

# I AM THAT I AM

SUBJECTIVITY AND WORLD VIEW  
IN THE SCIENCE FICTIONS OF PHILIP K. DICK

BY

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A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON  
IN FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS  
IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON  
2012



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# ABSTRACT

In this account of American science fiction writer Philip K. Dick's work, the aim has been to describe the involvement of assumptions inherited from philosophical and scientific discourse in both the understanding and experience of subjectivity. It is argued that Dick's representations of identity both picture the tensions engendered by the prevalent reality standard with which he had to deal and, in their development, come to articulate a path beyond the impasse this standard presents. The fundamental insufficiency of the world view Dick's fiction both encounters and embodies is epitomised by the twin questions with which he characterised his work: 'what is human?' and 'what is real?' In coming to terms with the significance of these questions the work of the Austrian philosopher and scientist Rudolf Steiner has been engaged as a critical foil to Dick's fictionalising. Special attention is given to the epistemological basis of Steiner's *anthroposophy* and its account of the world and our peculiar situation in it that, far from asserting any external and unvarying standard of truth, describes a process essentially evolutionary and unfixed. It is claimed that in Steiner, as in Dick, the human contribution to both identity and reality constitutes the validity of each, a matrix of subject and object from which one's self is delivered, in each instance a new beginning.



# INTRODUCTION

KNOWLEDGE IS NOT GAINED BY ASSERTING ONLY ONE'S OWN POINT OF VIEW, BUT THROUGH IMMERSION  
IN STREAMS OF THOUGHT FOREIGN TO ONE'S OWN.

RUDOLF STEINER

Around the time he began to write fiction for a living, Philip K. Dick, as he was later to recollect, had already begun 'to develop the idea that each creature lives in a world somewhat different from all the other creatures and their worlds.'<sup>1</sup> If in sustaining such an idea over time I was to develop my understanding of its consequences, it is possible that I, like Dick, might also come to question the nature of my experience in the most fundamental way. For Dick these consequences could be abstracted and distilled in the two questions with which his fiction has most often been identified: "what is human?" and "what is real?" These questions stood for Dick himself no less than they continue to for his readers and critics as an epitome of his thinking and work. Themes like these are of course essential to disciplines such as philosophy and theology – subjects in which he placed great stock – but, in staging his own inquest by means of genre fiction, came to be equally as indispensable for Dick. However, it should be pointed out that science fiction was, at least for the first half of his career, a fall back, a consequence of the 'mainstream' novels he was also writing failing, without exception, to find a publisher on their own merit. The service that those various publishing houses performed for his readers in rejecting his efforts to become a 'serious' writer could hardly have been apparent to the young author of the fifties and sixties. At that time writing science fiction was something of an embarrassment to him, often qualified as a temporary measure, a means to an income while he worked on more respectable material. It's something of an irony then that all but one of these serious literary works were published posthumously and, at that stage, only on the strength of his reputation as a writer of innovative and unique science fiction. This instance of frustrated aspiration however, a few words in the telling, has the means to say much more about the basis of Dick's fictions and give further grounds for the way in which the various worlds he understood us as inhabiting, 'each to his own,' was a narrative device in the true sense of the word – a way of organising and understanding life.

The 'visionary,' writes Andrew Welburn, is that which 'undertakes to create its own meaning, or to discover a pattern of truth rather than work within an accepted framework of ideas.'<sup>2</sup> This is clearly a way in which Dick's work may be understood. That his paradoxical narratives of marginal and eccentric everymen fighting for survival in the face of pervasive and omnipotent realities – whether technological, psychological, or ideological – have so frequently been adapted and projected for us onto the façade of popular culture is evidence perhaps that the 'pattern of truth' Dick was discovering was possessed of a more than personal significance. However, despite his early assertions (to which he would occasionally return) that we are caught in the impasse of our own private worlds, never quite coincident with those worlds of other selves which we infer from their appearance, his fictional work tended increasingly toward a demonstration of what he called 'joint hallucinations.'<sup>3</sup> An

explanation for the nature of these 'hallucinations' might reasonably enough lead the curious to a study of metaphysics; a life-long passion of Dick's to which allusion has already been made. This philosophical bent then, not arising as a consolation of his exile to the literary ghetto of science fiction, but a persistent quality of his outlook on life, should be equally manifest in his early mainstream manuscripts. And, in a sense, it is; present for the most part in his sketching the tensions and difficulties of relationships (something he would later bemoan the absence of in the science fiction of his time), the way in which a clash of ideologies emerges not only in the contact of one people with another but, equally, between individual and individual. Our own world, 'somewhat' different from that of others, may encounter pressure to change in the face of such difference, in the meeting with worlds 'without' my own. In his way Dick had already begun to articulate something every writer – more or less selfconsciously – will be confronted with. That is, why this narrative and not another?

[SF] is not mimetic of the real world. Central to SF is the idea as dynamism. Events evolve out of an idea impacting on living creatures and their society. The idea must *a/ways* be a novelty. This is the core issue of SF, even bad SF. That events accord with known scientific truths distinguishes SF from fantasy...The function of SF psychologically is to cut the reader loose from the actual world that he inhabits; it deconstructs time, space, reality.<sup>4</sup>

Ironically, it was in his resort to generic fiction that Dick found himself liberated from the relative constraint of writing mainstream contemporary fiction to explore instead the furthest reaches of his conceptual imagination. Equally evident are the contradictions in Dick's thinking: 'the idea must always be a novelty,' but 'events should accord with known scientific truths'; 'SF is not mimetic of the real world' – but surely if its 'function' is to 'cut the reader loose from the actual world that he inhabits,' to deconstruct 'time, space, reality,' the rule is as necessary as the exceptional? Distinguishable here is a further question that really underlies and presupposes those two others already mentioned: what is the relation, if any, between idea and thing? Putting things in this way is to make another connection between Dick's literary aspirations and their science fictional reality in that what became increasingly evident in his writing was a preoccupation with worldview as social reality; the possibility that a choice of any particular narrative organisation is a meaning chosen for us, determined by the particular worldview(s) to which our community – or those who exercise power within it – currently subscribes. However, more fundamental than this was his concern with the very phenomena of reality that, far from providing any sure basis on which we are able to depend, are likewise shifting and obscure. In contrast to an absolute relativism Dick, as is implied above, was most often inclined to express a belief in the existence of an absolute reality (of one kind or another). His real difficulty was establishing any basis upon which to form a relationship with it.

In college I was given Plato to read and thereupon became aware of the possible existence of a metaphysical realm beyond or above the sensory world. I came to understand that the human mind could conceive of a realm of which the empirical world was epiphenomenal. Finally I came to believe that in a certain sense the

empirical world was not truly real, at least not as real as the archetypal realm beyond it. At this point I despaired of the veracity of sense data. Hence in novel after novel that I write I question the reality of the world that the characters' percept-systems report.<sup>5</sup>

Dick was also to characterise the 'core' of his writing as 'not art but *truth*.' However, he goes on to qualify this –

Thus what I tell is the truth, yet I can do nothing to alleviate it, either by deed or explanation.<sup>6</sup>

It seems that in tracing the distinction Kant made between the empirical and the transcendental, between a phenomenon and the idea of its necessary conditions of existence, Dick was unable to escape the sense that this situation presented him with a world from which he was ineluctably estranged.

From the Kantian point of view, it is not just that we do not, as a matter of fact, know what lies beyond the range of our sense-perception, and those postulated ideas (such as cause and effect, and so on) which we must employ to make sense of it in our minds: Kant had argued that in the nature of things we never can know.<sup>7</sup>

Often, in discussions of Dick's work, observations about the results of this situation are linked to his personal difficulties. Accounts of these often include the early death of his twin sister, his absent father and difficult relationship with his mother, the early onset of various phobias and psychological disorders together with the attendant psychiatric or psychotherapeutic treatment (beginning in early adolescence, he would return to this kind of therapy intermittently over the course of his life), a series of breakdowns, failed marriages, substance addiction, and his encounter with 'Valis.' In what follows it is not my intention to dwell on details of biography although, to begin with, I think it useful to draw attention to these experiences now in order to clarify the way in which the narratives I will later discuss are grounded in Dick's life – 'the actual world that he inhabited.' This is not to say that what takes place in his novels and stories can be explained away by simply making such a link. Although the temptation to find the grounds for those wild and unpredictable narratives in his long-term use of amphetamines and other drugs, in his 'madness,' or in his visionary experiences of 1974, has proven too much for many journalists (and likely a few critics) this is a little like adding, by way of attempted explanation, another world in our own thoughts about Dick to the ones we find pictured for us in his fiction. Such a situation is itself represented in Dick's writing, in particular his work of the middle sixties, with its preoccupation with schizophrenia and autism, a culmination of that early insight by which he understood each of us to be confined to our own reality, the means of any real intimacy or mutual recognition fundamentally impaired. This kind of 'social empiricism' may help us to describe and diagnose the difficulties that were manifest in Dick's life but such a detached point of view can in itself bring us no closer to forming an understanding of how such realities arise, to produce for us a sense of their meaning. This, after all, was Dick's own motivation.

Instead, the way I have chosen to approach Dick's work is to, as he himself suggested, begin with the idea. If it is true that

'events evolve out of an idea impacting on living creatures and their society,' perhaps it is more useful to reverse the proposition of understanding Dick by what he did and was done to him, and look instead for the 'accepted framework of ideas' with which he worked and against which he struggled. In this way I have found a subject matching the reflection mirrored in the social and personal relations, the philosophical enigmas with which he constructed his narratives. The social alienation he characterised in his accounts of failed relationships were also dramatised as mental disorder, and these accounts of estrangement, whether one from another or one from all, are inextricably linked with the Kantian riddle already referred to. This itself was, in an adapted form, also his social reality and one of those 'meanings chosen for him,' implicit in the standards of his day. Essentially, in his efforts to legitimate human knowledge by establishing some kind of reliable connection between subject and object, Kant had imposed a whole series of dualisms and oppositions that, to his way of thinking, had liberated the programme of human knowledge by revealing the boundaries of the knowable. Kant had denied the earlier assertion of empiricism that knowledge is the accumulated impression of sense experience; for him the burden of a world experienced like this was not possible to bear, describing instead the way in which sense experience was necessarily filtered in order for any sort of intelligibility to be realised at all. However, the 'mental picture' which arises from this process, interposing itself between the 'thing-in-itself' and the subject, can never itself give us the world – only represent it to us:

[Such a view] believes us to be so organised that we can experience only the changes of our own selves, but not the things-in-themselves that cause these changes. This view concludes from the fact that I know only my mental pictures, not that there is no reality independent of them, but only that the subject cannot directly assimilate such reality.<sup>8</sup>

From out of this philosophical problem arise a great many of Dick's complex and often startling narrative migrations dealing with appearance and reality, mediation, and necessity or control. Beginning with this idea, it is possible to find in Dick its realisation in every kind of social connection and condition and, I argue, each of these can be traced back to the assumption implicit in Kant's thinking, that of detachment. Whether beginning with the idea of a solipsistic isolation, or the 'joint' hallucination of the world, whether engaging in a narrative comparison of competing philosophical and ideological systems or describing the exigencies of a single romantic relationship Dick, like Kant, was presupposing a latent perspective of detachment. Whether socially marginal or existentially estranged, Dick's stance is 'that of a perpetual alien, inwardly separated from the world in which he acts'<sup>9</sup>: he sees the truth of things yet 'can do nothing to alleviate it, either by deed or explanation.'

Looking at Dick's thinking in this way I have drawn extensively on the work of the scientist and philosopher Rudolf Steiner. Working in these fields during the last decades of the nineteenth century, Steiner was confronted by an orthodoxy in each that largely relied upon the same kinds of presuppositions that Dick, some sixty or seventy years later, would encounter in the worldview familiar to him. Steiner, like Dick, can also claim for his life's work a representative and twofold question. First, 'is it possible to know reality?' and, second, 'are we free?'<sup>10</sup> To Steiner these questions were two parts of a single proposition (as I will later claim of Dick's own questions) to which, in a sense, we ourselves were the solution. His early preoccupation with

Kantian metaphysics was for Steiner an initial phase of what was a gradual and life-long process of engagement with the limits that had been placed upon knowledge and freedom. What we find a record of in Dick's writing (nowhere more so than in the extensive personal journal he kept, his *Exegesis*) is in Steiner specifically nominated as the pivot of his philosophical conception: the thinking activity. In a similar fashion to Wittgenstein's demonstration that the necessary conceptual boundaries that Kant supposes can only be established internally (never permitting the proof of that apparently unknown reality beyond that these require<sup>11</sup>), Steiner turns Kant's assertion around, pointing out that in the very act of ascribing these limits to human knowledge 'we find the faculties to transcend them.'<sup>12</sup> For Dick, I will argue, that desire 'to cut the reader loose' from 'time and space' is a figure for his struggle with a reality standard for which these are the basic attributes. For Steiner, this wrestling with reality is in fact an encounter with our own presuppositions about reality. In Kant's case he has

taken over from the 'naïve' model the notion that the observer is ultimately other than the world he observes. That is why the problem reappears again after being displaced into the imaginary realm of things-in-themselves.<sup>13</sup>

Thinking is instead free from any theoretical limitation and neither the 'dogma of revelation' – where truths are passed down 'about things that are withheld from our view,' having oneself 'no insight into the world from which the postulates arise'<sup>14</sup> – nor any dogma of a positivistic empiricism that would claim for the description of natural processes a solution to the observing consciousness, are able to authorise a view of reality consistent with this insight.

Steiner's concern with these problems parallels Dick's own. He understood, as Dick was to powerfully and often grotesquely illustrate in his fiction, that our worldview is not simply instrumental – as if we somehow stand outside of it – but that it is an interpretive activity not only evident in its productions but productive of its evidence, a world created no more in God's image than in science's but rather, in our own. As Gertrude Reif Hughes describes it,

Rudolf Steiner's study of human freedom is really a study of human ways of knowing. Steiner made knowledge a key to freedom and individual responsibility, because he discovered that the processes of cognition, which he usually just called 'thinking,' share an essential quality with the essence of selfhood or individuality: each could, in some sense, know itself.<sup>15</sup>

Rejecting the idea of reality as essentially located outside our thinking, our ideas nothing more than a reflection of what exists without us, Steiner sees knowing as fundamentally creative of something completely new – the world in its fullest sense. 'In thinking,' he writes, 'the ground of being shows itself in its most perfect form.' Existence, essentially conceived, is to be found within thinking. In reading Dick, I have drawn attention to the recurring figure of an inconsequential and pathetic subjectivity that is later transformed by means of a changed relationship to the world (or, to the prevailing condition of power relations). Dick's narratives, containing both the subject and their world, are both the agent and object of change and, in this way, represent in fiction what Steiner articulates in his philosophy.

Thinking, or cognition, in Steiner's terms, can be conceived in a similar way to our use of terms like 'world' or 'word' to designate some common factor in which neither subject or object is the determining principle, indicating instead a field of activity that, necessarily, is neither one nor the other. It is this quality that enables what Steiner identifies as the 'special characteristic of thinking,' that it is able to observe itself. This, as Reif Hughes describes,

is an exceptional case of knowing in the same way that the pronoun, 'I,' is an exceptional case of pronoun reference. Just as 'I' always refers to the sayer of 'I' and to no one else, so, in the special case when thinking notices itself instead of anything else, observer and observed are identical.<sup>16</sup>

Present within our own thinking activity is not only the ability to recognise itself but, likewise, the capacity to acknowledge the selves of others. As Owen Barfield has observed, 'the paradox of individuality (it is *my* act) and universality (*it is superindividual*)' <sup>17</sup> that is inherent in thinking is also the root of an actual I-Thou relation between individuals. It is in this paradoxical sense that Steiner names thinking as a manifestation of 'essential existence' which, to the extent that both I *and* Thou participate in it, constitutes a reality including both our separate identities and the possibility of their mutual existence. Relationship is at the heart of Steiner's philosophy, not as it imposes upon the circumstances of conceptual or personal conditions, but in the processes it identifies as constitutive of human experience.

To begin with, through our active and independent efforts to think, we create a *free space*. The first activity of thought 'prepares the *appearance* of thinking.'<sup>18</sup>

Knowledge here is the fruit of 'an encounter between our own activity and the world's essential being, appearing, therefore, *only* in 'relation to the human being.' On the other hand, my reading of Dick is interested in exploring the frustration of his encounters with 'otherness,' which I see as an insoluble problem in terms of the system of enquiry he has inherited. This system, as I have described, relegates our knowledge to a world apart, thereby raising the question of whether or not the inevitably indirect inferences we make about it (i.e., those based on our ordinary experience) bear any relation to that reality. Therefore, Steiner writes that

Those who hold this point of view are concerned not with the inner connection of their conscious percepts but only with the non-conscious *causes* of those percepts.<sup>19</sup>

Arising from this situation is what I claim to be the single problem present in each of Dick's questions – both the reality of the subject himself and the world which he finds around him are jeopardised. This is implicit in Steiner's 'first observation' about thinking, 'that it is the unobserved element in our ordinary mental and spiritual life.'<sup>20</sup> For, if as he claims, 'the I is to be found in thinking,' and in thinking essential existence, then in the failure to account for our contribution to the world we risk the reality of our presence in it.

However, as I have attempted to show, the idea is not content with its situation in the abstract; its influence is unqualified,

manifest equally in Dick's vision of the politics, economics, technology, and society in and with which he lived. As will later be discussed, he harbours an often paranoid (if not unjustified) concern over its presence wherever power is exercised, not least of all in language and its use in writing – including his own. In calling his philosophy 'spiritual,' Steiner was recognising this same catholic quality in the idea and the concept, the products of thinking, the inner reality of the world. In describing his epistemological and moral philosophy as 'ethical individualism' he was providing in general terms what his thinking had sought to address at each point. In trying 'to present a view of the human being that can support all other knowledge' Steiner wants to claim for his positive assessment of cognition a means for realising freedom. Dick, with his bleak and encompassing imagination of what he called the Black Iron Prison – essentially a figure for the ideological and conceptual assumptions I have been discussing – is, for his part, desperately seeking his own path to the same end. Through the kind of realistic account of the world that can only be realised imaginatively, Dick demonstrates in fiction after fiction the mercilessly logical necessity that the authority or truth standard of the novel or story in question is imposing upon its inhabitants. For Steiner, as perhaps it was for Dick, the individual's counterpart in the world is not 'society' but the 'genus' or 'type.' For Kant the thing-in-itself of his moral and ethical philosophy was the rational ideal of a given action's basis in a principle valid for everyone – the concept of 'duty.' This is the imperative that Steiner called the 'death to all individual impulses of action.'<sup>21</sup>

After all, if moral significance attaches to the generalised principle, to the 'What if everyone...' element in the formula, the specific case, the moral act, is stripped of its ethical reality – which inheres rather in reflection, conscience, the awareness of good intentions or guilt.<sup>22</sup>

But this is precisely the kind of external authority that both Steiner and Dick were concerned to deal with. For Steiner the questions of knowledge and freedom were bound to one another for just this reason. In *The Philosophy of Freedom* the motive for action, if it is to be free, will be chosen at each opportunity by that same insight that grants us consciousness of our own thinking process. Steiner calls this 'intuition,' 'the conscious experience, within what is purely spiritual, of a purely spiritual content.'<sup>23</sup> That is, the basis of our actions – our motives – need not be established for us in advance, or through reference to any standard apart from our own 'unmediated and directly knowable' intuitive awareness. Through the course of Dick's 'metanovel' (as he would, in later life, refer to a large part of his work<sup>24</sup>), with its ineluctable Black Iron Prison, the beleaguered protagonists who suffer frequently the threat of effacement by the law of this society or that worldview, would surely be glad of such a freedom.

Though I've begun by making a sketch of Kant's influence upon both Dick and Steiner, the point has not been to limit their search for the identity of the human being and the nature of reality in terms of a response to the perceived impositions that Kant's philosophy represents. Rather, through reference to one particularly important instance, my intention has been to characterise the profound way that such a privileged discourse gets 'under the skin.' Andrew Welburn, describing Steiner's engagement with Kant, also indicates a more general situation evident in conventional conceptions of knowledge –

Steiner's technique is, as always, to get to the bottom of the philosophical enterprise, and to uncover the assumptions, the particular perspective, on which it is based. In this sense he is not hostile to Kant or out to catch him in a failure of logical deduction, but sets out to reveal the particular limited way in which Kant is true – so as also to expose the way in which we are liable to become fixated, stuck in a way of thinking instead of responding creatively to different cognitive situations when they arise. In reality, the illegitimate extension of ways of thought become a straightjacket on the thinker, beyond which is only the intrinsically unknowable, rather serving to displace the problems of knowledge instead of solving them. And because he stakes everything on the claim to know the only valid ways of thinking, the Kantian thinker is particularly prone to such illusions.<sup>25</sup>

Steiner is interested to converse with Kant on his own terms and, in addition to what Welburn outlines above, this means, simply, sharing a common philosophical discourse. Dick, on the other hand, for all his philosophical intent, is a writer of science fiction. However, this proves I think, something of an advantage to him and, in my reading of Dick, becomes the means by which he is able to overcome a closed system of knowledge and its ramifications for the subject and his reality. For example, the many 'fakes' of Dick's fiction are images, in a sense, of identities (or, *ideas*) uprooted and relocated from their concrete historical contexts to best serve a particular ideological perspective, making of identity something metaphysical and suspect. Androids too (whether mechanical or biological) are representative figures in Dick, 'types' bound by the law of their nature (biological, psychological, societal, technological etc.), incapable of the empathy or willingness to make exceptions that Dick recognised as essentially human qualities. Dick, who considered himself a 'fictionalising philosopher,' eschewed the discursive and rational conventions of philosophy, representing his thinking in the tropes and metaphors of his stories, which both diminishes the risk of their adoption as any kind of final solution and, crucially, foregrounds the necessary interpretive activity through which their meanings emerge. This was as true for Dick as it might be for any other interpreter; he frequently re-read his own work for news of their evolving message. In effect, this is the single solution that I see him indicating with the polarity he set up through, on the one hand, those two questions of his and, on the other, the response he articulates to these in his work.

We have already looked at Dick in the context of the visionary and seen how the struggle to create his own meaning brought him into conflict with the accepted framework of reality. Along the way he experimented with both personal and public fantasy (solipsistic and joint hallucination), finding in neither a firm ground for his narrative devices. In an irony that Archimedes might have appreciated, Dick found himself able to lever with these devices the cosmos from its hinges just because of their lack of any sure support. The meaning in life that narrative is expected to embody instead teetered dangerously for him on the brink of an abyss, of 'irreason' and chaos. Resigning, at his lowest ebb, the hope of ever finding a 'commonsense' within himself or the world he gave up, for a time, on his search. The record of what persisted is, however, at least as explicit in his fiction as it is in those accounts we have of his life. We know from reading Dick that the value of our capacity to empathise remained

undiminished for him. Increasingly fundamental to his situation in the world was Christ's recension of the Decalogue in John's gospel, 'This I command you, to love one another.' Some have interpreted the time following his experiences of 1974, during which his study of mysticism and religion was intensified, as a retreat into a metaphysics of revelation. Reading the novels he published after 1974 or the published extracts of his great journal, the *Exegesis*, it is certainly possible to arrive at such a conclusion. Dick himself remained undecided about what to make of these events, at least in any conclusive fashion. In what follows, my reading of his later work will prove somewhat similar to his own; both of us see his novel *Valis*, the most explicit fictional account of his '2-3-74' experiences, as providing a guide to his work as a whole. I also see in *Valis* a convergence of Dick's epistemological speculation and his Christology, an evolution of his consolation in Christ's injunction to his disciples by which those philosophical questions are resurrected as imaginative truth.

'The apprehension of polarity,' wrote Owen Barfield, 'is itself the basic act of imagination.'<sup>26</sup> This is a juncture at which Barfield calls on his reader 'not to think about imagination, but to use it.' I will argue that the use to which Dick was putting his imagination is pictured for us most clearly in *Valis*. Just as we earlier saw in Steiner the 'first activity of thought' as a creation of 'free space' in which it may then appear, in *Valis* we have a special instance of the 'third person,' a manifestation neither subjective or objective. Again, this is Dick the science fiction writer, figuring for us something similar to what Steiner has described discursively. Just as I will argue that the generic standard of knowledge and identity in *A Scanner Darkly* (together with the attempt by its powers to claim for this standard an existence independent of us) is overturned by the loving recognition of other selves so, in *Valis*, is self-consciousness emergent as the field in which every binary is present. The world, or reality, and the human being are each realised by the imaginative act, and objectivity is recast – no longer as a standpoint we adopt to determine the truth, but instead the way in which we recognise our own knowing relationship with the world. Out of the intrinsic contradictions of human existence, the alienation of idea and thing, the inevitable separation from which we gain our individuality no less than the freedom to meet the world and one another, is realised the *Logos*, emerging from that 'encounter between our own activity and the world's essential being' as a confirmation of their common ground. For Philip K. Dick, I argue, the images he furnished us with are not to be identified with the truths which for him, at times, they represented, but realised by the reader as no more than the means for further enquiry.

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- 2 Welburn, Andrew. *The Truth of Imagination, An Introduction to Visionary Poetry*. London: Macmillan, 1989. 30.
- 3 Sutin. 95-6: "What's got to be gotten over is the false idea that an hallucination is a *private* matter. Not hallucination but *joint* hallucination is my topic."
- 4 Dick, Philip K. *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick, Selected Literary and Philosophical Writings*. Ed. Lawrence Sutin. New York: Pantheon Books, 1995. 44-5.
- 5 Ibid. 45-6.
- 6 Ibid. xvii.
- 7 Welburn, Andrew. *Rudolf Steiner's Philosophy and the Crisis of Contemporary Thought*. Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2004. 232.
- 8 Steiner, Rudolf. *The Philosophy of Freedom, The Basis for a Modern World Conception*, Trans. Wilson, Michael. Forest Row, East Sussex: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1964 (1999). 50.
- 9 *Rudolf Steiner's Philosophy, and the Crisis of Contemporary Thought*. 237.
- 10 Steiner, Rudolf, *The Philosophy of Freedom*, p. xxiii.
- 11 Cf. The discussion in Welburn, 'Kant and the Post-Kantians: Steiner's Relationship to German Idealism,' Appendix 2 of *Rudolf Steiner's Philosophy, and the Crisis of Contemporary Thought*.
- 12 'There are those who believe that with the limits of knowledge derived from sense-perception the limits of all insight are given. Yet if they would carefully observe *how* they became conscious of these limits, they would find in the very consciousness of the limits the faculties to transcend them.' Steiner, Rudolf, *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts*. Trans. Adams, George and Mary. London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1973 (1985). 14.
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- 16 Ibid. xvi.
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- 19 *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path, A Philosophy of Freedom*. 74.
- 20 *The Philosophy of Freedom*. 26.
- 21 *The Philosophy of Freedom*. 133.
- 22 *Rudolf Steiner's Philosophy, and the Crisis of Contemporary Thought*. 238.
- 23 *The Philosophy of Freedom*. 122.
- 24 Dick, Philip K. *In Pursuit of Valis: Selections from the Exegesis*. Ed. Sutin, Lawrence. Novato, California: Underwood-Miller, 1991. 200.
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- 26 Barfield. 36.



# UBIK

HE FELT ALL AT ONCE LIKE AN INEFFECTUAL MOTH, FLUTTERING AT THE WINDOWPANE OF REALITY, DIMLY SEEING IT FROM THE OUTSIDE.

PHILIP K. DICK, *Ubik*

HUMAN BEINGS DIE BECAUSE THEY CANNOT JOIN THEIR BEGINNING AND THEIR END.

ALCMAEON OF CROTON

BERKELEY: THE UNIVERSE IS AN IDEA IN THE MIND OF GOD. I ALTER THAT TO "THE UNIVERSE IS AN IDEA IN THE MINDS OF MEN."

PHILIP K. DICK

In his novel *Ubik*, Philip K. Dick articulates what could be considered the foremost conceptual influence on his fictional and theoretical narratives. In an interview conducted in 1976 he expressed it in the following terms: "I think that, like in my writing, reality is always a soap bubble, Silly Putty thing anyway. In the universe people are in, people put their hands through the walls, and it turns out they're living in another century entirely...I often have the feeling – and it does show up in my books – that this is all just a stage." This questioning, perhaps sceptical, attitude toward reality or, more particularly, *appearances*, provides much of the dynamic tension in Dick's stories and novels. The distinction between appearance and reality, far from being unique to Philip K. Dick, has been of concern to Western thought in one guise or another at least since the time of Plato and Aristotle. However, since Descartes's attempt, at the dawn of the so-called 'Age of Reason,' to respond to the emergent question of the relationship between body and soul, the diminishing confidence in any providential guarantee has rendered inadmissible what he himself was still able to take for granted: that the right relationship between my mind and the world outside of it is ultimately insured by the beneficence of the creator as manifest in the harmonious order of His creation. In this description of the agents active in Descartes's epistemological picture it becomes possible to distinguish the ramifications for science in the course of its emergence from theology:

...once the role of God is weakened, then the idea in the mind and that which it purports to represent fall apart into the dichotomy of the so-called Cartesian dualism...It is from this that the famous problem of knowledge arises, i.e., the question: How can we be certain that a representation (idea) in consciousness corresponds to what is there "outside" of consciousness? How can we bridge the gulf between representation and reality? This "problem of knowledge" arises automatically from the Cartesian position once we cease to rely on God to guarantee things for us. Heidegger recognised that the problem of knowledge, i.e., epistemology, is really the metaphysics of knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Such a tenuous dichotomy and the conceptual relations it engendered were familiar to Dick, who was well aware of the epistemological pessimism of thinkers subsequent to Descartes such as Hume and Kant, developing many of his plots in light of just such an uncertainty. Given the presence of these influences in Dick's work it is useful to attend to the subtle way in which,

through the thinking of such ideas, we are extruded from the world about which we speculate, as if ideas arise about its nature and our relationship with it only in order to disqualify the thinker and his thoughts from any claim to the involvement these same ideas might otherwise imply. Perhaps, if it were not for the inherited epistemological standard that understands 'real' and 'ideal' as categorically exclusive, this situation might provoke more widespread reflection. Of course, this observation itself could be characterised on a linguistic level as succumbing to the same presuppositions evident in the idea it is intended to criticise (e.g., "the world about which we speculate...the thinker and his thoughts" etc.). Such a regress is a picture of how thoroughly a world view may engage us both conceptually and linguistically, being also an effective analogue of both *Ubik* specifically and Dick's typical characterisation of an ineluctable reality (witness his oft quoted aphorism, 'Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away')<sup>2</sup>. In considering the philosophical implications of Dick's work, such observations may go some way in accounting for the tension Dick identifies – and with which at times he may be identified – in both the dualist and empirical world views his thinking is engaged with.

One possible example of the influence which such world views exert may be drawn from the fundamentals of logic. Specifically, the Aristotelian logic which conventional thought presupposes. This is a modality in which it is impossible for a thing to both be and not be at once (*non-contradiction*); rather, it must have a single *identity*, being either one or the other, a necessary condition (*excluded middle*) of establishing a basis for any logical conclusion. These three principles were recognised by Hegel as really three aspects of one law (any one implying the other two), a law – in light of a recognition that distinction and relation are necessarily associated – that he saw as relative rather than absolute.<sup>3</sup> Henri Bergson observed that a rigid adherence to these principles amounted to a 'logic of solid bodies,' 'since it is in the world of such bodies that separation is the predominant feature.'<sup>4</sup> It was Kant who had earlier claimed otherwise, describing such a logic as a 'science *a priori* of the necessary laws of thinking not, however, in respect of particular objects but all objects in general...a science therefore of the right use of understanding and reason as such, not subjectively, i.e., not according to empirical principles of how the understanding thinks, but objectively, i.e., according to *a priori* principles of how it ought to think.'<sup>5</sup> Given a partitioning of reality so fundamentally conceived, and so universal in influence, it should come as no surprise that Dick, in confronting a world on these terms, struggled so mightily – and not always successfully – with finding, or forging, a conceptual language with which to articulate the doubts he found growing up through the cracks in this philosophy. As we shall see, Dick recognised this *a priori* standard as a challenge to human freedom, finding it necessary to circumvent such an epistemological hegemony through a resort to contradiction, conflation of identity, and paradox.

In *Ubik* such a grappling with reality is centrally positioned and neatly entwined with Dick's own role as writer and *demiurge* of a world of his own creation. At the conclusion of the novel's penultimate chapter one of the story's protagonists, Joe Chip, reflects with gratitude on the guidance of his boss, Glen Runciter,

The writer of instructions, labels and notes. Valuable notes. [206]

Immediately following, in the novel's final, elliptical chapter, told this time from the perspective of Runciter himself, Dick proceeds to undermine the apparently authoritative position from which Runciter had been issuing his instructions by casting into doubt both Runciter's own reality standard as well as the carefully developed logic of the story that Dick himself has devised. Any awareness of Dick's life and work may coincide here with the sense that, as author, Dick is once more writing himself into the narrative. In *Ubik*, as in all but the bleakest of his fictions, Dick presents language as possessing the capacity for communication between, at times, not only one consciousness and another, but between one world and the next; the presence of the Logos in Dick's work, as far as this is considered a source of meaning rather than a communication of bare information alone, is one of boundary bridging agent to which he returns time and again. For how else, should the worst forecasts of the various existential metaphysics prove true, are we to overcome this isolation? However, as we have already seen, the intention and its object may themselves be at odds. Dick's narratives manifest this insight as a deep-seated and characteristic irony.

As an important element of his thinking, these references to language were not limited to his fictional work alone:

The basic tool for the manipulation of reality is the manipulation of words. If you can control the meaning of words, you can control the people who must use the words.<sup>6</sup>

Of significance here is the relation Dick identifies between agency and language. However, the explicit references to language and communication aside, this passage contains several other important indications not only in connection with Dick's epistemological concerns, but also as they bear upon his thinking considered as a whole. His use in this context of the words 'manipulation' and 'control' in relation to 'reality' and 'people' demonstrate his understanding of how readily we can become a thrall to not only what we know but how we know it. Indeed, I claim in what follows that Dick has inherited a world view prizing knowledge as a 'tool' or instrument (Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* may be considered something of a manifesto in this regard), with its objects of knowledge, ideally, as subject to this manipulation and control. And while this passage alludes to concerns regarding ideology and indoctrination, social identity and freedom, of particular interest is the executive inclination implicit in the connection of these themes. In kind with the 'regress' I mentioned above, it may be possible to see here the way in which the phrasing of Dick's concerns and objections bear the impression of those concerning and objectionable qualities with which he is contending. Pragmatically or, perhaps, pessimistically, Dick was aware of what was at stake in a frank assessment of knowledge and its grounds. His frequent representations of the problem of mediation, whether psychological, social, political, or technological, allude to the uncertainty he felt regarding the possibility of a 'staged' reality. Just as Kant believed that our conceptual grasp of the world was determined by necessary conditions of sensibility or, as the quote above reflects, the view that social reality is driven by a detached and instrumental use of not only language but the social actors who must use it and the meanings with which it is imbued, so every world view is of potentially universal significance and bears equally upon questions of knowledge and freedom in the most fundamental way.

In clarifying the terms of his own epistemological observations the physicist and philosopher Henri Bortoft makes the following observation:

The point here is that the relation is intrinsic to the act of distinguishing, and not an external connection between separate "somethings" which have already been distinguished. This means that the relation is a necessary relation, and not contingent, as it would be if it were an external connection.<sup>7</sup>

That this is not usually noticed, Bortoft writes, is due to a failure 'to catch distinguishing in the act.' Were we to do so, he suggests, we might notice, instead of *what* is distinguished, that the primary *distinguishing* (the act, rather than its object) is at the same time a *relating*, each of these being poles of a single axis which, taken as a whole, comprise the 'organising idea' of phenomena. Rudolf Steiner, in his seminal philosophical work, *The Philosophy of Freedom*, wrote that 'Thinking must never be regarded as a merely subjective activity. Thinking is beyond subject and object, it forms both of these concepts, as it does all others.'<sup>8</sup> To this way of understanding, the grounds of reality are to be found *within* the cognitive process, in no way existing independently and antecedent to cognitive perception as might be expected from a subject-object dualism. Bortoft employs the sentence 'I see a tree' to show how the linguistic construction suggests that there is 'an I-entity and a tree-entity which first exist by themselves, separate from and independent of each other, which are then subsequently joined together (albeit in an external way) by the intermediate link "see."<sup>9</sup> According to Bortoft, the mistaken belief to be found here is that there is an 'I-entity' anterior to cognition when in fact, as Steiner had earlier described,<sup>10</sup> 'ego-consciousness' is itself a derivative of the process of cognitive perception. Both subject and object are secondary but are, by way of their origin in the cognitive process, united in the kind of polarity mentioned above. This is clearly a related but quite differently grounded picture of knowledge to the one which we find in Dick. What may be observed is the way in which a conception of language is expanded to include an account of the processes productive of language itself. Significantly we find ourselves included in these 'processes,' indeed, as their authors, rather than instruments organised only to fulfil their function.

Of central importance here is the recognition that ideas which we may form about the world are at once a part of that same world. Those contrasting conceptions of Descartes with which I began were in turn inspired by the even older Platonic stream. Derived from a reading of Plato that takes his philosophy to describe an absolute split between the 'intelligible' world of Forms – the pure idea or 'first' type 'behind' phenomena – and the 'sensible' world of nature, interpreted as appearance only, lacking the substantial essence of its Form, such world views present a dualistic cosmology from which the problem of epistemology inevitably follows. Rudolf Steiner's account of Plato differs in a similar way to which his account of knowledge differs from any metaphysic, ancient or modern. In an early work<sup>11</sup> Steiner describes Plato's 'two-world theory' as arising from the way he presented 'the relation between idea and sense experience.'<sup>12</sup> Rather than reading Plato as describing an absolute breach between the intelligible and sensory Steiner understands him to mean that *without* the informing idea sensory phenomena can be no more than a semblance. This indicates the relationship of idea and object in Steiner's own thinking. To Steiner's conception the world is necessarily sundered by the human organisation. By way of perception the awareness of one's own self

as definitely bounded and relative to other perceptual phenomena is established, while the relationship and common origin of these entities arise conceptually, the cognitive process 'beyond subject and object' is the common element in which percept and concept are joined. 'It is due...to our organisation that the full, complete reality, including our own selves as subjects, appears at first as a duality.' In contrast to the dualistic impasse sketched above, Steiner refers to his own epistemology as of a monist variety:

Let us call the manner in which the world presents itself to us, before it has taken on its true nature through our knowing it, "the world of appearance," in contrast to the unified whole composed of percept and concept. We can then say: The world is given to us as a duality, and knowledge transforms it into a unity... [dualism] does not assume just that there are two sides of a single reality which are kept apart by our organisation, but that there are two worlds absolutely distinct from one another. It then tries to find in one of these two worlds the principles for the explanation of the other.<sup>13</sup>

*Ubik's* protagonist, Joe Chip, is a technician for Glen Runciter's prudence organisation, Runciter & Associates. The novel opens with a dateline of June 5<sup>th</sup> 1992, New York City. As the story develops the reader learns that Runciter's 'prudence establishment' is an agency able to offer protection from the thought crime that has emerged in the wake of the development of psychic abilities, or 'psionics,' in a segment of the population. In addition there has clearly been a rapid development of technology enabling private travel to the Moon or Luna, as it is known, and the cryonic suspension of individuals near death in which they retain limited consciousness and communication ability; this state is known as 'half-life.' When Runciter & Associates are engaged by 'speculator and financier' Stanton Mick to secure his facility on Luna from suspected psychic invasion Runciter assembles a group of eleven 'anti-psi's' together with technician Joe Chip for the mission. However, upon arriving on Luna, the group of twelve plus Runciter himself discover that the job is in fact a trap. A bomb explodes and Runciter is mortally wounded, leaving Joe and the others to retreat to their spacecraft and on to Earth in order to commit him to half-life at the same facility in Switzerland in which his wife Ella is already interred. Following this calamity on Luna events begin to dictate increasingly contingent expectations of reality. The deterioration of various foods and cigarettes, and the transformation of coins into older forms of themselves are among the first signs that something has gone very much awry. By the time Runciter begins to appear on currency in place of the ordinary dead president, messages from him are found among graffiti on bathroom walls, and he appears to Joe Chip in a televised visitation, the agents of Runciter & Associates are speculating in all urgency as to what is taking place. These messages indicate that the agents themselves are the ones in half-life while Runciter remains alive on the "outside." As it slowly dawns on the characters that time itself is moving inexorably backward, into the past, Runciter's communications begin to emphasise a protean-like consumable, 'Ubik.' In fact each chapter of the book begins with an epigraph in the form of a Ubik advertising slogan which establishes the idea of a kind of 'ubiquitous' consumer brand connected with an array of products, each designated by the same name. As the story reaches its climax, the time slip is arrested in the year 1939, and Joe Chip's suspicions are confirmed when Runciter manifests himself in the now

pre-war era telling Joe that he was the only survivor of the blast on Luna, that Joe and the others are dead, and that his messages to the group have been attempts to communicate with them in half-life. Shortly after, Jorry Miller is revealed as the source not only of the time slip but the deaths of Joe's fellow agents over the course of their time in half-life. Members of Joe's group have perished one by one due to what appears to be an accelerated ageing and decomposition process, succumbing as they wander off from the others, to be found only after the process has run its course. Jorry, another half-lifer whom Runciter had briefly encountered earlier in the story while communicating with his wife Ella, has been consuming the life force of his fellow internees in order to lengthen his own 'half-lifespan' indefinitely. Having been delivered a life-saving dose of Ubik by Runciter and thereby finding himself temporarily inoculated against Jorry's life-devouring activity Joe Chip, in conversation with Jorry, is told that the entire retrograde world is a creation of Jorry's mind fabricated for the sole purpose of devouring the members of Joe's group. The story leaves Joe in a standoff with Jorry having, through Ella Runciter, found a line of supply to further quantities of Ubik, but remaining trapped for the time being in a world of Jorry's devising. Finally, this lack of a conclusive resolution is confirmed when Runciter, though apparently in the world of the living, discovers that several coins in his possession bear the profile of his erstwhile technician, Joe Chip.

Readers of Dick will be readily familiar with his enigmatic ambiguity. In common with so many of his fictions, *Ubik* outlines a circular indeterminacy that fails to square with any possible expectation of a neatly composed and conclusive final act. Instead, taken as a whole, the story appears to hindsight as a kind of hieroglyphic picture of both conceptual dilemma and the narrative contour of the novel itself. Runciter's early and almost premonitory intimation may well ultimately reflect the reader's own impression:

...he felt unhappy cravings arise, cloudy and pointless wants that led nowhere, that returned to him empty, as in the completion of a geometrically perfect circle. [43]

Nonetheless, as a representation of Dick's suspicion of reality as somehow staged, a façade, *Ubik* can be judged a success. At every turn the author fabricates further and unexpected complications, from the narrative-bending alternate realities of the parapsychologically talented Pat Conley, to the purgatorial ambiguities of half-life, to the very ontological status of the characters themselves,

I'll zip over to my conapt, he decided, pick up the free sample of Ubik, then head for Des Moines. After all, that's what the TV Commercial urged me to do. I'll be safer carrying a can of Ubik with me, as the ad pointed out in its own jingly, clever way. One has to pay attention to such admonitions, he realised, if one expects to stay alive – or half-alive. Whichever it is. [125]

As we have seen, none of these diversions are ultimately telling and indeed, if further confirmation of Runciter's 'unhappy cravings' were required, we arrive at the novel's final sentence only to read, 'This was just the beginning.' Even the conclusion is something of a narrative deception.

Given the nature of the discussion so far it should be unsurprising that Dick's *Exegesis* should contain the following self-reflection:

I am a fictionalizing philosopher, not a novelist; my novel and story-writing ability is employed as a means to formulate my perception.<sup>14</sup>

As a philosopher employing fiction 'as a means to formulate [his] perception' I see Dick's philosophy as being distinguished by a frequent uncertainty and distrust of thinking. In the context of the dialectical struggle between mind and matter this can leave his reader with the sense of having stepped into an empty elevator shaft. In his worst moments Dick's ambivalence is general; he demonstrates an inability to trust either the evidence of his senses or the workings of his mind, leaving him apparently unsupported, without grounds for being. His instrumental sense of language is manifest as the suspicion that someone or some *thing* is tampering with the course of his life. However, what becomes increasingly evident is that the dire end to which this cast of mind tends is itself a solution. In the discovery that the nature of the problem is universal, affecting reality as a whole, Dick is able to picture a means to bridge the epistemological divide he has inherited.

*Ubik* is notable for a number of important allusions to metaphysical thought, including the central development of ideas connected with Plato's theory of Forms together with the implication of two distinct worlds: one celestial, spiritual and ideal; the other, sublunary, earthly and corruptible, subject to the twin processes of growth and degeneration. This is not at all lost on the inhabitants of *Ubik*'s strange landscapes, as we may see when we read of Joe Chip ruminating on 'this old theory...this discarded ancient philosophy...Plato's idea objects...The ancient dualism: body separated from soul' [126-27]. A more recent reference to the same problem is given with a character's quotation of Shakespeare's Richard III, and his cursing of this "dissembling nature," his arrival "before my time into this breathing world" [45]. Throughout, such a separation lingers, providing direction from the wings of the drama unfolding centrally. The uneasy and puzzling relationship of mind and matter is characterised in all manner of peculiar and surreal narrative fabrications. The juxtaposition, for example, of man and machine figures frequently:

...objective machines geared to react only to physical properties. No psychological elements came into play there. Machines could not imagine. [105]

The gulf between the purity of the archetype Man and its all too human counterpart are contrasted in a gesture typical of the self-deprecating and dispirited Dickian protagonist:

It did not seem possible that Wendy Wright had been born out of blood and internal organs like other people...Near her he became aware of the physical mechanisms which kept him alive; within him machinery, pipes and valves and gas-compressors and fan belts had to chug away at a losing task, a labour ultimately doomed...noticing her body made him feel like a low-class wind-up toy...Her eyes...looked impassively at

everything; he had never seen fear in them, or aversion, or contempt...she struck him as being durable, untroubled and cool, not subject to wear, or to fatigue, or to physical illness and decline...and certainly she would never look older. She had too much control over herself and outside reality for that. [55-6]

Equally typical of Dick's playful perversity is the end he proceeds to make for Wendy Wright, who is the first among Joe Chip's party to suffer the withering consumption of her life force, in effect the very thing that Joe has imagined her as impervious to. In fact, the vicissitudes of Dick's shifting realities are seen as applying equally and in turn to both mind and matter. In the figure of Glen Runciter we have the means by which a kind of final statement of Dick's judgement of knowledge and reality may be understood. For, as early as the novel's opening chapter, Runciter has been established as a kind of 'master and commander,' an imposing articulation of the mind's capacity for subsisting in higher realms:

He chuckled, but it had an abstract quality; he always smiled and he always chuckled, his voice always boomed, but inside he did not notice anyone, did not care; it was his body which smiled, nodded and shook hands. Nothing touched his mind, which remained remote; aloof, but amiable. [5]

As we have already seen, Runciter's 'perfect circle' is ultimately unsatisfying and inconclusive, his privileged vantage point undermined decisively along with the conventions of the medium in which it has been presented, the promise of the intelligible and the mindless revealed as equally inadequate in a search for answers.

Among the Pre-Socratic philosophers most frequently cited by Dick is Heraclitus. Dick's borrowings from him include the idea of personal and public worlds or, *idios* and *koinos kosmoi*. This idea is a frequent presence in his fiction, clearly appealing as grist for his speculations regarding the relationship of subject with object, thinking and appearance. In *Ubik* it is conspicuous as the confusions of identity in half-life mentioned earlier, as well as in the inevitable question arising in regard to the world Joe and the agents of Runciter and Associates are told by Jorry is "a product of my mind" [190]. Plato's theory, as a sort of axis around which these figures revolve, was equally cognisant of some of the difficulties arising from Heraclitus's thinking. Indeed, the most famous of Plato's pupils believed the theory of Forms contained in it a response to Heraclitus's account of the mysteries of existence, and the condition of flux through which these, to an extent, become manifest for us.<sup>15</sup> A key statement of Plato's position in this regard is found in his *Cratylus*:

But we cannot even say that there is any knowledge, if all things are changing and nothing remains fixed; for if knowledge itself does not change and cease to be knowledge, then knowledge would remain, and there would be knowledge; but if the very essence of knowledge changes, at the moment of the change to another essence of knowledge there would be no knowledge, and if it is always changing, there will always be no knowledge, and by this reasoning there will be neither anyone to know nor anything to be known. But if there is always that which knows and that which is known — if the beautiful, the good, and all the other verities exist — I do not see how there is any likeness between these conditions of which I am now speaking and flux

or motion. [paragraph 440a8b]<sup>16</sup>

This 'always changing' that Plato identifies as representing a conception of knowledge that must finally consume itself is in *Ubik*, as it is elsewhere in Dick's work, a constant danger to the inhabitants of Dick's pseudo worlds. It seems that, in order to overcome the Cartesian problem with which he is wrestling, Dick chooses to circumvent the mind-body split by adopting a principle much like Heraclitus's 'always changing' to problematise each equally. This amounts to an inversion of Descartes's providential guarantee of a divinely ordered harmony. A reality contingent upon such a thoroughgoing plasticity is indicated when Joe Chip finds himself recognising a World War I era biplane by name, realising that 'Elements of this period appear to be developing corresponding coordinates in my mind,' and causing him to conclude that, 'I'm beginning to phase mentally with this time-continuum in earnest!' [135].

With this last insight Joe appears to take a step beyond narrative allusions alternating between mind ('Parapsychological powers, mental force operating directly, without any intervening physical agency' [141]), and matter ('His world had assumed the attribute of pure mass. He perceived himself in one mode only: that of an object subjected to the pressure of weight. One quality, one attribute. And one experience. Inertia,' [166]). Instead, what is becoming clearer is the way in which the two processes active in the story's unfolding ('There are two forces at work...one helping us and one destroying us' [181]) are each of a recognisably cognitive derivation. Both of these 'opposing forces' are seen to be responsible for the shifting and variable realities with which the characters must deal. Whether it be the reversion of time and the degenerative, coarsening effect that foreshadows Jorry's consumption of another of the character's life force, or the restorative, rejuvenating quality of Ella Runciter's 'Ubik' remedy, each influence is seen as both an operative 'idea' and *actually* effective. Just as the 'elements' of the nineteen thirties were found by Joe Chip to be developing 'corresponding coordinates' in his mind, so the entire landscape of *Ubik* is increasingly revealed instead to be a *mindscape*.

It seems that an element of the difficulty that Runciter and his Associates experience over the course of the novel may be connected to their attachment to various 'objective' measures of reality. The presence, for example, of the parapsychologically talented is established by resorting to a 'testing battery' [24], 'thought processes' are 'monitored' [35]; forces are in this way 'measured' in order to provide 'objective proof' of (psionic) 'talent' and 'counter talent'. In one context we are told that an objective and technical 'Medical science...supplies the material groundwork, and out of the authority of his mind Runciter supplies the remainder' [8]. As we have previously observed, the supplanting of Runciter's authority has much to do with the end to which Dick leads us and it is Runciter's representative kind of knowing specifically that Dick is at pains to demonstrate to us as essentially lacking. Referring once again to that circular return of his 'unhappy cravings,' we can see this now as a picture of Runciter's abstract mind, so at home in the contemplation of knowledge while devoid of any relationship with its production. The passage refers to the stirrings of desire for the young woman, Pat Conley, an instance where the situation depends entirely on his involvement, having meaning for the very reason that it is Runciter himself who is

experiencing this particular feeling in this particular context. His criterion of knowledge on the other hand is, like a testing battery, instrumental and objective, rendering the experience of his own engagement with the world 'cloudy' and apparently 'pointless,' to be conducted beneath the threshold of his awareness. Runciter's standpoint is indicated by one of his own agents when, dreaming of an encounter with a pair of Psis (whom we later find to be a manifestation of Jorry), she tells them:

Perhaps your definition of your self-system lacks authentic boundaries. You've erected a precarious structure of personality on unconscious factors over which you have no control. [44]

When we then come upon Joe Chip in meditation on his plight, the 'boundaries' that our agent spoke of, together with their authenticity, are proving to be less than certain:

An unnatural and gigantic force, haunting their lives. Emanating either within the living world or the half-life world; or, he thought suddenly, perhaps both. In any case, controlling what they experienced, or at least a major part of it...Ubiquity, he realised all at once...[125]

So, while Dick has, over the course of the novel, come to elaborate more explicitly his picture of the universe as 'an idea in the minds of men,' he is here suggesting something a little different from the executive ideal of Runciter's world view; the potent force to which he refers is itself the arbiter of things in the world of *Ubik*. In what was quoted above, the reference is clearly to the enervating, entropic force with which Jorry is identified. Later, however, in an important passage we see that the ramifications of Joe Chip's earlier observation extend beyond Jorry and provide the reader with an insight into an agent that is, as the title suggests, 'everywhere.' The key scene takes place in a drugstore as Joe attempts to purchase a cannister of the all-important Ubik from the reluctant pharmacist (who is in fact the 'polymorphic' Jorry in another of his guises). Rather than the necessary spray can, the product has regressed along with the rest of the environment and is available only in the form of a blue jar containing an old-time liver and kidney balm. This being of no use to Joe, he vainly attempts to induce the Ubik to evolve into its 1992 form by simply willing the change. It appears the empirical reality standard has slipped – along with the world we are accustomed to. Although failing in his attempt to effect the change himself we see, as Joe slumps dejectedly on a park bench, that his efforts have been sufficient to summon a mysterious young woman who is able to present him with a brand new spray can full of the Ubik formula. She informs him that 'You brought me from the future, by what you did there inside the drugstore a few moments ago' [204].

In speculating about the challenge that Ubik presents to his authority, Jorry decides that it 'originates from within our environment. It has to, because nothing can come in from outside except words' [189]. It seems, given what we find in the final chapter's epigraph, that Jorry is close but simply hasn't gone far enough:

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

I shall always be. [207]

This passage casts Ubik as an analogue of John's *Logos*, 'In the beginning was the Word...all things were made through him.' In this way Ubik's nature is further clarified as being the 'model' of all 'types,' it is the creative principle, identical with language insofar as language in Dick's thinking bears responsibility for the creation of worlds no less than the mediation and migration between those worlds. In turn, Joe Chip's participation with Ubik, in the form of his emergent awareness of the world as 'idea,' is perhaps in kind with Ubik's 'song of itself,' a promise of joining beginning and end, the realisation of a process by which mind and matter, conscious understanding and unconscious force, generation and corruption, are reconciled. These binaries become figures of the process by which the individual (Joe Chip), uniting in an act of conception subject with object, is himself realised. As Georg K hlewind, the philosopher and student of Steiner's epistemological work describes it, 'To become aware of the Logos is to become aware of the Logos in oneself.'<sup>17</sup>

In a letter dated March 4<sup>th</sup> 1975, Dick describes the role of language in significant terms:

General Semantics, is totally insane. Words are real – if coupled with something else. They are signals. Like when you see a red light along the road. It is real, but it refers to something, a context. But to say, "That red light is an illusion," is to deny the reality of the context as well: and the power of that context to give or take life.

We must be calm and serious here because what [the critic, Frederic] Jameson is alluding to is that somehow language is a set [genuine reality] in which salvation can overcome the evil of physical power.<sup>18</sup>

In common with the description given by Rudolf Steiner earlier, we see again here the way in which Dick describes a world given as a duality - 'word' and 'context' - that are, by the thinking activity, united in a particular instance by what Steiner calls the act of knowledge, a similarly transformative gesture. A connection can be made between *Ubik* and what Dick writes here by recognising the connection between Ubik the remedy and Joe Chip's emergent awareness of his own agency in the construction of reality. The objective and empirically minded Glen Runciter is the exemplar of a disposition that conceives of knowledge as ideas *about* the world in contrast to Joe Chip who finds as the novel develops that ideas *are* the world; rather than linguistic signifiers of self-dependent entities, words are revealed as the Word by which a thing comes to be. Questioning the connection between word and context, for example, or concept and thing, introduces a misconception derived from the Cartesian prejudice with which we began. As Bortoft has pointed out, in making such a distinction we bring the distinguished into being in just *that* way not because of the alienation of mind and matter but in recognition of their essential relatedness. Considered in terms of 'Logos-structure,' body is as printed text – linguistic sign – and mind the meaning we thereby derive. Distinguishing is also, therefore, relating, and each a function of cognition. The Logos or 'Word'-structure is in this way the two-fold manifestation of a single world.

The world of Jorry's mind and its regressive entropy is the world of reality in its crudest form. In this world of the past it appears at first as if, reality being finished and complete without us, we are entirely unfree, that all meaning is given, which is to say that there *is* 'no underlying pattern or meaning.' This 'wordless' world imposes itself on the novel's characters by isolating each of them in an environment in which their cognitive life, and therefore their individuality, has no reality, replacing language, or the Word, as the common element, as the basis for a common relationship to the world, with 'a tropism...urging [them] toward death, decay, and nonbeing' [169]. Cognition is of nominal value only and, ultimately, not even that, assuming inexorably 'the attribute of pure mass.' Revelation here is the advent of an apocalypse by which, in realising our identity with purely determined and natural processes, we realise also the end of all identity. Ironically, Dick has dramatised the projection of a positivist world view by taking it at its word, picturing as he does a cognition of only nominal value, in which ideas and concepts have no ontological existence. Looked at in this way the figure of Jorry becomes an anthropomorphism of a world view in which all value is arrogated by his hunger, his desire for self-preservation. Jorry strips the world of its qualities, rendering it meaningless. Egoism here is also nihilism; meaninglessness for human life is also its death, 'for if human life is not a part of the world, of what is it a part?'<sup>19</sup>

Georg K hlewind, building on indications in the philosophical work of Rudolf Steiner, develops an important distinction between thinking and 'the already thought.' Such a distinction demonstrates the way in which dialectical, dualistic thought is itself derivative of thinking and only in this sense can be claimed as characteristic of the world 'in itself.' This 'past' or, 'dead' thinking, as K hlewind sometimes calls it, is a residue of the dynamic activity productive of the relatively concrete ideas and concepts with which we understand our world; it is the 'formation' relative to the 'formative,' thought relative to thinking. In this way the experience of disjunction between mind and matter is mirrored in the qualitative alienation of thought from thinking. And, just as its idea can be understood to 'complete' a sensory phenomenon the *experience* of thinking can reunite a particular idea with the 'world' from which it emerges. That this activity is not usually noticed is due, paradoxically, to its centrality. Every observation or thought – every *thing* – depends upon it, making it all but transparent to our habitual consciousness. Ordinarily, as we look through a window, we only notice the window itself if, through some defect in its fabrication, it distorts the image we would otherwise expect to see clearly. What is usually noticed is the image that presents itself; it is perhaps only in exceptional circumstances that we attend also to the medium by which it emerges. And, even then, we notice the image, the thought, only after it has come to be, in, as it were, the past. Our conscious experience appears limited to the 'remnants, to what has dropped from presence into the rigid framework of the psychological time of mutually exclusive passing moments, whose present moment inevitably escapes us. Our consciousness is of this past alone, of what we have already thought (we cannot recall when).'<sup>20</sup> For K hlewind and Steiner this demarcation forms a significant first step in overcoming dialectical consciousness and the problem of epistemology from which it has emerged and to which it leads. In noticing this boundary we have in fact taken the first step beyond it in that it can no longer be considered determinative in nature for, as K hlewind frequently reminds his reader, how could we even make such a statement if it were? Whether

intended in precisely this way or not, Joe Chip's 'manifestation of the future' – in the form of a can of Ubik – can certainly be seen as such a threshold moment. For in recognising that the petrifying decay and death of Jorry's world may be overcome by his own cognitive agency, by his own ability to manifest the meaning which makes a human world possible, he not only resurrects his own existential potency but accepts responsibility for Jorry's world – he realises in the fullest sense that *that* world is also *this* world.

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# THE \*\* STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH

AND AS WE BEAR THE IMAGE OF THE MAN OF DUST, SO WE SHALL BEAR THE IMAGE OF THE MAN OF HEAVEN.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:49

BUT FOLLOW THOU, AND FROM SPECTATOR TURN  
ACTOR OR VICTIM

P.B SHELLEY, *THE TRIUMPH OF LIFE*

Our introduction to *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* is also an initiation into its protagonist's troubled world. Barney Mayerson's desperation to avoid the United Nations' sanctioned draft to an off-world colony is, at the outset, the futile defiance of an inescapable destiny. His earth, suffering massive environmental decline, is itself only the outcome of a social reality applying, without exception, to each one of its constituents. Barney's responsibility for such an environment is as negligible as his agency within it – this is just the way of things. Ultimately, his fitness is a matter of survival only; his sense of himself arrested, captured entirely by the world as he knows it. The real business of life, to which the rest is almost incidental, is the production and consumption of goods. This, in fact, is the arbiter of Barney's personal and professional fortunes. As senior 'Pre-Fash' consultant for P.P. Layouts, Barney is responsible for predicting the trend of fashions that will generate demand for the types of consumables to be produced. P.P. Layouts is a corporation producing and marketing 'mins' or, 'miniature layouts,' small models of everyday earth life complete with accessories and dolls of the central figure 'Perky' Pat Christensen and her boyfriend Walt Essex. Barney, by way of his 'pre-cognitive' ability, chooses which of the latest fashionable consumer goods P.P. Layouts will miniaturise. Conditions on the off-world colonies to which Barney is so determined to avoid being drafted are such that the hapless colonists spend much of their time using these mins to escape from the meaningless drudgery of their extraterrestrial lives. The indispensable element of this escapism is the drug Can-D. It is a narcotic that, in conjunction with the dolls and their mins, induces in the user an apparently consensual experience known as 'communication' in which the men and women participating co-habit within the sensory and, to an extent, psychological experience of Walt and Pat respectively. While P.P. Layouts's trafficking of the drug is illegal, the U.N. chooses not to interfere for as long as they also benefit from the associated financial gain, the drug's use ultimately contributing to their political and economic hegemony. This is the 'lousy situation' with which the novel begins.

The 'hot, hostile sun' that beats down on the earth ('Terra') of *Three Stigmata* has become so damaging that a new index of temperature has been formulated to account for it: a certain number of 'Wagners' is the term for each increment on the scale. As the oceans evaporate, humidity is likewise unprecedented; each step on the scale by which its level is determined is now referred to as a 'Selkirk.' The retreat of the earth's glaciers is also recorded; the unit of measurement is a 'Grable.' Richard Hnatt, the husband of Barney Mayerson's ex-wife, Emily, is introduced reflecting on these grim facts in his 'miserably high-

number conapt building 492 on the outskirts of Marilyn Monroe, New Jersey' [6]. Richard Wagner, Alexander Selkirk, Betty Grable and, of course, Marilyn Monroe, are both significant cultural figures and terms for the degrees of a composite index by which Dick communicates the significant standard against which environmental change is measured. That this is quite specifically intended is confirmed by the pointed reference to that 'miserably high-number' address of Hnatt's. In this connection, Barney's desperation to dodge the U.N. draft is less a desire to avoid re-location to an inhospitable environment – the difference in this respect between Terra and the Martian colony the narrative introduces being, perhaps, negligible – and far more to do with maintaining his position of relative social prosperity; his own conapt building is numbered 33 and, as the reader shortly discovers, his residence there had sometime earlier presented him with a choice between expulsion from this accommodation or divorce from his then wife Emily. A more effective measure of earth's climate is ultimately established through reference to his decision.

Given the almost off-hand references to a dying world it might strike the reader as something of an irony that Mayerson is most sorely pressed by a social reality that, as the novel begins, appears to represent an irrepressible imperative to which Barney is inextricably beholden. The narrative juxtaposition of the story's Martian colonists with Barney and Richard Hnatt is immediately evident and only heightened by the virtual worlds upon which each set of characters rely for confirmation and solace and with which their respective realities are largely identified.

He was Walt. He owned a Jaguar XXB sports ship with a flatout velocity of fifteen thousand miles an hour. His shirts came from Italy and his shoes were made in England. As he opened his eyes he looked for the little GE clock TV set by his bed... [43]

Into this complex Dick introduces the figure of Palmer Eldritch. 'Well-known interplan industrialist,' Eldritch 'had gone to the Prox system a decade earlier at the invitation of the Prox Council of Humanoid types' [11]. These 'Prox-men' had wanted Eldritch's help in modernising their own production facilities along the lines of their 'Terran' counterparts. However, reading his morning 'pape, Barney discovers there that Eldritch, his decade-long absence at an end, has now returned.

It would probably be better for Terra if this wasn't Eldritch coming back, he decided. Palmer Eldritch was too wild and dazzling a solo pro; he had accomplished miracles in getting autofac production started on the colony planets, but – as always he had gone too far, schemed too much. Consumer goods had piled up in unlikely places where no colonists existed to make use of them. Mountains of debris, they had become... [11]

Barney's misgivings concerning Eldritch are shared by his boss and head of P.P. Layouts, Leo Bulero. We meet Bulero for the first time as he is engaged in a vid-call, discussing the likely ramifications of the U.N.'s unexpected seizing of a shipment of his Can-D. It appears that Eldritch has returned to the Sol system with a cargo hold full of a narcotic lichen very similar to that from which Can-D is synthesised. This suggests a likely cause for the shifting power relations between P.P. Layouts and the U.N.

Loss of the U.N.'s favour would signal the end of P.P. Layouts, ruling out even the possibility of competing with Eldritch's U.N.-backed product.

It is in connection with the experiences these drugs induce that Dick's familiar preoccupation with reality arises over the course of the novel. As we are introduced to the Martian settlers we also become privy to their philosophical and ethical debates regarding Can-D and its use. Departing from the terms used to refer to the experience itself – to 'seek transit,' 'communication,' 'translation' – the inhabitants of the Chicken Pox Prospect settlement engage in conversations regarding their drug experiences, apparently representative of those taking place throughout the various off-world colonies. Questions concerning the reality of the translation into the world of Perky Pat and Walt Essex are couched in religious terms, adherents to one view or another designated as believers or non-believers, the 'corruptible' and 'imperishable' bodies of users are analogies for their forms outside and inside the drug effect. Perhaps, as some of the settlers speculate, the experience transcends the bounds of time and space, being instead an intimation of the eternal [42]. References and allusions to debates between the realists and nominalists of Scholastic philosophy, together with Luther and Erasmus's disagreement concerning the 'blood and wafer,' each draw on suggestive parallels in the use of Can-D and Eldritch's Chew-Z with the question of transubstantiation in the Christian mass. The early doubt as to whether or not deeds committed 'in communication' are real or mere fantasy is given a particular narrative form in the infidelity of two of the settlers beginning within but ultimately extending beyond the translation experience.

These questions themselves are of interest not only to the average drug user but to their dealers too. In attempting to track down Eldritch in order to broker some kind of arrangement, Leo Bulero walks into a trap Eldritch has devised for him. His plan is to administer a dose of Chew-Z to Bulero against his will. This is the first experience of Chew-Z with which the reader is presented. Living up to his billing as somewhat 'wild and dazzling...' of going 'too far' and scheming 'too much' it has become apparent that the drug Eldritch is pushing induces an experience in the user that is as unconstrained and destructive of the customary boundaries of identity as Can-D is limited and predictable in its carefully staged and accessorised outcomes. Such is the force of Bulero's experience that it violently disrupts not only his reality standard but the reader's own ability to judge with certainty when or even if Bulero returns to what has been described of the novel's consensual reality. Bulero concludes that whereas Can-D enables its users to participate in a 'valid interpersonal experience,' Chew-Z has an inescapably 'solipsistic quality' [98] – with the caveat that it appears as if it is necessarily Eldritch rather than the user at the centre of the system in which the experience unfolds. Eldritch on the other hand maintains – somewhat convincingly in light of Bulero's trial – that Chew-Z is genuine while Can-D induces only fantasy. Experiences had while under the influence of Chew-Z, despite no time passing in the familiar world, are actually effective to the extent that he refers to our 'real' bodies as 'former bodies' [91]. Whereas the earth of Pat Christensen and Walt Essex is as illusory as the two personalities themselves, it is possible through the use of Chew-Z, as Eldritch tells Bulero, to 'reincarnate in any form you wish' [92].

Apparently awakening from his Chew-Z trip, Bulero is released by Eldritch to decide whether he is willing to join him in the production and distribution of the drug. Choosing not to do so will spell death for Bulero. Shaken by his experience, Bulero resolves to kill Palmer Eldritch, not only for the sake of his own business interests, but for the preservation of the entire Sol system. Arriving back on Terra, Leo's first act is to fire Barney for failing to come to his aid. Barney, for his part, is riven with guilt for not doing so and decides to forgo his attempts to evade the draft and give himself up to a future existence on an off-world colony, going so far as to contact the U.N. and volunteer his immediate expatriation. When Bulero finds out what Barney has decided, he offers the chance to atone for his inaction by conspiring with him to provoke the U.N. into banning Chew-Z outright. The plan is to wait until Barney has settled on Mars in his new home at Chicken Pox Prospects before buying a supply of Chew-Z to use there. What he is then to do, Leo tells him, is to inject himself with a virus with which he will be supplied. This will allow Leo to support Barney's legal action against Palmer Eldritch and Chew-Z, ultimately forcing the U.N.'s hand.

Prior to making his final preparations before leaving Terra, Barney impulsively decides to visit his ex-wife Emily. Significantly, the termination of his aspirations along with his employment at P.P. Layouts has revealed to him a single motive behind both his decision to divorce Emily and his reluctance to initiate a rescue for Leo. He now judges each instance as an occasion on which he valued self-preservation over doing what he might otherwise have recognised as the right thing. He decides to seek out Emily in late recognition of his time with her being the best of his life and with the sense that she was always able to see 'through the self-justifying delusions that I erected to obscure the reality inside' [119].

Arriving at Emily's apartment Barney discovers her at work on the ceramic pots she designs and fabricates. It quickly becomes apparent that the 'evolution therapy' Emily tells him she has been undergoing with her husband Richard has had some sort of damaging effect on her. He recognises the pot she is forming as a replica of one of her earliest designs, her features are somewhat changed, and she admits to him that her mind 'feels so muddy. I can't seem to think properly; all my ideas get scrambled up together' [120]. At this point in the narrative the reader is, through the figure of Leo Bulero, as well as the earlier scenes of Emily and Richard's first treatment, already familiar with this 'E Therapy.' Bulero has, from the first, taken great pride in his 'evolution,' reminding Barney that 'You know because I take that E Therapy I've got a huge frontal lobe; I'm practically a precog myself, I'm so advanced' [19]. While the physical changes of the therapy are striking – clients, often referred to as 'bubbleheads,' develop enlarged, dome-like skulls covered with a thick 'rind,' a kind of 'chitinous shell...like a coconut' [69] – it is the social effect of the therapy that appears to be considered the more significant transformation. As Richard, in attempting to convince a sceptical Emily, describes it:

...even if we're there only a short time and only evolve a little, look at the doors it'll open to us; we'll be personae gratae everywhere. Do *you* personally know anyone who's had E Therapy? You read about so-and-so in the homeopapes all the time, society people... [34]

Ironically, among the first fruit of Richard's therapy, with it's 'new order of conception,' is the thought that

...this whole business preyed off the vanity of mortals striving to become more than what they were entitled to be, and in a purely earthly transitory way. [73]

And, similarly to Emily's former husband, through the choices he makes a new perspective is reached from which he can look back upon his actions, deepening the sense of his own motivations and realising the responsibility he bears for these. In fact, Richard's heightened faculties reveal to him a three-fold cosmological picture where the human being is bracketed by, on the one hand, a 'tomb world' where, machine-like, the individual becomes inexorably determined by 'the immutable cause-and-effect world of the demonic' and, on the other, an ethereal world above. Uniting these two is the mid-point of human existence where 'any aspect or sequence of reality *could become either*, at any instant. Hell and heaven, not after death but now!' Richard's insight recognises experiences such as depression and mental illness as a 'sinking' into the sub-human hell of the tomb-world while the possibility of ascent is, in a flash, revealed to him as the quality that, through its absence in his outlook, had brought him and his wife to this very moment. The possibility of realising heaven on earth is to be achieved,

Through empathy. Grasping another, not from outside but from the inner. For example, had he ever really looked at Emily's pots as anything more than merchandise for which a market existed? No. What I ought to have seen in them, he realised, is the artistic intention, the spirit she's revealing intrinsically. [74]

As Barney will subsequently experience as a ramification of his dismissal from P.P. Layouts, the emergence of insight or, 'evolution' as it is presented here, is intimately connected with the awakening of a moral conscience, that is, the awareness that the individual bears a responsibility for what is known and done. This is in fact the revelation of the 'intrinsic spirit,' or the deeds of a uniquely situated individual. Recognising this in oneself is in turn the basis for the recognition of it in another, the recognition indeed of other *selves*. In contrast to the generic commodities marketed by salesmen such as Richard himself ('The hell with his sales, his contacts'), of marketable cyphers such as Pat and Walt with which consumers are encouraged to identify, is the awareness of one's own unique and, as Barney comes to recognise it, 'authentic self.'

The discreet but perhaps central significance of Emily Hnatt is revealed by the observations of each of her two husbands in turn when they notice her repeating the creation of one of her earliest successful works. As Richard had realised that he was subjecting Emily to E Therapy 'just to further sales' [73], so Barney subsequently perceives his earlier betrayal and abandonment of her as an act motivated by the desire to save and further his own career. In the event of her failed E Therapy she begins to 'devolve' and lose her creative genius; 'the artistic intention, the spirit she's revealing intrinsically' has been betrayed in the name of social advancement and the confirmation from that reality that her husbands have each desired. The full measure of this sacrifice becomes clearer over the course of the novel, primarily in connection with the figure and deeds of Palmer Eldritch. However, it is certainly worth noting here that what Emily has taken from her is nothing less than the key to her identity – her biography. In her vain efforts following E Therapy to create a 'history future' for herself she succeeds only in repeating the past and even this much is only recognisable through the eyes of others. Emily herself has lost even that self-

awareness that would perhaps in itself be the ability to move beyond this impasse; she is in effect trapped in that hell of 'immutable cause-and-effect,' and rendered machine-like by the lovelessness of successive marriages. In this way Richard and Emily become instructive in their contrasting fortunes for, whereas Emily's inability to situate herself in a personal history denies her the quintessentially human possibilities of 'self' and 'other,' Richard finally awakens to Emily through the deeper insight into his own motivations. Tragically, this awareness arrives in his own biography too late to avoid the calamity it awakens him to. Despite the claims on behalf of 'evolution therapy' it seems that it is Emily's sacrifice that is ultimately the means by which each of her husbands is able to distinguish themselves from the picture that had held them captive.

Of course, Eldritch has a hand in these events too, for it was his money that funded the Hnatt's evolution therapy, Richard having earlier and impulsively sold the rights to a selection of Emily's designs to an envoy of Eldritch's. As the story unfolds this influence can be seen as entirely consistent with Eldritch's role in the narrative. The significance of his presence becomes ever more evident after Barney's arrival at the Chicken Pox Prospects settlement on Mars. It is here that his conspiracy with Bulero to frustrate Palmer Eldritch and his designs unfold. According to their plan Barney buys Chew-Z from Eldritch in order to set the scheme in motion. However, remaining in a mood of despairing guilt and self-recrimination for his past deeds, Barney willingly ingests the drug with the intention of exercising his fantasy of a life in which he and Emily are still together. What he experiences instead is the freedom to travel back through his own biography while utterly bereft of the means to change anything he meets with there. In fact, his first awakening within the reality of Chew-Z returns him to an apparently early period of his marriage with Emily in which – far from doing things differently – he is entirely identified with the attitudes and values characteristic of his earlier self, criticising her shortcomings and otherwise ignoring her in favour of indulging the anxiety his social ambitions incite in him.

Frustrated by his exchange with Emily, Barney leaves their apartment to take a walk by himself. In the corridor outside he encounters Eldritch who, expressing exasperation at Barney's 'perverse' desire to do nothing but repeat the past, attempts to thwart Barney's wishes by projecting him into a reality familiar to the reader from the novel's early pages. Apparently awakening in his old New York apartment to a day like any other, he finds himself in bed with his colleague and mistress Roni Fugate. Despite the disorientation and confusion these shifting realities engender, Barney continues to harbour only one intention, '*I have to get back to Emily.*' Making his way to her conapt building a picture of his plight slowly precipitates for him out of the rather dizzying shifts he is experiencing:

It seemed as if *no* time had passed, as if time had ceased and everything waited, frozen, for him; he was in a world of fixed objects, the sole moving thing. [181]

When he arrives at the apartment he is confronted by the very domestic scene he had desired, by way of his narcotic fantasy, to overcome. There to greet him are Richard and Emily Hnatt, contentedly sharing a breakfast together. Barney, convinced of the artificiality of the picture before him, wastes no time in directing to Emily the proposition that she consider coming away

with him; that she consider remarrying him. Even in this Eldritch-inspired dream world Emily's response is full of the 'light' of a genuine compassion and, equally, her reply is ultimately as Barney may have expected of the Emily he had known before. Whether out of loyalty or real love she refuses to countenance the possibility of leaving Richard. However, as crushing as this answer is, there is something about it that is even more disturbing, the sense that,

...her mind was not even made up – there was, to her, simply no reality to which he was referring. [182]

Subsequently Barney is disturbed in his drug-induced stupor, breaking the illusion and returning him to his 'hovel' on Mars. However, so desperate is he to return to the fantasy, he immediately takes from his fellow hovelists another dose in order to attempt to once more shape an illusion of the life with Emily that he so desires. Arriving this time in a future version of Terra, he finds himself greeted as a 'chooser' – the designation for that phantom form of the user of Chew-Z that the drug produces – and a phenomenon now widely known. Leo Bulero had earlier made this transition in the novel's first representation of the Chew-Z experience, and now we are given a more detailed exposition of what this 'ethereal' body entails.

You can't die; you don't eat or drink or breathe air...you can, if you wish, pass directly through walls, in fact through any material object you care to. [204]

Elsewhere, the nature of the 'chooser' is further elaborated,

Never forget that a phantasm can go anywhere; it's not bounded by time or space. That's what makes it a phantasm, that and the fact that it has no metabolism, at least not as we understand the word. [208]

In the future Barney, as phantasm, discovers when meeting his future self that the world has literally moved on without him. Finding his way about P.P. Layouts he meets and is told by Leo that Emily Hnatt, in this future world, *has* divorced Richard but demonstrates no inclination to be reunited with Barney. Leo knows this because the Barney of the future has already sought for such a reconciliation.

What this trinity of past, present, and future experience appear to share in common is the impossibility of participating in the realities which are represented. In the form of an advertising slogan, Palmer Eldritch's phrase, GOD PROMISES ETERNAL LIFE. WE CAN DELIVER IT, is revealed as the heralding of nothing more than a pseudo-reality. Crucially, what Barney finds himself excluded from are the relationships in which it seems that reality is actually established. As he had earlier argued, Can-D derives potency from its communal nature as a kind of sacrament performed 'in company with others who really go along. So it can't be entirely an illusion. Dreams are private; that's the reason we identify them as illusion' [134]. Chew-Z, on the other hand, appears to possess a definitive 'solipsistic quality' [98] as Leo earlier perceived it. Perhaps the discovery Barney makes of an iron-clad cause and effect operative in these fantasies – by which Eldritch is bound no less than the user him or herself – describes the way in which knowledge (and the reality thereby known) is conceived as essentially static and unchanging; it is another way of describing that same exclusion Leo had identified during his first Chew-Z experience:

'Alone,' Leo said. 'You mean each person goes to a different subjective world?' [96]

Whether or not it is due to that enlarged frontal lobe, it is perceptive of Leo to have identified so quickly what becomes evident as both cause and effect of Eldritch's Chew-Z experience:

And he had great power. He could overcome death. But he was not happy. For the simple reason that he was alone. So he at once tried to make up for this; he went to a lot of trouble to draw others along the route he had followed. [213]

In my earlier discussion of *Ubik* I introduced the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner as a means to draw out elements in Dick's work, with particular reference to Steiner's central preoccupation with thinking as the quintessential human capacity. Quoting Steiner's seminal insight that 'Thinking is the unobserved element in our ordinary mental and spiritual life,'<sup>1</sup> Andrew Welburn notes that 'This more than anything else defines the essential modernity of Steiner's thought, in contrast to the search for 'definitive' answers which preceded the modern self-awareness.'<sup>2</sup> With his commentary on Steiner's philosophy it is Welburn's intention to demonstrate the relevance of Steiner by situating him in the context of contemporary philosophical and critical discourse. At the outset Welburn characterises Steiner's method, which Steiner himself called *geisteswissenschaft*, or spiritual science, in the following terms:

Steiner did not wish to pose the question [in this instance, the interpretation of spiritual phenomena according to the viewpoint, with its given doctrinal truths and traditions, of a particular faith] in any such monolithic way, but to investigate spiritually, even spiritual 'phenomena' scientifically – which of course is also culturally specific: it is the approach of the modern individual thinker. Indeed, what he means by 'scientific' in this spiritual context is firstly that he does not ask for a prior act of belief. If he adopts a point of view in advance, it is that of the modern free individual with a desire to see for himself or herself, that is, to put to the test both the facts and the frame of reference, the assumptions we make about how to explain them.<sup>3</sup>

This desire to determine 'scientifically' not 'the truth,' but rather our own knowing relationship with the world is, I believe, also a significant element of Philip K. Dick's creative method. The kind of 'shifting realities,' as his biographer Lawrence Sutin termed it, that we have already seen in the narratives of *Ubik* and *Three Stigmata*, have much to do with Dick's own recognition of the way in which our knowing is an interpretive and transformative activity, ceaselessly shaping and re-shaping the world around us. Dick's narratives, often finding an absurd denouement in a kind of Nietzschean revelation of the 'human, all too human,' is at once a recognition of the creative powers of human beings and their capacity to construct the realities in which they live their lives. Likewise, it is this intuition of Dick's that leads also to his supremely pessimistic reflections on power relations within society, of his imagining of the 'Black Iron Prison' he came to see as dominating all but absolutely the social realities he experienced and described, no less than his understanding of language as a basic tool for the manipulation of

reality.

An aspect of this understanding in Dick's writing is the question it raises regarding the possible metaphysical and dualistic constitution of the realities he creates. Critics of Dick's work (Fitting, Golumbia, di Tomaso) have offered accounts both affirming and denying metaphysical readings, the cases for each being compelling. It seems likely that at various times Dick, with his typically probationary intellect, aimed to explore the ramifications of both monistic and dualistic conceptions of reality. The significance of this question for Dick is not unconnected with its significance for philosophy – that is, for knowledge – considered as a whole. This would also be consistent with Steiner's own understanding of the situation at the close of the nineteenth century when, in his philosophical testament, *The Philosophy of Freedom*, he was concerned to demonstrate just how important the understanding of knowledge is for human freedom and as Welburn, in reviewing the nature and scope of Steiner's thinking emphasises, is in fact two facets of the same human identity. In Dick the reader is frequently presented with a series of revelations awakening the protagonist to worlds that are each, in succession, utterly unlike the one in which he began. Very often the scene of such revelations, far from forming the basis for a liberation, are in fact the emergent intimation of nothing other than the necessary and unrelenting conditions of reality. Novels such as *A Maze of Death*, *Martian Time-Slip*, and *A Scanner Darkly* among others are representative of this variety of Dick's fiction. Whether pictured in terms of a prevailing social order or as a representation of the necessary conditions of sensibility, what is communicated is very much in line with the limits to human knowledge with which Steiner was confronted at the time of his philosophical work. This conceptual and often ontological inevitability, the 'fixed nature of the "fit",' as Welburn refers to it, is an incarnation of those timeless, logical principles – that *must* be true – with which knowledge has, since around the time of the Enlightenment and subsequent scientific revolution, been identified. Very much in the spirit of Philip K. Dick's representations of an apparently impossible desire for an authentic knowledge of self and other, which he most often framed in terms of the question of reality and the human being, is Rudolf Steiner's liberating demonstration of our freedom from metaphysical absolutes.

The epistemological part of *The Philosophy of Freedom* argues in effect that knowledge neither has nor needs 'foundations': thinking establishes connections between things, ideal connections whose validity does not need to be backed up by quasi-'real' metaphysical foundations or forces, or any other hypothetical entity such as the 'thing-in-itself'.<sup>14</sup>

The paradox of Dick's work, the contradictions evocative of such contrasting evaluations, is the manner in which we find there both a recognition of thinking's anarchistic and abundant creative powers, together with a profound and despairing search for some sure foundation on which this powerful generative capacity may be seen to rest.

The danger here is the one which Steiner had earlier recognised as present in the relinquishing of our own human agency to such 'hypothetical entities' as Kant's 'thing-in-itself' or, indeed, the 'human nature' of heredity or DNA. By leaning on such inviting explanations we ourselves demarcate those boundaries in which we subsequently claim to see the limits of knowledge

and freedom pictured for us. Forgetting, or failing to notice, that 'unobserved element,' our own thinking activity, we imagine instead the discovery of the world 'as it is.'

...the seductive and ever elusive idea of a simple encounter between mind and matter, of just finding things, which makes of man a perpetual stranger – always opening the door, so to speak, on a totally unfamiliar situation. For such an onlooker-perspective, man inevitably remains an outsider, and knowledge is necessarily something imposed upon the mind.<sup>5</sup>

The figure of the 'outsider' will be familiar to any reader of Dick, as it will be from so much of twentieth century literature and art in the West. The paradox in Dick is likewise a signal of a larger cultural discontinuity whereby we have the familiar certainties of the world 'as it is,' the scientific programme by which a fuller, more comprehensive understanding of the nature of things is gradually realised while, on the other hand, we are beset with the endless turnover of idea and innovation which disrupts the experience of socio-cultural evolution almost as fast as we can frame it (materialised for us, among other places, in the world of 'information technology'). Readily distinguishable here is the shift in world views most frequently described as the transition from modernity to post-modernity. Where, in this context, Dick should be situated is of course a matter of opinion;<sup>6</sup> what is perhaps less controversial is the way in which his writing communicates the pressures of these changes. Welburn, in drawing attention to Steiner's early work on Nietzsche, describes the latter's judgement on morality as constituting a very human standard, far removed from the customary claims of a divine origin with which the great religious and ethical systems had been formerly connected. Nietzsche's re-valuation of value, no doubt shocking not only to the sensitivities of his contemporaries but ultimately and most profoundly to the man himself, moved him to assert the primacy of the individual's own will on the environment in which it was active as an heroic if not futile confrontation with that abyss which his insight had revealed to him. Here it might be instructive to contrast the scientific community's frequent insistence on knowledge as essentially 'value-free'<sup>7</sup> with Steiner's own philosophical conception which, though free from metaphysical imperatives and any absolute standard of external validity, was far from claiming a freedom from any judgement of value. In this respect it should become clear why Nietzsche's prognosis of moral truth was likewise a statement that continued to overshadow the question of knowledge throughout the twentieth century and has itself a continuing and special relevance for post-modernity. If, with Steiner and Dick, we are willing to acknowledge the genuinely formative quality of thinking, an influence that not only interprets but creates and transforms worlds, the question of whose thinking – of which perspective – must inevitably be faced. The freedom in which we conceive our relationship with the world also signifies for knowledge 'a particular relation to reality from which it is true.' In establishing our own frame of reference for our actions – there again we have the allusion to that 'modern thinker' – the emphasis of modernity shifts to that of post-modernity and its apparently groundless relativism, to what, in Welburn's account of Steiner, is referred to as 'nothingness.'

This polarity – of reductive accounts of the human being on the one hand, and of a freedom which is, *in extremis*, also a condemnation to meaninglessness, of an inner content lacking reality, on the other – was recognised and consistently

replicated in many of the conceptual and moral configurations of Dick's fiction. Even in *Ubik* it was perhaps unclear whether its Platonic model implies a corporeality ultimately at odds with the nature and being of the soul or, as I have interpreted it, suggests something of the fundamental groundedness of each in the conceptualising activity of thinking, with its apparently boundless potential to turn back even such erstwhile absolutes as physical death. In this last – the question of resurrection – is a figure of Dick's engagement with Christian thought, and here too the same questions are once more raised and deployed in his fictionalising. Does he, in kind with what are perhaps the most conventional accounts of Paul (whose theology is often present in Dick's work, not least of all in *Three Stigmata*), account for Pauline theology by representing an estrangement of body and soul, or is there not rather a picture provided of the third aspect of the trinity in which a reconciliation is arrived at by the realisation of a common agent? The point here is not to attempt an analysis of Dick's theology but to instead discern those elements of his thinking that, in their persistence, are descriptive of what might be considered his fundamental orientation. It is my intention that, through a parallel consideration of Steiner, certain common themes may be better understood in Dick's work as, to borrow a phrase of his, the *koinos kosmos* – the world common to each of them, with its *sturm und drang* of change, raised questions to which each, in their sensitivity to the pressures of these changes, searched for suitable answers.

The explicit introduction of a Christian content in the novel coincides with Barney's meeting of the 'Neo-Christian' Anne Hawthorne aboard his flight to a new beginning on Mars. It is in conversation with Barney that Anne discusses prayer as a means of beneficial intercession in the lives of others. In first describing the appeal of prayer as directed toward, not God but 'the Holy Spirit within,' she goes on to ask him if he has read the biblical writing of Paul, specifically what may be found in it regarding the 'incorruptible' resurrection body that he describes as the fruit of overcoming death and sin. The connection between this spiritual body and the narcotic experiences of both Can-D and Chew-Z, as referred to above, is a link that Anne herself then goes on to make, with particular reference to Eldritch's provocative advertising slogan. The peculiar relationship between the heaven-orientated Neo-Christian conceptions and Eldritch's hellish subjection of the individual to his Chew-Z pseudo-worlds is, in connection with the 'chooser' phenomenon, noted with approval by Eldritch himself:

I'm inclined, as you can see, to be somewhat sympathetic to the Early- and Neo-Christian point of view, such as Anne holds. It assists in explaining a great deal. [204]

Here, the earlier religious parallels Dick quite clearly invites between the Eucharist of the Christian mass and the communal consumption of Can-D, complete with its miniature ritual paraphernalia and wafer-like narcotic, are extended also to Chew-Z with its imperishable 'resurrection body' extruded from within the bounds of time and space. In fact, the common quality shared by both religion and narcotic (the novel as a whole obviously invokes the spirit of Marx), Can-D and Chew-Z, has once more been earlier revealed by Leo Bulero's rapid grasp of the situation. During his experience of the novel's first Chew-Z experience, Bulero had been informed by Eldritch that the various illusions he is being confronted with are being generated by Eldritch who encourages him to try for himself:

Go ahead – project a fraction of your essence; it'll take material form on its own. What you supply is the logos. [92]

What over the course of the narrative becomes increasingly evident is not necessarily that one or other of the novel's competing value systems and the means to its enactment is right and the others wrong (it should however be noted that neither the U.N.'s political hegemony nor capitalist oligarchy are favourably represented), but instead that it lies within the means of human actors to participate creatively and authentically in their own lives; that it is possible, through the exercise of an awareness of our own thinking, to realise a knowledge of one's unique situation and thereby establish 'our own moral frame of reference along with our actions,' would appear to support, as Welburn describes it, Steiner's conclusion that in this recognition 'freedom and self-knowledge become the same.'<sup>8</sup>

Freedom, in this regard, clearly relies upon the self-awareness that establishes our unique viewpoint by acknowledging its difference from that of others. Just as an object in space will appear differently depending on the position of the viewer, so will a given situation be met in diverse ways depending on the dispositions of the participants; likewise, a single person's disposition will be modified and change over time – there is a biographical and therefore *historical*/dimension to this being human, this developing self. Palmer Eldritch – obliquely characterised by reference to a book the U.N. of the novel has banned, *Pilgrim Without Progress* – would take from the users of Chew-Z this freedom. It is the freedom that is dramatised in the novel as the human situation between past and future, heaven and hell; to not be fixed by what we already know but, at the same time, in stepping out into the emptiness of pure consciousness, to conceive or picture new possibilities, to avoid losing touch with the world around us, with 'what we have done and suffered,'

It is something of a paradox, but it is the ability to go on changing without losing touch with what we were, or the world we have known, that makes us a self, an identity.<sup>9</sup>

As the novel approaches its conclusion Eldritch remains at large, although it has been foreseen – by both Bulero and Barney – that their efforts will eventually win the day. However, there remains something inescapably provisional about all this. As Eldritch had earlier declared, his ambition was to 'become a planet...I'm going to be everyone on the planet...I'm going to be all the colonists as they arrive and begin to live there. I'll guide their civilisation; I'll *be* their civilisation!' [214-15]. The early uncertainty as to whether or not ordinary, consensual reality had been restored following a Chew-Z trip is sustained without exception throughout the remainder of the novel; the very last scenes involving both Barney and Bulero witnessing visions of Eldritch's stigmata, his mechanical arm and visage, manifesting both in those around them and, alarmingly, in their own self-perceptions. Again, this is a means to dramatise an aspect of the novel's thematic content, to draw attention to the characters as accessories to Eldritch's crime; from Barney and Richard's treatment of Emily to P.P. Layouts' duping of colonists to the U.N.'s profiteering. The crime is in fact ultimately revealed as an existential flaw within humanity itself, a curse:

All three stigmata – the dead, artificial hand, the Jensen eyes, and the radically deranged jaw. Symbols of its inhabitation, he thought. In our midst. But not asked for. Not intentionally summoned...It is out in the open, ranging in every direction. It looks into our eyes; and it looks *out* of our eyes. 'It's a price,' Anne decided. 'That we must pay. For our desire to undergo the drug experience with that Chew-Z. Like the apple originally.'

[231-2]

Quite clearly alluding to a conception of original sin, this statement, coming as it does near the novel's close, could be interpreted as a reasonably conventional judgement on the 'vanity of man' that it would, according to such an account, have been the business of the narrative to describe. On the other hand, given what we know of Palmer Eldritch and the rest of the novel's cast, we can also imagine these visions as moments in which that path travelling the razor's edge between the fixities of determined outcomes and the abstract indeterminacies of the abyss is particularly present. In 'projecting a fraction of our essence' we may manifest ourselves at points toward either end of the spectrum; in the empiricism of a materialistic science or the abstract boundaries of metaphysical speculation. Whatever our persuasion, the philosophical implications will be manifest in the world with which we are then confronted, together with the possibility to transform these conditions through the recognition of our role in creating them. 'The ship rushed on, nearer and nearer Earth,' – in the novel's final line it is perhaps possible to distinguish a statement in support of the process of knowledge I have attempted to describe here. In my account the novel's final line is a kind of affirmation of Barney Mayerson's 'authentic self' as it is experienced in change, in direction, and in transformation, as it moves from certainty to emptiness to certainty again, defined not by what is but revealed primarily in what things are not. The image of transit between one world and the next, itself destined to be dissolved and created anew.

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1 Steiner, Rudolf. *The Philosophy of Freedom, The Basis for a Modern World Conception*, Trans. Wilson, Michael. Forest Row, East Sussex: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1999. 26.

2 Welburn, Andrew. *Rudolf Steiner's Philosophy and the Crisis of Contemporary Thought*. Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2004. 26.

3 Ibid. 23.

4 Ibid. 39.

5 Ibid. 42.

6 See for example Christopher Palmer's *Philip K. Dick: Exhilaration and Terror of the Postmodern*. Liverpool: Liverpool

University Press, 2003.

7 Cf. Welburn, 50-1.

8 Ibid. 52.

9 Ibid. 156.





# A SCANNER DARKLY

VERY SHORTLY, WHEN ONE WILL HAVE WRITTEN THE YEAR 2000, A KIND OF PROHIBITION AGAINST ALL THINKING – NOT A DIRECT PROHIBITION, BUT A SORT OF LAW INTENDED TO SUPPRESS ALL INDIVIDUAL THINKING – WILL COME FROM AMERICA. A START HAS ALREADY BEEN MADE IN THIS DIRECTION OF SUPPRESSING INDIVIDUAL THINKING. WE ARE ALREADY SEEING A PURELY MATERIALISTIC THINKING IN WHICH THERE IS NO NEED TO WORK ON THE SOUL BUT ONLY TO CONDUCT EXTERNAL EXPERIMENTS IN WHICH THE HUMAN BEING IS TREATED LIKE A MACHINE...NOW, IN THE FUTURE, THERE WILL BE NO LAW PASSED THAT SAYS YOU MUST NOT THINK. WHAT WILL HAPPEN IS THAT THINGS WILL BE INVENTED WHOSE EFFECT WILL BE TO EXCLUDE ALL INDIVIDUAL THINKING.

RUDOLF STEINER, APRIL 4<sup>TH</sup>, 1916.\*

In an essay to which I have alluded previously, 1978's 'How to Build a Universe That Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later,' Philip K. Dick describes the use of language as 'the basic tool for the manipulation of reality.'<sup>1</sup> In developing this idea he suggests an additional method to achieve a similar end -

But another way to control the minds of people is to control their perceptions. If you can get them to see the world as you do, they will think as you do. Comprehension follows perception. How do you get them to see the reality you see? After all, it is only one reality out of many. Images are a basic constituent: pictures.

In my earlier discussion of *Ubik* and *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* I identified elements common to both Dick and Rudolf Steiner's theory of knowledge. In *A Scanner Darkly* the question of knowledge remains central to Dick's narrative, its significance modified only insofar as it is necessary to bring his concern with power and control to the foreground. While telling a very personal story, inspired in part by the circumstances surrounding his own drug use, Dick recognises themes bearing upon his personal experience as being possessed of a wider consequence:

I myself, I am not a character in this novel; I am the novel. So, though, was our entire nation at this time. This novel is about more people than I knew personally. [218-19]

Previously, in examining what is at stake in an understanding of the grounds of knowledge, I described the connection Steiner makes in *The Philosophy of Freedom* between knowledge and freedom. That thinking, as he describes it, can claim no foundation that it does not itself provide; that it should be classed apart from any metaphysical force or thing, is not only desirable but necessary if we are to consider it together with freedom. As long as we understand thinking as operative in the same sense as, for example, a natural process, we concede both agency – for 'who' would be active? – and meaning. Questions such as 'why should I do this?' or, 'why do it this way rather than that?' become fundamentally redundant based, as they would be, on only the illusion of identity. Instead, for Steiner, thinking itself is responsible for establishing the connections between things, and these together with their relationships undergo a succession of interpretive conversions, each point of reference, each framework, in turn a solution and a dissolution marking, as Dick in a sense alludes to in the quotation above, the evolution of both self and selves. What is imagined in *Scanner*, however, is not so much a natural as an ideological process. Although, as we

shall see, it is an ideology that aligns itself with the kind of remorseless determinism with which we often identify nature.

Discovering the novel through the eyes of its protagonist Bob Arctor, it is certainly not unreasonable to identify Dick's narrative with the largely fascistic near-future California within which the events unfold. The book's fictional government, not content with the exercise of a control based on political and economic power, is revealed to be covertly manufacturing and distributing a drug so debilitatingly addictive that it is referred to by its users as 'Death.' As we will see, it is in this way that Dick's portrayal of substance abuse as the means for an existentially total hold over the user situates drug use within an ideological contest for not only the right to define reality, but for 'access' to the 'instrument' by which such a definition may be carried out. It is in this respect far from coincidental that there are five direct references to Goethe's *Faust*, a drama in which the dramatic tension is founded upon the struggle for its protagonist's soul. Despite its fictional setting *Scanner* is a novel, as Dick himself has described it above, that is also a social history, providing him with the opportunity to once again examine the grounds of what he understood to be the dominant reality standard of our time together with the toll he believed it to be taking on us, its actors.

The undercover narcotics agent who calls himself Bob Arctor is ostensibly charged with the responsibility to discover the source of Substance D. He has assumed the Arctor identity in order to move unnoticed in the underworld of the 'heads,' a counter-culture defined by drug users and, more broadly, including both ethnic minorities and the economic underclass. Paradoxically, however, Dick reverses genera expectation by characterising Arctor as an 'authentic' identity and caricaturing 'Fred,' as the anonymous 'code name under which he reports the information he gathers.' While Arctor is, over the course of the novel, subject to the usual character description and development, Fred remains, as he is first introduced: indistinct; 'a vague blur' (15). This anonymity is all but absolute, facilitated by means of a 'scramble suit,' a membrane worn by the user that masks the voice, flattening its affect, and providing the material medium for a projection of 'a million and a half physiognomic fraction-representations of various people,' elements of their features being randomly combined and re-combined endlessly: 'Hence any description of him – or her – was meaningless.' Here the cop is, rather than the 'good guy,' an emotionless, faceless figure of authority. In fact, all the novel has to report of Fred's interiority is ultimately attributable to Arctor, Fred himself is no more than the surface projections flickering momentarily across the membrane of his suit.

Fred/Arctor is introduced preparing to give a carefully scripted speech to a Rotary Club gathering on the dangers of drugs and drug addiction. The speech is of a standard format for such occasions and has been memorised earlier, at some point prior to the six times Fred has previously delivered it. The presentation is also being monitored by one of Fred's superiors at HQ, so when he begins to deviate from the expected message he hears a voice in the suit's ear piece ready to supply the correct formula. This becomes the occasion for an important insight -

“...this is what gets people on dope.” He thought, This is why you lurch off and become a dooper, this sort of

stuff. This is why you give up and leave. In disgust. [19]

What Dick establishes here, at the beginning, is that these 'straights,' in their conformity, are reduced. They have given up anything which marks them out as unique, as an individual, in order to, as is expected of Fred, read from the script. As Fred is introduced by the compère his audience is described as 'mirror[ing] the qualities of the host in every possible way.' The emptiness here is achieved by reducing identity to an external image, to the pure virtuality of a picture being; for what Fred/Arctor requires his scramble suit, the audience has achieved unaided. However, looking out on the gathering, Arctor realises that there exists for him there no reflection of his own inner alienation. The ready cooperation of the audience with the moral authority he stands for is something like a retardation of their humanity: 'This was the only way they could be reached. He was talking to nitwits. Mental simps.' As the events of the novel unfold we can see here, from the start, what lies in store for the users of Substance D. In employing the use of such a virulent agent of control as 'Death,' the powers that be intend for those who are 'unable' to demonstrate the ready and enthusiastically blank compliance that we see when, with Arctor, we look out over the audience, that they should be inoculated against any possible stirring of civil disobedience. As Arctor concludes, what we hear is not a description of the damage that drugs do to their users and the societies in which they are used but, departing from the script and speaking for himself, we listen instead as he delivers his judgement of the world that sits facing him:

"D," he said aloud to his audience, "is for Substance D. Which is for Dumbness and Despair and Desertion, the desertion of your friends from you, you from them, everyone from everyone, isolation and loneliness and hating and suspecting each other. D," he said then, "is finally Death..." [19-20]

In this improvised statement the situation and the course of the novel is contained; it is for Arctor – and Dick himself no less – to wrestle with this picture of their fate, and avert it if they can. It remains to be seen, however, how such an image attained its power.

In Arctor Dick presents the reader with a measure of the ailment that afflicts society; as one of Arctor's friends sees it, 'This is a world of illness, and getting progressively worse' [28]. Arctor, in order to perform his part, must be no exception. As the story develops we follow his descent into an underworld; not so much a place apart as a revelation of the world where he is, of the truth of things. This descent is also the descent of disorientation and damage, the effect of his own use of Substance D upon body and mind. Beyond his personal suffering, what this process achieves is two-fold. On a narrative level it gains Arctor, as an addict, covert access to the sources of Substance D production and supply and, on a textual level, we as readers are granted the opportunity to witness the effect of this society's reality standard as it remorselessly bears down on one particular individual. It is the latter vantage point that allows Dick to articulate his epistemological and moral philosophy in his own vernacular, as a writer of fiction.

The psychological disintegration that Arctor undergoes is monitored, much like everything else, by the police force for whom he works. Early on in the piece Fred/Arctor is sent for evaluation by a pair of 'medical deputies.' They tell him that several agents have recently been admitted to Neural Aphasia Clinics with symptoms of severe brain damage connected with 'bilateral dysfunction,' a problem apparently caused by Substance D where a split between the two hemispheres of the brain develops along with a consequent disruption of ordinary cognitive function. Given that Fred/Arctor is assumed to be using Substance D in the discharge of his duties as an undercover officer, all his contacts with the department are monitored for early signs of such impairment. With his recent extemporisations at the Rotary Club in mind, and despite protestations that the meeting is nothing more than a routine procedure, Fred/Arctor is anxious to know why the interview with the deputies has been scheduled. After harrying his interviewers over the course of the tests, an admission is elicited that the testing was in fact prompted by an exchange between Fred and his supervising officer Hank some weeks before. During this conversation Fred/Arctor had told Hank about a situation he had been a part of while working his cover amongst the 'heads.' The scene revolved around a member of the group bringing home a bicycle he had bought from a neighbour, having been assured that the bike was equipped with a full ten gears. It develops that, being unfamiliar with the workings of such a bicycle, none of the group are able to decide or calculate how many gears the bike does in fact have. Eventually they wheel it out on the street and the first passer-by is able to explain to them how the two front chain rings and the rear cassette cooperate to produce the full range of gears. Apparently understood by the deputies as 'bullshitting' between Fred and Hank the anecdote, intended as a humorous account of the group of slightly spaced out 'heads' among whom Fred is working, is nonetheless taken seriously enough to have prompted the testing session to which Fred/Arctor has been summoned. This story provides a picture, explain the deputies, of a failure to 'perceive the simple mathematical operation involved in determining the number of its very small system of gear ratios...They give aptitude tests like that to children' [93]. When Fred/Arctor observes that 'It sounds to me like a cognitive fuckup, rather than perceptive. Isn't abstract thinking involved in a thing like that?' the deputies refer to findings that demonstrate cognitive systems failing when the 'inputs' they receive are inaccurate and cannot usefully support reasoning based on such 'data.' This is an explanation of not only the motivation for bringing Fred/Arctor in for testing but, implicitly, of the test itself.

The fundamental principle of the test in question, a 'Set-Ground'<sup>2</sup> evaluation the deputies have been conducting, becomes clear when, as they describe the presumed basis of Arctor's inability to determine the correct number of gears on the bicycle, they indicate the framework of percept-cognitive function their method assumes. By presenting Fred/Arctor with a series of cards, each with a geometric design masking a single image printed within it, the expectation is that any impairment in his ability to accurately distinguish a given image from its background should be apparent. With complete confidence, one of the deputies informs Fred/Arctor that it is superior to the similarly pictorial Rorschach test because 'it is not interpretive':

...there are as many wrongs as you can think up, *but only one right*. The right object that the U.S. Department of Psych-Graphics drew into it and certified for it, for each card; that's what's right, because it is handed

down from Washington. You either get it or you don't, and if you show a *run* of not getting it, then we have a fix on a functional impairment in perception and we dry you out for a while, until you test okay later on. [89]

This then, is the identification of a judgement – if it would be correct – with the given materials of perception. A kind of empiricism, maintaining that certainty can be arrived at to the extent we are able to fix ourselves to the data provided. But more than this, in its apparent denial of 'interpreting, connecting, and relating in the construction of [a] meaningful world' we instead make of knowledge nothing more than the 'submission to a supposed order of things we are compelled to accept.'<sup>3</sup> Such a reality standard is pictured by Dick in not only the steady neutralisation of the user of Substance D, as epitomised by Arctor, but in the entire climate of such a society. The fear of the 'other' emerges quite naturally from a world view that has so substantially alienated knowers from the known. Rather than identity and its educational, cultural, and political means of realisation, both individually and communally, we have only identification with a pre-fabricated standard imposed by institutional agencies such as the 'U.S. Department of Psych-Graphics' or Fred's Orange County Sheriff's Department, an identification as comprehensive as any force of nature. It is little wonder that Arctor's experience with the medical deputies reveals the desirability of pure pattern recognition; as the deputies tell him, if the subject is receiving 'accurate data' the cognitive system cannot fail. The circulation and use of Substance D sunders the cooperative function of the brain's two hemispheres, isolating the observational and interpretative faculties of the individual – which has the effect of hindering or disabling entirely the individual's ability to judge their own perceptual experience – in order to promulgate a world view that identifies a given view of reality with that of reality 'itself.' The drug trade in *Scanner* can now be revealed as a figure for the pushing of what Dick often referred to as a 'pseudo-reality,' and is in fact the novel's answer to that question of his with which we began: *How do you get them to see the reality you see?*

The circle of friends among whom Arctor takes his place, identified as they are with society's underclass, is a presentation of Dick's philosophical concerns manifest, as he saw that they were, in a social and cultural setting. Tellingly, they are also the context for Bob Arctor's authenticity. The significance of these relationships to Arctor and, through him, to the narrative as a whole should not be underestimated. The novel concludes with Arctor, now known as 'Bruce,' having achieved what his superiors had hoped for – admission to a federal rehabilitation clinic. Once inside, and despite his advanced stage of cognitive impairment, he is able to locate and secure one of the small flowers from which Substance D is synthesised. Dick's judgement is implicit here not only in the revelation that the same government prosecuting an operation designed to locate and eradicate the supply of illegal narcotics is also manufacturing and supplying them, but in the enduring motivation of Arctor to close the investigation by taking a single, small blue flower as a gift 'for my friends.' The authenticity here is that of the 'authentic human being,' the nature of which is the subject of a great number of Dick's stories and novels. Gestures of kindness and mutual regard are scattered throughout *Scanner* and are clearly present as a contrast to the impersonal and faceless indifference of the authorities epitomised, as we have seen, by the scramble suit. Dick's authentic human being, on the other hand,

...is one of us who instinctively knows what he should not do, and, in addition, he will balk at doing it. He will refuse to do it, even if this brings down dread consequences to him and to those whom he loves. This, to me, is the ultimately heroic trait of ordinary people; they say *no* to the tyrant and they calmly take the consequences of this resistance.<sup>4</sup>

Just as Dick, elsewhere, remembered the early Christians for their resistance to the power of imperial Rome, so we have here the marginalised and oppressed in the shape of Arctor's 'heads,' holding on, however, not so much to the special interests of a minority group, but to the recognition of their own unique moral situation, the ability to bear witness to the intrinsic value of one another – the reality of freedom itself.

There is, though, no corner of the world Dick imagines that is not overshadowed by the fear, alienation and loneliness of this world order; Dick once again presents the global threat of reality in the form of an idea. Even among the friends of Arctor there is suspicion and recrimination. The contradictions of the dominant reality which Arctor must bear and which in him are nowhere more evident to the reader, does not escape the attention of those among whom he moves:

...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 behaviour. In his total relatedness to life. [32-3]

In a perversion of Whitman's American the 'multitudes' to which Arctor's contradictions of identity expose him are essentially imposed from without. So unlike the flourishing of Whitman's self-experience is Arctor's descent into insensibility that for him, while it remains, identity is a performance – 'where does the act end? Nobody knows' [21] – and, possessed by each of the successive roles he must play, a performance in which *he*, by degrees, is subordinated to *them*, a herd mentality: 'my name is Legion, for we are many.' The system of power relations that we have been presented with is being extended beyond the fringes of the ghetto and into the minds of its inhabitants. The dissociation that develops in Arctor likewise does not stop at the threshold of his soul but moves in, inhabiting the man and looking out from inside. That this should be so is natural given 'the orientation of external knowledge, where we look on as if we had no part in the world.'<sup>5</sup> This idea is a real gesture, creative and transformative, as Dick realises in his representation of the society that is its outcome. What Arctor and the others suffer, the felt alienation from their own self-experience, is so precisely because of the reality of the meaning that arises through their active engagement with the world.

This dissociation, as it holds on him becomes absolute, effects in Arctor a bifurcation of identity. When, subsequently, his supervising officer, Hank, assigns Fred to close surveillance of Arctor, it serves only to formalise an already existing condition. A short while later we listen in as Arctor, his paranoia growing and without trace of irony, meditates upon the sabotage of his life and property:

Whatever was going on, whoever it was by, it was going to be chickenshit and devious: some freak without integrity or guts lurking on the periphery of his life, taking indirect potshots at him from a position of concealed safety. Not a person but more a sort of walking, hiding symptom of their way of life. [48]

While it remains inconclusive whether the acts of sabotage to which Arctor is alluding have been carried out by one of his housemates or by he himself, what is certain is the bizarre manner in which Fred/Arctor's dual-identity has become something existential. The agency of an idea has become, virus-like, the disease of this 'world of illness,' not despite but because of its psychosomatic nature. In an account of materialism and science Andrew Welburn, in his book on Rudolf Steiner's thought, indicates the ramifications of such a philosophy when realised with the kind of insane logic pictured by Dick:

In the deepest sense [materialism] is the denial of relationship, seeing the world as something to be manipulated, controlled, and understood solely under those one-way aspects which lead us to dominate, to use and afterwards to dispose of. Science becomes materialistic, not when it seeks to understand the laws or regularities in nature, but when it comes to regard things, beings and people as only the product of regularities, only real in so far as they can be manipulated by control of their predictable behaviour. But in this way...we make ourselves slaves.<sup>6</sup>

Though the use of Substance D takes its toll of Arctor, its pound of flesh, it is perhaps the mentality that conceives reality on the basis which Welburn describes that is the real source of the malady, the symptoms of which Arctor had earlier diagnosed so clearly for us: 'the desertion of your friends from you, you from them, everyone from everyone, isolation and loneliness and hating and suspecting each other.'

In a coincidence that perhaps reflects something of their common concern with questions of knowledge and the grounds of human experience both Steiner, in his seminal *The Philosophy of Freedom*, and Dick, here in *Scanner*, quote an identical passage from Goethe's *Faust*:

Two souls reside, alas, within my breast,  
And each one from the other would be parted.  
The one holds fast, in sturdy lust for love,  
With clutching organs clinging to the world;  
The other strongly rises from the gloom  
To lofty fields of ancient heritage.<sup>7</sup>

This is one of a number of passages in *Scanner* that Dick quotes in the original German, including five separate excerpts from *Faust*, as well as one each from the poetry of Heinrich Heine, and the libretto to Beethoven's *Fidelio*. This one in particular, which Arctor recites to himself, seems to allude to the growing alienation between his two identities, their very different value standard and situation. In his essay 'Digressions on Allusions in P.K. Dick's *A Scanner Darkly*'<sup>8</sup> Frank C. Bertrand observes that

the passage is interpolated immediately after Fred/Arctor reflects that 'I know Bob Arctor; he's a good person. He's up to nothing. At least nothing unsavoury. In fact, he thought, he works for the Orange County Sheriff's Office, covertly' [145]. Two further excerpts from *Faust*, though introduced a few pages apart from, in their source, one continuous passage -

What does that grinning hollow skull mean, save  
That in its brain, confused like mine, once lived  
Something that sought bright day, desiring truth,  
Yet in the heavy dusk went miserably astray?  
Surely this apparatus mocks me with its wheels,  
Rollers, cogs and tackle. I stood at the gateway;  
These should have been the key. The wards  
Are intricately made, but have no bolts.

These lines occupy a juncture of the narrative in which Arctor visits a locksmith's shop to pay a service fee for which a check he had earlier written failed to cover. Entering the 'semigloom' of the shop's interior, he is confronted with 'doorknobs made to resemble human heads, great fake black iron keys' and 'a counter where two huge key-grinding machines loomed up, plus thousands of key blanks dangling from racks' [139]. Finally, upon returning back to his house later in the same chapter, Arctor again recites in the German of Goethe's drama lines among which are the titular figure's question, 'Alas, am I stuck in this prison?' We can imagine here that the conjunction of these images have for Bob Arctor much to do with his declining cognitive capacity, the effect of which is to 'incarcerate' him within his own corporeality and, further, that this is the work of a society that has so thoroughly revised the concept of the penitentiary as to alleviate the necessity for penance entirely: instead the remedy is to more effectively identify the inmates with the 'laws' and 'regularities' of the system as it is. Society has become an apparatus by which 'blanks' are manufactured before being ground down to the purely functional form required. This is the 'Death' to which the users of the drug allude.

In his survey of *Scanner's* textual allusions Bertrand singles out the fragment of the Heine poem included in *Scanner* as having been drawn from a collection that engages the theme of the 'double,' a doppelgänger figure as 'pervasive and foreboding symbol for a division into an acting and a watching self.'<sup>9</sup> This, as we have seen, is the 'freak...lurking on the periphery of [Arctor's] life.' As much as this malaise is societal and identified with the institutions charged with the communication of the privileged meanings we are encouraged or, in this case, coerced to adopt as our own, it is telling that Dick provides no significant individual representative of this programme. What we have instead are individuals such as Arctor, divided against themselves. The first of the references described, that citation in which Faust broods over the twin souls he feels within, is used by both Dick and Steiner to related but differing ends. The axis of freedom after all runs between sovereignty and servitude, and the situation of each along it will vary accordingly as one addresses himself to the conditions of its attainment and another to those of its absence. For his part, Steiner enlists Faust to introduce the second chapter of his *Philosophy of*

*Freedom*, entitled 'The Fundamental Desire for Knowledge.' In first observing there that 'Man is not organised as a self-consistent unity' he then goes on to describe the way that this desire for knowledge is, in a sense, a special instance of the inadequacy of nature to fulfil our needs. In recognising this search for an 'explanation of the facts' we begin to distinguish ourselves from the world. The intention here is to establish the grounds of knowing as something that may be relied upon for, should this not be the case, it can make no difference to Steiner or anyone else whether we should assert that the freedom of his work's title is or is not a reality, because in this case an assertion is all it must be if no valid knowledge on this or any other subject is possible. In the first instance then, the situation of knowledge as a revelation of our separation from the world is established. It is the task of the chapters subsequent to demonstrate Steiner's view of the significance of our own activity of thinking as presenting us engaged not in some existential stand-off with the world but in a process of development in which we emerge from an earlier identity with it in order to free ourselves to experience our own individual being; at this point the reality of freedom is self-evident, the challenge, instead, can be productive of nothing more than a further question: how are we to live with this?

It should now be obvious that the situation in which Arctor is caught presupposes a failure of self-knowledge itself let alone any power such a knowledge could have to heal the fracture of self and world. In fact, the monism of Steiner's epistemology – that our thinking may provide us with the means for the reconciliation we seek is possible because it too is a part of the world – finds its own 'double' of sorts in *Scanner's* reduction of Arctor and its other drug users, the effacing of their free identity:

One more in a long line, a dreary entity among many others like him, an almost endless number of brain-damaged retards. Biological life goes on, he thought. But the soul, the mind – everything else is dead. A reflex machine. Like some insect. Repeating doomed patterns, a single pattern, over and over now. [49]

In *Scanner*, addiction is the supreme automatism, each addict an appendage of a machine-like social reality outside of which there is nothing. This is the growing identity of reality with our idea of it – the way in which life fulfils the conditions we place upon it. Steiner called his philosophy 'spiritual' through a recognition of something very close to Dick's own concern for the authentically human, that is, the recognition of beings and things in their own right. In an echo, on the other hand, of Welburn's account of scientific materialism, Dick describes Arctor reflecting on how 'to get you to become a means for him to obtain more junk,' the junkie, 'a machine, will turn you into *his* machine' [124].

If, then, we conceive of the society that is creating the demand for the drug it also produces as an expression of what has become a compulsion to exist in just *this* way, we approach the general condition of which the junkie as described by Arctor, is a manifestation. Elsewhere, Arctor has also observed this same, impossible circularity, in the ubiquitous 'McDonaldburger' restaurants. He pictures the situation to himself as if all of southern California were on a revolving 'circular strip' that presents him on each occasion with the same McDonaldburger restaurant, selling the same burger as the last time 'and the time before that and so forth, back to before you were born,':

They had by now, according to their sign, sold the same original burger fifty billion times. He wondered if it was to the same person. Life in Anaheim, California, was a commercial for itself, endlessly replayed. Nothing changed; it just spread out farther and farther in the form of neon ooze. What there was always more of had congealed into permanence long ago, as if the automatic factory that cranked out these objects had jammed in the *on* position. How the land became plastic, he thought... [22]

The novel-length contour of Arctor's journey is, in form as well as content, a protest against what it describes; it is a personal and human account of a dehumanising world. However, in being drawn ineluctably downward, Arctor too suffers the fate of his reality's narrative.

As the boundaries between Arctor and his 'function' as Fred, law enforcement official, begin to break down, so too does the line between what he does and who he is. This though means more than an increasing identification with the covert surveillance and information gathering Arctor carries out as Fred and Fred carries out as Arctor but, just as the junkie comes to be identified with junk, so too does Fred/Arctor come to identify/become identified with his own observing activity. As his mental stability is increasingly compromised, his sense, as Arctor, of being observed grows and becomes dissociated with his role in which, as Fred, he himself carries out the observing. 'Murk outside; murk inside,' he reflects to himself – the problem of identity begins to preoccupy him without, however, finding any concrete connection with his own plight, accompanying him instead as a kind of haze in which he moves. That desire for knowledge to which Steiner referred becomes an existential desperation even as the space which Steiner saw it as revealing between 'I and World' is, for Arctor, diminishing rapidly toward a vanishing point:

What does a scanner see? He asked himself. I mean, really see? Into the head? Down into the heart? Does a passive infrared scanner...see into me – into us – clearly or darkly? I hope it does, he thought, see clearly, because I can't any longer these days see into myself. [146]

As he reflects on this sense of being watched, Arctor once again speaks words prophetic of his own demise: 'Whatever it is that's watching, it is not a human.' As the scene concludes Arctor, apparently distracted, declaims quietly to himself lines that could be taken from the work of some philosopher, but are in fact a personal expression phrased, fittingly, in the third person:

Any given man sees only a tiny portion of the total truth, and very often, in fact almost perpetually, he deliberately deceives himself about that little precious fragment as well. A portion of him turns against him and acts like another person, defeating him from inside. A man inside a man. Which is no man at all. [147]

Arctor is, by the state's apparent desire for total control, being re-made in the image of a machine, a human monitor. In order to become a more effective agent he is being divested of his agency, re-modelled for pattern-recognition only; it is not he that sees but the state in him. By the time he is 'rehabilitating' at a federal clinic his self-reflection, now reduced is, for all its brevity, definitive: 'I am an eye' [200]. The clinic at which Fred/Arctor is resident – 'New-Path' – has already been infiltrated by the same police operation that he has been involved with. The operative there, however, has not the requisite level of

impairment to have been able to penetrate the suspected criminal activity. This 'Mike' becomes Arctor's handler on the inside, directing him in his impaired state as his superiors on the outside had previously in positioning him to become addicted to Substance D. Without his knowledge Fred/Arctor/Bruce has been manipulated at every step, from the police academy to the federal rehabilitation clinic. As Mike now watches Arctor 'watching' New-Path, he considers that if, as suspected, New-Path is involved in the production and distribution of Substance D the profits would be more than enough to keep it '*growing*.' Immediately following, and without irony, he goes on to reason that

The living...should never be used to serve the purposes of the dead. But the dead – he glanced at Bruce, the empty shape beside him – should, if possible, serve the purposes of the living. That, he reasoned, is the law of life...The dead, Mike thought, who can still see, even if they can't understand: they are our camera. [210]

Mike, who otherwise treats 'Bruce' with sensitivity and kindness, is ultimately as compromised as Arctor himself. An effective reality first replaces any competing images with its own before replicating itself through the self-consistency of its logic. Even this attempt of the system to undermine its own operation is itself carried out on the premise established by that system; with the best of intentions, the purely instrumental use of Arctor is a sign of the effective rule of a single reality. It is also a concrete realisation of 'a tiny portion of the total truth' being mistaken for the whole.

'*Mors ontologica*,' as the true name of Substance D is finally revealed to be: 'Death of the spirit. The identity. The essential nature' [202]. In rendering its users as machines the drug destroys their 'essential nature.' As I have emphasised throughout, the manifestation of society as an accessory of addiction reveals the extent to which the idea upon which it is based not only does not possess the means to account for the individual but actively works against the individual's realisation. In the title of the novel is a reference to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, a part of the widely known hymn to love [1 Corinthians 13]:

For now we see in a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.

The careful conjunction of themes that wind like a golden thread through the narrative connect, at each end, questions of knowledge with those of identity. It has become clear that the picture of himself captured on the screen of his 'scanner' has the power to communicate to Arctor very little of who he is. In his final interview with the two medical deputies, Arctor has explained to him the 'competition phenomenon' they have diagnosed him with. In having, in the form of his brain's hemispheres, two separate and conflicting sources of information it is, they tell him, something like attempting to determine which of two gloves is the left and which the right with no reliable referent. They suggest to him that he is cognising the world in two different ways at once, but that he has no way of either distinguishing between the two or judging which, if either, is correct. As it has been throughout, Arctor is again fulfilling the role for us of dramatising the way in which any particular representation remains only an image of an image:

...such a 'camera'-like notion can never deliver to us the observing self which is supposed to acquire the

knowledge, since it recedes in an infinite regress.<sup>10</sup>

If the basis of knowledge can never be separated out from the act of knowing, if it is always *somebody's* knowledge from some *particular* point of view, it means that knowledge in the form of an image, or any other prescription, can never be simply imposed from without. The lie of this society's ability to constitute knowledge for its members is elsewhere in Dick's work echoed by the reality of things escaping the definitions individuals place on them, as if they were able to stamp significance on a blank world. Likewise, the futile attempt – genuine or otherwise – to derive knowledge directly from sensory experience alone. In this sense Arctor was not so wrong in linking identity with a performance for, if we are to know anything, we *must* act. This is why Steiner, in consistently drawing attention to our own activity in the production of knowledge, is able to claim such a philosophy to be one of freedom. Through the recognition of our own particular standpoint we are liberated from it – from the simple determinism it otherwise exercises over us.

Contra, in fact, to the presumption that all we know of the world and others is an external image to which we assign some 'meaning effect' is Steiner's idea that 'knowing something in perception...is more usefully described as like reading-activity.'<sup>11</sup>

In what is a direct appearance to the senses, something else is indirectly revealed. The mere sense-appearance extinguishes itself at the same time as it confronts me. But what it reveals through this extinguishing compels me, as a thinking being, to extinguish my own thinking as long as I am under its influence, and to put the other's thinking in place of my own. I then grasp its thinking in my thinking as an experience like my own. I have really perceived another person's thinking. The immediate percept, extinguishing itself as sense-appearance, is grasped by my thinking, and this is a process taking place wholly within my consciousness, and consisting in this, that the other person's thinking takes the place of mine.<sup>12</sup>

This can only give grounds for a crediting of Dick with genuine insight in his connection of identity and knowledge within the social tableau of his novel. Steiner's account of knowledge as 'pre-existing neither in the subject or the object, but only in a coordination involving a transformation of the self to include the others perspective'<sup>13</sup> not only affirms Dick's sense of the significance of reciprocity in human relations, but is evocative of another common source of allusion. Much like Dick, whom Bertrand counts as having made reference to the specific passage from Paul's letter to the Corinthians cited above in at least four separate novels,<sup>14</sup> Steiner counted Paul's work as an important precursor to the kind of thinking he saw himself as engaged in, referring to his own epistemology on more than one occasion as a 'Pauline' theory of knowledge.<sup>15</sup> The refrain, 'not I, but Christ in me,' is a familiar one to readers of Paul's letters, and one which Steiner linked explicitly with his philosophical description of the activity of thinking. In an unmistakeably similar context Dick himself had this to say:

The *kosmos* is not as it appears to be, and what it probably is, at its deepest level, is exactly that which the human being is at his deepest level – call it mind or soul, it is something unitary that lives and thinks, and

only appears to be plural and material. Much of this view reaches us through the Logos doctrine regarding Christ. The Logos was both that which thought and the thing that it thought: thinker and thought together.<sup>16</sup>

I quoted earlier from Arctor's bleak message to the Rotary Club audience, delivered by forming for them a picture of the fate to which the user of Substance D is consigned. Claiming, as I did, that this sketch is also an epitome of the novel and its world, I wrote that 'it is for Arctor – and Dick himself no less – to wrestle with this picture of their fate, and avert it if they can.' It is perhaps difficult to distinguish, in the account I have given, any small sign of success, or even hope, in this struggle. The novel, for Arctor, ends inconclusively; it is uncertain whether or not he will recover from the cognitive impairment he is suffering at its close. What light there is to be had in the gloom of this underworld to which Arctor has descended is perhaps only to be found in the very last act of the novel, where he arrives finally at the source for which he has been searching. Stooping to admire the small blue flowers he has come upon, the Executive Director of New-Path stands alongside him and asks, 'A transcendent vision, is that what you see growing there?':

He tapped Bruce firmly on the shoulder, and then, reaching down his hand, he cut the sight off from the frozen eyes.

"Gone," Bruce said. "Flowers of spring gone."

"No, you simply can't see them. That's a philosophical problem you wouldn't comprehend. Epistemology – the theory of knowledge." [216]

In obscuring Bruce's 'transcendent vision' and attempting to replace it with his own statement of fact we have in this single moment, with its figure of authority, both a recapitulation of the novel's struggle, and Dick's judgement of the system of power relations he saw as obtaining; that moved him to identify 'the entire nation' with the bleak message he was delivering to it. What we may ourselves judge as representing the impending downfall of this system is figured for us not so much in the image of Arctor's final act, the covert removal of one small flower, but rather in his reason for doing so. We have seen that, in the transformation of the self that Steiner called 'spiritual,' we find also the possibility to recognise in their own right other selves, beings, and things. And because this self is real, if not fixed, we risk it in that extinguishing of consciousness before the other that every act of recognition requires, the uncertainty each authentic encounter must involve. The gift Arctor gives to his friends is in the end a vindication and resurrection of Paul's hymn; he provides the example of someone willing to take that risk. By stepping forward into the world out of love for them, he affirms for his friends the possibility that we may truly know as we are known.

\* Steiner, Rudolf. "Occult Brotherhoods." *Spiritualism, Madame Blavatsky, and Theosophy*. Ed. Christopher Bamford. Great Barrington, MA: Anthroposophic Press, 2001. 212,213.

1 Dick, Philip K. "How To Build A Universe That Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later." *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick, Selected Literary and Philosophical Writings*. Ed. Lawrence Sutin. New York: Pantheon Books, 1995. 265.

2 *Set and Ground*: Terms used by PKD (apparently borrowed from gestalt perception theory) to both distinguish between genuine reality (set) and spurious reality (ground), and to describe their seeming admixture in the everyday world. In Dick, Philip K. *In Pursuit of Valis: Selections from the Exegesis*. Ed. Sutin, Lawrence. Novato, California: Underwood-Miller, 1991. 269-70.

3 Welburn, Andrew. *Rudolf Steiner's Philosophy and the Crisis of Contemporary Thought*. Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2004. 80, 83.

4 *Shifting Realities*. 278-79.

5 Welburn. 68.

6 Welburn. 67.

7 Goethe, J.W. *Faust*, Part One, sc. 2, lines III2-III7; quoted in Steiner, Rudolf. *The Philosophy of Freedom, The Basis for a Modern World Conception*, Trans. Wilson, Michael. Forest Row, East Sussex: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1999. 13, and *A Scanner Darkly*. 145.

8 Bertrand, Frank C. "Digressions on Allusions in P.K. Dick's A Scanner Darkly." Tribes.net. Last accessed July 10, 2011. <<http://tribes.tribe.net/philipkdick/thread/d04dl743-3101-4525-9041-3428e1bfc27a>>

9 Ibid.

10 Welburn. 62.

11 Ibid.

12 Steiner, Rudolf. *The Philosophy of Freedom, The Basis for a Modern World Conception*, Trans. Wilson, Michael. Forest Row, East Sussex: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1999. 225.

13 Welburn. 109.

14 There are also references in Dick's work to Paul's writing generally. As referred to in a previous chapter, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* is one example.

15 See for example, *Rudolf Steiner on his book, The Philosophy of Freedom*. Ed. Palmer, Otto. United States: Steiner Books/Anthroposophic Press, 1975. ch. 12, for a collation of many of the relevant references.

16 *Shifting Realities*. 277.





# VALIS

APPREHENSION OF THE BARE PRINCIPLE OF IDENTITY CAN GIVE US NO MORE THAN THE BARE *FACT* OF PERSONAL IDENTITY. THE *CONTENT* OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS ON THE OTHER HAND IS ALWAYS TRI-UNE, OR THREE "IN" ONE AND ONE "IN" THREE, AND IT IS ONLY IN REALISING TRI-UNITY THAT WE CAN BE SAID TO REALISE OUR ACTUAL SELVES.

OWEN BARFIELD, *WHAT COLERIDGE THOUGHT*

I AM HORSELOVER FAT, AND I AM WRITING THIS IN THE THIRD PERSON TO GAIN MUCH-NEEDED OBJECTIVITY.

PHILIP K. DICK, *VALIS*

FOR WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED IN MY NAME, THERE AM I AMONG THEM.

MATTHEW 18:20

In his novel *Valis*, Philip K. Dick's concern with the frequently troubling and often all but irreconcilable nature of reality and identity is manifest as an illness, a wound both personal and cosmic. From the opening sentence, which begins an account of the protagonist Horselover Fat's breakdown, this is a novel that emphasises the significance of Fat's 'slow decline into depression and psychosis and isolation,' [19] together with his attempts to find meaning in his suffering which is, at once, his desire for redemption. As a 'fictionalising philosopher' Dick is concerned to claim for the grounds of this search, like the wound with which it begins, a general significance.

We find a narrative that confronts us with what its protagonist believes to be an irrational world, a world in which pain and suffering appear to make no sense. In *Valis* this confrontation begins with the suicide of Horselover Fat's friend, Gloria Knudson. Phoning Fat to see if he has any Nembutal, Gloria responds to Fat's asking her why she needs them by calmly telling him that she intends to kill herself: 'She had fifty of them, but she needed thirty or forty more to be on the safe side' [9]. This moment begins an awakening, an awakening to what is, in the beginning, a realisation 'that it is sometimes an appropriate response to reality to go insane' [10]. For what Fat comes to understand is that Gloria's impassive derangement is in fact a manifestation of and consistent with the very foundation of the world. Fat's own 'decline into misery and illness' is, likewise, as inevitable as 'the sort of chaos that astrophysicists say is the fate in store for the whole universe' [11]. Perhaps if we were to adopt a standpoint of objectivity, to stand outside the world and look in on it, we too would see that Gloria is in fact '*rational*ly insane' [11] because, if the world is irrational, insanity is, as he surmises, 'an appropriate response.'

This in fact is the perspective of the novel's narrator who, early on, tells his reader that, 'I am by profession, a science fiction writer. I deal in fantasies. My life is a fantasy' [12]. Therefore, as a writer of science fiction, and because of what he has to describe, Phil Dick has chosen to write 'in the third person to gain much-needed perspective' [11]. 'I am Horselover Fat,' he tells us and, consequently, we may take it that whatever is done by and happens to Horselover Fat is in fact the work and experience of this writer, who names himself Phil Dick for the purposes of the fiction he is unfolding. As we shall see, this unusual device,

by which we have a novel, *Valis*, written by Philip K. Dick, containing the character Phil Dick, science fiction writer, who generates an alter ego, Horselover Fat, in order to come to terms with experiences that have threatened to overwhelm him (or, them), is of fundamental significance to not only what happens, but *how* it happens.

The earliest sign of the importance of this strategy can perhaps be divined in the description we are given of Gloria:

As she talked she began to disappear. He watched her go; it was amazing. Gloria, in her measured way, talked herself out of existence word by word. It was rationality at the service of – well, he thought, at the service of non-being. Her mind had become one great, expert eraser. All that really remained now was her husk; which is to say, her uninhabited corpse. [13]

Gloria, as we have seen, is identified with the world; her insanity is in fact nothing more than an expression of its nature, in her. Fat, in the description above, communicates his recognition that though it is apparently an “I” who speaks, someone – or *something* – else has charge of the helm. As previously discussed, whether in *Ubik*, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, or *A Scanner Darkly*, this concern with the control exercised by forces, systems, and their embodied representatives is a pervasive presence in Dick's fiction, one which persistently threatens the subject with extinction. Here, in Gloria, Fat finds himself staring into the abyss and, through the eyes of his friend, the abyss stares also into him.

If, in reading between the lines, we come to understand Horselover Fat as a device produced in order for his author to cope with the horror of this recognition together with the experiences that follow on from it, we go only some distance to the truth. To go further though, as we shall see, is to go beyond our standpoint of objectivity, and to step once more into the world in order to find there for ourselves answers to those familiar questions of Dick's: 'what is reality?' and 'what is the human being?' For, in the end, if we understand things as Dick did, we will see that from these two questions comes a single solution.

From the beginning then, it is apparent that language remains for Dick an essential means of both creating, and disposing creation. Unlike Gloria, who 'talked herself out of existence word by word,' Horselover Fat begins to write himself (or, himself be written) into reality through the composition of a journal – an 'exegesis.' Fat began the exegesis, a term Phil points out as derived from theology, where it designates 'a piece of writing that explains or interprets a portion of scripture,' [22] in response to his encounter with God. This encounter has arrived following his exposure to Gloria's madness, and in the midst of the descent it had for him initiated, an experience Fat considered a theophany, 'a self-disclosure by the divine' [37]. God had begun to talk to Fat and, as a result of this meeting, in which a beam of blinding pink light had been fired at him, he claimed that 'he knew things he had never known' [21]. For him the nature of the universe had been revealed as information. Desiring a meaning for the suffering which enclosed him about, on all sides, Fat had been granted an apocalyptic vision of the world as nothing but meaning. But with this came also the insight that something had gone wrong:

All creation is a language and nothing but a language, which for some inexplicable reason we can't read outside and can't hear inside. So I say, we have become idiots. Something has happened to our intelligence. My reasoning is this: arrangement of parts of the Brain is a language. We are parts of the Brain; therefore we are language. Why, then, do we not know this? We do not even know what we are, let alone what the outer reality is of which we are parts. The origin of the word "idiot" is the word "private." Each of us has become private, and no longer shares the common thought of the Brain, except at a subliminal level. Thus our real life and purpose are conducted below our threshold of consciousness. [23]

Like water from a well, Fat's challenge is to draw his experience up from beneath the threshold of consciousness if he is to really understand it. The difficulty, however, is in distinguishing in these 'messages' – in what is available to ordinary experience – the essence from the accident. Fat, it seems, his theophany notwithstanding, is in the position of Pilate who, when confronted with the figure of Christ, can ask only, 'What is truth?' As was evident in the 'truths' of Bob Arctor's police state, the human being is incapable of finding himself in pictures of sense shorn of all sensibility. The question for Fat remains, 'what am I to make of this?' However, for him, as much as Gloria, this remains 'a world of illness,' whereby what *is* and what is *known* of what is, is sundered – 'outside' from 'inside'. The darkening of the intellect – divided from the world and all but conquered by it – pictured so forcefully in *Scanner*, is recapitulated for us here. The consequences of this confusion and sickness, of this 'occlusion,' leads to one end only. Here also in *Valis*, as in *Scanner*, 'the wages of sin is death.'

The awareness of this existential situation, where he met in Gloria's madness a nature that extinguished her selfhood through identity with it, rendering her eventual suicide no more than a formality (perfectly consistent with that 'fate in store for the whole universe'), is now matched by Horselover Fat in his retreat to the opposite pole of experience. The insulation of his own selfhood in the face of the world's irrationality delivers him instead into a state of isolation and, as a separate, excluded self, his meeting with God, when it comes, can only incur for him the same sense of inadequacy with which he encounters the world. In Fat we can distinguish his sense of personal loss at the death of a friend, together with the onset of despair, from the overwhelming and cosmic estrangement. But, nonetheless, these two come at once, and the presence of each is manifest in the cosmological speculations of his exegesis,

From loss and grief the mind has become deranged. Therefore we, as parts of the universe, the Brain, are partly deranged.

The changing information we experience as World is an unfolding narrative. This woman, who died long ago, was one of the primordial twins. She was one half of the divine syzygy. The purpose of the narrative is the recollection of her and her death. The Mind does not wish to forget her. Thus the ratiocination of the Brain consists of a permanent record of her existence, and if read, will be understood this way. [36-7]

In the perception of this convergence of the individual and the cosmic his cosmology exhibits the first signs of a renewal of the

relationship between Fat and the World: Fat continues to author his own creation. As Phil, to the reader, emphasises:

If, in reading this, you cannot see that Fat is writing about himself, then you understand nothing. [37]

However, the significance of his journal-keeping is still not entirely clear, although its importance is hinted at when, in the same passage, Phil observes that, while a theophany is a genuine encounter with the divine,

It does not consist of something the percipient does; it consists of something the divine – the God or gods, the high power – does.

This is further confirmation that 'a revelation of truth' can really only be the imposition of another reality standard so long as, like solid objects in space, the 'percipient' is excluded from the grounds on which the truth is founded. Just as Gloria became a slave to this world, so Fat is beholden to his transcendent vision of the divine and, as we have seen, the outcome of such an error is death. As foretold at the very outset of the novel, Fat is inexorably drawn into Gloria's wake and is spared her fate only by the failure of his attempted suicide. Fat finds himself, confined to a psychiatric ward and on suicide watch, in the very pit of despair:

Right now Fat sat on the plastic and chrome couch mentally dying; in fact he was already mentally dead, and in the room he had left, the experts were deciding his fate, passing sentence and judgement on what remained of him. It is proper that technically qualified non-lunatics should sit in judgement on lunatics. How could things be otherwise? [47]

While in hospital Fat finds himself with time to reflect on the content of his exegesis. Among the most significant of the messages and, again, a kind of self-diagnosis, is the description of a sundering between 'two realms.' In one of these is found sentience and volition, while the other, lower realm, 'is mechanical, driven by blind, efficient cause, deterministic and without intelligence, since it emanates from a dead source' [47]. Having been granted a glimpse of something beyond it, it would appear that the outcome of Fat's vision, rather than beatification, is an unusual sensitivity to this lower realm which, ordinarily, 'we are not even aware of...so occluded are we.' The wound for which he has been hospitalised is also an affliction of the suffering that such an alienation imposes. The lower realm is characterised as a 'Black Iron Prison...Everyone dwelt in it without realising it. The Black Iron Prison was their world' [48]. Furthermore, it is a figure of the very conditions imposed by time and space. On the other hand, Fat's encounter with his fellow psych ward inmates inspires in him the realisation that 'God is here in your goddam mental hospital and you don't know it. You have been invaded and you don't even know it.' Or, as he recalls describing it in another exegesis entry: 'He lived a long time ago but he is still alive' [52].

Fat's fall, precipitated by Gloria, had reached a terminal velocity with the departure of Beth, his wife, together with his son. The degree of acrimony between man and wife is revealed by Beth's reaction to Fat's failure to kill himself, 'You have once again shown your inability to do anything' [56]. When he later undergoes psychological assessment, the physician in charge, Dr.

Stone, arrives at the same conclusion, albeit for different ends. 'Fear, helplessness, and an inability to act,' [58] according to the doctor, are the symptoms of Fat's ailment. More important than this however is the conversation between the two. It seems the doctor has more than a notion of those mystical, historical, and philosophical preoccupations of Fat's, proving himself in fact an expert in the field and able to challenge and augment a number of Fat's speculations. This is a true meeting, face-to-face, in which the physician proves himself to be the 'first person at the North Ward, outside the patients, who had talked to him as if he were human.' Beyond his prescription of Bach flower remedies or his erudite conversation, is Dr. Stone's restoration of Fat's 'faith in himself' [65]. In contrast to his 'technically qualified' colleagues who, with disinterested detachment, pass 'sentence and judgement' on the so-called lunatics, Stone, upon being asked by Fat for his opinion on a further point of metaphysic, responds not in kind, but with a different degree of gesture altogether, remarking to Fat that 'You would know...You're the authority' [65]. We have already seen Gloria use language to 'talk herself out of existence,' and now we have here words used, not to destroy, but to heal. This exchange between doctor and patient is prompted by Stone showing Fat an unpublished manuscript describing a being higher than the mad, irrational deity Fat had supposed as responsible for a world of the same nature, going on to provide an account of an 'enlightened, immortal man' who had existed first and would later appear 'within the human race' in order to redeem it. It is clear though that while these 'words' are also significant, the 'series of words that will heal' [67], in this case Stone's 'You're the authority,' are not, like the content of the manuscript, considered primarily for the information imparted but rather, for their restoration of 'Fat's faith in himself,' his 'self-confidence.' Dr. Stone 'had given Fat back his soul. The soul which Gloria, with her hideous malignant psychological death-game, had taken away' [66]. For, ultimately, all of Fat's striving for knowledge of self and world had convinced him only of his intrinsic powerlessness to know anything, had done no more than reveal to him the extent of the wound which was itself the impasse to his understanding, leaving him destitute and broken.

Stone here is an image of St. Paul's 'I live, no longer I, but Christ in me' [Galatians 2:20]. His name is likely a reference to Psalm 118<sup>1</sup> that, since at least the time in which the gospels were composed, has been taken as a prophetic allusion to Christ, being mentioned in this context regularly over the course of the New Testament. What works through Stone is manifest in Fat's account of the change proceeding from that healing 'series of words' and is reminiscent of the many occasions in the gospels in which Christ answers the supplication of a believer by declaring that their 'faith has made them whole.' The particular significance in making these observations, aside from introducing definitely the profound influence of Paul's thought on *Valis* and much of Dick's work generally, is the indispensable value Paul's admission has for an understanding of the experience we have here, through the voice of Horselover Fat, described for us. The consequence of Phil Dick's early resort to the 'third person' is, far from a literary device as an end in itself, both the basis of Fat's resurrection from his 'spiritual death' and the form of its expression. Like Fat, Paul has described his 'inability to do anything' – 'it is given to me to will the good but not to carry it out' [Romans 7:18] – and, as Fat too has come to believe it, Paul pictures this as not merely a moral or personal failure but as something cosmic – 'For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God [Latin: 'gloria' –

radiance or, the light of being]' [Romans 3:23]. However, as it emerges, the answer for each was not the replacement of an old covenant with the new, of one formula for another, but the realisation within of the life 'that was the light of men.'

The doctor's healing phrase notwithstanding, the persistence of suffering and sickness in the world in which Fat finds himself is also indicated by another series of words,

The remedy is here but so is the malady. As Fat repeats obsessively, "The Empire never ended" ...That one sentence appeared over and over again in his exegesis. [48,72]

It seems that the awakening that his meetings with God and, later, Dr. Stone, have been unable to stimulate in him the qualities of either a more perfect understanding or a more active and free volition. The Black Iron Prison's Empire is intact and continues to exercise its grip upon reality and, once again, is encountered in the guise of a woman with whom Fat becomes involved, a woman who 'had more power in her weakened body than all these other entities combined, including the living God. Fat had decided to bind himself to the Antichrist' [74].

Over the course of the novel's narrative there are a small number of crucial encounters in which Fat's suffering and obscurity are mirrored back to him. The first of these is of course his seminal experience of Gloria's madness and loss, later we meet among Fat's group of friends the second woman described above, Sherri Solvig and, finally, as the story develops it is an encounter with the rock star Eric Lampton, his wife Linda, and their producer and fellow musician Brent Mini, that provides the occasion for the illumination of insight for which Fat, together with his friend Phil Dick and their 'Rhipidon Society,' have been searching. The situations in which we meet these individuals are all expressive of Fat's understanding of the world and his condition in it, each of them picturing both for him and us, as readers, 'the stumbling stone' with which he must reckon during the course of his journey. The method by which Fat makes his way has already been indicated in the description of his constructive use of text through which, from our own objective standpoint, we can see him both creating and – as a representative of the third person – proceeding from an act of creation. However, should a text be realised as such it must be read, meaning arising not from the simple fact of encounter, but by the deepening of that realisation by which, in the beginning, both reader and text are brought into being. It is in conversation with Sherri that the importance, not only of what has happened to Fat, but the question of what he makes of it, arises. And, not without precedent, it is through reference to a Biblical source that we are presented with a clue to the process which Fat is undergoing:

His disciples asked him what this parable might mean. And he said, "the mysteries of the kingdom of God are revealed to you, for the rest there are only parables, so that they might see but not perceive, listen but not understand." (Luke 8:9-10) [75]

What is suggestive to Fat is, on the other hand, greeted with indifference by Sherri. Where he finds interest in this apparent 'secrecy theme' in the gospels – and wonders at the significance for the message as a whole, it is enough for Sherri to refer

the problem to Larry, her priest. Fat had 'imagined that basically he and Sherri shared a common bond,' both considering themselves Christians. However, where Fat's commitment has emerged from his theophany, Sherri's faith is couched in terms recognising her possession of 'official documents declaring her a Christian' [74]. In fact, Sherri is far more concerned with the rather narrower interests of her local parish and her position there, including her relationship with Larry, which is present in conversation with Fat as the conceit of complacency with regard to the 'revealed truth' of her religious affiliation.

However, Sherri's identity with the course of the Black Iron Prison world, its suffering and obscurity, is ultimately attributable in her own response to illness, manifest as the terminal cancer with which she is diagnosed. With a consummate perversity Sherri wants to die:

In the back of her mind, Sherri thought about death ceaselessly. Everything else, all people, objects and processes had become reduced to the status of shadows. [79]

Fat's therapist – another figure of the physician – will later attempt to convince him that Fat is drawn to Sherri because he also possesses a death wish:

"You're lying to yourself; you're lying that Gloria meant something to you, that what's-her-name – Sherri – isn't going to die – of course she's going to die! That's why you're shacking up with her, so you can be there when she dies. She wants to pull you down with her and you want her to; it's a collusion between the two of you. Everybody who comes in this door wants to die. That's what mental illness is all about. You didn't know that? I'm telling you. I'd like to hold your head under water until you fought to live." [84]

As Phil Dick has told us, Maurice, the former Israeli commando, gun runner and dope trafficker, 'was not your standard therapist,' nor is he a likely figure of the Baptist but, in a very real sense, this is exactly how he is cast. Like 'one crying out in the wilderness' Maurice is imploring Fat to repent – to change the way he is thinking – which is at once a turning away from the inevitabilities of a wordless world of 'blind, efficient cause,' a world 'without intelligence,' which 'emanates from a dead source.' The implication is that, until he is able to make this change Fat, like these others, will 'see but not perceive, listen but not understand.'

Again, in Sherri this time, as we had previously in the person of Gloria, the power exercised is only cosmic and never personal, the 'Antichrist' is the enemy of everything unique, individual and, therefore, self-conscious. We have seen in Gloria, as with Bob Arctor in *Scanner*; the possession by, and identity with, a totalising power, extinguishing everything individual. The alternative, to hold fast to the apparent reality of one's separate self, is to admit the same destructive power by different means, for

if I experience *everything* as other and external to me, then I am nothing – a mere null-point of awareness, which I shall not even be able to maintain, because there is no "I" to do the maintaining.<sup>2</sup>

As representatives of that 'Empire that never ended' Gloria and Sherri are also proselytes of its message: "My ways cannot be known, oh man." Which is to say, "My ways do not make sense, nor do the ways of those who dwell in me" [73]. Fat, in contrast, had experienced through his theophanic insight that 'the universe is made out of information' [22]. In light of this, he drafts and revises, ceaselessly expanding on his insight by means of the exegesis, drawing and re-drawing conclusions reached – some concerning this world and others the next, that one to which all parables allude:

The universe is information and we are stationary in it, not three-dimensional and not in space or time, the information fed to us we hypostatise into the phenomenal world. The phenomenal world does not exist; it is a hypostasis of the information processed by the mind. Space and time were revealed...as mere mechanisms of separation. [110]

His speculations on time and space, however, initially prove no more than a different route to the same dead end:

I am being caught in a sin of the highest magnitude: using Aristotelian two-value logic: "A thing is either A or not-A." (The Law of the Excluded Middle.) Everybody knows that Aristotelian two-value logic is fucked. [133]

These excursions beyond the pale of what is commonly understood as reality or, sanity, are fragments of the ruin into which Fat has seen the world, before his eyes, become. But what are we to make of our narrator who, by way of introduction, has already written that 'I deal in fantasies. My life is a fantasy,' when he annotates these schemes of his third person voice by telling us:

You can understand why Fat no longer knew the difference between fantasy and divine revelation – assuming there is a difference, which has never been established. [101]

However we understand them, an essential element of Fat's experiences and the theories they inspire is his sense of a second personality within his own, 'living in another century and at another place' [109]. This personality, whom he names as "Thomas," and understands to have been a 'secret Christian' in second century Rome is not, as Phil Dick suggests to Fat, evidence of the transmigration of a single individuality and the memories connected with a former incarnation of that identity, but instead, as Fat tells him, the awareness of an individual 'living now. Living in ancient Rome *now*. And he is not me. Reincarnation has nothing to do with it.' What it does have to do with is the challenge Fat has already, in his exegesis, made to the 'spatiotemporal' world as an objective and absolute standard of reality. And it is to this customary truth that Phil Dick, Samuel Johnson to Fat's Berkeley, alludes in raising the obvious objection:

*"But your body,"* I said.

Fat stared at me, nodding. "Right. It means my body is either in two space-time continua simultaneously, *or else my body is nowhere at all.*" [109]

It seems as if, in the activity of auditing his fantasies, Fat has arrived at the step he must take to move beyond the skylla and charybdis of *either* absolute identity *or* complete alienation – each of which must lead to that same state of non-being. He is

finding instead that the grounds for his own reality – his own “I” – is no ground at all, but rather depends instead upon the reality inhering in mutual recognition, an ‘interpenetration quite other than position.’<sup>3</sup>

That we ordinarily assume things to be otherwise follows from our fallen condition, described by Fat as a kind of cosmic ‘toxin’ – the Black Iron Prison itself, both cause and condition of the ‘layer of delusion’ that clouds and obscures reality as it is, masking it instead with the fixities of reality as we have it:

The Empire is the institution, the codification, of derangement; it is insane and imposes its insanity on us by violence, since its nature is a violent one.

Against the Empire is posed the living information, the plasmate or physician, which we know as the Holy Spirit or Christ disincorporate. [134-35]

Concealed within the world, as Fat has it, is a *Deus absconditus* – a hidden god. The Empire aborts the manifestation of this divine presence by confounding for us reality with the bare fact of the body and the object; we are rendered passive before the world or, conversely, and as W.B Yeats understood the world view he opposed with his own vision, it ‘leaves man helpless before the contents of his own mind.’<sup>4</sup> What Fat refers to in his exegesis as *aletheia* is an awakening to the promise of his own true being, the coming of the spirit concealed in every man [Romans 8]:

However, in concealment, it does not become the spirit of truth, of un-concealment – *aletheia* – but turns against itself, becoming the power by which *denial*/becomes possible – denial of the Word, of the Spirit, of the Father. All depends on man. The power is there.<sup>5</sup>

In the letter of 1John to which Fat attributes particular significance to and from which a quotation is included among speculations immediately following on from his encounter with Dr. Stone, is a similar statement affirming the presence of the Son of God, who has ‘given us understanding, to know him who is true.’ Contra to the way of truth in knowledge John advocates here is, again, the denial of the Word and, with this in mind, John concludes his epistle by cautioning the faithful to ‘keep yourselves from idols’ [1John 5:20-21]. Such idolatry, the subjection of one’s self or others to a mute, wordless world has been alluded to previously; it is now for Fat, Phil and their friends, to perceive in the parables with which they are faced the key to the mysteries of both their own lives and the world of which they are a part.

In what would perhaps present an unlikely solution anywhere other than a Philip K. Dick novel, the road beyond the proposition of either fantasy or divine revelation takes Fat, Phil, and their friends Kevin and David to the cinema – to see the film, VALIS. This film, the work of rock star Eric Lampton, his wife Linda, and fellow musician and producer Brent Mini, represents in fictional form many of the ideas, theories, and hypotheses that Fat had himself formulated previously, together with references to the nature of his theophany, including the laser-like brightness of the pink light Fat attributes with transferring to him much of the knowledge that he, through the experience, had been granted. Kevin, the small group’s sceptic had, on seeing the film

before the others, correctly recognised much of its esoteric message based on his part in many conversations with Fat – most of which had involved his disparaging mockery. What they find in the film is a puzzling and chaotic farrago of sight and sound that, as Kevin had promised them, did indeed appear to provide an independent confirmation – in its recondite fashion – of the substance of Fat's fantastic visions. After the group has seen the film together a second time, Phil is able to step back from the immediacy of the experience and recognise that, just as significant as the coincidence of content, is the mode of transmission:

Watching it carefully I realised that on the surface the movie made no sense whatsoever. Unless you ferreted out the subliminal and marginal clues and assembled them all together you arrived at nothing. But these clues got fired at your head whether you consciously considered them and their meaning or not; you had no choice. The audience was in the same relationship to the film *Valis* that Fat had had to what he called Zebra: a transducer and a percipient, totally receptive in nature. [158]

It seems the film has been inspired by, and is attempting to enact, an experience much the same as the one that Fat has undergone.

Having his experiences rather surprisingly confirmed by the film, Fat, who in a certain way 'always felt reassured to think that his March 1974 encounter with God emanated from mere insanity' [159], was in an unusual position of 'authority,' the one to whom the others were now turning for advice. Far from being reassured by this, he felt instead a sense of dread that his intuition of the 'melting of the physical world itself' together with 'the ontological categories which defined it: space and time' might be verified by the people behind the film – or, as he asks, 'what if the world doesn't exist?' On the other hand, the entity Fat had often called Christ but at other times, Buddha, Apollo, Zoroaster, an immortal plasmate, or Zebra, and to whom the film referred to as VALIS, did appear to exist:

"It's a good thing Sherri isn't alive to hear about all this," Fat said, surprising us. "I mean, it would shake her faith."

We all laughed. Faith shaken by the discovery that the entity believed in actually existed – the paradox of piety. Sherri's theology had congealed; there would have been no room in it for the growth, the expansion and evolution, necessary to encompass our revelations. No wonder Fat and she weren't able to live together. [161-2]

Aside from the unlikely medium of film for divine revelation, the narrative idiom may itself be a bridge too far for the theologically conservative among its potential audience. Imagined in the screenplay's sci-fi scenario as a satellite orbiting the Earth, VALIS appears an unlikely avatar of the World Saviour. In a nod to his presence in the narrative – as well as those well documented experiences of his own – the author Philip K. Dick is surely with us in an exchange among members of the Rhipidon Society in which we can infer a caution that would serve as well for the novel's readers as it does for its characters against any too-literal rendering of the text's parable-like quality:

"A satellite?" I said. "A very old information-firing satellite?"

Irritably, Kevin said, "they wanted to make a sci-fi flick; that's how you would handle it in a sci-fi flick if you had such an experience. You ought to know that, Phil. Isn't that so, Phil?" [152]

In the character's agreement that the satellite is 'a sci-fi device, a sci-fi way of explaining it' [154] we have again – as is epitomised for us in *Horselover Fat* – a clue to what was mentioned at the outset as the mystery of not the happening itself but how it happens. After all if, as the members of Fat's little group believe of the film, 'everything is in pieces, all the information' [152], stands as true for the novel in which it is reported then, significantly, the act of knowledge is the perceiving of something imperceptible; it is a witnessing of, in addition to the 'things' themselves, those relationships in which they participate, which constitute their meaning, recasting knowing as an act of faith, one by which the story and its reader are 'made whole.'

Clearly, for this 'act' to move from what is potential (universal) to what is actual (particular) 'all depends on man.' The gradual awakening of this recognition is dramatised by the development of Fat's exegesis, itself an act of enquiry constructive of the insight for which he is searching. And, as mentioned earlier, this awakening is opposed by encounters with both Gloria and Sherri as well as the Lamptons and Brent Mini. Though the details of their cosmology converge at many points with Fat's, the orientation of *Gottesfreunde* or, 'Friends of God,' as they call their own group, differs essentially from what emerges from the last of the novel's key encounters, this time taking place between Fat, accompanied by the Rhipidon Society, and 'Sophia.' Sophia, as the Lampton's understand her, is 'An artificial intelligence...a terminal of VALIS...An input, output terminal of the master system VALIS':

Smiling, Linda said, "An artificial intelligence in a human body. Her body is alive, but her psyche is not. She is sentient; she knows everything. But her mind is not alive in the sense that we are alive. She was not created. She has always existed." [193]

The terms in which Sophia describes herself, however, are significantly different:

"I am not a god; I am a human. I am a child, the child of my father, which is Wisdom Himself. You carry in you now the voice and authority of Wisdom; you are, therefore, Wisdom, even when you forget it. You will not forget it for long. I will be there and I will remind you." [199]

The divergence indicated by these two passages is itself epitomised by the first, decisive act of Sophia on meeting with the Rhipidons where, at a glance, she dematerialises Phil Dick's friend and narrative device, *Horselover Fat*, enabling his recognition of Fat as 'part of me projected outward so I wouldn't have to face Gloria's death' [191]. The significance of Phil's observations regarding Fat have, in this encounter with Sophia, become his own experience of an insight realised:

Maybe Fat was searching for himself when he set out in search of the Saviour. But I don't dare tell [him that]. He is not ready to entertain such a notion, because like the rest of us he seeks an external saviour. [132]

And this too is the error at the root of *Gottesfreunde's* inability to grasp – or even hear – Sophia's message. Unable to awaken to their own production of those images, by which the reality out of which Sophia consciously speaks is made visible, they become slaves to them. When Mini asserts that 'There is no human element in the Saviour' [189] he also denies that the reality of God (or, if it's preferred, the god of Reality) is a human reality, a reality of human consciousness. This was already implicit in Phil's reflections on the film VALIS that, with the intrusion of its clues which 'got fired at your head whether you consciously considered them and their meaning or not,' replicates this world view by placing the audience in the same relationship to the film as the Friends of God are to VALIS. Mini, in his description of VALIS as the coming of a saviour to free us from the 'binding, controlling conditions of the maze' of this world is likewise helpless to perceive the role which he and the Friends are to play in this. 'Everything is taped,' he assures us, 'Sophia is surrounded by audio and video recording equipment that automatically monitors her constantly.' Unable to himself realise the act of self-awareness that would identify the God he expects with the 'Wisdom' he carries within by exercising the unique and individual creative power required to do so, he relies instead upon a purely objective and instrumental technology. Mini can only manipulate and control what is already there, subject to and defined by the condition of time and space from which he desires liberation, whereas faith, as we have seen, is the manifestation of 'something' out of 'nothing.' This error is again manifest in illness – Mini has been diagnosed with plasma cell myeloma [182], a degenerative condition that even in early onset has greatly reduced his capacity to do even the most basic of tasks without aid. When we finally hear of Mini's accidental killing of Sophia during an attempted 'information-transfer by laser' the picture is complete of a world view that wants to 'get as much information' as possible but, in its separation from the original, divine creative powers, has not realised within itself the means to *make* anything of it.

In contrast, Phil Dick, in 'searching for himself' has awakened to his identity with not only Fat, but the creative imagination and its activity – the very faculty with which he produced the image of Fat. The nature of that 'much-needed objectivity' which engendered Phil's excursion into the third person has proven an unexpected offspring. Rather than the either/or he had previously presented us with – either fantasy or divine revelation, we find instead revealed in our author's transmigrations, a meaning that may at once be both – and more. In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's theory of 'Imagination' we have its operation described in the following way:

It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealise and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, in an echo of Coleridge's sense here does Sophia – following on from her release of Fat from a condition of mere externality – tell Phil that,

"Unless your past perishes, you are doomed...Your future must differ from your past. The future must always differ from the past." [191]

What this stands for in *Valis* is that activity which is the true objectivity Phil Dick claims for his third person, an objectivity that not only endures the dissolution of its incarnation in Fat but, through acknowledgement of its presence at his creation, is strengthened by it. I suggested earlier that Dick, in *Valis*, responds to those familiar questions of his concerning the nature of reality on the one hand and of the human being on the other, with a single gesture, that he overcomes the customary requirement of 'objectivity' for knowledge by challenging the framework upon which its claim is suspended and, essentially, he finds in this way both the truth of himself (through his own 'projection' Phil Dick, no less effectively than Phil is able to with his) and of the world not by *imagining* himself outside of it but by *entering* into it imaginatively. That is, if we are to give the name 'imagination' to this ability to enter more fully 'into experience, whether our own or another's.'<sup>7</sup> We might be, with Fat, more inclined to do so if our need is for the overcoming of that cosmic wound, whether pictured as the ineluctable logic of contradictories or, as he points out to his therapist, Maurice, the mutually exclusive standpoints of Goethe's *Faust*, with its opposition of 'word' and 'deed,' or indeed any other of the myriad narratives with which we have, wittingly or otherwise, fashioned images of our alienation from the Garden and its creative source. *Valis*, perhaps more than any of Philip K. Dick's written works (with perhaps the exception of his own exegesis) is a compendium of the kind of 'juxtaposed cyphers' and 'subliminal messages' that we see Phil Dick, in the novel's final stanzas, seeking to thread through and draw out from the fabric of the created world. These are mined from many traditions: popular, philosophical, theological, orthodox, heterodox, ancient and modern, the mainstream and the tributary. It is without doubt, however, that the presence of a Christian world view is powerfully influential upon *Valis* and its author. When Phil Dick, yet to guess at the mystery of his relationship with Fat, employs imagery from Wagner's *Parsifal* to characterise Fat's search, he chooses a phrase that epitomises the text's own relationship with its Christian theme: '*With this sign I abolish your magic*' [132]. These are the words which Parsifal speaks to cause the stronghold of his nemesis Klingsor to disappear. Phil wonders at the possible analogy between the 'huge stone castle' and Fat's 'Empire,' his 'Black Iron Prison' – 'Is the Empire "which never ended" an illusion?' And the sign? 'The sign, of course, is the sign of the Cross.' At this important juncture of the narrative, Dick chooses to cite a work that, like his own, re-imagines the Christian message in a new form, as 'new wine in new wineskins.' In the same spirit too is the Pauline acknowledgement of the cross and its significance not only as an image of Christ's death but, crucially, his resurrection. For, through this, Phil is able to find his way into Sophia's presence and hear there her account of the activity of Wisdom in the perishing of the past and its resurrection in the present. Each, to the degree that this creative activity is realised, is the hypostasis of Wisdom or, as Sophia tells him, 'the true god, the living god, is man himself' [198]. And in this living, creative activity, the cyphers and messages of the novel *Valis* are, should they be read in the spirit they were written, elevated beyond the 'congealed theology' of Mini's 'Friends of God.'

In his lectures on Shakespeare, Coleridge described a 'middle state of mind,' at the edge of representational consciousness, as

more strictly appropriate to the imagination than any other, when it is, as it were, hovering between images, as soon as it is fixed on one image it becomes understanding; but while it is unfixed and wavering between

them, attaching itself permanently to none, it is imagination.<sup>8</sup>

If we see in this description the outline of a 'spiritual' philosophy of mind we would likely be doing justice to Coleridge's intention and have also a sense of Dick's guiding intuition in *Valis*. Sophia, described in the novel as an incarnation of Christ, is present in the narrative's final act to enliven within Phil Dick and the Rhipidon Society the healing presence of the Spirit, itself incarnated as the activity of the creative imagination. In comparing Coleridge's description with Dick's own indications with regard to a 'third person' we come close to unveiling the importance of what I earlier referred to as the 'how' of what takes place in *Valis*. This 'how' is the recognition that thinking is not only supersensible ('matter is plastic in the face of mind' [41]), but superindividual, individualising 'entire in each and one in all'<sup>9</sup> for just this reason. Again, in deference to Coleridge,

might not Christ be the World as revealed to human knowledge – a kind of common sensorium, the total Idea that modifies all thoughts? And might not numerical difference be an exclusive property of phenomena so that he who puts on the likeness of Christ becomes Christ?<sup>10</sup>

So, in *Valis*, we have a *participation* in 'a single mind' [110] – that Pauline 'I live, no longer I, but Christ in me' again – represented for us not only in the trinity of Philip K. Dick, Phil Dick, and Horselover Fat, but in the three members of 'only one Immortal Man; and *we are that man*' [102], the Rhipidon Society's Philip, Kevin, and David, or, P.K.D. However, more particularly, the third person of the trinity is distinguished from the Word, or the Son, in the distinction of the *act* of begetting from the begotten. In the realisation of this act is the promise of the Spirit, the resurrected Christ who, in dying to the world 'remains, in each individual man, the representative of humanity as a whole.'<sup>11</sup> This is to go beyond 'the bare *fact* of personal identity' – whether this is evident in the distinction between the human being and god or of mind from body – and realise 'the *content* of self-consciousness,' which is the relation between these, given in neither, but constituting each. 'The world is as man *sees* it; it is *how* he sees it.'<sup>12</sup>

To recognise the Word, the Logos, is to acknowledge the 'language of creation,' and this acknowledgement not only of our ability to effect change in the world but to do so from within it is also the solution to 'who and what we are' – to the condition of our idiocy, our inability to share in 'the common thought,' to overcome the condition of our private worlds, where we leave 'our real life and purpose' to be 'conducted below our threshold of consciousness.' When, following his dismissal from before Sophia, Horselover Fat reappears, Phil Dick fears the worst, that 'Fat's madness had returned.' The changed conditions of awareness are, however, manifest in Phil's chastisement of Fat:

"There is no Zebra," I said. "It's yourself. Don't you recognise your own self? It's you and only you, projecting your unanswered wishes out...That is the beginning and the end of it." [218]

Fat reappears no longer an idol of externality, a figure of Phil's own desire for an 'external saviour,' but has become instead a means for him to acknowledge his own participation in the world that meets him, a figure of the timeless creative act, a search with no conclusion, but fruitful in itself. Attending to the search and its signs is where our narrative leaves Phil, the true

objectivity in *Valis* revealed in the acknowledgement of one's own involvement in and responsibility for the world's creation which ever remains, as it was, in the beginning.

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1 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner,' Psalm 118:22. 'The Stones Rejected' was the original title for Dick's 1967 collaboration with Ray Nelson, *The Ganymede Takeover*. He also cited this passage of scripture on at least one occasion in his own Exegesis: 'Stone rejected by the builder; the edifice is discarded; the true edifice is invisible – disguised as rubble (plural constituents).' Entry from 1980, cf. Dick, Philip K. *In Pursuit of Valis: Selections from the Exegesis*. Ed. Sutin, Lawrence. Novato, California: Underwood-Miller, 1991. 159.

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4 Welburn, Andrew. *The Truth of Imagination, An Introduction to Visionary Poetry*. London: Macmillan, 1989. 3.

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6 Coleridge S.T. *Biographia Literaria*. Ch.13.

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9 *What Coleridge Thought*. 106.

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12 Kühlewind. 86.



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