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**Counterfeiting and Power in *Invisible Man* and
*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep***

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Abstract

With the rise of modern reproduction, anxiety over the difference between the authentic and counterfeit has risen. This has led to copious investigations into the nature of authenticity by such theorists as Derrida and Baudrillard, but this approach overlooks pertinent social questions. By looking into *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Invisible Man*, I hope to foster a conversation about who counterfeits and what they get out of it. What rises from my approach is an understanding of counterfeiting as a manifestation of Foucauldian power. By dictating the terms of what is real and what is fake, certain groups of people perpetuate circumstances which benefit them at the expense of others. Counterfeiting, then, can be a form of protest within these systems but is always subordinate to the ability to label counterfeits as such. *Do Androids Dream* and *Invisible Man* demonstrate these principles particularly well because of their subtle exaggeration of existing approaches to counterfeiting. They push the fake to logical extremes where the logic of the authentic and inauthentic must be challenged.

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Chapter I - Introduction

When Walter Benjamin undertook his analysis of reproduction, this mode was in its infancy. The ability to perfectly duplicate artwork quickly blossomed into the ability to duplicate almost anything, and – though this period was far from the first appearance of anxiety over the real and unreal – the proliferation of fakes and knock-offs blossomed into a key concern of the latter half of the 20th century. The opening sentence of this paragraph is a working example; it employs the opening line of Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” almost verbatim, and my anxiety over how to properly attribute it is ample demonstration of the cult of the original that Benjamin predicted if not in precisely the same way. This anxiety over authentic and counterfeit can be found as much in McCarthyism and the reworked Copyright Act of 1976 as in the more contemporary usage of the “uncanny valley” and phobias over cybersecurity and identity theft. Benjamin’s approach concerned himself mostly with the reproducibility of film and its antifascist implications, but many of the strongest and clearest statements on the real and fake came from the forward-thinking fiction of the postwar period which broaden reproducibility and inauthenticity into a cultural paradigm.

To introduce any discussion of counterfeiting is automatically to flirt with authenticity and its many iterations throughout modern criticism. I began with Benjamin because he initiated the understanding of authenticity as it is tied to reproducibility. He is worth quoting at length here:

The situations into which the product of technological reproduction can be brought may leave the artwork's other properties untouched, but they certainly devalue the here and now of the artwork. And although this can apply not only to art but (say) to a landscape moving past the spectator in a film, in the work of art this process touches on a highly sensitive core. . . that core is its authenticity. The authenticity of a thing is the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it. Since the historical testimony is sfounded on the physical duration, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction in which the physical duration plays no part. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object. (Benjamin 1054)

This paragraph is meant as a practical exhortation: Benjamin's goal is to politicize art through reproduction to make it "useless for the purposes of fascism" (1052). Anti-fascism is the tangible material politics and guiding principle of this passage, but it also raises the high-conceptual question of the nature of "the authentic" which has waxed and waned in popularity in the years since.

A contemporary understanding of authenticity begins with the realization that it is not only art which is "the product of technological reproduction" and therefore not only artwork which has its "here and now" (1054) devalued. Baudrillard reaches one logical conclusion of the difference between real and counterfeit in his proposal of the hyperreal – a time and place where "the real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, from memory banks and command modules – and with these it can be reproduced an infinite number of times" (Baudrillard 1557). Since *anything* can (and has been)

reproduced Baudrillard contends that “signs of the real” have been substituted for “the real itself” (ibid). In language both compelling and hysteric, Baudrillard constructs a universe of counterfeits perpetuating other counterfeits and meaningful signification falls immediate victim to “symbolic extermination” (1564). The stakes of Baudrillard’s argument are rather high – that quite apart from Benjamin’s claim that reproduction would “[formulate]. . . revolutionary demands in the politics of art” (Benjamin 1052), reproduction has become another way for power to re-assert itself.

What remains of “authenticity” are platitudes and dead-ends. In *Archaeologies of the Future* Jameson attempts to avoid distinguishing between authentic and inauthentic utopias, but nods at attempts “to reveal the deeper authenticity of the inauthentic as such” (Jameson 4) – a turn of phrase with considerably more paradox than substance. This statement implies a world in which everything must be authentic, because counterfeits are still genuine counterfeits and everything has its right place. Jameson rejects this position and all discussions of authenticity in favor of “[staging] the distinction [between kinds of utopias] in more spatial terms” (ibid), and has nothing more to say about discussions of authenticity than that they exist. Nevertheless, his nod toward the authentic remains as a representative statement for one of the only viable approaches to authenticity.

At the other end of the spectrum from Jameson, Derrida happily summons forth the infinite possibilities of counterfeiting. “In order for there to be counterfeit money,” he says, “the counterfeit money must not give itself *with certainty* to be counterfeit money” (Derrida 95). In short, anything *might be* a counterfeit because a true counterfeit by its very nature goes mistaken for the real thing. The value of counterfeiting in Derrida’s work lies in the inability to ever say for sure if there is or is not counterfeiting going on.

He represents this by only identifying his subjects as “perhaps” counterfeit. And so three viewpoints all at extremes emerge from the conceptual possibilities of reproducibility. Either everything is infinitely reproduced and removed from its origins, or everything is originary in its own sense, or we can’t ever really figure out the difference between real and fake and must forge our way through an infinitely agnostic universe.

The practical politics with which Benjamin began his analysis, however, have fallen by the wayside. While questioning what authenticity is has made careers and established high theorists, it is rare for critics to mention what authenticity does. I do not mean to be cryptic. One might agree with Derrida that a counterfeit must be indistinguishable when it occurs, but it is also possible to trace the circulation of counterfeits because it is possible to identify that a counterfeit *has* occurred. We might now identify a Roman coin as counterfeit that nevertheless was accepted as legal tender in its own time. There is valuable work to be done in this arena, because it poses important questions for the workings of everyday life (questions which don’t necessarily require a firm definition of “counterfeit,” and so largely avoid the philosophical pitfalls therein): What sorts of things are labeled as counterfeits? Who or what gets to label them? How and on what terms are the real separated from the fake? Who goes about creating the things which come to be called counterfeit? These questions focus not on the innate qualities of counterfeit and authentic items, but on the usage of the terms “counterfeit” and “authentic.” The first, a way not only of ostracizing but of humiliating that which dares to exit its rightful place; the second, a way of lauding those things which fit in their right place particularly well. I hardly need to emphasize here that “right place” is always a subjective term imposed on individuals by external forces.

The previous theorizing on counterfeiting has done important work in destabilizing the boundaries between real and fake, work which might in time challenge the necessity for the questions I posed, but does not provide a way of reading the circulation of counterfeits *as counterfeits* – that is to say, counterfeits as they existed in the second half of the 20th century and continue to exist today in both literary and material realms. Deconstructionists, like Benjamin, also tend to overvalue the effect of signification and reproduction as a form of protest because they ignore that those in power are just as capable (if not more capable) of reproduction and signifying play, though it must be granted that Baudrillard has a fine sense of the malicious implications of counterfeiting in the hands of the powerful.

My claim, then, is that counterfeiting is best understood as a manifestation of power. When applied to human identity, the most politically fraught battlefield of authenticity, “there is no more powerful position than that of being ‘just’ human” because “the claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity” (Dyer 2). The struggle between the authentic and the counterfeit appears most significantly as a struggle to determine discrete categories of common experience and to relegate experiences to those categories. This is an incredibly important staging area within discussions of authenticity and inauthenticity, but one best approached carefully. As Derrida helpfully pointed out, counterfeits are only capable of challenging this hierarchy when they are not identified as such. If an attempt were to be undertaken, it would within that same act negate the work that the circulating counterfeit is doing by announcing that it is a counterfeit. Since fakes derive their power from their ability to pass for real, this is in effect to destroy the effectiveness of the counterfeit. There are times where this might be

both wise and good, but I would prefer to leave that for the conclusion of this paper and bypass any attempt to identify counterfeits as such until then.

In the meantime, studying the circulation of counterfeits allows revealing the power to declare and control counterfeits. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault famously describes the effect of the Panopticon as the ability “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (201). Power operates most effectively not through force but through making coercion unnecessary. The ability to declare the existence of counterfeits and mark their features works like this because it dictates the terms of reality. Some people and things get to be authentic while others do not, and the very process of defining those which do not allows the “authentic” to exist categorically. Foucault describes a similar function when he mentions that “it is in the isolation, intensification, and consolidation [in my language, the categorization] of peripheral sexualities that the relations of power to sex and pleasure branched out and multiplied, measured the body, and penetrated modes of conduct” (*Sexuality* 48). This is why the projects of abstract theory may in time challenge the power structures of counterfeiting – they may disprove the core assumptions about reality which make a binary between real and fake possible. In the meantime, authenticity and its counterpart allow a division of human experience which, like the Panopticon, stratifies and petrifies itself into unmalleable structure.

The structure of counterfeiting becomes permanent through two of its properties. First, only things which are approved by the “authentic” get the chance to approve other things of authenticity. To return momentarily to Dyer, “the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity” (2) is also an implicit claim that only similar beings can speak

for that commonality – only the authentic gets to be an authority on the authentic. The self-perpetuating nature of power also appears in Foucault. The Panopticon is an “important mechanism” because it “automatizes and disindividualizes power” (*Discipline* 202). This leads into the second property: power as Foucault conceives it is de-centered. There is no panel of judges one might appeal to. In this conception “patriarchy” is more a self-fulfilling prophecy producing its own necessary patriarchal (straight, white, male) enforcers than it is a council of any given group of individual white men. Following these two conditions, power is nefarious because of its self-perpetuating nature. Power strives to become pure structure. The panopticon – both a literal and metaphorical power structure – shows how pure power is not directed to benefit anyone or anything but to create a method capable of producing controllers and controlled ad infinitum, and thereby preserving its (unjust) circumstances.

I’ve chosen two books to demonstrate how the identification and circulation of counterfeits functions as power; they are Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. Both fit an exceptionally broad definition of “science-fiction,” a choice I’ve made based more upon the cognitive flexibility of the genre than upon the practical ramifications of the period they were published in. These books were able to anticipate and address the challenges of reproduction and the counterfeit in the hands of powerful people decades before the issue became prominent enough to inspire Baudillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation* (published 1981).

The books are divided by project. My analysis of *Invisible Man* focuses most of its energy on a demonstration of the ability for those in power to make use of signification for nefarious purposes. By working backwards through the novel, I hope to

indicate that it is not Rinehart or the invisible man who are the masters of counterfeiting in *Invisible Man*, but the white people that the protagonist finds himself so often at odds with. It follows, then, that counterfeiting is not by its very nature an action of protest since it can be employed by those in power to solidify their power.

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep then allows me to address how and why systems of counterfeits and the authentic are established. The novel makes clear allusion to the different tests and criteria that androids have been held to throughout its fictional history in opaque attempts to justify their subordination to intrastellar (that is, within this solar system) colonial communities. By interrogating the processes that humans use in the novel to identify androids, it is possible to draw out a new and more workable relationship to the authentic and inauthentic without discarding those terms entirely. Rick Deckard's narrative places him at odds with the ability to distinguish androids from humans and, though he implicitly accepts that they are different, he concludes that proper behavior is to treat androids with the same compassion that he would treat humans.

I will conclude by questioning what the hegemonic powers of each novel hope to get out of their abuse of authenticity. The setting of each novel is only possible because of the subjection of multiple populations. In *Invisible Man*, black men and Marxists and the urban poor of all ethnicities do the work which allows their society to function but are all overlooked by those in power. In *Do Androids Dream*, both androids and "chickenheads" are forced into menial labor to provide for their "normal" superiors. Despite their significant differences, the two come together to pass a coherent message about the difficulties of protesting the unfair relegation of laboring classes to inauthentic identity.

Chapter II – Invisibility and Signifying Power

The history of criticism of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is littered with explorations of the interaction between identity and the titular invisibility. More recently, critics have tended to turn from equating that state of invisibility with a state of subjection. In these readings, invisibility (particularly *racialized* invisibility) becomes a place for powerful objections to repressive power. These arguments rely on the subjected individuals' ability to counterfeit, often with emphasis upon Rinehart and the invisible man. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is filled to bursting with fakes, some of which we find to be fakes and some we can only suspect.

This is not an invitation to broad speculation. It is, indeed, very difficult to nail down what has been counterfeit or what might be counterfeit (and metaphysically impossible to say definitively that something *is not* counterfeit), but *Invisible Man* itself is not particularly invested in picking out fakes. Instead, it seems to accept that fakes exist, and to present a more interesting problem. The economy of counterfeits – since any circulating system is an economy – comes to define both race relationships and interpersonal relationships in *Invisible Man*. What it reveals, however, is not a boilerplate tale of repressed culture speaking back to power.

The most optimistic reading of *Invisible Man* possible is put forth by Shelly Jarenski, in her "Invisibility Embraced: The Abject as a Site of Agency in Ellison's *Invisible Man*." Her argument opposes "general readers and critics of the novel [who] have understood [the invisible man] to have been rendered invisible by a highly racist

society” (Jarenski 85). Instead, “Ellison’s narrator . . . has invisibility imposed upon him. . . [but] he comes to embrace that invisibility and claim it” (ibid). In this reading, Rinehart is the narrator’s perfect foil. Rinehart eschews identity for personal gain without challenging social norms. Rinehart “choose[s] to inhabit many bodies, all of them acknowledged subject positions within the stereotypes assigned to blackness by white supremacy. . . the narrator chooses no body” (103). The narrator’s invisibility thus becomes a safe space to craft a socially responsible and active persona based in imagination rather than an exploitation of chaos (a dichotomy which, for Jarenski, represents the narrator and Rinehart respectively).

Lisa Yaszek likewise sees *Invisible Man* as an attempt “to rethink reality – and to rethink the histories we tell ourselves to make sense of reality” (Yaszek 298) where the narrator locks himself away to craft “a new identity, a new aesthetic practice, and perhaps, finally. . . a truly new future” (310). Both agree that the power of the invisible man’s position is his indeterminate place in relation to conventional power structures, and that indeterminacy is linked to his ability to pass for many things – in my terminology, to counterfeit. Jarenski refers to how “political utility and deconstruction are linked” because imagination “allows [the invisible man] to theorize a form of agency that is compatible with the sense of possibility that opens for the narrator as a result of invisibility as abjection” (Jarenski 103). Yaszek claims the invisible man “holds within him the possibility of a new future” and so “performs an important act of chronopolitical intervention into conventional thinking about the future” (Yaszek 310). Their argument is a future-oriented claim that the indeterminacy of faking or counterfeiting is sufficient to

restructure power in such a way that a new black awareness or imagination might claim its own place, but their confidence may be unfounded.

The black character who benefits most from indeterminacy in *Invisible Man* is unquestionably Rinehart. Though we never meet him, we know that he patrols Harlem at certain hours in a Cadillac (Ellison 493) and that on more than one occasion people try to give him cash for unknown transactions (494) and that he has a dedicated congregation (496-497). Rinehart wields an uncommon amount of wealth and influence in Harlem, and his money and power come exclusively from elaborate role-playing. The narrator entertains the possibility that Rinehart could be “Rine the runner and Rine the gambler and Rine the briber and Rine the lover and Rinehart the Reverend” all at the same time, but concludes that he is in fact just “Rine the rascal” (498). If identity is fluid and the narrator successfully “enlisted in a fraternity in which [he] was recognized at a glance . . . by clothes, by uniform, by gait” (485) then Rinehart isn’t a “fraud” because he has chosen a role and plays it but because he plays mutually exclusive roles. Exterior indicators and behaviors are how everyone is identified, but a respected reverend should not provoke a bar fight upon walking into the Jolly Dollar. It is impossible to say which of Rinehart’s identities is faked, but at least one must be counterfeit because he cannot simultaneously inhabit all of his roles.

Rinehart’s ability to play many roles fuels the narrator’s revelation that “the world in which we lived was without boundaries” (498) and inspires him to live outside of them. Rinehart, however, does not live in a world without boundaries. He never plays a role which flaunts power structures. We have no reason to believe he ever pretended to be the mayor, or a Wall Street broker, or an apartment building owner – all common sights

in New York (if not in Harlem). He is free to profit so long as he profits within a hegemonic framework; he is free to profit but only in Harlem. Rinehart has so much influence in Harlem that Barrelhouse tries to placate him even while Barrelhouse is forcing him out of the Jolly Dollar at gunpoint. “Now you all right with me, Rinehart,” he says, “don’t get me wrong” (489). The same Rinehart (or rather, the invisible man playing Rinehart) is unceremoniously shaken down by a white police officer later the same night (492). Indeterminacy may make room for a new interaction with power but clearly Rinehart isn’t involved in any such activity. His glasses and hat allow the invisible man to impersonate Rinehart throughout Harlem but would not allow him to impersonate a police officer, or the mayor, etc. Contrary to the narrator’s (and Jarenski’s and Yaszek’s) claim, indeterminacy does have limits – and fairly strict ones.

Counterfeit goods reinforce this idea. When the narrator takes his job under Kimbro, he is told to apply a dropper to paint but not told what to fill the dropper with. The result is that he mixes paint remover into a large batch of paint, and is reprimanded. He is furious, “emotions whirling,” and “seized by an angry impulse” mixes all of the bad paint as if it were a good batch (205). Kimbro accused the narrator earlier of “trying to sabotage the company” (204) but now the narrator is, in fact, carrying out sabotage. Except that he fails miserably. Both Kimbro and the men who come to collect the paint notice no difference in the color, and it is unclear whether or not there *is* any difference to notice. The narrator, for his part, “watched with a sense of unbelief as [Kimbro] rubbed his thumb over the sample, handed it back and left without a further word” (205). Kimbro shows enough confidence that the invisible man questions his own ability to determine whether the paint is real or fake. He inspects other tubs of paint and closes his eyes to

look again. Soon, the paint passes inspection with the men picking it up and is shipped off to disappear from the narrative without a ripple.

Again, *Invisible Man* has shown a counterfeiting process which does not challenge authority. The narrator is unambiguously trying to usurp Kimbro's power over him, and fails. When his paint passed for "Optic White," the invisible man despairs, "I had a feeling that something had gone wrong, something far more important than paint; that either I had played a trick on Kimbro or he, like the trustees and Bledsoe, was playing one on me" (206). The trick is, undoubtedly, on the narrator. Even if he has succeeded in selling faulty paint, there are no repercussions for him or anyone else. The paint disappears into a narrative abyss, to decorate an unnamed monument and go unnoticed. The improperly made paint demonstrates that the mere fact of counterfeiting is insufficient to challenge social structures. We learn with the invisible man that "the real quality of the paint is *always* determined by the man who ships it rather than by those who mix it" (ibid, emphasis his). It is not the maker of counterfeits nor the counterfeits themselves which determine their worth, but whoever controls the exchange where they circulate. This paradigm remains accurate in *Invisible Man* even when transferred from a paint factory up to the scale of social order. Even if Rinehart were inclined to leverage his powers of performance against the powers-that-be, he would not be free to, and so he remains subordinate to even a corrupt white police officer.

The racialized power of counterfeiting is most evident at the end of the first chapter. The battle royal is memorable for many reasons, chiefly for being brutally dominated by white men. All of the town's prominent white male citizenry attends the battle royal, "bankers, lawyers, judges, doctors, fire chiefs, teachers, merchants. Even one

of the more fashionable pastors” (18). They then revel in their power over the boys in the battle. What they yell is considerably less important than that they yell – that the boys should both look and not look at the naked woman; support for every man against every man; miscellaneous boxing advice. By the end the drunk observers have physically overpowered the black combatants as well. One boy is “lifted into the air, glistening with sweat like a circus seal, and dropped, his wet back landing flush upon the charged rug” (27). The narrator himself is kicked in the chest onto the electrified rug. There is no place within the hotel ballroom for any kind of insurgency, only for survival. Even when the narrator squeezes “social equality” into his speech, he is immediately forced to swallow his words with no discernable effect on the audience.

Nevertheless, almost unnoticed in the chaos, a counterfeit appears at the battle royal as well. The boys are lured onto the electrified rug by money scattered across it: dollars, change, and gold coins. The experience in the hotel ballroom is so overwhelming that the invisible man “did not even mind when [he] discovered that the gold pieces [he] had scrambled for were brass pocket tokens advertising a certain make of automobile” (32). Though only one of many indignities from the battle royal, and only mentioned for a sentence, this act of counterfeiting should not go unnoticed. The tuxedoed observers don’t need to throw fake money on the carpet. The paper dollars and change seem to be real, and failing that the men prove their willingness to simply throw the boys onto the rug. The only use for the false golden coins in that situation is to humiliate the boys when they realize they fought for worthless marketing gimmicks.

The coins at the battle royal exemplify the counterfeit at its worst – a tool for expanding the power of those already powerful. The men observing the event control the

circumstances and outcome; the coins will make no one unexpectedly rich or empower any of the children to question the authority of the men who played that cruel prank. There is so little to do about it that the narrator glosses over the entire event – he did not even mind. Counterfeiting here, in its most obvious (though somewhat overlooked) place in the novel, comes from power and compliments power.

After working backwards through *Invisible Man*, I'd like to return to Rinehart. Commentators tend to read the book straight when the narrator discovers that Rinehart fakes his identity. The invisible man declares that Rinehart's "world was possibility and he knew it. He was years ahead of me and I was a fool" (498). Both Yaszek and Jarenski take this as a revelation which fuels the creative possibility of the invisible man's own underground revolution. This reading works backwards, and takes a broadly deconstructionist worldview to a novel which is not inviting it. Rinehart's world *is* all possibility, but it is also strictly bounded by the limits of Harlem. He never appears outside of Harlem, and all of the identities which he plays at have a place within the accepted social order of Harlem. For Yaszek and Jarenski, this is evidence that possibility is a powerful tool. In their thought, Rinehart is not publicly motivated; he eschews the public good to manipulate class roles for his own gain. I believe we must vindicate Rinehart of selling out. Though he may be a fraud and a cheat, though he may be Rine the rascal in "a vast seething, hot world of fluidity" (498), there is no way for him to leverage being Rine the rascal into a meaningful resistance. Like the paint and the coins, Rine is allowed to continue doing what he does because he does not bother anyone that matters. The passage does not say "the" world was possibility; it says "his" world was possibility.

His world and the possibilities of circulating counterfeits within it end at the borders of Harlem.

But I do not want to completely jettison Jarenski or Yaszek. *Invisible Man*, after all, does not end with Rinehart. Derrida says about the motivation for counterfeiting that “the desire to ‘create an event’ by the offering of counterfeit money . . . can only render a criminal enjoyment excusable if there were *desire* to create an event. In itself, this desire would be good, it would be the desire to give that on which to live, very simply, *to give more (with which) to live*, indeed to give life” (Derrida 157, emphasis his). Counterfeit money has the ability to “create an event,” that is, to disrupt regular order, because of its indeterminacy. The effects of the poor paint and the fake gold coins are lost because as counterfeits they do not cause any disruptions. The true power of counterfeiting, one which Jarenski and Yaszek take for granted, is that the counterfeit must first pass to a poor beggar (that is, in Derrida’s literary experiment it is a beggar) and then must “[engender] true money” (158). If a character can *make* counterfeits instead of just receiving them, then he can circulate further outside of his given structures.

I feel it would be amiss her not to admit that my structure emphasized white power within the novel at the expense of the actual trajectory of the plot. In *Invisible Man*, of course, my most clear example occurs at the beginning; Rinehart appears near the end. In all fairness to optimistic readings of *Invisible Man*, the plot of the novel is unmistakably redemptive. In the battle royal the narrator is lucky to escape without permanent injury, but with Kimbro he manages to play a trick (even if that trick immediately disappears). From Rinehart he learns that identities can be manipulated. In the cellar he is indisputably better off than he was in the first chapter. First, he has

realized that white power amounts to “the crude joke that had kept [him] running” (573). There is finally definitive proof that, though it has all-too-real effects, white power is sustained by the convenient fiction of race difference – the counterfeiting of an entire social order. By learning from each of the institutions of his past, the invisible man is able to point to how racial difference was constructed and perpetuated.

Second, and this point is entirely conjectural, there is the potential to respond. Because the narrator has gone from unaware to aware we believe he will continue progressing. He makes no difference, then he makes the wrong difference, but the novel is very open to the possibility of future positive action. Hope remains that when the invisible man claims “the hibernation is over,” hope because “there’s a stench in the air, which, . . . might be the smell either of death or of spring” (58). While the power of signifiers embedded in the ability to counterfeit is not sufficient to overthrow racist hegemony, it may be enough to begin that overthrow. “Even an invisible man,” after all, “has a socially responsible role to play” (581).

Perhaps I was too harsh on Rinehart, and with time he too would have escaped Harlem. I find Yaszek and Jarenski’s readings too optimistic primarily because they take for granted (as I quoted earlier) that “a new identity” and “a new aesthetic practice” point toward “a truly new future” (Yaszek 310). *Invisible Man* gives us adequate reason to be leery of the potential for change in sheer possibility – change is as often bad as good for Ellison’s characters and only the invisible man’s looked-to emergence from the underground room might spark any change at all. That emergence will be marked by the submission to counterfeit economies, and his success judged solely by whether he can surpass Rinehart and fake his way out of Harlem entirely. Alternatively he might – or

perhaps already has, through writing the novel – expose white patriarchy as a counterfeit itself, and force it to be subject to its own limitations.

Chapter III – On Androids and Identity

Invisible Man might seem like a strange bedfellow for Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, but the two share a preoccupation with the difference between objects which are genuine and objects which seem to be genuine. The power associated with counterfeiting in both is not so much the power to fake something but the power to dictate what *is* or *is not* real. Categorization (white/black, human/android, gay/straight) is an exercise of power. It seems that categorizations are instances of deviancy but in fact "never have the agencies of power taken such care to feign ignorance of the thing they prohibited, as if they were determined to have nothing to do with it. But it is the opposite that has become apparent. . . never have there existed more centers of power" (*Sexuality* 49). The drama of *Do Androids Dream* grows out of the tension between Rick's duty to "retire" the androids and his conviction that ending any conscious existence is wrong. Rick's interactions with the Nexus-6 androids throughout *Do Androids Dream* progressively reveals that he has no satisfactory category in which to place androids, but that the de-centered power behind the novel is determined to label them violent fakes and has quite a bit to gain from that categorization.

Reading counterfeiting at the center of Dick's fiction creates a schema starkly at odds with Baudrillard's understanding of simulation and the symbolic. Baudrillard, who has commented directly on the works of Philip K. Dick, relegates the counterfeit to the "classical" period (between the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution) because for

Baudrillard the counterfeit requires a belief in the original. He claims that “Dick speaks specifically of simulacra. . . here the double has disappeared, there is no longer a double, one is always already in the other world. . . simulation is insuperable, unsurpassable, dull and flat, without exteriority” (Baudrillard qtd in Rosa 64) thereby relegating Dick’s works specifically to the era of the simulacrum. Fortunately, Jorge Martins Rosa has already addressed Baudrillard’s reading of Dick, and has an answer that will serve as well for me. Rosa explains that Baudrillard’s historical schema “allow[s] for an interpretation according to which there could have been some kind of ‘Golden Age’ before the dawn of simulacra. . . when ‘Reality’ still had the chance to be real” but that “Dick’s assumptions for his approach diverge. . . he suspects that, apart from the divinely endorsed ‘Reality’ that awaits to be unveiled – which is the proper meaning of the word ‘apocalypse’ – all others, no matter how they came to be, may be fakes” (Rosa 66).

Without Baudrillard’s understanding of historical epochs of simulacra, the idea of counterfeiting as an epistemology need not be relegated to only the classical period. Without the need to establish the simulacra as a recent and temporally-bound phenomena, “simulacra” and “counterfeit” approach becoming synonyms, insofar as counterfeits are the product of a system which establishes both arbitrary criteria and the ability to categorize (or exclude) based on those criteria.

Though I am indebted to Rosa’s reading for freeing space to trace the counterfeit, the pessimism he finds in Dick’s worldview will necessarily be a point of departure for me. Rosa leans on Dick’s description of Disney World to justify that “more technology means more and better ways to produce ‘fake fakes’ (androids, drugs, coldplaces, etc.) and thus less ‘Reality,’” (66). He claims this shows an “active form of nihilism that stands

out in some earlier novels” (he cites *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, *Ubik*, and *A Maze of Death* – all released in roughly the same period as *Do Androids Dream*) (ibid). This reading of Dick accurately portrays his approach to fakes and “fake fakes” as totalizing, but claiming that Dick is cynical (but “at times hopeful of divine intervention” [67]) overlooks the strange optimism of works like *Do Androids Dream*. While fakes threaten Rick Deckard – the primary antagonists of the novel are the androids – it is the questionable ethics of his orders which place him in danger, and which contribute substantially to the conditions that make androids dangerous. The message of *Do Androids Dream*, then, is not a cynical criticism of fake things. Instead, it records the unfair systems which arbitrarily bestow the label of “fake” and suggests a more accepting attitude toward the counterfeit beings.

From its beginning, Dick’s novel juxtaposes the danger of the fake androids with a narrative which attempts to establish an objective reality by which they are judged. In the opening scene of the novel, Iran accuses Rick of murder for hunting and killing androids and his immediate defense is that he has “never killed a human being” (Dick 4). The couple does not dwell on his claim, but it is the first of many in *Do Androids Dream* that insists on a dichotomy between androids and humans. They seem human enough to have inspired Iran to sympathize with them while still failing to fulfill the unnamed criteria for “human being”. Rick plays out a similar conversation with his neighbor immediately after as he pretends to care for his fake sheep. Even though he “put as much time and attention into caring for it as [he] did when it was real” he finds the task of caring for the sheep draining and difficult (12). Barbour, his neighbor, reacts much as Rick did to Iran’s accusations – “It’s not the same” (ibid). Neither Rick nor Barbour think

to wonder *what* might not be the same; intangible difference is enough to establish their shared conviction.

A more solid basis for the purportedly objective difference between humans and androids comes later in the novel, as Rick interviews Rachael Rosen. It is not the first mention of the Voight-Kampf empathy scale, but is the first time it is shown in practice. The Voight-Kampf has all the accoutrements of the scientific process: clinical lights pointed into Rachael's eye, an electric diode, twitching needles and comparative graphs. That the test purports to rely on involuntary response aids its claims to impartiality; "verbal responses won't count," Rachael predicts, "It's solely the eye-muscles and capillary reaction that you'll use as indices" (48). Since Rachael can control her words and one would naturally expect an android to lie to protect its existence, the test admits only counterfeit-proof evidence. Its results should be objective in the strictest sense modern science can produce.

Eldon and Rachael Rosen attempt to fool Rick by lying about the result. Eldon tells Rick that he has mislabeled Rachael as an android. Rick packs up his gear because "if it failed once there's no point in going on" (53), but is stopped by the Rosens who attempt to bribe him. The lies and mind-games the Rosens pile upon Rick can then be read as the subjective response to Rick's objective conclusion. In the world of deception and play, the Rosen Corp. and its androids have a clear advantage as Rick is outmaneuvered at the table with Eldon and Rachael. It is only by turning back to the Voight-Kampf that Rick manages to re-establish an objective order in his favor. With his last question Rick satisfies himself that the Rosens had been lying and that the scale

works. He definitively claims that “the scale has been adequate in [Rachael’s] case” and that he “can extrapolate from that; it’s [the test is] clearly still effective” (59).

Having established the suspect nature of the Voight-Kampf, Rick goes through most of the narrative of *Do Androids Dream* relying on it, and at first blush this isn’t at all problematic. A later scene in John Isidore’s apartment lends credulity and gravitas to the otherwise somewhat abstract difference the Voight-Kampf scale is meant to detect. The androids vivisection a spider apart from any prompting or motivation. Unlike the other androids, who are introduced only in the extreme circumstances of Rick’s hunt, Isidore’s guests are needlessly cruel to the spider without prompting. Pris notes that “there’s nothing for it to catch around here anyhow. It’ll die anyway” (206), so the spider itself is not particularly valuable. Isidore’s reaction, however, creates a contrapuntal sense of desperation. The androids lack empathy for Isidore’s distress even if we disregard their more forgivable attitude toward the nonhuman spider. Take this exchange:

“Please,” Isidore said.

Pris glanced up inquiringly. “Is it worth something?”

“Don’t mutilate it,” he said wheezingly. Imploringly.

With the scissors, Pris snipped off one of the spider’s legs. (206)

Pris’s reactions may not be inhuman, but they certainly lack empathy for Isidore. These are precisely the kinds of reactions which the Voight-Kampf is meant to test for – complex situations which require the beings experiencing them to instinctively feel empathy without having to consider why or for what benefit – and they illuminate that it does successfully separate those who cannot or do not from those who do.

The failing of the Voight-Kampf is not an inability to represent an absolute reality, or at least what the novel presents as an absolute reality. Dick repeatedly reveals over the course of *Do Androids Dream* that the Voight-Kampf test does successfully separate the sociopathic androids from the feeling humans. Instead, the novel challenges the authenticity of human experience and the validity of human empathy. During the very scene where Isidore is imploring the androids not to kill the spider, the android Buster Friendly broadcasts an expose (playing in the background) of the prominent empathy-based religion. Buster shows that “Wilbur Mercer is not human, does not in fact exist. The world in which he climbs is a cheap, Hollywood, commonplace sound stage which vanished into kipple years ago” (209). Mercer in post-apocalyptic California is an ur-human, capable of uniting people not only in empathy but in experience. It is common in the novel for characters who fuse with Mercer to come out physically wounded and bleeding. If Mercer is a fraud, it suggests that the objective separation the Voight-Kampf can detect is objective in the sense of being correct but only detects the difference between those who have learned behaviors and those who have not learned those behaviors well enough. If Mercer is a fraud, invented from whole cloth, then the virtues that he embodies should have their validity questioned.

This principle is as true of the novel’s protagonist as it is of Mercer. The first scene, for instance, firmly establishes Rick’s conviction that androids are not human but Rick and Iran simultaneously argue over how they are going to program their mood organ to dictate their feelings toward each other. They call androids definitively not human for their lack of empathy, but Rick’s marriage to Iran is in the process of imploding over their inability to feel. Iran begins describing “a 382 mood. . . although [she] heard the

emptiness intellectually, [she] didn't feel it" (5). This causes her to realize "how unhealthy it was, sensing the absence of life, not just in this building but everywhere, and not reacting. . . that used to be considered a sign of mental illness" (ibid). All of Rick's emotions in the novel are conceivably veiled from despair in the same way; he leaves his apartment only after "he dialed for a creative and fresh attitude toward his job" (7). This begins the counter-narrative of *Do Androids Dream*: showing human empathy, the presumed determining factor of humanity, at risk.

From the moment Iran questions the moral sanity of their culture until Rick kills the last of the androids, Rick is a liminal figure between the pure empathy of Mercer and the affectless androids. We might expect his role as a man who eliminates androids – counterfeit humans – to be a hero, but quite the opposite is true. A great deal of the novel is spent musing over the ethical ramifications of Rick's chosen profession. Rachael Rosen skeptically asks whether he has "no difficulty viewing an android as inert" (40); Luba Luft uses his statement that "an android. . . doesn't care what happens to another android" to accuse him, saying "then. . . you must be an android" (101). Following a confounding set of events, Rick finds himself in the Mission Street Hall of Justice facing arrest for murder. Not only is he accused of being an android, but we learn that "several times in the past [they've] had escaped andys turn up posing as out-of-state bounty hunters here in pursuit of a suspect" (114) and the novel introduces Phil Resch immediately after. The main character of *Do Androids Dream* is a bounty hunter, but bounty hunters are so inhuman that the only two bounty hunters (in name) Rick meets in the novel are an android in disguise and Phil Resch, a man so unpleasant that Rick *hopes* he fails the Voight-Kampff. Rick wants it to be true so he can believe in the meaningful

difference between androids and humans. Resch, however, is not a facsimile. He passes the Voight-Kampf test.

There are two diverging interpretations from here. First, the hard-bitten bounty hunters might show that a community with utopian respect for life must necessarily be safeguarded by people willing to work outside of that utopian morality. Second, they might demonstrate that the society is anything but utopian and has simply deceived its bounty hunters into violating its own moral codes by arbitrarily excluding androids from moral consideration. There are considerable indications that the second of these is the case in *Do Androids Dream*. While in his office, Rick hints at the development of the Voight-Kampf scale – the wave of Nexus-6 models is only the latest. A past wave of “over fifty T-14 android[s]. . . made their way by one means or another to Earth. . . but then the Voight Empathy Test had been devised by the Pavlov Institute. . . and no T-14 android – insofar, at least, as was known – had managed to pass that particular test” (29). The fact that there have been different tests in the past means that there have been different criteria in the past. That there have been many different tests implies that androids are becoming increasingly human-like and are distinguishable not because of innate characteristics but because the institutions creating androids and funding bounty hunters continue to change criteria to whichever innate characteristics an android does not have.

With this understanding, what had seemed to be insurmountable difference between humans and androids is recognizable as anything but. Androids have been designed to pass intelligence tests in the past. Rachael goes to Rick with orders to “report back” following which “the association makes modifications of its zygote-bath DNS

factors. And we then have the Nexus-7. And when that gets caught, we modify again, and eventually the association has a type that can't be distinguished" (190). Phil Resch's Boneli Reflex-Arc Test, based on entirely different differences between androids and humans, is equally at risk. "Someday," Rachael tells Rick, "the Boneli test will fade into yesterday's hoary shroud of spiritual oblivion" (ibid). Two significant powers are at work here: one continuously meeting the current requirements for personhood and the other continuously labeling and re-labeling counterfeits. The ability to distinguish "Real" people from facsimile androids unilaterally preserves the status quo of colonial expansion in the post-apocalyptic setting of *Do Androids Dream*. Because living, thinking beings are protected both by law and the tenants of Mercerism, the nebulous governmental and economic authorities must shuffle androids out of those categories. Only then can they be punished for escaping their servitude "as body servants or tireless field hands" (17).

In this world, power is derived directly from the ability to control interpretation. Full relativism is at bay, because fakes are never (as Baudrillard feared) fully interchangeable for whatever might be called "Real," but the "Real" itself is never a firm category. Put another way, "A Mercerite *sensed* evil without understanding it. . . a Mercerite was free to locate the nebulous presence of The Killers wherever he saw fit" (32, italics his). The category of "the killers" must exist as a vague undefinable *something*, and there must be a demographic to fill it (however that demographic is delineated). The religion needs an enemy so it creates one by allowing its adherents to find that enemy wherever they need; the unnamed forces in control of governing dystopian San Francisco need an under-class so they create it by creating and distinguishing androids. The difficulty of this kind of power is that it has no real nexus to

attack or protest against. Though Rick and Resch are the hands of institutional order; neither of them has any say in the orders which seem to materialize out of the ether. Inspector Bryant is the highest-ranking character in the entire book. Polokov almost kills Rick by hijacking the chain of command to foist himself on Rick. There is no indication of who a character might protest to over rights and the ethical treatment of androids, even if any of them were inclined.

This all works very well with nihilism so far. Rosa, who claims that “Baudrillard’s concept of the simulacrum paled next to the audacity – not to say insanity – of Dick’s” (66), believes that a de-centered power with the flexibility to redefine the terms of reality is too formidable an opponent to fight. His solutions are to give into nihilism or look to a divine turn. Though the mysticism of the last chapters of *Do Androids Dream* does hint at formidable grace, that Mercer’s toad turns out to be fake undermines the efficacious nature of Mercerism. It may be powerful, but it falls short of the absolute power that Rick assumed existed. Instead of complete nihilism, the lack of divine power points to Dick’s practical optimism about the ability of humans to learn to empathize. Though Dick may not list anyone in particular to list grievances *to*, he provides both solutions and the hope that they might be carried out.

Rick’s religious awakening supports the dichotomy between “Real” and unreal at first blush. He finds the toad because “[he is] Mercer. . . found it because [he] see[s] through Mercer’s eyes” (237). The magic of the moment is in finding “life which we can no longer distinguish; life carefully buried up to its forehead in the carcass of a dead world” (238). This makes the twist that the toad is fake strike harder; *Do Androids Dream*

flirts with complete nihilism in that moment. The discovery and loss of the toad, however, is a red herring.

The new relationship with power that the book proposes as an improvement over the status quo is not the discovery of unappreciated life “in every cinder of the universe” (ibid). Instead, we should consider Rick’s earlier hallucination of Mercer and Iran’s regard for the fake toad. Instead of scouring the world for unfound life, the real hope lies in the ability to appreciate artificial life *as* authentic. When Rick discovers that Rachael has killed his brand new Nubian goat, he bitterly remarks that “everything is true. . . everything anybody has ever thought” (227). By the end of *Do Androids Dream* this has gone from a statement on the defeat of the old system of thought to the incarnation of a new one for Rick. By abolishing the counterfeit as a possible category, it establishes a more just universe which cannot justify the effort to enslave, hunt, and kill androids since androids must be afforded the same mercy as “authentic” life. This, in turn, abolishes the most dystopian power of Dick’s most famous novel.

Coda

Throughout this paper so far, I have lobbied for a more material understanding of the way we understand counterfeits than previous metaphysical musings have allowed. Now would be an appropriate time, then, to acknowledge that I have also been avoiding the most tangible manifestations of the counterfeit in both books. In both the novels that I use as examples – and, I suspect, in a broad sample of American literature – counterfeiting does not just take the form of power but of racialized power.

The surrealism of *Invisible Man*'s Optic White passages drives home the fundamentally racial tensions of counterfeiting in the text. Its slogan, "If It's Optic White, It's the Right White" (217) reminds readers of white people, who "are everywhere in presentation. Yet precisely because of this and their placing as the norm they seem not to be represented to themselves *as* whites but as people who are variously gendered, classed, sexualized and abled. At the level of racial representation, in other words, whites are not of a certain race, they're just the human race" (Dyer 3). The white paint, like the white race, becomes an unquestioned standard but it is also a standard without an absolute referent. Though the paint is "so white you can paint a chunka coal and you'd have to crack it open with a sledge hammer to prove it wasn't white clear through" (Ellison 217) – a metaphor for passing worth papers on its own – the paint is still sold and accepted as Optic White even when the invisible man intentionally ruins the finish. The ruined batch is accepted as white enough even though both narrator and readers know

that by any reasonable standard it is not – except that the only relevant standard is that it is accepted as white.

A similar pall hangs over *Do Androids Dream* even though the novel almost entirely avoids explicitly addressing race. The only exception is an early description of android ownership when an advertisement cuts into the narrative:

The TV set shouted, “ –duplicates the halcyon days of the pre-Civil War Southern states! Either as body servants or tireless field hands, the custom-tailored humanoid robot – designed specifically for YOUR UNIQUE NEEDS, FOR YOU AND YOU ALONE – given to you on your arrival absolutely free, equipped fully, as specified by you. . . this loyal, trouble-free companion in the greatest, boldest adventure contrived by man in modern history will provide–” (Dick 18)

Even here, the identification with slaves avoids racializing the experience as black – though, of course, the experiences of slaves in the pre-Civil War Southern states was exclusively black. The implications of this racialized reading of the android experience resounds through the rest of the novel.

It can be seen first and foremost in the anxiety that Inspector Bryant and Rick share over the abilities of the Voight-Kampf test. The reason it needs to be experimented with for the Nexus-6 androids is because there are indications that they are actually better at the Voight-Kampf test than a small class of humans. Though Rick succeeds at testing the Voight-Kampf scale, he never establishes it as capable of distinguishing a schizophrenic human from an android. This suggests that the difference between “off-white” (or “android”) and “white” (as Dyer says, “‘just’ human” [2]) has no basis in objective reality. Like the possibly-grey white of the botched Optic White shipment, *Do*

Androids Dream ensures that we must always question whether the establishment of the test – the assumption of difference – is *itself* a counterfeit.

It is worth keeping in mind that *Androids* was published in the age of the standardized test. The SAT, introduced in 1926, represents another attempt at impartiality in assessment. The Voight-Kampf is modeled on the same illusion of scientific distance and unbiased results. No informed commentator, however, claims that the SAT is in any way impartial. There has been a race gap in SAT results for as long as results have been tallied by race; a gap which persists even when correcting for median household income, gender, and other factors (“Racial Scoring Gap” 75). Like the point of Ellison’s work, testing is a way of indicating a non-existent objectivism to reinforce the function of power as it already exists.

These are the stakes of counterfeiting in American fiction. When faking and the ability to brand fakes coincide, what results is rigid hegemonic structure. The power these two novels clearly describe in their narratives is expended in perpetuating racial difference. Though I cannot claim to have proved the pervasiveness of counterfeiting across genres and disciplines in American fiction, the effectiveness of the approach and the fame of each of these texts suggests there are broad trends which will justify using this approach to counterfeiting more broadly, particularly to read racial power structures.. It might then join other criticisms in an anti-hegemonic and, especially, anti-racist mission.

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