Ma, Harvard University Press, 1971; Luigi L. Pasinetti, *Structural economic dynamics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993.
10. Alain Touraine, *La société post-industrielle*, Paris, Seuil, 1969.
11. Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*, New York, Basic Books, 1973, ebook.
12. Ivi, *The Axial Age of Technology Foreword: 1999*.
13. Valentina Romanzi, *American Nightmares: Dystopia in Twenty-First Century US Fiction*, Oxford, Peter Lang, 2022, pp. 28-33.
14. Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, Boston, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University

Press, 2014, p. 2.

15. Cfr. Philip K. Dick, *Ubik*, London, Gollancz, 2010, p. 1, 19, only to list two instances.
16. Carlo Pagetti, *Introduzione*, in Philip K. Dick, *Ubik*, tr. it. Paolo Prezzavento, Roma, Fanucci, 2011, ebook.
17. Dick, p. 226.
18. Ivi, p. 136.
19. Ivi, p. 190.
20. Ivi, p. 216-217.
21. Ivi, p. 23, emphasis added.
22. Ivi, p. 24.
23. Cfr. Romanzi, pp. 21-26.
24. Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, London, Blackwell, 1987, p.104.
25. Dick, p. 4.
26. Ivi, p. 5.
27. Ivi, p. 7.
28. Ivi, p. 10.
29. It is a well-known trivia fact that in 1974 Dick sent a (baseless) letter to the FBI denouncing Stanisław Lem, Peter Fitting, Fredric Jameson and others working for «Science Fiction Studies» of being involved in a Marxist plot aiming to harm him. Cfr, Robert M. Philmus, *The Two Faces of Philip K. Dick*, «Science Fiction Studies», vol. 18, no. 1, 1991, pp. 91-103.
30. The other stories, in order of appearance are *Model Minority*, dealing with racial violence perpetrated by the American police force; *Radicalized*, focusing on dark web hater communities; and *The Masque of the Red Death*, dealing with doomsday and survivalism.
31. Benjamin Aleksandr Franz, *Cory Doctorow (1971-)* in *Fifty Key Figures in Cyberpunk Culture*, edited by Anna McFarlane, Graham J. Murphy, Lars Schmeink, New York, Routledge, 2022, ebook.
32. Cory Doctorow, *Unauthorized Bread* in *Radicalized: Four Novellas*, London: Head of Zeus, 2019, ebook, emphasis added.
33. Idem.
34. Idem.
35. Idem.