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“WHAT DOES A SCANNER SEE?”  
PHILIP K. DICK’S AND RICHARD LINKLATER’S  
TAKE ON IDENTITY AND IDENTITY CRISIS

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To Philip K. Dick, who never had the pleasure  
of seeing his words adapted to the big screen.



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## ABSTRACT

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This research presents a comparative analysis between Philip K. Dick’s 1977 novel *A Scanner Darkly* and Richard Linklater’s 2006 homonymous film adaptation of it. The focus of this analysis is the theme of postmodern identity, having as a theoretical framework the issues about identity and postmodernism problematized by theorists such as Fredric Jameson and Stuart Hall. This analysis shows how the issue of postmodern identity is ubiquitous both in Dick’s novel and in Linklater’s film. In order to analyze the issue of adaptation, the ideas of scholars such as Dudley Andrew and Robert Stam, as well as film theorist André Bazin were used. The differences between a novel and a film that narrate the same story are unavoidable. However, what is possible to see in the case of *A Scanner Darkly* is that the treatment and the emphasis given to the issue of postmodern identity in both works is equivalent. In order to do so, the film takes advantage of the specificities of its medium to represent elements that, due to each medium’s nature, cannot be transposed into a film.

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RESUMO  
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Esta pesquisa apresenta uma análise comparativa entre o romance de Philip K. Dick *A Scanner Darkly* (*O Homem Duplo* – 1977) e a adaptação cinematográfica homônima feita por Richard Linklater em 2006. O foco desta análise é o tema da identidade pós-moderna, usando como base teórica as questões sobre identidade e pós-modernidade problematizadas por teóricos como Fredric Jameson e Stuart Hall. A partir desta análise, é possível observar como o tema da identidade pós-moderna é ubíquo e ambas as obras. Para analisar as questões relacionadas a adaptação, foram utilizadas as ideias de acadêmicos como Dudley Andrew e Robert Stam, assim como do teórico André Bazin. As diferenças entre um romance e um filme que narram a mesma história são inevitáveis. Porém, o que é possível ver no caso de *A Scanner Darkly* é que o tratamento e a ênfase dados ao tema da identidade pós-moderna em ambas as obras é equivalente. Para tanto, o filme utiliza as especificidades do seu meio para representar possíveis elementos que, por conta da natureza de cada meio, não podem ser transpostos para o cinema.



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## INTRODUCTION IDENTIFYING A(R)CTOR

### 1.1. First Glance

The story of *A Scanner Darkly*—both in Philip K. Dick’s 1977 novel and in Richard Linklater’s 2006 film adaptation—deals with the issue of identity, which can be seen in several moments of both narratives and their characters, but is used mainly in the development of the protagonist of the story. This character is a young white male narcotics agent, who is working undercover within a group of drug users trying to systematically buy larger quantities of drugs in order to be introduced to bigger drug dealers and, eventually, make an arrest (ASD<sup>1</sup> 0:18:49-0:19:03). When this character is playing the role of the police officer, he goes by the codename Fred. Among his drug user friends, he is known as Robert (Bob) Arctor. When in the role of Officer Fred, he must wear a scramble suit<sup>2</sup> to hide his “true” identity and protect his role as an undercover officer. Besides the shifting names and social roles, identity becomes a main issue in the plot of both film and novel due to two main facts: (1) Fred receives the task of surveilling Bob Arctor (i.e. himself) and his group of friends, and (2) Fred/Arctor uses and becomes addicted to drugs—especially the fictional Substance D—which ultimately leads him to brain deterioration and a total loss of his sense of self. In both cases, surveillance, misplacement, loss of identity, and subjectivity are major issues for the development of the plot.

Since this research deals with a story told through two different media, namely a novel and a film, the general context of this investigation pertains to filmic adaptations of literary works. What I mean by adaptation here is broadly what Dudley Andrew describes as “the appropriation of a meaning from a prior text” (29). Even when sharing the same basic storyline, a novel and a film are essentially different. A novel is what Robert Stam calls a “single track medium,” that is, a medium that relies solely on words, whereas a film is a “multitrack medium,” which counts on “theatrical performance, music, sound effects, and moving photographic images” (56). Due to this

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<sup>1</sup> I chose to use the acronym ASD to quote the film *A Scanner Darkly* and the word *Scanner* when quoting the literary work.

<sup>2</sup> A technological suit which simultaneously projects “fraction-representations of various people” (*Scanner* 16), making it impossible for anyone to recognize who is inside it. The scramble suit will be further discussed and analyzed later the subsequent chapters.

difference in each medium's nature, novels and films can take the same story and highlight certain aspects in different ways. Such a possibility allows for a similar feeling, idea, or theme—such as the issue of “identity” in *A Scanner Darkly*—to be conveyed differently.

It is clear that identity is a major issue in the story, but dealing with such an issue requires caution, since the term is used in many areas of study in somewhat different ways. Sociologists Sheldon Stryker and Peter J. Burke point out that “[t]he language of ‘identity’ is ubiquitous in contemporary social science, cutting across psychoanalysis, psychology, political science, sociology and History” (284). Within literary studies, Jonathan Culler notes that the term is also used within “Marxism, [. . .] cultural studies, feminism, gay and lesbian studies, and the study of identity in colonial and post-colonial society” (location 1728). Stuart Hall claims that we are living in a society in which both social and personal identities are becoming more fragmented (*The Question* 274), and such fragmentation is exactly what seems to happen to Fred/Arctor, the main character in Dick’s novel, who has different names when impersonating different identities. This hypothesis is corroborated by reviewers such as Vaughan Bell, who claims that “Philip K. Dick [struggled] with increasing doubts over the nature of reality and personal identity” (par. 1). Similarly, Paul Youngquist argues that Arctor “faces a dilemma [. . .] of radical undecidability between identities” (97), and Manola Dargis begins her film review by saying that “[i]dentities shift and melt like shadows in Richard Linklater’s animated adaptation of ‘A Scanner Darkly’” (par. 1).

Both the novel *A Scanner Darkly* and its adaptation are contemporary works of art which can be classified as postmodern. Elaine Baldwin (et al.) notes that the term “postmodernism” is “often used in rather loose ways to refer to: a society or experience, particular forms of artistic activity, and a philosophical or theoretical approach” (400). Therefore, it becomes crucial to define in which way the term “postmodern” is used here to talk about identity in *A Scanner Darkly*. In order to do so, I will use Fredric Jameson’s account of postmodernism. Jameson discusses the processes of change that happen in society and in the arts when there is a break which generates a transition from modernism to postmodernism. Such a break happens not only in terms of aesthetics—when “empirical, chaotic, and heterogeneous” (54) works, considered as inferior “low” art—begin to grow in terms of production and acceptance, but also in terms of the historical period in which such changes begin (and continue) to happen. In this fashion, Jameson proposes “to offer a periodizing hypothesis” (55), that is, to



theorize about the contemporary historical period instead of simply describing the aesthetic aspects of postmodernism, which he uses as illustration and exemplification of how such a period functions.

In terms of production, both the novel and the film *A Scanner Darkly* are unquestionably works from a time period that can be considered postmodern, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The novel was written and published in the 1970s and its story is set in 1994. The story was scripted in the late 1990s and early 2000s, before finally being produced and released in 2006 as a film (Robb 267-83). The film is stated to be set “seven years from now,” which keeps the story postmodern and contemporary in terms of time. Furthermore, the genre to which the works belong—Science Fiction—is one such genre that was considered “low art” by the modernist movement: “The postmodernisms have in fact been fascinated precisely by this whole ‘degraded’ landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Readers’ Digest Culture, of advertising and motels [. . .] the murder mystery and science fiction or fantasy novel” (Jameson 55).

Taking such aspects of postmodernism into account, one can argue that *A Scanner Darkly*—novel and film—are not only postmodern works in terms of time of production, but also in terms of aesthetics and themes. One of the characteristics of postmodernism, according to Stuart Hall, is that “[t]he subject, previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented; composed, not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities” (*The Question* 276-77). This issue of contradictory identities will be further explored in the following chapters, but fragmentation can be seen in *A Scanner Darkly* not only in specific instances of identity, but aesthetically as well. The novel presents part of its narrative in a fragmented way: scientific articles, character’s disconnected thoughts, and seemingly random texts in German interrupt the narrator and characters in the middle of a sentence or a word. The film, on the other hand, presents a linear narrative, but uses an animation technique called Rotoscoping—a process in which post-production artists draw on top of finalized film frames—which simultaneously creates a sense of familiarity and detachment from the actors, settings, and *mise-en-scène*<sup>3</sup>. Finally, *A Scanner Darkly* is postmodern in its theme. The issues approached by the story are extremely contemporary, especially in their

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<sup>3</sup> “the director’s control over what appears in the frame [. . .] setting, lighting, costume, and the behavior of the figures” (Bordwell and Thompson 169).

questioning of identity and its multiplicity and crisis of identities, which seems to be the epitome of the epoch in which we are currently living. As Jameson puts it, notions of crisis characterize postmodernism: “the end of ideology, art, or social class; the ‘crisis’ of Leninism, social democracy, or the welfare state” (53).

## 1.2 A Closer Look

### 1.2.1 Adaptation

From a more general perspective, theorists such as Dudley Andrew (28) and André Bazin (19) explain that there is a great number of texts that are transposed from one semiotic system into another and can be considered adaptations. A painting, for example, can be an adaptation of a song, which can, in turn, be an adaptation of a novel. Since adaptation is a matter of interpretation (Andrew 29), the possibilities are endless. According to Andrew, if some social theories are seriously considered, the range of what can be called an adaptation is even wider, since everything we perceive in the world is filtered through our mind’s conscience and ideology; therefore, everything is adapted at some level (28-29). Having such an idea in mind when talking about cinema, one can say that all films are already an adaptation of someone’s ideologies, ideas, thoughts, or experiences. However, the kind of adaptation that is in question here is the same one with which authors such as Andrew and Bazin are concerned: films that adapt a literary work—mainly a novel—and acknowledge it.

André Bazin proposes the idea of adaptation as being “the Cinema as digest,”<sup>4</sup> that is, as “a summation or condensation of a body of information,”<sup>5</sup> or a “comprehensive and systematic compilation of information or material, often condensed.”<sup>6</sup> His argument is that adaptations encompass more than the literary field, and since “literature only partakes of a phenomenon whose amplitude is much larger” (19), other forms of adaptation should be considered. For the author, even a museum can be considered a digest, since it compiles a series of works of art which have been displaced from their original or intended “architectural and decorative context” (19). In this sense, their original intentions and interpretations have been adapted into a different context, usually in a different time and space as well.

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<sup>4</sup> As seen in the title of his article “Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest.”

<sup>5</sup> Merriam-Webster online

<sup>6</sup> Dictionary.com

Thirty-six years later, Dudley Andrew expands Bazin's notions and speaks of a "transcendent order" of cinema. Andrew claims that "[i]f we take seriously the arguments of Marxist and other social theorists that our consciousness [. . .] filters the world to the shape of its ideology, then every cinematic rendering will exist in relation to some prior whole lodged unquestioned in the personal or public system of experience" (28-29). According to Andrew, what differentiates the works that are self-labeled as adaptations from those which are not is that the former acknowledges the existence of a previous representational work of art. More recently, in 2006, Linda Hutcheon points out that adaptations are more common and present than we perceive. She takes into consideration not only the traditional art forms, but several types of (new) media that permeate the twenty-first century, such as television, video-games, theme parks, comic books, and the Internet (2).

Robert B. Ray claims that films have always been more often and easily compared with literary works—and not so much with other art forms—because both literature and film rely on narrative form (39). Claiming that a "narrative is not specific to any one medium," (39), Ray is following Seymour Chatman's idea that "narrative is basically a kind of text organization, and that organization, that schema, needs to be actualized" (Chatman 121). Such an actualization of the narrative form can occur in literature or in film, as well as in other media, as previously mentioned. Another reason for us to compare literature and film is given by Dudley Andrew, who, after E.H. Gombrich, states that "adaptation introduces the category of 'matching' [...] We can and do correctly match items from different systems all the time: a tuba sound is more like a rock than a piece of string; it is more like a bear than like a bird; more like a Romanesque church than a Baroque one" (Andrew 33).

One problem with comparing literature and film is that since they belong to different sign systems, they will undoubtedly have different characteristics and different rules. One major difference is the aforementioned number of "tracks" intrinsic to each medium, as proposed by Robert Stam (56). Another difference is the way we interact with each work. Stam points out that "[w]e read a novel through our introjected desires, hopes, and utopias, and as we read we fashion our own imaginary *mise-en-scène* of the novel on the private stages of our mind" (54). When a film adaptation is conceived, it is the consequence of a series of personal private readings which conflate in one final product, a kind of collaborative reading. It is not hard to notice that the end result of an adaptation will unavoidably be different than

that of its preceding novel. Another difference concerns the production of each work, as pointed out both by Stam (56) and Robert B. Ray (42). A novel needs only one person with a creative mind and writing skills in order to exist. The author usually has no time or space constraints and may be writing never to be published. A film, on the other hand, generally requires a great number of people and a large amount of money to be produced. Given that, films need to be market-oriented to pay for its production. This financial need of the film industry is one of the reasons for novels to be adapted: it is a way to keep an audience that is familiar with the literary form of the story, and therefore to guarantee some financial return, especially if the novel was financially successful as well.

### 1.2.2 Postmodern Identity

As previously stated, both the terms “postmodern(ism)” and “identity” are used in dissimilar ways by different areas, such as literature and philosophy and, therefore, need to be further explored before they are put in context within my analysis of *A Scanner Darkly*. “Postmodernism” can refer not only to aesthetics, but also to the historical period in which we are. Furthermore, the term has been used to talk about “a society or experience, particular forms of artistic activity, and [as] a philosophical or theoretical approach” (Baldwin 400). One of the main characteristics of postmodern times, according to both Fredric Jameson and Stuart Hall, is the fragmentation of the subject. The being, which was once considered to be a single, unified self, is now seen as having multiple constitutive parts. Jameson mentions that one of the consequences of the modern-postmodern shift is that “the alienation of the subject is displaced by the fragmentation of the subject” (63). Similarly, Hall says that old ideas of a unified identity—which have been accepted for a long time—are making way for the notion of new and multiple identities. In this process, the human being is no longer seen as one whole indissoluble unit, but as a fragmented subject.<sup>7</sup> Such a change destabilizes people’s old certainties,

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<sup>7</sup> Hall gives a practical example of this process of fragmentation of identities. In 1991, then president of the United States of America, George Bush, appointed a black conservative judge to the Supreme Court, in an attempt to get support both from the conservative and from the black communities. However, this judge faced sexual harassment allegations, which divided the opinion of people of different genders and ethnicities. Each person would either support or

and a “crisis of identity” may arise as a result (Hall *The Question* 274). Hall problematizes the notion of a unified subject, thus proposing a debate on this topic. In *A Scanner Darkly* the issue of identity is pushed into the limits of its existence. One such reason is that Arctor performs different roles and, therefore, different identities at different times. Another aspect is that Arctor’s ultimate brain-split is a complete fragmentation of his being, in which he is not only constituted by different parts, but each part becomes unaware of the other part’s existence, to the point in which he—either as Robert Arctor or as Fred—ceases to exist. At this point, a third identity emerges, a laconic harmless borderline retard called Bruce, which is the name given to Fred/Arctor when he is ultimately admitted into a rehabilitation center. The story also mentions a possible fourth identity: Fred/Arctor’s life before his double agent days, a life in which he was married with children. Other characters also present this fragmentation of their identities, which will be discussed in Chapters One and Two.

Another main characteristic of postmodernism and postmodern identity is the decentering of the subject. Hall argues that “what has happened in late-modernity<sup>8</sup> to the conception of the modern subject is not simply its estrangement, but its dislocation [. . .] whose main effect, it is argued, has been the final de-centring of the Cartesian subject”<sup>9</sup> (*The Question* 285). Correspondingly, Jameson speaks of a “decentering of that formerly centred subject of psyche” (63 original emphasis). Thus, what happens in the postmodern society is a loss of a sense of unity and a shift to an understanding of the being as multiple and decentered, that is, with no referentiality. Such an issue can immediately be seen in *A Scanner Darkly*. If one considers just the two main identities of Fred/Arctor, one may say that the dominant one is Robert Arctor acting as a cop, or prefer to say that it is officer Fred acting as a drug user, such as Brian J. Robb does when he says that Fred “adopts a fake identity known as Bob Arctor” (268). The fact is that he seems to be both and neither at the same time. The narrator of the novel makes such distinction almost impossible, referring to the character as “Fred, who was also Robert Arctor” (23), but also as “Arctor-Fred-Whatever-Godknew” (29). The decentering of the postmodern subject is evident in

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condemn the judge depending on which identity spoke louder: of gender, of race, of political views, etc. (*The Question* 279-80).

<sup>8</sup> Hall uses the terms late-modernity and postmodernity interchangeably to refer to the “second half of the twentieth century” (*The Question* 285).

<sup>9</sup> i.e. the unified subject.

Arctor given that the acting aspects of his identities are seen in both of them. The first time the character appears in the story is during a speech he gives as officer Fred. During this speech, the acting aspects of his job as a narcotics agent are revealed by his thoughts of contempt towards the “straights”<sup>10</sup> in the audience. Later, however, when, in his role as Robert Arctor, his thoughts reveal that he is also acting, for example when he arrives at home after the scanners have been installed inside his house. Arctor thinks that he “[is] supposed to act like they aren’t [there]” (ASD 01:14:55), “[I]ike an actor before a movie camera [. . .] you act like the camera doesn’t exist” (*Scanner* 146).

The issue of decentering and acting is also closely related to the discussion of simulacra and simulations raised by Jean Baudrillard. Jameson mentions the notion of the simulacrum as being “the identical copy for which no original has ever existed” (Jameson 66), and such is the notion that Baudrillard explores, pointing out that “the age of simulation [. . .] begins with a liquidation of all referentials” (167). Both Robert Arctor and officer Fred are, thus, co-existing simulacra with no referentiality, with no hierarchical existence. Their acting as each identity is, similarly, of the order of simulation discussed by Baudrillard, in which one has “to feign to have what one hasn’t” (167). I want to argue that, as his name suggestively implies, Robert Arctor is an actor. Acting can sometimes be seen as representation, but since there is no referentiality and, therefore, it becomes impossible to determine which identity (Arctor/Fred)—if any—precedes the other. It seems to be much more a case of acting as simulating, as simulation. Baudrillard argues for an opposition between the notions of representation and simulation, saying that “[w]hereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum” (170), as seems to be the case of Arctor in *A Scanner Darkly*.

### 1.3 Objects and Questions.

The general objective of this research is to compare and contrast Philip K. Dick’s 1977 novel *A Scanner Darkly* and Richard Linklater’s 2006 homonymous filmic adaptation—the corpora for this investigation. I am particularly interested in observing how both, novel and film, tell a similar story in different media and how each works with the

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<sup>10</sup> The way in which non-drug users are referred to in the novel.

construction of postmodern identity in both novel and film, especially in terms of mise-en-scène, characterization, and plot.

As previously stated, *A Scanner Darkly*—both the novel and the film—has a constant presence of elements pointing to questions of identity and identity crisis. Such elements range from the essence of the main character—who takes different names when performing different social roles and switching identities—to the ultimate dissociation Fred/Arctor suffers from himself, when he loses his sense of self and starts talking about “Bob Arctor” in the third person (*Scanner* 106, ASD 01:13:21). Taking into consideration the discussions raised, I have elected three questions to be developed and answered throughout this research: (1) how is identity emphasized in the story?; (2) how do novel and film deal with such an issue?; and (3) is the emphasis given to identity equivalent in the novel and the film? In order to do so, I will be analyzing plot, mise-en-scène, and characterization.

The significance of this research is to add to the field of comparative studies between film and literature, namely the study of adaptation. In order to do so, a thematic approach is going to be used, dealing with identity. Such theme seems to be of great relevance for the contemporary postmodern society in which we live, an age in which identities are becoming more and more multiple and fragmented (Hall *The Question* 274). I am particularly interested in the story in question—and especially in the themes of identity and identity crisis—because I can personally relate to it. Being a citizen of this postmodern society, in which identities are fragmented and crisis seem to occur more frequently, I am in a constant search for myself. I seem frequently to undergo several types of crisis, including identity crisis, and trying to understand these phenomena in fiction might help me better to understand and cope with my own issues.

As far as the corpora chosen for this investigation, I believe this research will add to a still small body of studies that have been done about *A Scanner Darkly*. According to the MLA International Bibliography database (<http://bit.ly/oZsway> in July 31, 2011), there have been twenty-one studies done on either the novel or the film, among which only four were peer-reviewed. Fifteen of these studies deal with the novel and seven with the film adaptation. Twelve of these were chapters in books, eight were journal articles and only one was an academic doctoral dissertation, which dealt only with the novel. However, none of them bring the issue of postmodern identity and adaptation as their central concern of analysis. Rather, these studies

have discussed, for example, the representation of the 1960s in the novel, as well as issues such as time, reality, and manipulation.

Although there are several differences between Philip K. Dick's novel *A Scanner Darkly* and Richard Linklater's homonymous adaptation, both deal with issues pertaining to personal identity in the postmodern society. In Chapter One I will discuss the novel and how identity is conveyed in it. In Chapter Two I will discuss the film, comparing it to the novel to understand in which ways the stories are similar or dissimilar, especially in terms of postmodern identity. Finally, I will be able to answer my research questions concerning "identity" and "identity crisis" in *A Scanner Darkly* in order to observe whether or not both works convey the same message concerning such a theme.



## CHAPTER ONE SCANNING A NOVEL

This chapter will examine Philip K. Dick's novel *A Scanner Darkly* dealing especially with manifestations of the theme of postmodern identity as discussed by Stuart Hall and Fredric Jameson. In order to do so, I will discuss how issues related to identity appear in *A Scanner Darkly*, both at the narrative level and also delineating categories in which such manifestations are evident. Finally I will discuss the moments in which identity crises emerge, also discussing their meaning. I will draw examples from throughout the novel to discuss most categories of identity, but to talk about crisis, I will then pay special attention to chapters seven and eleven of the novel, as they are the ones in which there is narrative rupture following the main character's state of mind, when he is losing his sense of self and, consequently, his identity.

### 2.1 PKD

Philip K. Dick was a prolific author who, according to Paul Williams of the Philip K. Dick Estate,<sup>11</sup> has forty-four published novels, over one hundred short stories, as well as letters, screenplays, poems, and non-fiction essays. As Brian J. Robb notices, "Dick returned obsessively to a set of key themes, with the nature of reality and what it means to be human being his two main philosophical concerns" (8). Even though Dick tried to achieve commercial success through mainstream realist fiction, it was in the Science Fiction niche that he found readers as well as a source of financial income. Concerning Dick's style of writing, Yuji Oniki points out that "[a]fter attempting to write in two separate modes—science fiction and realist mainstream fiction—by the mid-sixties Dick ended up with a kind of hybrid style that utilized fundamental premises from both genres" (193). Writing at a frantic pace and selling many stories to pulp magazines, Dick dealt with the philosophical themes that haunted him, narrating about what he himself ("If You Find" 00:00:39) as well as Robb (in the title of his book) call "counterfeit worlds," which usually come with alien life forms, paranormal activity (precognition, mind reading, etc), machines acting as humans (or, in the case of *A Scanner Darkly*, humans acting as machines), dead people, to mention a few examples. In *A Scanner*

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.philipkdick.com>

*Darkly* he explores the themes of reality and humanity in a less fantastic way than in other works, but via other themes such as capitalism, drug subculture, religion, and identity.

## 2.2 *A Scanner Darkly*

The manifestations of “identity” in *A Scanner Darkly* seem to happen at a macro and a micro level. What I mean by macro level is the most blatant and perceivable aspects concerning identity in the novel: the main character struggles between two social roles and two identities, eventually losing his sense of self and giving way for a third (non)identity<sup>12</sup> to emerge. What I call the micro level is the language in the narrative, the ways in which issues related to identity appear in the novel at certain specific moments, and playing specific roles. In such level, I have elected seven more or less fixed—and often interconnected—categories to explore: social roles, names, drugs/drug subculture, artificiality and humanity, capitalism, memory, and crisis. There are two other important micro manifestations that belong exclusively to the fictional world of *A Scanner Darkly*: the scramble suit and Bruce, the final stage of Fred/Arctor’s identity. Such aspects will also be discussed throughout this thesis.

### 2.2.1 The Macro Level

The chief manifestation of identity in *A Scanner Darkly* is the case of its main character, who is caught between the roles of police officer Fred and drug user Robert Arctor. He is first mentioned by another character as “Bob” in the first chapter of the novel, but he is fully presented for the first time in the second chapter, this time as agent Fred. Wearing a scramble suit and giving a memorized speech about the war on drugs to members of the Anaheim Lions Club, he is described as “Fred, who was also Robert Arctor” (*Scanner* 17), a depiction that comes to show the multi-layered nature of his identity construction. At this point, however, his situation does not seem complicated: it appears that he is a man called Robert Arctor, who simply has to hide his identity at the police department due to the nature of his undercover job. The Lions Club host who introduces Fred to the audience already hints to the fact that his situation is not so simple by claiming that “he looks [. . .] like a vague blur and nothing more” (*Scanner* 15), a description that scholar Jason P. Vest calls “a perfect metaphor for Arctor’s existential

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<sup>12</sup> This new identity, Bruce, does not seem to have any distinguishing features as an individual, he works more like a machine.

state” (156). Indeed, as the story progresses, the boundaries between Fred and Arctor begin to blur, and even the narrator has a hard time separating both at times, referring to him, for example, as “Fred, Robert Arctor, whatever” (*Scanner* 18, 19) or as “Arctor-Fred-Whatever-Godknew” (21).

Robert Arctor lives with two roommates—Ernie Luckman and Jim Barris—in a house in which he remembers having lived before with a wife and kids. He and his roommates also socialize with Charles Freck, Jerry Fabin—a minor character who is committed to a Neural Aphasia Clinic<sup>13</sup> in the first chapter of the novel—and Arctor’s girlfriend and drug dealer Donna Hawthorne. This group of friends makes extensive use of various drugs, but especially of the fictional Substance D—also known as *death* or *slow death*—which is synthetically made from a flower called *Mors ontologica*. If the extensive use of Substance D does not end in the user’s actual physical death, it most likely will lead to an ontological death: the death of the being, “of the spirit. The identity. The essential nature” (*Scanner* 202). This is precisely what happens to Fred/Arctor, who loses his identity and humanity and becomes a kind of automaton, a body responding to stimuli and performing tasks.

Due to the high rate of undercover officers getting addicted and being admitted into Neural Aphasia Clinics, Officer Fred is evaluated by two psychologists of the Orange County Sheriff’s Department. In his first visit, the psychologists explain that many people who take Substance D develop a “toxic brain psychosis affecting the percept system by splitting it” (*Scanner* 87). In this visit, Fred is already presenting some small signs of brain damage, such as the loss of the ability to perceive shapes: looking at a picture with the outline of a dog, he sees the shape of a sheep (88), already showing the consequences of his drug abuse which will be further explored in the “micro level” section. Flustered by his difficulties taking the tests the deputies were applying, he leaves and comes back to finish his evaluation at another time. By his second visit, when he gets fully evaluated, the process of identity loss is almost complete. The passage in which the deputies call

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<sup>13</sup> “Aphasia is an acquired disorder of language due to brain damage” (Medscape). Neural Aphasia Clinics (NACs) are fictional facilities that resemble—and were inspired upon—drug rehabilitation centers, that is, clinics that admit people at advanced stages of drug addiction leading to brain deterioration, supposedly in order to try to rehabilitate them. The main NAC in *A Scanner Darkly* is New-Path.

Fred to schedule a new meeting is also the passage in which his new identity—a stoic almost irresponsive man, who will later be named “Bruce”—begins to appear, albeit still shyly. The psychologists eventually diagnose him with experiencing a “competition phenomenon [. . .] between the left and right hemispheres of [his] brain [. . .] like two signals that interfere with each other by carrying conflicting information” (*Scanner* 167), two conflicting identities: a police officer and an outlaw. This evaluation leads Fred/Arctor to be committed into a Neural Aphasia Clinic called New-Path, where Bruce will finally emerge.

Another macro-level manifestation of identity is related to the character Donna Hawthorne, although the reader is unaware that she is also an undercover agent for the most part of the novel. Even though it is eventually revealed that she works for the Federal Police, Donna is presented simply as Arctor’s girlfriend and a small drug dealer throughout most of the novel. We only learn that she is also a law enforcement agent when she drives Arctor to New-Path. The great plot twist and climax of the novel, however, is not that Donna is an undercover federal agent, but that her objective all along had been to get Robert Arctor addicted to Substance D and ultimately damaged to the point in which he would be considered harmless to the people at New-Path. The people for whom Donna works believe that *Mors ontologica* is grown inside New-Path, but have no way to prove it. In order to infiltrate somebody into New-Path and get evidence that the clinic was growing the flower, this person would have to be truly brain damaged and be accepted as a patient into the institution. Therefore, Robert Arctor could never be aware that he was being used, or that New-Path was suspected of growing *Mors ontologica*, but his brain was filled with images of “spring flowers,” suggested by one of the psychologists at the Sheriff’s Department (95) as well as by Donna herself (119). The federal agents hope was that once inside New-Path, something from his previous life would remain; “if they were lucky, pattern recognition would take place” (186), “[a] memory. A few charred brain cells [would] flicker on. Like a reflex. React, not act” (202).

In fact, by the time Fred/Arctor—now under his New-Path given identity Bruce—is trusted to go work in the farms, he encounters a field of *Mors ontologica* and collects one to bring as present to one of his friends at the institution, where another federal agent—Mike Westaway—was also infiltrated. Their plan had worked; Fred/Arctor/Bruce fulfills his role, but the paradox of conflicting social roles seems even stronger now: more than law-enforcement officers

breaking the law, an institution that is supposed to rehabilitate drug addicts is in fact creating their own clientele. As Vaughan Bell points out, this is “a society so awash with drugs, that the mysterious cartels have infiltrated all levels of government” (488), that is, New-Path “profits both from selling the drug and from treating those damaged by it (Hickman 154).

### 2.2.2 The Micro Level(s)

The story of *A Scanner Darkly* deals with multiple and fragmentary notions of identity, but these notions manifest in a more specific way at the level of language. In this level, there are many moments in which the issue of identity in *A Scanner Darkly* surfaces, some of which are reoccurring and related to others. Even though such manifestations may overlap from time to time, for organizational purposes I have classified them into topics: social roles, names, drugs/drug subculture, artificiality and humanity, capitalism, memory, and crisis.

#### 2.2.2.1 Social Roles

It is clear that social roles are a main origin for identity crisis in *A Scanner Darkly*. Any person needs to play different social roles daily in order to function in society; one is expected to act differently when acting as a parent, a professional, a friend, a lover, a stranger, and so on. The influence of social roles on the building of identity is evidenced in *A Scanner Darkly* when, for example, Fred/Arctor wonders about the nature of identity and its relations to social roles, thinking that “[y]ou put on a bishop’s robe and miter [ . . . ] and people bow and genuflect and like that, and try to kiss your ring, if not your ass, and pretty soon you’re a bishop. So to speak. What is identity? [ . . . ] Where does the act end? Nobody knows” (*Scanner* 20-21). However, the problem in *A Scanner Darkly* complicates due to the conflicting social roles which infiltrated officers, such as Fred/Arctor and Donna, have to perform. Such officers have the paradoxical job of breaking the law in order to enforce it. This duality is contradictory in itself, but it worsens when some of these agents become addicted to drugs, and the boundaries between the social role of an undercover officer and of a drug user begin to blur, and

the agents got deeper and deeper into using their own stuff, the whole way of life, as a matter of course; they became rich dealer addicts as well as marks [ . . . ] after a time some of them became to phase out their law-enforcement activities in favor of full-time dealing. But then, too, certain dealers

[. . .] began narking and went that route, winding up as sort of unofficial undercover narks. It all got murky. (*Scanner* 68)

This conflict is evidenced by Stuart Hall when he points out that “identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often *intersecting and antagonistic*, discourses, practices and positions” (*Who Needs* 4 my emphasis). However, in the case of Fred/Arctor, this conflict is even bigger—and, therefore, contributes even more to his identity crisis—due to the task that he is given: to spy and report on himself. In the beginning of the novel, agent Fred has multiple subjects on whom he reports, but as his boss Hank receives an anonymous tip that Bob Arctor has more funds than his job would provide, Fred is “assigned primarily to observe Bob Arctor” (45), after which point Arctor’s house is bugged with holographic scanners so that Fred can later review the recordings. Fred/Arctor himself tries to make sense of his condition: “[u]p the street at the house I am Bob Arctor, the heavy dooper suspect being scanned without his knowledge, and then every couple of days I find a pretext to slip down the street and into the apartment where I am Fred replaying miles and miles of tape to see what I did” (81-82).

#### 2.2.2.2 Names

Another even more basic way in which one can be identified is through a name. We are all given a name at birth and that name becomes not only a way of identification, but an identity, a part of who we are. In *A Scanner Darkly* names delineate each identity, especially those of the main character. The importance of names appears in the opening pages of the novel when Charles Freck has a fantasy about being stopped by a police officer, and being unable to remember his name, probably due to his drug use, he ponders that “[t]o survive in this fascist police state [. . .] you gotta always be able to come up with a name, your name. At all times” (*Scanner* 5). The incapability of remembering his own name generates, in this context, not only the incapability of being identified as a citizen, but the probability of being identified as a drug user.

Names are so important in the construal of identities in *A Scanner Darkly* that the main character has different names when playing different identities. Not only is he named Fred when in his police officer role and Robert Arctor in his civilian drug addict one, but by the end of the story—when he loses all traits of both Fred and Arctor—he becomes a new identity with a new name: Bruce. The importance of names as

part of an identity is acknowledged by the Neural Aphasia Clinics, which is where Fred/Arctor is renamed as Bruce: “[o]nce inside [the clinic] his wallet, his name, everything that identified him, was stripped away in preparation for building up a new personality not drug-oriented” (35). Besides Fred/Arctor/Bruce, at least another character in *A Scanner Darkly* also has a double naming. In the novel, Fred’s superior, Hank, is at least twice referred to as “Mr. F.” (*Scanner* 19, 35). This double naming of Hank is not explored, it is simply mentioned, and his civilian identity is never revealed. Another character that may have more than one name is Donna Hawthorne. Since she is an undercover federal agent, it can be inferred that she has either another civilian name or an unknown codename to report her undercover activities—or both—although no other names are explicitly revealed. Last names also play a role in creating identities. It is noticeable that the “non-human” identities of *A Scanner Darkly* possess no last names such as the robotic undercover agents wearing their scramble suit—namely Fred and Hank—or the robotic stimuli-response automaton, Bruce. Furthermore, Robert Arctor’s last name plays an even bigger role in the story of *A Scanner Darkly* since it works as a pun on the word “actor,” indication Arctor’s main function in the story.

### 2.2.2.3 Drugs/Drug Subculture

*A Scanner Darkly* can be seen as a cautionary tale about drug use. The opening lines of the novel set two important traits of its mood that are going to accompany the reader throughout the narrative: the degrading stage of hallucination caused by brain damage as well as the persistent sense of anguish and suffering that addiction and drug abuse causes:

Once a guy stood all day shaking bugs from his hair. The doctor told him there were no bugs in his hair. After he had taken a shower for eight hours, standing under hot water hour after hour suffering the pain of the bugs, he got out and dried himself, and he still had bugs in his hair; in fact, he had bugs all over him. A month later he had bugs in his lungs. (*Scanner* 1)

The novel already begins showing the consequences of drug abuse, and it ends in a similar fashion. The novel per se ends with the complete mental destruction of Fred/Arctor. However, the cautionary tone extrapolates the diegetic material, and the novel brings a postscript called “Author’s Note,” in which Dick dedicates the novel to all addicts,

including himself. Even though he claims in this postscript that “[t]here is no moral in this novel,” he begins it by saying that “[t]his has been a novel about some people who were punished entirely too much for what they did” (218) and ends it with a list of friends who are either deceased or have some kind of permanent health damage, the most devastating consequences of drug abuse.

Drug use, however, does not appear in the novel simply as a theme of its own, it is also closely related with the issue of identity. The most apparent consequence of drug abuse that can be seen in the novel is the addict’s brain deterioration that leads to loss of identity, such as what happens to Fred/Arctor. However, there are other moments in which the mentioning of drugs is related to identity as well. One example is when Charles Freck is running low on his stock of Substance D and thinks about the drug as what provides him with an identity: “I’ve got to get my supply or pretty soon I’ll be freaking, and then I won’t be able to do anything. Even sit at the curb like I am. *I not only won’t know who I am, I won’t even know where I am, or what’s happening*” (*Scanner* 6 my emphasis). However, the search for identity may be in vain. This is similar to what Israel Bartal describes in the search for a Jewish identity, saying that it is like “an onion, from which you peel layer after layer until you reach the nothingness at its core” (136). If the core in fact is empty, the search for identity will undoubtedly end in crisis, since we are just the roles we perform, with no core identity to be lost or found. “As always with Dick, reality is not what it appears, identity is fluid and changeable, and there are layers within layers” (Robb 269).

Another moment in which drugs are related to identity and loss of identity can be seen in Officer Fred’s speech at the Lion’s Club, when he talks about “[t]he identity of the purveyors of the poisons concocted of brain-destructive filth shot daily, orally taken daily, smoked daily by several million men and women—or rather, that were once men and women—is gradually being unraveled” (*Scanner* 18). In this passage, identity is mentioned both as something the drug producers want to hide and the drug users lose. This loss of identity presented in the phrase “were once men and women” implies that the drug addict ultimately loses his or her humanity.

#### 2.2.2.4 Humanity and Artificiality

The issue of humanity—or lack thereof—is closely related to the issue of artificiality, that is, people acting fake, playing a role. Denise Corrêa mentions that “the postmodern discourse [is] where the self ends up being an endless number of representations and fakes” (110). Drug



users have to act fake in order to hide their socially condemned condition of addicts. Furthermore, there is the sense that addicts, by losing their identity, also lose what makes them human. When Arctor arrives at New-Path to be admitted, for example, one employee asks, “What is it?” to which Donna replies “A person!” (*Scanner* 188). Artificiality is also present in Fred/Arctor’s daily life, since he has to pretend not to be a drug user when being Fred, and pretend not to be a police officer when being Arctor; Arctor is, in fact, an actor. Before his brain split fully takes place, Arctor, as Fred, report on himself to Hank and says that “Arctor is doomed [. . .] if he’s up to anything. And I have a hunch from what you say that he is” (*Scanner* 83). As the story progresses, however, Fred’s talking about Arctor as a different individual becomes more than acting, and Fred/Arctor loses his humanity at the same time as he stops acting, that is, when he becomes Bruce.

Fred/Arctor’s final stage of identity, Bruce, is characterized by absence. He lacks all that once made him human, made him a person with an identity. There is an emphasis on the loss of human traits and a highlight of animal, instinctive ones. Bruce is laconic and devoid of affect, and simply responds mechanically to requests and repeats what he hears. Traces of Bruce’s personality first appear when Officer Fred is reviewing tapes from the holo-scanners and gets a call from the psychologists to reschedule his evaluation. At this point, the narrator uses words such as “silence,” “pause,” “stoically,” and “glumly” to characterize Fred’s interaction with the psychologists over the phone (*Scanner* 155). Similar words are used when describing Fred/Arctor/Bruce through the rest of the novel, but Bruce becomes gradually visible in his actions as well, especially in chapter fourteen, to the point in which he either stops responding or merely answers short words and phrases such as “okay,” “nice,” “fine,” “I see,” “yes,” “no,” among others. (192-215). Bruce is all instincts and chapter fourteen also stresses that out by the frequent repetition of words related to senses, such as “smell,” “see,” “eye,” “touch,” “feel,” “noise,” “hear,” and so on. (193-202). “To speak a language is not only to express our innermost, original thoughts, it is also to activate the vast range of meanings which are already in our language and cultural systems” (Hall *The Question* 288). Bruce, lacking language, also lacks original thoughts and cultural systems.

#### 2.2.2.5 Capitalism

*A Scanner Darkly* can also be seen as a critique on Capitalism and consumerist societies. Such theme is strongly related to the themes

of drugs and identity. Drugs divide the capitalist society into one of non-drug users (referred to as “straights” in the novel) and another one of drug users. The non-drug users are part of the official/legal capitalist system, in which a massive presence of capitalist “monuments” can be seen, whereas the drug users are part of the underground capitalist system: the drug dealing market. The novel mentions names that strongly represent capitalism, especially as franchise systems that are present throughout the United States and the world, such as 7-11, McDonald’s, Pizza Hut, and Coca-Cola. However, there is not an exultation of such names, but on the contrary, they are mocked, for example, by the ironic use of the word “marvels” when the narrator describes when Fred/Arctor “wandered down one of the commercial streets of Anaheim, inspecting the McDonaldsburger stands and car washes and gas stations and Pizza Huts and other marvels” (*Scanner* 20). This word can be taken ironically given the context of the novel and this passage. Right after the narrator mentions such capitalist “marvels,” Arctor begins wondering about the nature of identity and reaches the conclusion that such stores lack the plurality of identities that people have:

In Southern California it didn’t make any difference anyhow where you went; there was always the same McDonaldsburger place over and over, like a circular strip that turned past you as you pretended to go somewhere. And when finally you got hungry and went to the McDonaldsburger place and bought a McDonald’s hamburger, it was the one they sold you last time and the time before that and so forth, back to before you were born, and in addition bad people—liars—said it was made out of turkey gizzards anyhow. (*Scanner* 22)

Another instance in which Capitalism manifests itself is within the drug subculture, in which the outcasts of the official culture live by the same rules as the “straights.” Even though they are illegal, drugs are also a commodity and as such, follow the rules of trade of the Capitalist system. Within the drug subculture there are buyers, sellers, supply, demand, competition, and so on. The exclusion of the drug users from the mainstream Capitalism can be seen, for example, when Charles Freck watches people enter a shopping mall, being unable to enter one himself:

one of those giant shopping malls surrounded by a wall that you bounced off like a rubber ball—unless you had a credit card on you and passed in through the electronic hoop. Owing no credit card for any of the malls, he could depend only on verbal report as to what the shops were like inside. [ . . . ] He watched the uniformed armed guards at the mall gate checking out each person. Seeing that the man or woman matched his or her credit card. (*Scanner 6*)

This passage clearly shows how capitalism works as an identity, that is, one is identified and allowed into a place based on their purchasing power: the credit card becomes an identification card. Outcasts of the official market such as Charles Freck are unable to find their identity within the system, since “[m]eaning is inherently unstable: it aims for closure (identity), but is constantly disrupted (by difference). It is constantly sliding away from us” (Hall *The Question* 288).

#### 2.2.2.6 Memory

The issue of identity is also closely related to memory insofar as it is through one’s memory that an identity can be consolidated. We know who we are also because we remember who we have been, what we have done. According to Hall “identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being” (*Who Needs* 4). This seems to be what happens with Fred/Arctor, who loses his history (as either identity), his language (becoming mere monosyllabic repetition), and culture. He loses complete touch with his identities once he forgets about his past and cannot remember who he is. The issue of memory begins to manifest strongly in *A Scanner Darkly* mainly when Fred/Arctor already shows extensive signs of memory loss, but from the first time the character appears, he already shows some subtle signs of memory loss. During his speech at the Lion’s Club, Officer Fred forgets the memorized speech he was supposed to give and has to improvise.

The issue of memory and identity becomes more evident when Fred observes Barris receiving a telephone call and passing for Arctor: a locksmith calls Robert Arctor about a bad check and Barris not only pretends to be Arctor on the phone, but he also has an old checkbook of Arctor’s. Fred/Arctor is convinced Barris is plotting against him, forging his signature and passing bad checks, but the reader may not be so sure of it. Fred/Arctor’s thoughts get confusing and he has memory

lapses; he momentarily forgets he is Robert Arctor, and wonders “[w]hat was Barris getting Arctor back for? What the hell had Arctor been up to? Arctor must have burned him pretty bad, Fred thought, for this” (*Scanner* 132). At this point, such moments of disconnection with his identity as Arctor were brief and he immediately realizes who he is and says “I’m the man on the scanners, the suspect Barris was fucking over with his weird call with the locksmith, and I was asking, What’s Arctor been up to get Barris on him like that? I’m slushed; my brain is slushed” (132). As Corrêa puts it, “the quest for memories ends up being the quest for one’s identity” (57). The memory confusion Fred/Arctor is experiencing is transmitted to the reader in the narrative, and it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether Barris was in fact posing as Arctor or if Arctor had signed the check and simply forgotten about it. Such confusion is transmitted in passages such as: “He got out the check to see how closely Barris had been able to approximate his handwriting. [. . .] Arctor saw that the handwriting was his [. . .] A perfect forgery. He would never have known it wasn’t his, except that he remembered not having written it” (*Scanner* 140-41).

Another passage in which memory is directly related to identity is when Arctor thinks about his house as a perfect place for a family. We know through Arctor’s memory that he had been a married man with children and that he lives in the same house he used to live with his family. At advanced stages of his identity dissociation, Arctor seems to have no recollection of this past life and ponders on the fact that his house had been designed for a family and the way he and his roommates were using it was a waste. This passage is filled with irony, since the reader is aware of the fact that he is somewhat wishing for exactly what he once had, only he is unaware of his past.

“What a waste, he thought, of a truly good house. So much could be done with it. A family, children and a woman, could live here. It was designed for that: three bedrooms. Such a waste; such a fucking waste! They ought to take it away from him, he thought; enter the situation and foreclose. Maybe they will. And put it to better use; that house yearns for that. That house has seen so much better days, long ago. Those days could return. If another kind of person had it and kept it up” (145).

Memory is an issue that becomes more and more evident and important as Fred/Arctor approaches the final stages of his identity loss.

As Bruce takes over, he has no recollection of his past lives: “He heard nothing now. And forgot the meaning of the words, and finally, the words themselves” (200). “If, indeed, the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold, and to organize its past and future into coherent experience, it become difficult enough to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but ‘heaps of fragments’ and in a practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory” (Jameson 71). As previously mentioned, Bruce becomes absence: absence of memory, absence of language, absence of humanity, absence of life; “There is little future [. . .] for someone who is dead. There is, actually, only the past. And for Arctor-Fred-Bruce there is not even the past” (*Scanner* 210). Bruce’s memories are not his own; anything that remains from Arctor cannot be reliably recognized as being part of his past: “[o]nce he had lived with two other guys and sometimes they had kidded about owning a rat named Fred that lived under their sink. And when they got really broke one time, they told people, they had to eat poor old Fred” (211). It is difficult to determine whether this episode ever took place and Arctor decided to adopt the codename Fred for his police officer persona based on it, or—which is more likely—if such a memory is simply his brain mixing up separate facts of his life: that he once had two roommates, and that he once was a “rat” in the sense of an undercover spy, that answered to the name Fred.

Such issues with memory can make the reader question anything conveyed via Fred/Arctor’s memories and perceptions. One such thing is the existence of a past life with wife and children. We only know of his past life because of things Fred/Arctor either thinks or says. He first mentions having two kids when giving his speech at the Lion’s club. Later he has some memories of how he was bored with his family and left them. Finally, when Hank lets him go, Fred/Arctor says “I’ve got two kids,” to which Hank replies “I don’t believe you do; you’re not supposed to” (180). The fact that such children only appear when mentioned by Fred/Arctor along with this last comment by Hank allow the reader to question if they are real at all, that is, if there has ever been a fourth, pre-Arctor identity, that of a father and husband.

#### 2.2.2.7 Crisis

The conflicting social roles which Fred/Arctor needs to perform, along with his abusive drug use lead to a crisis of identity, and aspects related to contradiction and crisis can be seen throughout the novel, oftentimes filled with irony. At the beginning of the novel, for example, the narrator says that “[r]oaming aimlessly along like this on the public

streets with all kinds of people, [Fred/Arctor] always had a strange feeling as to who he was” (20). Shortly afterwards, Jim Barris discloses the fact that he observes such contradictions in Arctor, telling Freck that: “I have come—we have come, those of us who have observed Arctor acutely and perceptively—to distinguish in him certain contradictions. Both in terms of personality structure and in behavior” (32-33). Such passages show the effects that a double life is having on Fred/Arctor’s life: not only are others—i.e., Barris—noticing something weary about his behavior, but Fred/Arctor himself begins to show signs of an identity crisis; he has “a strange feeling as to who he [is],” he does not fully identify with either identity. The double life lead by Fred/Arctor is even more contradictory due to the aforementioned conflicting social roles of an undercover officer who must break the law he is supposed to be enforcing. Although such social roles are conflicting, “both the dealers and the narks knew what the street drugs did to people. On that they agreed. [. . .] Arctor ruminated about other ironic agreements in the minds of narcotics agents and dealers” (67).

Another ironic passage of the novel shows an intoxicated Ernie Luckman talking about homonyms and the problem homonyms may pose and wondering “How many Robert Arctors do you think there are, Barris” (74)? This apparently mundane question becomes much more interesting for the reader, who is fully aware of the multiplicity of Robert Arctors. The same question also generates a philosophical one in Fred/Arctor’s mind, who shortly after being assigned the task of focusing mainly in Robert Arctor’s activities, already questions the contradiction of his role, as can be seen in the following passage:

“[t]o himself, Bob Arctor thought, *How many Bob Arctors are there?* A weird and fucked-up thought. Two that I can think of, he thought. The one called Fred, who will be watching the other one, called Bob. The same person. Or is it? Is Fred actually the same as Bob? Does anybody know? I would know, if anyone did, because I’m the only person in the world that knows that Fred is Bob Arctor. *But*, he thought, *who am I? Which one of them is me?* (Scanner 74-75 original emphasis)

Such discomfort and confusion with the task of observing himself remains and, later in the novel, when Fred is already well acquainted with the activity of watching Arctor on tape, the same questioning concerning the nature of his identity arises and Fred/Arctor tries to make

sense of his condition by pondering: “Up the street at the house I am Bob Arctor, the heavy doper suspect being scanned without his knowledge, and then every couple of days I find a pretext to slip down the street and into the apartment where I am Fred replaying miles and miles of tape to see what I did” (81-82).

Fred/Arctor’s crisis of identity also has a physical cause: split-brain phenomenon caused by Substance D abuse. The narrative of the novel runs somewhat linearly and with no interruptions until the point in which Fred/Arctor has his first appointment with the Police Department’s psychologists. During this first visit, he is not yet diagnosed as suffering from split-brain, but the psychologist deputies ask him some questions to assess if that could be his case. The narrative of Fred/Arctor’s first evaluation is abruptly interrupted by a chunk of a scientific article discussing split-brain phenomenon. One of the deputies is giving Fred/Arctor instructions about the task he is expected to perform by saying “[w]hithin the apparently meaningless lines is a familiar object that we would all recognize. You are to tell me what the . . .” at which point what seems to be another narrator interrupts by saying “Item. In July 1969, Joseph E. Bogen published his revolutionary article ‘The Other Side of The Brain: An Apositional Mind.’” and such narrator continues describing and quoting Bogen’s article until the deputy reappears in the exact same place where he was interrupted: “. . . object is and point to it in the total field” (*Scanner* 86). This is the first of many interruptions that will follow until the end of the novel, some by scientific articles discussing the duality of the mind, some by quotes in German, some by flashbacks that appear in the form of dialogues such as plays or movie scripts. The narrative becomes as fragmented as the identity of the character, but this phenomenon may also indicate that the narrator himself—or even the novel—is in crisis, portraying multiple identities or personalities.

The split-brain phenomenon is informed in the fictional realm of the narrative as being an occurrence in which both sides of the brain compete for dominance and the person begins to feel and act as if there were literally two different people in his or her brain. Bogen’s article explains that “[a]ll the evidence indicates that the separation of the two hemispheres creates two independent spheres of consciousness within a single cranium, that is to say, within a single organism” (*Scanner* 92). The Fred/Arctor duality becomes, therefore, not only metaphorical, but literal; the separation of identities that was a product of acting within conflicting social roles ironically becomes a scientifically explained separation. The several interruptions the narrative presents from chapter

seven on indicate this duality, and the interruption by German quotes is not surprising given that one of the deputies asks Fred/Arctor if he had been experiencing “[t]houghts not your own. As if another person or mind were thinking. But different from the way you would think. Even foreign words that you don’t know” (*Scanner* 87). Jameson mentions that “[the] shift in the dynamics of cultural pathology can be characterized as one in which the alienation of the subject is displaced by the fragmentation of the subject” (63), and Fred/Arctor’s pathology is simultaneously biological and cultural, in both cases ending with the fragmentation of his identity.



## CHAPTER TWO PROJECTING A FILM

This chapter will discuss how the issue of identity is presented and explored in Richard Linklater's adaptation of *A Scanner Darkly*, comparing and contrasting the film and the novel it adapts. Linklater's film was released in 2006 and it stars Keanu Reeves in the role of Fred/Arctor, Winona Ryder as Donna Hawthorne, Robert Downey Jr. as Jim Barris, Woody Harrelson as Ernie Luckman, and Rory Cochrane in the role of Charles Freck, who, in the film, is a combination of two characters in the novel: Charles Freck and a minor character called Jim Barris. In order to carry out this analysis, I will discuss how the film retells the story of its originating novel and how it makes use of its own particularities in order to convey meaning.

### 3.1 Richard Linklater and Rotoscoping

The first noticeable issue about Richard Linklater's *A Scanner Darkly* is the fact that it is a rotoscope animation, that is, an animation based on live action footage. The Oxford Dictionary Online defines "rotoscope" both as a noun, meaning "a device which projects and enlarges individual frames of filmed live action to permit them to be used to create cartoon animation and composite film sequences" and as a verb, meaning "[to] transfer (an image from live action film) into another film sequence using a rotoscope" (<http://bit.ly/T8kYr0>). The animation provides the film with an eerie feeling of familiarity: one can see clearly who the actors are, yet they are not quite the way they are supposed to be, that is, the way they look in real life.

Rotoscoping has also been previously used by Linklater in his 2001 film *Waking Life*, and it is not coincidental that he has chosen to use the same technique in both films, since both deal with the notion of perception, and rotoscoping somehow alters the spectators' perception of the film. *Waking Life* is a film that follows an unnamed main character (played by Wiley Wiggins), who is trapped in a constant state of dream life. As the character tries to awaken, just to find himself trapped in yet another dream, he meets and talks to scholars, philosophers, actors, and even Richard Linklater himself, and has philosophical discussions with all of these characters about the nature of reality and the meaning of life. Linklater has two cameo appearances in the film: in the beginning, when he is animated in high detail and has only one line, and in the end, when he is animated in a slightly less realistic way but has a longer part and discusses a dream which he

supposedly had after reading an essay by Philip K. Dick, in which Dick discusses his thoughts on the nature of reality and time. The connection between *Waking Life* and *A Scanner Darkly*, thus, is technical as well as thematic: even though the main theme of both stories is not exactly the same, both deal with reality and perception, which are main Dickeyan themes.

The use of rotoscope animation in *Waking Life* and in *A Scanner Darkly* is, however, different as far as the level of detail used in each film is concerned. The style of animation in *Waking Life* changes throughout the film. At certain points there is a high level of detail in the animation, in which the actors can be realistically perceived as live human beings (fig. 1), but at other moments the images resemble a cartoon (fig. 2) or are completely stylized (fig. 3). Rotoscoping in *Waking Life* also allows for the use of some fantastic elements that pertain to the dream world, such as people floating and flying (fig. 4) or backgrounds fading and people turning into clouds (fig. 5). This shift in style and level of detail is also connected with the narrative itself, since it is set in dreams within dreams within dreams, and the nature of dreams allows—or even calls for—the stylization that Linklater uses in some scenes.

*Scanner Darkly*, on the other hand, does not deal with the dream world, but it also questions reality and perception, albeit in a different way. Whereas *Waking Life* contrasts the reality of the dream with the reality of the waking state, *A Scanner Darkly* puts in check the possible realities of our life—with all the realities of different social roles or of being undercover, for example—as well as the reality/perception of the sober mind versus the reality/perception of the substance-altered one. The technique, therefore, still functions as another layer of meaning to the narrative, since it alters our perception of the characters, just as the drugs alter the characters' perception of the world. The rotoscoping in *A Scanner Darkly*, therefore, renders its characters in a much more realistic way, and spectators can access the *mise-en-scène* almost as live action. The choice of rotoscoping the film realistically, that is, with a high level of detail, both adds meaning to the narrative itself (altering the spectator's perception, but not completely) and allows the identification of the cast, which consists mainly of famous Hollywood actors.



**Figure 1 - *Waking Life* - the main character – realistic**



**Figure 2 - *Waking Life* - the main character – cartoon**



**Figure 3 - *Waking Life* - the main character – stylized**



**Figure 4 - *Waking Life* – the main character – floating**



**Figure 5 - *Waking Life* – poet David Jewell and filmmaker Caveh Zahedi talk about the existence of a “holy moment” as the background fades into the sky and they become clouds.**

The cast chosen to act in *A Scanner Darkly* is also thematically significant to the story. Some of the actors in the film have been publically involved with some kind of illegal activity related to drug use. Winona Ryder, for example, was arrested for shoplifting in 2001, when she was also charged with possession of prescription drugs (Young par. 1). Robert Downey Jr. is publically known for his struggle with substance abuse, having been arrested and committed to rehabilitation centers several times.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Woody Harrelson is publicly known for being an advocate for hemp, having narrated the documentary “Grass” and having been arrested for planting marijuana<sup>15</sup>. The public lives of the actors may aid in the identification of the film’s characters as being “outlaws” in some sense, which may make the story somewhat more believable for spectator; that is, the public identity of such actors help build the identity of the characters in the spectators’ minds.

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<sup>14</sup> Information about Downey Jr.’s addiction struggle are widespread on the news, and can be found even on his IMDb profile:

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000375/bio>

<sup>15</sup> <http://abcn.ws/N5DeOC>

### 3.2 Intertextuality and Metanarrative

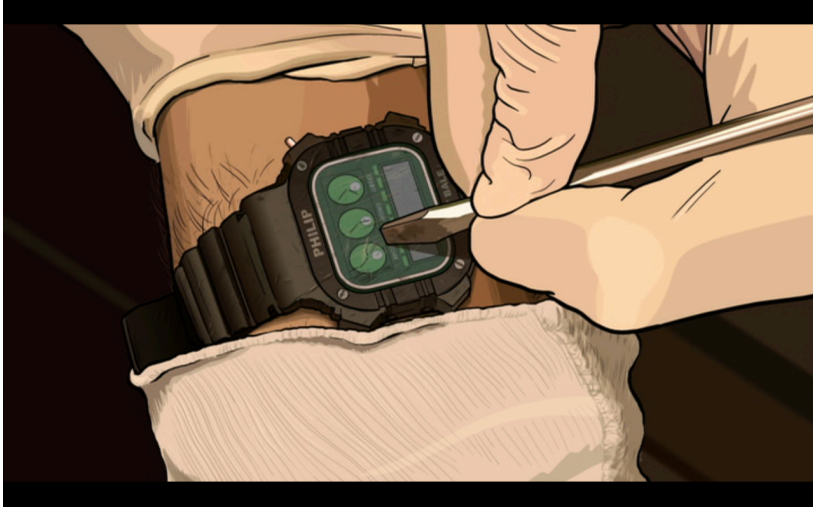
Intertextuality is present not only in the fact that Linklater's character mentions Philip K. Dick in his movie *Waking Life*, but also in other moments of *A Scanner Darkly*—both the novel and the film. A noteworthy passage in both the film and the novel is when Arctor, Barris, and Luckman are talking about an impostor that posed as an impostor. Luckman tells his roommates about a man who “appeared on TV claiming to be a world-famous impostor. [This man] had posed at one time or another [. . .] as a great surgeon at Johns Hopkins Medical College, a theoretical submolecular high-velocity particle-research physicist on a federal grant at Harvard [. . .] [but] the guy never posed as any of those. He never posed as anything but a world-famous impostor” (*Scanner* 156-57). The issue of the impostor who impersonated an impostor here is similar to Fred/Arctor's multiple layers of identity, and the scene was kept in the film with some minor but notable changes. Whereas in the novel Luckman explains that such impostor-poser had his idea while reading a book—“[an] autobiography about [a] world-famous impostor”(157)—in the film Luckman talks about how the impostor got his idea by watching “that old DiCaprio movie,” i.e. *Catch Me if You Can*. (ASD 00:52:24-00:53:14). Intertextuality in this case is also metanarrative, since the book mentions another book whereas the film mentions another film.

Metanarrative is also strongly present in the fact that the film calls attention to the medium of Cinema itself. First of all, as previously discussed, Arctor is an actor as well as a spectator: when acting as officer Fred, he is a spectator watching his own life on a screen (fig. 6). The many levels/layers of identity are also portrayed visually in frames within frames: we are watching the film through its frame and Fred is watching Arctor through the frames of his surveillance monitors. Furthermore, the holo-scanners have audiovisual components that are recorded separately just as in Cinema: a camera captures the images while a microphone captures the audio.



**Figure 6 - Officer Fred watches Robert Arctor on screens.**

Another use of intertextuality in the film is a subtle reference to the author of the novel. When Arctor, Barris, and Luckman are trying to fix Arctor's car, Barris uses his watch—which supposedly also works as a calculator—to do some nonsensical and calculation under the influence of drugs concerning how many people would fit in the car. In a close up of Barris's wrist, we can quickly see that the brand of his watch is a fictional one called "Philip" (fig. 7). As Jameson notices, "our awareness of the pre-existence of other versions, previous films of the novel as well as the novel itself, is now a constitutive and essential part of the film's structure: we are not, in other words, in 'intertextuality' as a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect" (67) and de film explicitly pays its due to the originating text by Philip K. Dick.



**Figure 7 - Jim Barris uses the calculator on his watch "Philip"**

### 3.3 *A Scanner Darkly*: Story and Plots

Considering that Philip K. Dick's and Richard Linklater's *A Scanner Darkly* are works that pertain to two different systems—using Robert Stam's definition, the “single track medium” of literature and the “multitrack medium” (56) of film—it is possible to say that both works tell the same story via different plots. Since the term “plot” refers to “the way narrative events are arranged in the film” (Prince 10), that is, how a story is told, the plots of a novel and a film will be different due to their very nature: a novel can only rely on words whereas a film makes use of images, sound, and music to help convey meaning. The difference in the two plots of *A Scanner Darkly*, however, goes beyond this one related to each medium's nature: it specifically touches the question of time and chronology.

In the previous chapter, I have discussed how the narrative of Philip K. Dick's *A Scanner Darkly* becomes fragmentary once Fred/Arctor's brain begins deteriorating more severely. Scientific articles, quotes in German, and flashbacks interrupt the narrator and the characters at several times. In this sense, the narrative itself merges with Fred/Arctor's state of mind, making the reader almost as disturbed as the character must be. In contrast, Linklater's narrative is quite linear and straightforward. The film has only one clear flashback—of Arctor's presumed previous life with his family—and its cinematography follows



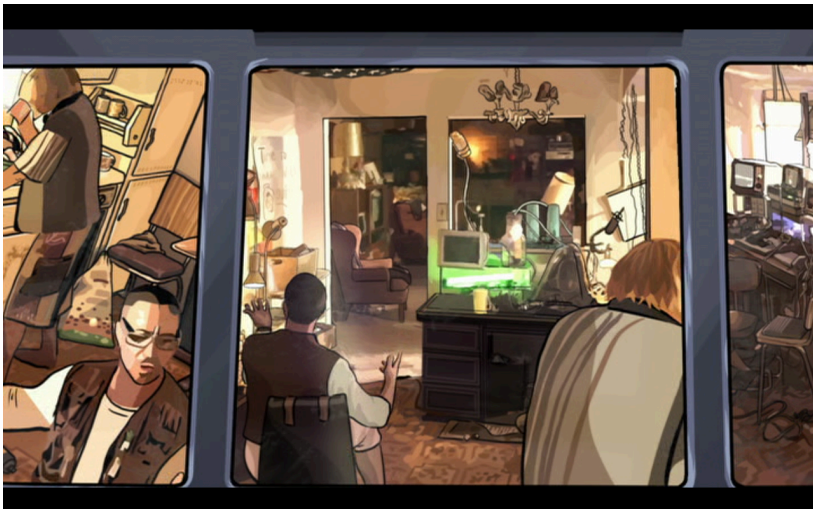
the classic Hollywood style of continuity. Most of the framing is centered and eye-leveled, and there are virtually no jump cuts, handheld cameras, canted angles, or other disruptive framings or camera movements. Most of the moments in which there is an extensive use of multiple framing (e.g. figs. 8, 9, and 10), high angles (figs. 11 and 12), and canted angles (fig. 13), for example, are directly related to surveillance cameras, especially when Fred watches the recorded images in the surveillance monitors. Surveillance cameras are instruments of control, of manipulation and “the postmodern individual, who has his most intimate life controlled and manipulated by late capitalism, is a subject of loss” (Corrêa 113). The use of such disruptive framings in moments of surveillance reinforce the manipulation that Fred/Arctor—as well as society in general—is undergoing, at the same time as it touches the issue of identity and privacy. Other than that, the only evident elements that may generate some kind of anguish or estrangement in the spectator, in the same way the novel does to the reader, are the use of rotoscoping, the visual portrayal of the scramble suit, and the occasional occurrence of a “fast-forwarding.” Even though Linklater keeps his narrative linear and smooth, these three additions proper of the film medium contribute to generating meaning in the story.



**Figure 8 - Hank shows Fred how to use the monitors of the holo-scanners**



**Figure 9 - POV shot - Fred watches Robert Arctor's house**



**Figure 10 – multiple framing on surveillance monitors**



Figure 11 – high angle on surveillance monitors



Figure 12 – Fred watches the holo-scanner tapes



Figure 13 – high, canted angle; fastforwarding

Rotoscoping, as previously argued, adds a visual effect to the meaning of altered perception at the same time as it calls attention to the film medium. The character's perception in *A Scanner Darkly* is distorted both by the nature of the undercover job and by drug use. The undercover job itself has layers of perception in it: Arctor's roommates see him as their equal when he is in fact spying on them; Fred/Arctor is aware of his double agent condition, but unaware that he is being used himself for other reasons. In this sense, rotoscoping adds layers to the filmic representation, that is, we do not have direct access to the mise-en-scène, but we see it transformed by the filter of animation. Similarly, this estrangement in perception puts in evidence to the spectator that a film is being shown; *A Scanner Darkly* represents itself as representation, and not in an attempt to convey reality.

Perception is also altered in the story when a character is wearing a scramble suit, but the visual portrayal of the scramble suit in the film also adds to the distressful mood of the novel. Whereas in the novel the reader may or may not feel any kind of discomfort by the description of the scramble suit itself, the spectator of the film possibly will at first dislike the ever-changing image of fragments of different people that compose the suit (figs. 14 and 15). It becomes difficult to focus on a person when they have several different body parts at any given second. This visual portrayal also reinforces the idea of shifting and fragmentary



identities, which relates to “the post-modern subject, conceptualized as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity” (Hall *The Question* 277).



**Figure 14 – Fred/Arctor in the scramble suit**



**Figure 15 – Fred/Arctor in the Scramble suit**

Even though the film is mainly linear and continuous, it uses another metalinguistic element to call attention to its nature as Cinema: fast-forwarding. In the beginning of the film we see Barris and Freck driving to a convenience store and purchasing some items as if we were watching a videotape being fast-forwarded (figs. 13, 16 and 17). Later it becomes evident that such visual element is present because that is a society constantly under surveillance but at this point it may still seem awkward to see time altered in such a manner, especially since we are not watching another character viewing such tapes. The fast-forwarding effect is seen at other moments in the film, especially when Fred is reviewing the recordings made by the scanners, but the aforementioned sequence of Barris and Luckman at the convenience store puts the spectator in the place of the police officers analyzing the tapes, that is, the spectator becomes a character.



**Figure 16**



Figure 17

### 3.4 Blurry Boundaries and The Limits of Diegesis

As discussed in the Introduction, one of the main characteristics of postmodernism is the de-centering of the subject and the absence of referentiality, that is, the lines that separate certain items become blurry. Such blurry boundaries can be observed in *A Scanner Darkly* in the existence of multiple identities—especially that of Fred/Arctor—as well as in the diegesis itself. To discuss the diegesis, I will use two sequences in the film: Freck’s suicide and Fred/Arctor’s third visit with the psychologists, when he learns about his split-brain condition.

Concerning identity, some of the boundaries that become blurry in *A Scanner Darkly* are, for example, those that separate Fred and Arctor, or those that delineate what a cop or an outlaw is. Throughout the story it becomes clear that Arctor and Fred interconnect and merge in such a way that it is only possible to perceive them as co-existing and not two completely different identities. It is impossible to determine which one (if either) is the originating identity: one does not know if Fred is acting as Arctor or if Arctor is acting as Fred. Similarly, the boundaries between the outlaw and the law enforcement officer are just as unclear: a police officer (Fred) is breaking the law just as much as an outlaw (Arctor) is enforcing it. The good-bad Manichaeism ceases to exist when “meaning, truth, and reference are replaced by surfaces which results in fragmentation of the subject and the loss of the

distinction between inside and outside” (Shirvani 293). This phenomenon is already present in the second sequence of the film, when the audience is introduced to the character, as Officer Fred. We first see and hear Fred in the same way the people he is addressing in the Brown Bear Lodge conference do: as “a constantly shifting vague blur” (00:05:23). However, as the host of the conference is introducing Fred to the audience and explaining about the scramble suit, the camera zooms into Fred and penetrates his suit, delivering an extreme close-up of Arctor’s eyes (fig. 18) followed by a tilt down to extreme close-ups of Arctor’s nose and lips (fig. 19), which is when he delivers his first line, in a whisper: “This is terrible,” in the voice of Robert Arctor. When we see Fred/Arctor from outside the suit, we hear his mechanical synthesized voice, but when we watch him from inside the scramble suit, we see and hear Robert Arctor. Linklater takes advantage of the “multi-track medium” of Cinema and shows the duplicity in Fred/Arctor from the very beginning: we first *see* Fred but we first *hear* Arctor.

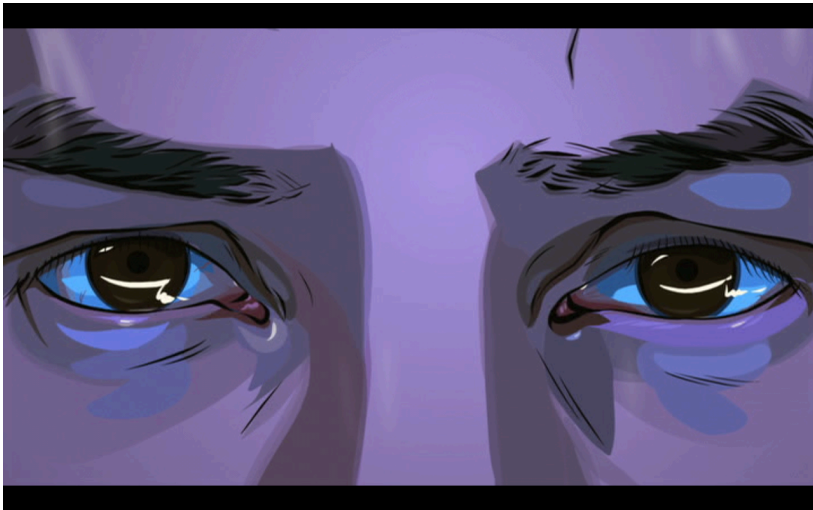


Figure 18





**Figure 19**

Just as the boundaries of identity become hard to delineate, the limits of the diegesis also becomes blurry: the diegetic and non-diegetic world interconnect. Keanu Reeves in an actor playing the role of Fred/Arctor, a character who is acting in the story. Arctor is being watched by Fred and both are being watched by spectators. Characters become actors just as spectators become characters in a way. One

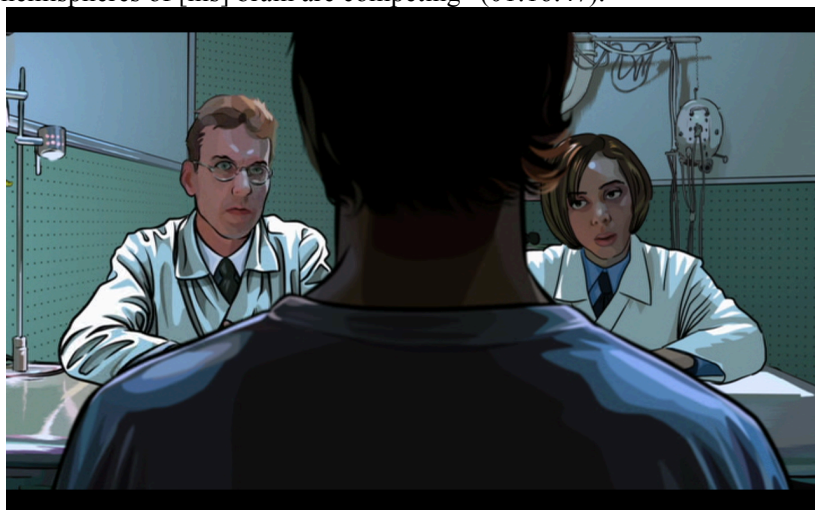
example of diegetic and non-diegetic material merging into each other is Freck's suicide scene. In the film, Freck's suicide attempt is narrated by a voice-over narrator, which uses basically the same words as the narrator of the novel. The scene starts with a radio playing music and Charles Freck tuning into a station in which a man narrates his life: "Charles Freck, becoming progressively more and more depressed by what was happening around him decided finally to off himself" (00:58:30-00:58:41). The voice on the radio can be taken to be diegetic not only because Freck adjusts the dial and we hear the changing stations, but because the camera focuses on the radio and tilts up to Freck, who is on his back and turns around to look at the radio, with a puzzled expression on his face (fig. 20), as if surprised to be hearing his life narrated on the radio. As the scene continues, there are cuts into different times and spaces (he goes from the kitchen to the bedroom, to a store, etc.) but the voice-over continues uninterruptedly, thus becoming non-diegetic material.



**Figure 20 – Charles Freck hears his life narrated on the radio**

In another moment in the film, there is the use of a non-diegetic element being used diegetically: the split-screen. A split-screen is an easily perceptible framing usually showing different actions simultaneously. In *A Scanner Darkly*, however, Linklater chooses a highly significant moment to use split-screen: the moment in which Arctor learns about his brain's split state. Fred/Arctor goes back to the

psychologists' office to get the results on his tests and they inform him about his condition. As they do so, the frame shows the back of Arctor and each psychologist on either side of him, over his shoulders, facing the camera (fig 21). Linklaters keeps to his continuity editing by using traditional framing instead of the split-screen per se, but he creates a split-screen diegetically, using Arctor's body as the dividing element. Even though the same time, space, and action are being shown here, the diegetic split-screen occurs when Fred/Arctor is being told of his split-brain, which adds great meaning to the choice. Furthermore, the speech of the psychologists overlaps at times, as they occasionally compete to give Fred/Arctor information, just as, in Fred/Arctor says that "the two hemispheres of [his] brain are competing" (01:16:47).



**Figure 21 – the diegetic split-screen**

### 3.5 Multiplicities

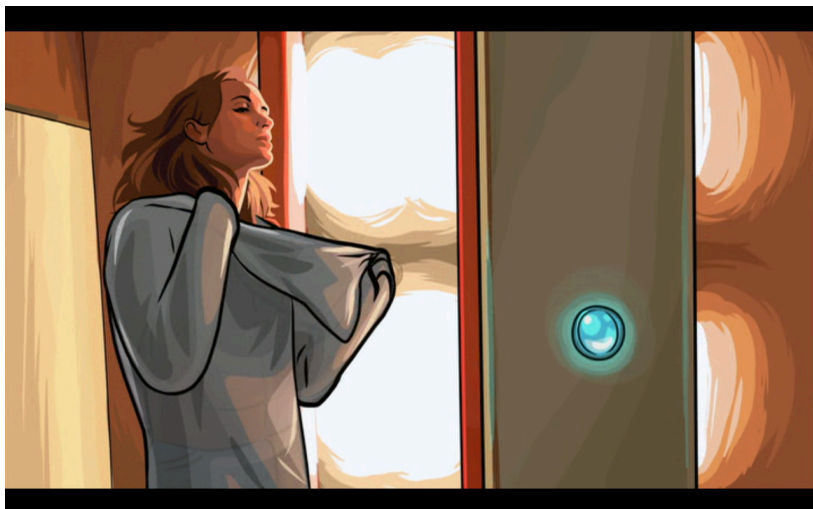
As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the chief manifestations of identity and its multiplicity in *A Scanner Darkly* is the existence of conflicting social roles and variety of names. The main character, for example, has two separate names—Fred and Robert Arctor—each related to a given social role, and ends up with a third name, social role, and identity—Bruce. In that sense, Fred/Arctor is not only a double, as the Portuguese translation title of the novel and film—

*O Homem Duplo*<sup>16</sup>—suggests, but he is also a “triple,” at least. Some other characters in both the novel and the film present some duplicity as well, but one in particular is “promoted” from a double in the novel to a triple in the film: Donna Hawthorne.

The double identity of Donna is not only maintained in the film, but it is enhanced by it. Just as in the novel, Donna Hawthorne appears to be simply Arctor’s girlfriend and smalltime drug dealer until towards the end of the film. In the novel she is revealed to be a federal agent with the ulterior motive of getting Arctor addicted to substance D in order to get him admitted into a Neural Aphasia Clinic, where they believe the plant used to produce the drug is being grown. Towards the end of the film, however, there is not only the discovery that Donna was part of this organized master plan, but she is also revealed to be Arctor’s boss, Hank. Since the duplicity of Hank in the novel—where he is occasionally named Mr. F.—appears to be an enigma, Linklater adds more meaning to it, by making these two characters, that are a constant presence in Fred/Arctor’s life, into one. The closest person to Fred is Hank and the closest one to Arctor is Donna; as it turns out, Fred is Arctor and now Hank is Donna. This change makes the surveillance and the betrayal upon Arctor even bigger, since he is not only being manipulated by his girlfriend, but also by his boss. Such change adds enormously to the story and cinema allows it to be done in a simple and fast way, with no use for words: the fact that Donna is Hank is not mentioned or emphasized, but shown quickly in a twenty-three-second-long shot (1:25:41–1:26:05) that shows Hank getting off his/her scramble suit to leave the Sheriff’s Department (fig. 22).

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<sup>16</sup> The double man (my translation)



**Figure 22 – Hank getting off the scramble suit and revealing Donna**

Even though Donna is revealed to be a double agent in the novel, her name remains the same; the person behind the persona either has the same name or the narrator chooses to omit her other name(s). The multiplicity of identities given by different social roles is reinforced by names in the film in Donna's character as well. After we have already been shown that Donna is Hank, we see her talking to another man who is infiltrated as a staff member in New Path, a sequence in which they talk about their plan and when such plan is made clear to the spectator. In the film, however, this third identity is also given a third name: Audrey. The fact that Donna is not only a double agent but also Fred's boss, as well the third name—and identity—given to Donna/Hank/Audrey, enhances multiplicity in the film, as well as it makes Arctor/Fred/Bruce parallel to Donna/Hank/Audrey. Both people have three closely related identities: Arctor is Donna's boyfriend, Fred works under the supervision of Hank, and Bruce ends up in New Path because of Audrey. Hall argues that "as the systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities, any of which we could identify with – at least temporarily" (*The Question* 277), and that seems to be the case of Donna/Hank/Audrey, since she is fully aware of each of her identities and can perform any of the roles without any external interference. Arctor/Fred/Bruce, on the other hand, can only partially

and temporarily identify with either Arctor or Fred, but Bruce comes to existence without his permission or awareness.

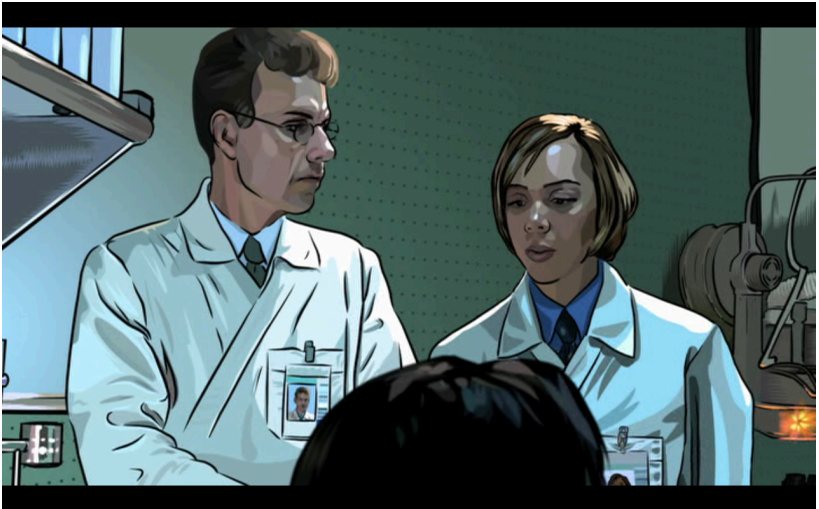
### 3.6 Becoming Bruce

The process which Fred/Arctor undergoes to become Bruce is not accidental: Donna/Hank/Audrey and the people for whom she works have purposefully manipulated him into getting addicted to Substance D in order to infiltrate a “harmless” unknowingly spy into New-Path. In the novel, Fred/Arctor is exposed to a series of references to flowers that the Federal Police hoped would stay in Bruce’s unconscious, in an attempt for a “pattern recognition [to] take place” (*Scanner* 186) and for Bruce to collect a sample of the flower from the fields. The film enlarges such references making use of its visual track.

One moment in which there is a reference to flowers is when Fred/Arctor pays his first visit to the psychologists’ office in the Sherriff’s Department. Fred/Arctor asks for suggestions to reach Donna, to which one of the deputies say “you can buy her flowers. This time of year you can get little blue flowers at any nursery. Give them to her” (00:27:57-00:28:06). The images of spring flowers in the novel have been replaced by “little blue flowers” since the flowers in the movie are blue, but what is remarkable about this statement is more than the psychologist words, but how they are conveyed by the camera. When the psychologist says “give them to her,” there is a close-up point-of-view shot of her face saying it (fig. 23), which adds a strong sense of command to her statement. Furthermore, the entire scene has a constant subtle presence of flowers. One of the machines behind the deputies regularly shows a blinking orange light in the shape of a flower (fig. 24), which works as a repetitive image meant to get imprinted in Fred/Arctor’s unconscious. On Fred/Arctor’s third visit to the psychologists, the blinking flower is no longer there, but it has been replaced by flowers on the table, which were absent in the previous scene. The shots used in this last scene are mainly the diegetic split-screen previously discussed, shots of Arctor seen from over the shoulder of both psychologists (fig. 25), and a shot of the three of them from the side, in which the screen is divided by an arrange of bluish purple flowers on the table in the center of the screen, and Fred/Arctor and the psychologists on either side of it (fig. 26).



**Figure 23 – “Give them to her”**



**Figure 24 – a blinking orange flower on the corner of the screen**





Figure 25



Figure 26 – Flowers separating Fred/Arctor and the psychologists



## CONCLUSION

The objective of this research was to present a comparative analysis between Philip K. Dick's novel *A Scanner Darkly* and Richard Linklater's film adaptation of it, focusing on the theme of postmodern identity and identity crisis, which I have elected as the main theme of both works. In order to carry out such analysis, I have in Chapter One, focused on the novel, the preceding work. Subsequently, in Chapter Two, I have dealt with the film, already comparing and contrasting some aspects of it with the novel, such as the narrative structure and the multiplicity of identities in each work. In this conclusion I will review some of the main issues I have raised and finally answer the three research questions proposed in the introduction: (1) how is identity emphasized in the story?; (2) how do novel and film deal with such an issue?; and (3) is the emphasis given to identity equivalent in the novel and the film?. Most of the theoretical issues related to identity, postmodernism, and adaptation were discussed in the Introduction of this thesis. I have based my studies on Hall's and Jameson's problematization of postmodernism and the fragmentation of identity and Stam's and Andrew's definition of adaptation within a postmodernist scenario. In relation to that the work of Hutcheon is quite significant as she expands the term adaptation to include different forms of intertextual readings as forms of adaptation.

### 4.1 Revisiting Fred/Arctor

In Chapter One I have analyzed Philip K. Dick's novel and its representations of identity broadly, as well as in specific subthemes/categories in which the issue of identity emerges. In order to do so, I divided such representations into a macro level and a micro one. What I have called the "macro level" is in fact the level of the story, that is, "the subject matter or raw material of a narrative, the actions and events, usually perceived in terms of a beginning, a middle, and an end focused on one or two characters" (Corrigan and White 216). Taking such definition of "story" into account, one can say that Philip K. Dick's novel and Richard Linklater's film convey virtually the same story via different plots. Therefore, the manifestations of identity that take place at the macro level are pertinent for both works.

The micro level, on the other hand, deals with specific subthemes and specificities of the literary language in which the theme of identity is one of the most relevant themes. Since the macro level deals with the general aspects of the story, there is a similarity at the micro level

between novel and film, especially since the film takes not only dialogs from the novel verbatim, but it also takes parts of the descriptive narration, which is transposed by use of a voice-over narrator. However, literature and film have different narrative systems by nature, and it seems more appropriate to focus on the particularities of the film language when analyzing the film's "micro level." Therefore, in Chapter Two I have discussed identity as presented by filmic elements such as *mise-en-scène*, framing, and editing.

#### 4.1.1 A Common Macro Level

The story of *A Scanner Darkly*—both in the novel and in the film—is about an undercover narcotics officer who begins to suffer from an identity crisis generated mainly by two factors: (1) extensive use of a brain deteriorating drug and (2) having the paradoxical/ironic task of spying on himself, i.e. as officer Fred he receives the job to spy on Robert Arctor, his civilian identity. The consequence of such conflict is the birth of a third identity, Bruce. The first factor, being of a straightforward biological/neurological nature, does not seem to present many complications; it already invites the reader to contemplate the fragmentary nature of identity in a postmodern society. Even if it presents a simple cause-effect relationship—a man takes brain deteriorating drugs and, as a consequence, suffers from brain injury—the process of alienation from himself leads him into painful process of fragmentation. The second factor, which will be briefly discussed, presents further sociological complications.

The world of *A Scanner Darkly*—both the novel and the film—is one of constant surveillance, where video cameras and holographic scanners—at times installed without the consent or knowledge of the observed subjects—are omnipresent and work as a tool of control. Officer Fred's main assignment in the story is to watch the activity in Robert Arctor's house and report anything suspicious. This generates a double bias in Fred/Arctor: as officer Fred, he should analyze the tapes objectively, which he cannot do since he is both one of the subjects under inspection and friends with the other subjects as well; as Robert Arctor, he is supposed to live his ordinary life, yet fails to do so since he is aware of the hidden scanners inside his house. "'Nobody home, I guess,' he stated aloud as usual, and was aware that the scanners had picked that up. But he had to take care always: he wasn't supposed to know they were there" (*Scanner* 146).

Eventually, Fred/Arctor begins talking about Robert Arctor in the third person, interpolating such dissociative thoughts with others of

recognition of his double agent condition. He stops acting only for the cameras, his friends, and his supervisors, and starts acting for himself, losing touch with his identity(ies). From this point on, the dissociative thoughts increase and he eventually becomes neither Fred nor Arctor. His identity crisis is such that it cannot be resolved in either identity, but on the birth of a vapid third one, Bruce. What is ultimately revealed to the reader/spectator, however, is that Fred/Arctor/Bruce was being manipulated all along. Stuart Hall notes that “[d]isciplinary power is concerned with the regulation, surveillance and government of, first, the human species or whole populations, and secondly, the individual and the body (*The Question* 289) and that seems to be exactly what happens in *A Scanner Darkly*: surveillance is used to regulate society as well as to manipulate individuals such as Fred/Arctor.

#### 4.1.2 The Micro Level of the Novel

Analyzing the “micro level” manifestations of identity in Philip K. Dick’s novel, I have elected seven categories of subthemes that reoccur somewhat extensively in the novel: social roles, names, drugs/drug subculture, artificiality and humanity, capitalism, memory, and crisis. These categories, as well as the macro and micro level themselves, often interconnect and overlap, and such classifications serve mainly an organizational purpose.

The issue of identity in *A Scanner Darkly* starts with multiple and conflicting social roles performed by some of its characters, such as the undercover police officers who become drug users—i.e. outlaws—in order to accomplish the goals of their job. The boundaries between police officers and outlaws become blurry and, as the narrator of the novel puts it, “it all [gets] murky” (*Scanner* 68). Some of these officers have different names when performing different social roles—such as Fred/Arctor—and that also has a significant role in reinforcing the multiplicity of identity as well as in engendering identity crisis. Furthermore, drug addicts admitted to New-Path receive a new “not drug-oriented” name and identity (*Scanner* 35). In the case of Fred/Arctor, his New-Path identity, Bruce, is the result of Fred/Arctor’s identity crisis. Similarly, last names play a major role in identity formation, and the “non-human” artificial identities of the officers wearing a scramble suit have no last/family names. These agents are known simply as “Fred” or “Hank,” for example. Another identity which lacks a last name, Bruce, is also artificial—since it has been somewhat manufactured by the Federal police—as well as “non-human.” Bruce is like a machine that has been programmed to perform

the task of collecting a sample of *Mors Ontologica*, the flower from which Substance D is originated.

*A Scanner Darkly* is a novel about drugs and drug subculture, but drugs are not an unpretentious theme: the story shows how drug abuse can lead to brain damage, identity crisis, and identity loss. Such issues are clearly portrayed in what happens to Fred/Arctor/Bruce, but it can also be seen in some minor moments in the novel, such as in Charles Freck's obsession to buy some drugs before he loses sense of who he is (*Scanner* 6). Loss of identity caused by drug abuse is also related to loss of human traits, as illustrated by officer Fred when he says in his memorized speech that people who take drugs "were once men and women" (18). This lack of humanity is also explored as artificiality. Drug users live artificial lives to hide their condition, and drug abuse leads to loss of human traits. Bruce, for instance, has character traits that are closely related to animalistic instincts, and he performs artificial repetition of phrases and mechanic obeying of orders.

Another manifestation of identity in Dick's novel concerns Capitalism. The novel portrays an illicit market of drugs that follows the same basic rules as the official one, as well as it places the participants of the former as outcasts of the latter. Identity in the official market is closely related to purchasing power, and credit cards work as identification cards that grant access to shopping malls. The novel also mentions big franchises that lack any sense of individuality as they all look the same: the mass production mode of franchises makes each store the same anywhere at any time, the McDonald's burger is always the same, "the one they sold you last time and the time before that" (22). Just as drug addicts consume the commodities of their own markets—i.e. the drugs—non-addicts or "straights" are as addicted as their "underworld" counterparts. Consumerism is as much of an addiction as a drug, and the "straights" are just as manipulated by the system as the addicts, even if the system is licit. This manipulation and its many levels can also be seen in the fact that the institution that is expected to be fighting drugs and rehabilitating users is fostering drug production and, as a consequence, maintaining its own existence by creating its own clientele, who may eventually become their work force. As Corrêa point out, this is "the very logic of a late capitalist society which controls every feature of an individual's life, even his most intimate memories, so that the individual himself cannot achieve understanding of his own identity" (61).

Memory is a primary factor in identity constitution and the novel explores the relationship between memory and identity extensively. The

issue of memory can be seen from the beginning of the novel—when Fred forgets part of his memorized speech—and it progressively increases until it culminates in the appearance of Bruce, who can only exist once the memories of both Fred and Robert Arctor are gone. Moreover, Fred/Arctor/Bruce’s assumed fourth identity of a past life with wife and children is only accessed via Fred/Arctor’s memories and as such can be questioned of having ever existed outside his own mind.

All the aforementioned categories lead to a seventh one: crisis, especially of identity. Bruce is the final result of Fred/Arctor’s identity crisis, but his appearance is foreshadowed from the beginning of the novel by numerous references to crisis. Such references go from Fred/Arctor having “a strange feeling as to who he was” (20) in the beginning of the novel, to an apparently harmless conversation about homonyms that makes Fred/Arctor think about his condition as a double agent and wonder which identity is his own (75), to the final stage of brain split suffered by Fred/Arctor, a “crisis” between both hemispheres of his brain, which are competing for dominance. Once crisis reaches the point of the split-brain phenomenon, the literary text becomes “split” as well, interpolating external texts with the narrative. The novel in itself seems to suffer from a crisis, accompanying the mental state of its main character.

#### 4.1.3 The Film’s Specificities and its Relationship with the Novel

The main visual characteristic of Richard Linklater’s film is the use of the rotoscoping technique, which alters the spectator’s perception of the *mise-en-scène* while allowing for clear recognition of places and actors. Since the film deals with issues such as reality and perception, the use of rotoscoping calls attention to the difference between the perception of a sober mind and that of a substance-altered one. *A Scanner Darkly* is a film which presents a significant use of metanarrative. Robert Arctor is an actor playing a part in front of cameras (holographic scanners) and being watched by a spectator, Fred. Fred/Arctor is, therefore, in both sides of the “diegetic cinema.” There is also a non-diegetic layer, which is that of the actual cinema and its spectators: Arctor is being doubly watched while Fred both watches and is being watched.

Unlike the partly fragmented narrative of the novel, the film’s narrative is linear and straightforward, and its editing follows the classical Hollywood style of continuity. Disruptive shots are used mainly in scenes that clearly show surveillance, such as the images in the screens watched by Fred, which present multiple framings of the same

action. To compensate for the lack of fragmentation in its narrative, the film uses other elements to cause disruption, such as the use of the rotoscoping technique, which adds another layer in the spectator's access to the actors and the *mise-en-scène*. Another disruptive element used by the film is fast-forwarding, which is related both to cinema and to surveillance. The use of fast-forwarding in particular, transforms the spectator in a character much like Fred and other officers who watch tapes and fast-forward through them.

Another way in which the film blurs the boundaries of diegesis is in Freck's suicide scene and in Fred/Arctor's last appointment with the psychiatrists of the Sherri's Department. In the former, a diegetic narrator on the radio becomes a non-diegetic voice-over one. In the latter, there is the use of a diegetic split-screen—which is mainly a non-diegetic element—when Fred/Arctor learns about his split-brain condition. The boundaries are also blurry diegetically: one cannot say for sure whether Fred or Arctor, if either, is the originating identity, just as it is not possible to determine if he is a law enforcement agent breaking the law or an outlaw working for the police force. This blurry duality is explored by the two of the film's tracks: when the character is introduced, the visual track first shows Fred in his scramble suit, but the audio track first presents Arctor in his original voice, not altered by the scramble suit.

The multiplicities of the novel are not only maintained by the film, but also enhanced by it. Just as the main character has three clear cut identities—Fred, Robert Arctor, and Bruce—another character in the film receives the same multiple treatment: Donna Hawthorne. Even though Donna is a double agent in the novel as well, in the film she also becomes Fred's supervisor Hank, and her identity as a Federal agent (or whoever she works for in the film) receives a name of its own, Audrey, which does not happen in the novel. This change serves to parallel Fred/Arctor/Bruce with Hank/Donna/Audrey, and the relationship between them in each identity: Fred works for Hank, Arctor dates Donna, and Bruce comes to existence because of Audrey. However, Hank/Donna/Audrey is aware of each part she plays while Fred/Arctor/Bruce is manipulated by her in every one of his identities.

For Bruce to come to existence and fulfill his purpose of collecting a sample of the flower, images of flowers had to be imprinted in his brain, and such images can be seen in some moments in the film, especially in the psychologist's office. Similarly, when a psychology deputy suggests that Fred should buy Donna some flowers, the camera delivers a shot from Fred/Arctor's point of view: a frontal close up of

the deputy's face changing the connotation of the sentence "give them to her" from a suggestion to a command.

#### 4.2 Final Remarks

After having analyzed and discussed Philip K. Dick's novel and Richard Linklater's film, I finally return to the research questions that have guided this thesis. Among the many issues raised by both works, "identity" stands out as the main theme of the story in both instances. My first and second research questions have been discussed throughout this thesis (nonetheless, I will briefly return to them) and what remains is to discover whether there is an equivalence in the emphasis given to the issue of identity in both works.

To answer my first research question and see how identity is emphasized in the story of *A Scanner Darkly*, I must think of the narrative shared by both works: a man is caught between two conflicting identities—a police officer and an outlaw—while being manipulated into unknowingly becoming a pawn for a higher institution. The issue of identity in *A Scanner Darkly* is, therefore, emphasized by the use of multiple, fragmentary, shifting identities throughout the story. Besides the case of Fred/Arctor/Bruce, multiple identities caused by the nature of the infiltrated agent job also happens in the case of Hank or Mr. F in the novel and Hank/Donna/Audrey in the film, as well as in the minor character Mike Westaway, who works infiltrated at New Path.

My second research question concerns how the novel and the film deal with the issue of identity. If Dick's and Linklater's works share a story, they certainly do so in different ways given the nature of each work and the possibility each medium provides. One major difference between the novel and the film is the treatment given to Donna Hawthorne and Hank. Even though both are double/infiltrated agents in the novel, they become the same person in the film. The novels uses a fragmentary narrative to deal with fragmentary identities while the film uses rotoscoping animation do alter the spectator's perception just as the undercover officers need to be perceived as different identities.

My third and final research question proposes to check for a possible equivalence in the emphasis given to "identity" in the novel and the film. The general story of *A Scanner Darkly* seems to be exactly the same in the novel and in the film, in spite of some minor changes that do not seem to alter the main events. The film has changed the order of some scenes, but such changes were not significant to change the development of the story. One of the most significant changes made

by the film is the fusion of the characters Donna Hawthorne and Hank. Both characters work covertly in the novel, but by making them the same person in the film, Linklater adds a layer of multiplicity to Donna/Hank and intensifies her role in manipulating Fred/Arctor and, therefore, contributing to his identity crisis/loss. Another important innovation brought by the film is the use of rotoscoping animation, which enhances the sense of hidden and distorted identities to the spectator. Even though rotoscoping may make the spectator uneasy, the film lacks the suspension of action and fragmentation of events caused by the interruptions that happen in the narrative of the novel from chapter seven on. The film could have used more artifices such as flashbacks, fast paced editing, and uncentered framing to reinforce the issue of fragmented identities in the story, but this loss is surely compensated by other elements Linklater added to the story, giving both works an equivalent, although different, treatment to identity and identity crisis. Both works convey accurately the displacement of identity of the postmodern subject especially as represented by Fred/Arctor. As Hall states, “what this decentring requires [. . .] is not an abandonment or abolition of ‘the subject,’ but a reconceptualization – thinking it in its new, displaced or decentred position within the paradigm” (*Who Needs 2*).



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