

UNDERSTANDING THE GRASSHOPPER

Leitmotifs and the Moral Dilemma in the Novels of Philip K. Dick

By David Wingrove

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“At six-fifteen in the evening she finished the book. I wonder if Joe got to the end of it? she wondered. There’s so much more in it than he understood. What is it Abendsen wanted to say? Nothing about his make-believe world. Am I the only one who knows? I’ll bet I am; nobody else really understands *Grasshopper* but me – they just imagine they do... He told us about our own world, she thought.”

Anyone who has read enough of the work of Philip K. Dick to glimpse something of the pattern of meaning behind the surface enchantment must have shared something of Juliana Frink’s sense of enlightenment on completing *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*. It is partly a feeling that the ‘What if...?’ element, on which so much science fiction thrives, is subordinate in Dick’s work to a powerful moral intention: that the work is not so much an escape *from* as an escape *into* ‘reality’. And just as Hawthorne Abendsen and his alternate world novel, *Grasshopper*, mirrors Dick and his alternate world novel, *High Castle*, so in thirty science fiction novels Phil Dick has distorted and exaggerated aspects of our world in the trick-mirror of his imagination to give us a far clearer sense of our own world than most strictly ‘realist’ novelists could provide. In this sense, Dick is writing in the tradition of Dickens and Dostoevsky, utilising the absurd and the fantastic to create a vivid sense of the real – of the feeling and meaning of things as well as the simple idea and appearance of things. But Phil Dick chose to utilise what has, in the literary establishment, been long considered a hack literature, science fiction; and to use its standardized tropes in his own peculiar manner and for his own unique purposes.

That this *was* a choice, and not simply (as is often the case within the genre) an act of ignorance, is clear from a passage in the 1956 novel, *The Man Who Japed*:

“‘You’ve read these?’ Allen scanned the volume of *Ulysses*. His interest and bewilderment grew. ‘Why? What did you find?’ Sugermand considered. ‘These, as discriminated from the other, are real books.’ ‘What’s that mean?’ ‘Hard to say. They’re about something.’”

Dick’s consciousness of this distinction – however vaguely expressed – must be borne in mind when reading even the least significant of his works.

“...the symbols of the divine show up in our world initially at the trash stratum. Or so I told myself ... The divine intrudes where you least expect it.” [VALIS, Chapter 14]

Many readers (myself amongst them) might quibble with the word ‘divine’, and prefer ‘profound’, but, as I hope to show through reference to fifteen of his science fiction novels, what at first sight appears mere ‘trash’ is, in fact, part of a profound and coherent worldview. What Dick has done, I feel, is to construct for us a single,

coherent (if not entirely consistent) text, within which he presents those arguments and counter arguments that preoccupied him throughout his life as *leitmotifs* (recurring themes or specific images). This article will deal with a number, if not all, of those *leitmotifs* – Bardo Thodol; pots; the Black Prison; *dokos*; gubbish; Nord Amerika – and attempt to evaluate both their meaning and their place within Dick’s work. Yet to understand these fully we must also understand that there is not a single, directing impulse at work in Dick’s writing, but three quite different impulses; of you like, three separate Phil Dicks, whose interests sometimes coincide, but at other times are in conflict. The first of these is the entertainer; the deviser of complex plots, of exaggerated gimmickry and absurd situations; a kind of comic Prospero, delighting in his own inventive excesses; a kind of ‘What if?’ pedlar, dealing in Can-D illusions. But this first Phil Dick is rarely given full liberty of expression, and where he is – as in *Counter-Clock World* and *The Zap Gun* – it is clearly detrimental to the finished work. More often we find the entertainer subject to the other two Phil Dicks – Dick the theologian-philosopher, and Dick the moral teacher; the abstract theoretician and the concerned humanist. Thus far it is as the theologian-philosopher that Dick has received most critical attention, yet, as I hope to show, it is as a moral teacher that he has true importance.

The comparison between Dick’s writing and the works of Dickens and Dostoevsky has been made already, and I shall return to it; but in terms of these overlapping and oftentimes conflicting impulses, Dick is far closer to Dostoevsky than he is to Dickens. Whilst, as entertainer, Dick’s imaginative worlds are nearer to the fruitfully-diseased worlds of Dickens, Dick strongly rejects the underpinning Christian sentimentality, and, both as theologian-philosopher and as moralist, echoes Dostoevsky’s concern with showing the true and horrifying depths of Man’s potential moral degeneration. In the introduction to *The Golden Man*, Dick wrote the following:

“Kabir, the sixteenth century Sufi poet, wrote, ‘if you have not lived through something it is not true.’ So live through it; I mean, go all the way to the end. Only then can it be understood...’

In Dick’s work we are often made to “go all the way to the end” – with Jason Taverner, Joe Chip, Rick Deckard, Jack Bohlen, Barney Mayerson and Mr Tagomi – and our experience, second-hand as it is, has the felt aspect of truth to it. These journeys are both a descent into ourselves, and an unveiling of a universe in which the basic explanation for existence – the primal cause (or God) – is absent. It is a journey which mimics (and is sometimes portrayed as) the psychological process of encroaching madness; that same disintegrative process which Dostoevsky portrayed through Raskolnikov in *Crime And Punishment*. But, as Dick realised, there are no pat solutions or simple cures: indeed, the disease is perhaps the condition of life itself:

“Purpose of life is unknown, and hence way to be is hidden from the eyes of living critters. Who can say if perhaps the schizophrenics are not correct? Mister, they take a brave journey. They turn away from mere things, which one may handle and turn to practical use; they turn inward to *meaning*. There the black-night-without-bottom lies, the pit. Who can say if they will return? And if so, what will they be like, having glimpsed meaning. I admire them.” [Martian Time-Slip, Chapter 6]

And yet the journey *is* separate from the terrain. The pessimistic visions of the intellect *are* offset by the eternal optimism of the traveller: Joe Chip forever climbs

the stairs to his hotel room, even though the force of death depletes him with every step.

In every case, whilst the labyrinth through which we have travelled is the product of the abstract theoretician, the route through the maze results directly from the moral sensitivity of Phil Dick. Dick is both Hermes, the guide through the underworld, and the fabric of the underworld itself.

Put more simply, the construction and peopling of the labyrinth are products of the different Phil Dicks. So far, so good. But what motivated Phil Dick to construct and people his labyrinths? Why did Abendsen write *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*? Or. As Juliana Frink put it, “What is it Abendsen wanted to say?”. In the introduction to *The Golden Man*, Dick provides us with a simple, direct answer:

“I want to write about people I love, and put them into a fictional world spun out of my own mind, not the world we actually have, because the world we actually have does not meet my standards. Okay, so I should revise my standards; I’m out of step. I should yield to reality. I have never yielded to reality. That’s what SF is all about... I want to show you, in my writing, what I love (my friends) and what I savagely hate (what happens to them).”

But like all great writers, Dick has mixed feelings towards that fictional world spun from his mind. It is *not* as simple as he makes out; and it can be quickly demonstrated just how potent this ambivalence in Dick’s attitude really is. Like the Dickens of *Edwin Drood*, Dick questions the morality of art itself:

“Zina said... ‘Isn’t a beautiful dream better than a cruel reality?’ ... ‘Intoxication,’ he said. ‘That is what your domain consists of. Drunken with dancing and with joy. I saw that the quality of realness is more important than any other quality, because once realness departs, there is nothing. A dream is nothing... Grey truth is better than the dream’, he said. [*The Divine Invasion*, Chapter 13]

There is, of course, an ironic undertone to this: we know, in this instance, that Zina’s world more closely corresponds to our own than the world Emanuel sees as real. But there are many instances in Dick’s work where Emanuel’s argument *is* pertinent: the half-life world of *Ubik* terrorised by Jory, or the world of *Three Stigmata* where Palmer Eldritch, through the drug Chew-Z becomes in effect an evil deity, peopling the dark labyrinths of his own mind. Both Jerry and Eldritch are evil Properoes, creating their worlds not to instruct, but to torment: kindred more to the universe of *Lear* than to that of *The Tempest*. But Dick provides us with three arguments to counter this view of fiction as evil, as “‘The Ape of God’” (see *The Divine Invasion*, Chapter 15); three arguments which justify his use of fictional worlds. The first of these questions overtly Emmanuel’s assertion that “Gray truth is better than the dream” and reaffirms Dick’s belief that we should never yield to reality:

“Already Sam Regan could feel the power of the drug wearing off, he felt weak and Afraid and bitterly sickened at the realization. So goddam soon, he said to himself. All over; back to the hovel, to the pit in which we twist and cringe like worms in a paper bag, huddled away from the daylight. Pale and white and awful. He shuddered.

Shuddered, and saw, once more, his compartment with its tiny bed, washstand, desk, kitchen stove... and, in slumped, inert heaps, the empty husks of Tod and Helen Morris, Fran and Norm Schein, his own wife Mary; their eyes stared emptily and he looked away, appalled (*The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, chapter 3).

This is, perhaps, the least convincing of Dick's justifications, but in *Now Wait For Last Year*, in a discussion on the simulated worlds of Wash-35 (a fully-recreated environment, tailored to fit childhood memories) Dick's mouthpiece, Eric Sweetscent, provides us with a precise definition of the function of fiction:

"I don't like it. I like things to appear what they really are."

A thought came to Eric. "Do you object to a stereo tape of a symphony played back in the evening when you're at home in your apt?"

"No," Jonas said. "But that's totally different."

"It's not," Eric disagreed. "The orchestra isn't there, the original sound has departed, the hall in which it was recorded is now silent; all you possess is twelve hundred feet of iron oxide tape that's been magnetised in a specific pattern ... it's an illusion, just like this. Only this is complete."

... We live with illusion daily, he reflected. When the first bard rattled off the first epic of a sometime battle, illusion entered our lives; the *Iliad* is as much a "fake" as those roband children trading postage stamps on the porch of the building. Humans have always striven to retain the past, to keep it convincing; there's nothing wicked in that. Without it we have no continuity; we have only the moment. (Chapter 2)

This sense of *continuity*, of binding a civilization together, relates, as we shall see, to Dick the moral teacher, whereas the third of these justifying arguments involves, and indeed unifies, all three of the shaping impulses in Dick's work:

"It is up to you to discern who I am. You yourself must decipher my identity; I will not do it for you."

"Yes," Zina said, "because it is through tricks that you will learn."

(*The Divine Invasion*, Chapter 13)

It is in this mode, as trickster, that Dick's genius is most clearly displayed: the twists of the labyrinth and the reactions of the people in the maze, are always and only to this end. The "brave journey... inward to meaning" is a journey of discovery, by which we, the readers, learn something essential both about ourselves and about the world we inhabit.

Yet there is one last element to be considered before we are ready to make the journey; and that is a way of assimilating the numerous and quite complex metaphors Dick utilizes in any single novel. A first reading of any Dick novel (with the exception, perhaps, of the two mainstream novels) leaves the reader with a sense of clutter; of having been presented with too much in too short a space. It is only through reading a number of Dick's novels that some sense of coherence is attained. As Dick says of the film VALIS in the novel of that name: "ninety per cent of the details are designed to go by you the first time – actually go by your conscious mind; they register in your unconscious." This is, I believe, how Dick's own fiction is constructed, and so, in the remainder of this article, I want to try to *articulate* what is normally only *sensed* or *felt* by the reader of Dick's novels; to go through the novels "frame by frame" so to speak, and bring the unconscious effects to the notice of the conscious mind.

In the 1969 novel, *Ubik*, each chapter carries as an epigram an advert for the all-purpose wonder product, Ubik. But at the head of the last chapter, the product speaks for itself:

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. (Chapter 17)

In the 1967 novel, *Counter-Clock World*, a similar idea is expressed in an epigram from Erigena: 'Man is most correctly defined as a certain intellectual notion eternally made in the divine mind.' This preoccupation with an un-nameable entity which created and *is* All (the Primal Cause, or God, normally absent from Dick's worlds) resurfaces in the two linked novels of the 1980s, *VALIS* and *The Divine Invasion*. In these works the pattern enacted covertly in the earlier novels becomes an overt theological statement, expressed in *VALIS* as follows: "One Mind there is, but under it two principles contend." It is a kind of cosmic schizophrenia which, in *The Divine Invasion*, is made explicit:

A crisis that caused some part of the Godhead to fall; the Godhead split and some remained transcendent and some ... became abased. Fell with creation, fell along with the world. *The Godhead had lost touch with part of itself.* (Chapter 11)

But what does this mean in simpler, human terms? How does it affect *our* lives on a non-Cosmological level? In *VALIS* Phil Dick places himself directly within the framework of the fiction. He is there both as the insane, god-haunted Horselover Fat and as the more sceptical writer, Philip K. Dick. The pattern of cosmic schizophrenia repeats itself at this most human level, and not merely in the persons Phil Dick is, but in the labyrinth those divided selves jointly inhabit.

Who am I? How many people am I? Where am I? This plastic little apartment in southern California is not my home, but now I am awake, I guess, and here I live – in comparison to my life in the inter-connected dreams, this life is lonely and phony and worthless; unfit for an intelligent and educated person. *Where are the roses? Where is the lake? Where is the slim, smiling, attractive woman coiling and tugging the garden hose?* The person that I am now, compared with the person in the dream, has been baffled and defeated and only supposes he enjoys a full life. In the dreams I see what a full life really consists of, and it is not what I really have. (*VALIS*, chapter 7)

This is Dick talking of his real; life, not a fictional division; and yet that same sense of existing in an abased and fallen world first emerged in the 1956 sf novel, *The Man Who Japed*, where Alan Purcell, as a member of the Morec society (Moral Reclamation) found he had slipped into that world of roses, lake and attractive woman; living in a house he had never owned with a wife he had never seen before.

It is an idea that is continually expressed in Dick's writing, though often (as for Jason Taverner in *Flow My Tears*) the world into which a character slips is more abased than that in which he began. The 'half-life' world of *Ubik* is a prime example of a situation in which the enjoyment of a 'full-life' is shown to be physically denied to the "baffled and defeated" inhabitants. Beginning in the midst of one of these 'half-life' worlds – the world of the 'special', J.R. Isidore – I want to provide a detailed picture of that abased world, before proceeding to deal with the second "principle" of the Cosmic Mind and the basis by which the Godhead is reunited with itself. But first

we must enter the world of the tree that died, a journey which, as in *The Divine Comedy*, begins by descending into Hell itself:

“Remember this?”

“Oh yes,” Mavis nodded. “The tree that died. The anti-colonization Morec.”

“You know better than that,” Allen said.

Mavis looked bland. “Symbol of spiritual starvation, then. Severed from the folk-soul. You’re going to put that through? The new Renaissance in propaganda. What Dante did for the afterworld, you’re going to do for this.”

“This particular packet,” Allen said, “is long overdue.”

(*The Man Who Japed*, chapter 16)

The world of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* In which Isidore exists, is a Post-holocaust Earth; a world where, though the decaying structures of an inorganic civilization remain, most of the natural life forms have died out or are in the process of dying, killed by the radioactive dusts. It is a world in which Man has assisted the processes of *Natur*, of entropy:

...he saw the dust and the ruin of the apartment as it lay spreading out everywhere – he heard the kipple coming, the final disorder of all forms, the absence which would win out.

...Reaching out, he touched the wall. His hand broke the surface; gray particles trickled and hurried down, fragments of plaster resembling the radioactive dust outside. (Chapter 18)

The term “kipple” in the novel serves to express all of the processes of entropy; the decay of forms, the proliferation of junk, the approach of absolute silence and the physical and mental degeneration of the human race. As Isidore says in Chapter 6 – “the entire universe is moving towards a final state of total, absolute kippleization.”

In *Martian Time-Slip* we are given a remarkably similar scene to the one quoted above, as Jack Bohlen slips into what he believes is his psychotic state:

A voice in his mind said, Gubble, gubble, gubble. I am gubble, gubble, gubble, gubble.

Stop, he said to it.

Gubble, gubble, gubble, gubble, it answered.

Dust fell on him from the walls. The room creaked with age and dust, rotting round him. Gubble, gubble, gubble, the room said. The Gubbler is here to gubble, gubble you and make you into gubbish. (Chapter 10)

Bohlen’s reaction, like Isidore’s, is to fight the encroaching silence and disorder - the gubbish and kipple – and surround himself with people or with deafening music. But both kippleization and the gubbishing of things can only be contained, not reversed; they are inexorable processes, it would seem. Yet there is an important distinction between the two which reflects a division in Dick’s thinking on the matter. Kipple is an indifferent process; a series of mechanical events which can be perceived by the sanest of observers; whereas Gubbish is a malignant force, and is presented through the vision of a psychotic. And there is, after all, a *Gubbler*. A type of malevolent deity (although this can be traced to its source, to the potent imaginings of the autistic child, Manfred Steiner.)

“...why would he want to see that?”

“Perhaps he has no choice,” Jack said. Gubbish, he thought. I wonder; could gubbish mean time? The forced that to the boy means decay, deterioration, destruction, and, at last, death? The force at work everywhere, on everything in the universe.

And is that all he sees?

(Chapter 9)

But is the vision of a universe of active gubbish and indifferent kipple a psychosis or is it, as Jack considers elsewhere, “a glimpse of absolute reality with the facade stripped away” (Chapter 5)? It all depends, it seems, on whether Time itself is real, or is simply a distortion of our perception of the real. In *VALIS* Dick provides two answers to this conundrum:

Are we to infer that time has *not* in fact passed? And did it ever pass? Was there once a real time, and for that matter a real world, and now there is counterfeit time and a counterfeit world...

(Chapter 3)

And –

“Time is a child at play, playing draughts; a child’s is the kingdom.” As Heraclitus wrote twenty five hundred years ago. In many ways this is a terrible thought. The most terrible of all. A child playing a game ... with all life, everywhere.

(Chapter 11)

But while Dick finds the first of these ideas quite attractive, it is with Time as a child at play that he more normally deals; sometimes overtly. Manfred Steiner is one example, and Emanuel (in *The Divine Invasion*) another. Jory, in *Ubik*, is a third.

A boy, he said to himself. Disorganised and immature. A cruel, unformed, peculiar personality. This may be it, he said to himself. It would fit in with what we’re expecting, the capricious, contradictory happenings. The pulling off of our wings, and then the putting back.

(Chapter 14)

This, as I have already noted, is the *Lear* universe of whimsical and unnatural events, where even the deserving are, like Cordelia, cruelly punished. Indeed, that phrase Joe Chip uses to describe Jory – “pulling off our wings” – is a distinct echo of Gloucester’s words in *King Lear*, Act IV, Scene 1: “As flies to wanton schoolboys, are we to th’Gods; they kill us for their sport.”

Yet when we strip the facade away and leave the *Lear* universe naked, what remains? What is the underlying reality – the *really real*? In his usual manner, Dick gives not one, but five different answers. In *Do Androids Dream*, it is Silence, which “burst in without subtlety, evidently unable to wait. The silence of the world could not rein back its greed.” (Chapter 2). And again in *Ubik* it is Silence – “Nothing. The sound of absolute nothing. A very strange sound.” (Chapter 8). In *The Three Stigmata* it is perfect white light – “an empty white expanse, a focused glare, as if there were not a 3-D slide in the projector at all. The light, he thought, that underlies the play of phenomenon which we call ‘reality.’” (Chapter 6). In *Eye In The Sky* it is a basic formlessness – “a gray bucket, no lights, no colours, just sort of – a primordial place... Before the cosmos became chaos. Before the darkness was separated from the light. And things didn’t have any names.” (Chapter 3). In *VALIS* we of course have two different visions of ultimate reality, and again they reflect that distinction between an

indifferent force and an active deity (which might be seen as representing the mechanical and the theistic universes):

Under everything else, even under death itself and the will towards death, lies something else and that something else is nothing. The bedrock basic stratum of reality is unreality; the universe is irrational because it is built not on mere shifting sand – but on that which is not. (Chapter 5)

and

So if reality “(is) to some extent hidden”, then what is meant by “theophany”? Because a theophany is an in-breaking of God, an in-breaking which amounts to an invasion of our world; and yet our world is only seeming... Horselover Fat would like you to consider this above all other things. Because if Heraclitus is correct, there is in fact no reality but that of theophanies: the rest is illusion; in which case Fat alone among us comprehends the truth... (Chapter 3)

Fusing all these images of reality, it might be said that, for Dick, the underlying reality is a formless void of perfect silence, perfect whiteness, awaiting the divine intrusion. Indeed, it is recognisable that the universe Dick represents in his world corresponds very closely to his situation as a writer, facing a blank white sheet, the story unformed and awaiting his god-like direction; the act of naming. This correlation partly explains why Dick’s characters often feel, to themselves, like characters in someone else’s story, and often, within the story, actually *are*. Indeed, there are few of Dick’s novels where this situation does not at some point occur. The most obvious example of this is in *The Three Stigmata Of Palmer Eldritch* where that distinction between fiction and a theological-cosmology is made through the two drugs, Can-D (a confection, and clearly an escapist fantasy) and Chew-Z (which proves another “Fall Of Man”, a succumbing to god-like but evil forces):

...it’s all the same, it’s all him, the creator. That’s who and what he is, he realized. The owner of these worlds. The rest of us just inhabit them and when he wants to he can inhabit them, too. Can kick over the scenery, manifest himself, push things in any direction he chooses. Even by any us he cares to. All of us, in fact, if he desires. (Chapter 11)

Of course, it would be difficult to say conclusively whether Dick’s worldview influenced the structure of his writing or vice versa, but the fact is that there *is* this strong correlation: the form is matched perfectly to the substance of his fiction. The worlds of his novels mimic what Phil Dick perceived in the real world about him. This may seem a lot to claim, but even a cursory reading of *VALIS* would bear this out. As Philip K. Dick said in an interview in *Science Fiction Review* (August 1976):

I guess that means I’m taking my own writing as more fact than fiction than I used to. I don’t think I ever took it as completely fiction, I always was... reaching for an answer ... to the question of “what is real?” And I think I am finally beginning to get a sense of what is real. And one of the things that is *not* real is time (Page 12)

At another time, Dick would have recalled that final statement, just as he did in *VALIS*. The point is, however, that we must adopt a dual perspective in reading Dick. The layers of illusion and deception – of *dokos*, as Dick calls them in *VALIS* – are not

merely a recognition of the fictionality of fiction, nor are they simply an expression of the way Dick thought the universe was actually constructed; *dokos* (delusion/seeming) partakes of both of these ideas; is part art, part nature; part indifferent force and part active malignancy. It is therefore unsurprising that so much of Dick's fiction is physically set where art and nature meet, in the perceptive faculties of the head. Perhaps what is surprising is *how much* of the action occurs in the heads of one character or another. *Eye In The Sky* is a journey through the insides of four different heads; four distinct "percept systems". In *Dr Bloodmoney* it is suggested that the world exists in Bluthgeld's head and that he caused the Holocaust (a suggestion which is partly validated, yet which is also part delusion). In *The Simulacra* the paranormal freak, Kongrosian, begins to ingest the universe (Chapter 14), whilst in *Martian Time-Slip*, Jack Bohlen begins to slip into Manfred Steiner's percept-system:

... in some ways he *controls* it, he can make it come out the worst possible way that's... how he sees reality. It's as if by being around him we're sinking into his reality. It's starting to seep over us and replace our own way of viewing things... (Chapter 10)

Psychosis or drugs – both means by which the perception of reality is altered – are the catalysts of this process of slipping over. For instance, when Alys Buckman takes the experimental drug, KR-3 in *Flow My Tears*, the whole world slips over, into her head:

"Taverner, like the rest of us, became a datum in your sister's percept system and got dragged across when she passed into an alternate construct of co-ordinates."
"...he and we are at the same time remained in our own universe. We occupied two space corridors at the same time, one real, one unreal. One is an actuality; one is a latent possibility among many..." (Chapter 27)

I have already mentioned the malign deities of *Ubik* and *Three Stigmata*, yet there is also Emmanuel's world of *The Divine Invasion*:

Pain filled him, the pain of isolation; suddenly... everything vanished. He tried to make it return but it would not return. No time passed. Even time had been abolished. *I have completely forgotten*, he realized. *And because I have forgotten, it is all gone.*
... His lips moved and he pronounced one word.
HAYAH
The world returned. (Chapter 4)

It is a return to the ubiquitous god of *Ubik*, the all-permeating presence which creates and *is* the world. And the splitting of that godhead is a process of forgetting, of occlusion:

At once, Fat understood what he had read. Samael was the creator deity and he imagined that he was the only god as stated in Genesis. However, he was blind, which is to say, occluded. "Occluded" was Fat's salient term. It embraced all other terms: insane, mad, irrational, whacked out, fucked up, fried, psychotic. (VALIS, Chapter 5)

In *The Divine Invasion*, Emmanuel is suffering from brain damage, elsewhere Palmer Eldritch is naturally blind, Manfred Steiner is autistic, Jory is dead. In all cases the controlling deities are unhealthy, if not insane. They are Samaels, and they perceive things wrongly –

This is how the goat-creature sees God's total artefact, the world that God pronounced as good. It is the pessimism of evil itself. The nature of evil is to see in this fashion, to pronounce this verdict of negation. Thus, he thought, it unmakes creation; it undoes what the Creator has brought into being. This also is a form of unreality, this verdict, this dreary aspect. *(The Divine Invasion, Chapter 19)*

But the "dreary aspect" is also the abased world of Dick's fiction. Are we then to assume that Dick himself is evil by picturing the world in his peculiar manner? Or, as for Herb Asher in the novel, is it only a part of him which is evil? Of course, there is another, different view. That things actually *are* as bad as the psychotic makes out. The schizophrenics *might* be right in their worldview:

"The compulsive," Dr Stockstill said, "lives in a world in which everything is decaying. This is a great insight. Imagine it."
"Then we must all be compulsives", Bonny Keller said, "because that's what's going on around us... isn't it?" *(Dr Bloodmoney, Chapter 4)*

But if the abased world (the exaggerated fiction) is the product of psychosis, of the malignant deity, the Gubbler, it is hard to equate the vitality of that active deity with the normal condition of psychosis:

Now I can see what psychosis is: the utter alienation of perception from the objects of the outside world, especially the objects which matter: the warm-hearted people there. And what takes their place? A dreadful preoccupation with – the endless ebb and flow of one's own self ...
It is the stopping of time. The end of experience, of anything new.
Once the person becomes psychotic, nothing ever happens to him again. *(Martian Time-Slip, Chapter 11)*

But in Dick's work both inner and outer worlds still coexist, and time still flows. It is not wholly a psychotic's world, an occluded world. Kipple, the indifferent force, whilst a sign of decay, is at least a *natural* occurrence: a symptom not of compulsiveness, but of normality. As in *VALIS*, only part of this abased world is occluded – the Lear universe of theophanies in which Horselover Fat exists. Put simply, whilst the novels mimic madness, it is not to say that they were the products of a madman. Indeed, we can glimpse a picture of a truly psychotic novel from Dick's own descriptions of the effects of psychosis:

Fat heard in her rational tone the harp of nihilism, the twang of the void. He was not dealing with a person; he had a reflex-arc thing at the other end of the phone line. *(VALIS, Chapter 1)*

These are people who have lost their human qualities and become machines. The description of the Starman leader, Frenesky, in *Now Wait For Last Year*, with his "single undisturbed psychomotor concentration ... this unending ensnaring fixity" (Chapter 9), is a description of another form of this. But perhaps the most chilling description of the process by which people become things, is given in *A Scanner Darkly*:

"Imagine being sentient but not alive. Seeing and even knowing, but not alive. Just looking out ... there's still something in there but it died and just kept on looking; it can't stop looking."
Another person said, "That's what it means to die, to not be able to stop looking at whatever's in front of you." *(Chapter 14)*

The inability to stop looking, the reflex-arc at the phone's end, the failure of recognition and the stopping of time and experience, are all graphically described by Dick in novel after novel. Yet these *things* were once warm human beings. What has happened to them, and why are they fixed? Perhaps it might be described as a blurring of categories, a loss of the ability to make distinctions, yet it seems more extreme than that. They have slipped over, sunk into the *Lear* universe, the abased world, and cannot find their way back – indeed, have lost the means of getting back.

In an essay written in 1976, “Man, Android and Machine” (in Peter Nicholls’ *Science Fiction At Large*), Dick described the blurring of the categories:

...sly and cruel entities ... These creatures are among us, although morphologically they do not differ from us; we must not posit a difference of essence, but a difference of behaviour. In my science fiction I write about them constantly ... they can be absolutely born of a human womb ... and themselves be without warmth; they then fall within the clinical entity ‘schizoid’, which means lacking proper feeling. I am sure we mean the same thing here, with the emphasis on the word “thing”. A human being without the proper empathy of feeling is the same as an android built so as to lack it, either by design or mistake. We mean, basically, someone who does not care about the fate which his fellow creatures fall victim to...

This blurring of the categories between womb-born and machine-made things is, of course, vividly dramatized in the pages of *Do Androids Dream*. But in his descriptions of the android mentality, Dick is making a much more crucial connection than the one between schizoids and machines; he is inferring that certain kinds of madness (however induced) are actually unveilings of ultimate reality. But to reach that ultimate reality, the schizoids and psychotics must also penetrate the mask of their illness – the stare-locked eyes and reflex-arc voice. And the mask of their illness is death, behind which lies the formless void of perfect silence and perfect whiteness:

Now that her initial fear had diminished, something else had begun to emerge from her. Something more strange. And, he thought, deplorable. A coldness. Like, he thought, a breath from the vacuum between inhabited worlds, in fact from nowhere.

(*Do Androids Dream*, Chapter 6)

It is the same place from which the creature who took over Palmer Eldritch came – *a vacuum between inhabited worlds*. In seeing the android, Rachel Rosen, in this manner, J.R. Isidore is provided with a glimpse through the veil of apparent reality. And though he may not *understand* it, he can *sense* it – and perhaps even sense what Dick articulates in “Man, Android and Machine”: “...what we must accept, once we realise that a veil (called by the Greeks *dokos*) lies between us and reality, is that this veil serves a benign purpose...”

Dokos, which equates with our perception of things, is a defence mechanism. In Dick's work, it seems that those who lose it tumble into abased and hideous worlds; are given foul glimpses of the Gubbler's universe, where youthful beauty rots away before the eyes. There are several examples of this in the novels: Jack Bohlen's vision of Doreen in Chapter 10 of *Martian Time-Slip*; Joe Chip's vision of Wendy Wright in Chapter 8 of *Ubik*; Leo Bulero's vision of Roni Fugate in Chapter 6 of *The Three Stigmata*. Those three and the apocalyptic vision Jason Taverner has of Alys

Buckman in Chapter 21 of *Flow My Tears*, are all sudden, nasty rendings of the veil of *dokos*; abrupt changes of perception. They are death visions, where things age centuries in seconds. But this is only one possibility; there are forever two principles contending in the One Mind, and when, in *The Man In The High Castle*, Mr Tagomi “slips over” for a brief while, he makes a vital recognition:

Metal is from the earth ... Yin world, in its most melancholy aspect. All that has died, slipping back and disintegrating back down layer by layer. The daemonic world of the immutable; and time-that-was ... *Bardo Thodol* existence, Mr Tagomi thought. Hot winds blowing me who knows where. This is vision – of what? ... Yes, the *Book Of The Dead* prepares us... The terrible journey – and always the realms of suffering, rebirth, ready to receive the fleeing, demoralized spirit. The delusions. (Chapter 14)

Another name for this is the Tomb World; the world into which Mercer sinks in *Do Androids Dream*. And all of the leitmotifs discussed so far, kipple and gubbish, “half-life”, occlusion, mental illness, mechanical existence and death visions – all things of the *Lear* universe – are brought together in Mr Tagomi’s sudden vision. But the vision is also of that “real” world depicted in *The Divine Invasion*, where:

“They are poisoned as if with metal ... Metal confining them and metal in their blood: this is a metal world. Driven by cogs, a machine that grinds along, dealing out suffering and death, he realized. ... There are two realities, he said to himself. The Black Prison ... in which they now live, and the Palm Tree Garden...” (Chapter 10)

This abased, Yin world of metal and death, is the first of the two realities, the world *perceived* with the intellect in Dick’s novels; the terrain presented to us by Dick the theologian-philosopher, it is also the “bad womb” we have been wrongly born into (see Greg Runciter’s comments to Ella, his wife, dead and in half-life; *Ubik*, Chapter 2), and it equates with that sense Dick expressed in *VALIS* (and earlier in *The Man Who Japed*) of the denial of a full life – of the world of the roses and the lake and the slim, smiling, attractive woman.

So often in his novels Dick presents a world which, like Dickens’ in *Little Dorrit*, is a prison world:

“This whole structure is like a giant torture chamber, with everybody staring at one another, trying to find fault, trying to break one another down. Witch hunts and star chambers. Mr Bluenose banning books. Children kept from hearing evil. Morec was invented by sick minds, and it creates more sick minds.” (*The Man Who Japed*, Chapter 17)

This Morec society is only another version of the “Black Iron Prison” of *VALIS*; and whether it is Mars or Amerika, the C hew-Z experience, “half-life”, or a post-holocaust world, the terrain is always that of the Yin world. And the condition of Man within the Yin world is, as Barney realizes in *The Three Stigmata*, “the condition of slavery. Like the Fall.” (Chapter 11).

But for most of the time the average inhabitants of these Yin worlds is unaware of their true condition. Like the *Bes* of *The Simulacra*, the secret has been kept from them –

Any failure would have betrayed to the Bes the secret, the Geheinis, which distinguished the elite, the establishment of the United States of Europe and America; their possession of the one or more secrets made them into Geheiminstrager, bearers of the secret, rather than Befhaltrager, mere carry-outer of instructions. (Chapter 3)

The Geheimnis equates to the veil of *dokos*. And yet there must come a moment – an interval – when the veil is rent and the secret made known:

“But you will tell,” Pembroke said ... There’s no time left now, because Karp and Sohnen has made its move. This is the moment, doctor, the Augenblick – as our German friends say.” ...

“There will be a reaction, of course: I expect it to demolish the system of government... no more division into *Ge* and *Be*, Because we’ll all be *Ges* now, correct?”

“Yes,” Superb said.

(Chapter 13)

We have seen already that most penetrations of the veil of *dokos* were the result of mental illness, and there is no difference here. The removal of the Geheimnis will have the same effect; to be a Geheiminstrager and to have perfect knowledge of the really real, is, in effect, to be mad. But what happens *after* the revelation? The moment of revelation itself – an interval in which the perception of the terrain changes radically – equates with St. Paul’s idea that “we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” Dick recognises this and uses St. Paul. In *Counter-Clock World*, it is this quote from *Corinthians 15* that he uses to describe the change of perception that allows everyone suddenly to realize that time runs backwards.

If we return, then, to that moment in Chapter 14 of *The Man In The High Castle*, where Mr. Tagomi had his *Bardol Thodol* vision of the Yin world, we see once again the *augenblick* related to St. Paul and a change in perception – a rending of the dark glass of *dokos*:

Now one appreciates Saint Paul’s incisive word choice... seen through a glass darkly not a metaphor, but astute reference to optical distortion. We really do see astigmatically, in fundamental sense: our space and time creations of our own psyche, and when these momentarily falter – like acute disturbance of middle ear.

Occasionally we list eccentrically, all sense of balance gone.

It is at such a moment of optical distortion, when Dr Bluthgeld suffers a moment of disturbance in the middle ear, that the holocaust of *Dr Bloodmoney* occurs, and the whole world slips into the dream visions of Hoppy Harrington (see the opening of Chapter 5).

One last element remains now to be added before the map of the terrain is complete: the *leitmotif* of “Nord Amerika” – Dick’s obsession with the evils of Nazism and their apparent grafting onto modern-day America. In the *Science Fiction Review* interview, Dick provided an insight into the importance of this *motif* within his writing.

I think that may have been the moment when this began, was the extermination of the gypsies, and Jews, and Bible students in the death camps, people making lampshades out of people’s skin. After that, there

wasn't much to believe or disbelieve, and it didn't really matter what you believed or disbelieved. (Page 11)

In Dick's novels the huge manufacturing cartels and drug producers are German (A.G.Chemie, Karp and Sohnen), the half-crazed scientists are German (Bluthgeld in *Dr Bloodmoney*, Dr Denkmal in *The Three Stigmata*) and even the philosophical emphasis is distinctly German. Indeed, the finest and, to my mind, most important expression of what the Yin world is, can be found in *The Man In The High Castle*, in the "Scandinavian", Mr Baynes' thoughts about Nazism.

But, he thought, what does it mean, *insane*? ...
He thought, it is something they do, something they are. It is their unconsciousness. Their lack of knowledge about others. Their not being aware of what they do to others, the destruction they have caused and are causing. No, he thought. That isn't it. I don't know; I sense it, intuit it. But – they are purposelessly cruel... is that it? No, God, he thought. I can't find it, make it clear. Do they ignore parts of reality? Yes. But it is more. It is their plans... Their view; it is cosmic. Not a man here, a child there, but an abstraction: race, land. *Volk*. Land, Blut. Ehre. Not of honourable men, but of Ehre itself, honour; the abstract is real, the actual is visible to them. Die Gute, but not good men. This good man. It is their sense of space and time. They see through the here and now, into the vast black deep beyond, the unchanging. And that is fatal to life. Because eventually there will be no life; there was once only the dust particles in space, the hot hydrogen gases, nothing more, and it will come again. This is an interval, *ein Augenblick*. The cosmic process is hurrying on, crushing life back into the granite and methane; the wheel turns for all life. It is all temporary. And these – these madmen – respond to the granite, the dust, the longing of the inanimate; they want to aid *Natur*.
And, he thought, I know why. They want to be the agents, not the victims, of history. They identify with God's power and believe they are godlike. That is their basic madness. (Chapter 3)

This madness is, of course, given its personification in Manfred Steiner, the godlike autistic of *Martian Time-Slip*, from whom the Guibbler stems: the force that is actively malignant in its identification with the natural processes of Kipple. Baynes' thoughts are a perfect summation: the map of the terrain. But as ever with Dick it is only half the story. In *The Simulacra* the neo-Nazi "Sons of Job" are *Americans* and Baynes, the Scandinavian, turns out to be Rudolf Wegner of the Abwehr, an official of the Nazi machine. Bertold Goltz, the leader of the Sons of Job, proves to be the chairman of the government that controls the United States of Europe and America. Once again Dick is saying that it is far from simple, that the fault does not lie with a single racial type, but with a way of seeing things. Insanity, as has been said before, is an occlusion, an astigmatic vision of things; and the Yin world is a result of this occluded, astigmatic vision. It is the result of seeing in abstract rather than human terms. And yet it is not *all* that can be seen; it is only one of the two principles contending in the One Mind; only the terrain, the labyrinth, and not the people inside the maze,

The labyrinth is, as I said earlier, a product of the abstract theoretician, of that impulse in Dick himself that responds to *Natur* and identifies with God's power. But the other principle contending in the One Mind – a principle that corresponds with Dick the moral teacher, provides a way out of the labyrinth, and even in his most abstract moments, in the *Tractates Cryptica Scriptura* of *VALIS*, Dick can recognize this:

The one... generated a diploid sac which contained, like an eggshell, a pair of twins, each an androgyny, spinning in opposite directions (the Yin and Yang of Taoism, with the One as the Tao). The plan of the One was that both twins would emerge into being (wasness) simultaneously; however, motivated by a desire to be (which the One had implanted in both twins), the counter-clockwise twin broke through the sac and separated prematurely; ie., before full term. This was the dark or Yin twin. Therefore it was defective. At full term the wiser twin emerged ... From them as hyper-universes they projected a hologram-like interface, which is the pluriform universe we creatures inhabit. (VALIS, Chapter 6, Note 47)

This was clearly Dick's personal cosmogony, held in his life and dramatised in his fiction. It was not, for him, merely a theory; it was (as the earlier quote from VALIS, about the other life denied him, demonstrates) something he experienced daily.

But to return to the argument; because the Yin world was born first, our perception of the "hologram-like interface" between Yin and yang worlds is in the Yin world's own defective manner. And yet what is perceived (and indeed can be measured scientifically) as the whole of life, is not all that is there. Like J.R. Isidore we *sense* that another world exists. Indeed, the Yang world is not so much a way of *seeing* as a way of *behaving*. It is a *moral* universe, different in kind from the Yin world:

Charley, without answering, picked up one of the pamphlets, turned the pages, then read aloud. "The measure of a man is not his intelligence. It is not how high he rises in the freak establishment. The measure of a man is this: how swiftly can he react to another person's need? And how much of himself can he give? In giving that is true giving, nothing comes back, or, at least –"

"Sure; giving gives you something back," Nick said.

"You give somebody something; later on he returns the favour by giving you something in return. That's obvious."

"That's not giving, that's barter." (*Our Friends From Frolix 8*, Chapter 7)

But to prove that it is more than a problem of semantics – of defining what a word means – we have to leave, momentarily, the world of the tree that died. This is not to say that we have cast aside the pattern of Dante's *Divine Comedy*; it is still with us. We are out of the Yin world of Hell, however, and for the moment are standing in the holographic projection of Purgatory (the "real" world), knowing what lies beneath us and searching for a way up into the Yang world of Paradise. Indeed, we are in the very situation Richard Hnatt finds himself in, in *The Three Stigmata* having undergone artificial evolutionary treatment in Dr Denkmal's surgery. Hnatt's increased perceptive faculties allow him a glimpse not merely of the terrain but of the route to be taken:

Hell and heaven, not after death, but now! Depression, all mental illness, was the sinking. And the other... how was it 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. (Chapter 5)

However, it is not simply a question of escaping from the Yin world into the Yang, but of harmonizing the elements of each. In *The Man In The High Castle*, Robert Childan, a figure curiously similar to Hnatt (both are salesmen of others' artwork), glimpses this harmony of elements in the lifestyle of two of his Japanese customers:

The wabi around him, radiations of harmony ... that is it, he decided. The proportion. Balance. They are so close to the Tao, these two young Japanese ... I sensed the Tao through them. Saw a glimpse of it myself.

What would it be like, he wondered, to really know the Tao? *The Tao is that which first lets in the light, then the dark.* Occasions, the interplay of the two primal forces so that there is always renewal. It is that which keeps it all from wearing down. The universe will never be extinguished because just when the darkness seems to have smothered all, to be truly transcendent, the new seeds of light are reborn in the very depths. That is the Way.

If *psychosis*, the ultimate in Yin-world vision, was the stopping of all experience, wabi is its Yang counterpart, the beginning of the new. Childan gives a small piece of metal jewellery to the young Japanese, Paul, and through it we are shown a different aspect of this harmonizing force.

‘The hands of the artificer,’ Paul said, ‘had wu, and allowed that wu to flow into this piece. Possibly he himself knows only that this piece satisfies ... By contemplating it, we gain more wu ourselves ... To have no historicity, and also no artistic, aesthetic worth, and yet to partake of some ethereal value – that is a marvel ... in most cases, the wu is within the viewer. It is a religious experience. Here, an artificer has put wu into object, rather than merely witnessing the wu inherent in it ... It is authentically a new thing on the face of the world.’

(Chapter 11)

It was a similar piece of jewellery purchased from Childan, that gave Tagomi the *Bardol Todol* glimpse of the Yin world. More often, however, it is not through metal, but through fired earth that the new is born – through clay pots. And though Dick uses the Japanese terms *wu* and *wabi* only in *The Man In The High Castle*, it is upon that same sense of a religious experience contained *within* an object, that balancing of forces within something, that he dwells time and again. In *VALIS* he makes the connection explicit:

Stephanie brought Horselover Fat to God ... by means of a little clay pot ... It looked like an ordinary pot; squat and light brown, with a small amount of blue glaze as trim ... The pot was unusual in one way, however. In it slumbered God. He slumbered in the pot for a long time, for almost too long.

(Chapter 2)

In *Flow My Tears* this same harmony and sense of godliness is implied but never stated. Mary Anne Dominic’s quiet, balanced lifestyle plays Yang to Alys Buckman’s violently disordered Yin world: each world producing its own particular flowering; the Yin-world skeleton of Alys, dead for centuries; and the simple piece of pottery that epitomizes Mary Anne’s modest Yang world –

The blue vase made by Mary Anne Dominic wound up in a private collection of modern pottery. It remains there to this day, and is much treasured. And, in fact, by a number of people who know ceramics, openly and genuinely cherished. And loved. (Epilogue]

That there is *wu* in Mary Anne’s pot – or God, if you like – is emphasised by the fact that this passage is the last thing in the novel. It is towards *balance*, or the Tao, that all of Dick’s work tends.

In *VALIS*, however, the pot is not merely a symbol of Tao, nor, like the silver jewellery a container of *wu*, but a key to the understanding of cosmological events:

The photos showed a Greek vase, on it a painting of a male figure who we recognized as Hermes, Twined around the vase the double helix confronted us. ...

‘Twenty-three-or-four hundred years ago,’ Fat said. ‘Not the picture but the krater, the pottery.’

‘A pot,’ I said ... There could be no doubt; the design, pre-dating Christianity, was Crick and Watson’s double helix model...

‘ ... Originally the caduceus... was the staff not of – Hermes – but – ‘ Fat paused, his eyes bright. ‘Of Asklepios. It has a very specific meaning, beside that of wisdom, which the snakes allude to; it shows that the bearer is a sacred person and not to be molested ... which is why Hermes, the messenger of the gods, carried it.’ (Chapter 14)

A part of this (in keeping with the novel *VALIS* itself) strikes one as being on the lines of Von Daniken, but the connection of the pot, the life symbol and the messenger through the underworld is essential to Dick’s work. Pots show up throughout the film of *VALIS* (see Chapter 9) just as they do in the novels of Philip K. Dick, and, whether Dick knew it or not (and it is my belief that he did, as he constantly quotes from Heraclitus), one of the earliest Western conceptions of a dualistic cosmos utilizes the image of pot and potter:

Potters use a wheel that goes neither forward or backwards, yet goes both ways at once. So it is like the cosmos. On this wheel is made pottery of every shape and yet no two pieces are identical, though all are made of the same materials and with the same tools.

- Heraclitus, Approx. 500 BC

We have already encountered this image in Dick’s cosmogony of the twins Yin and Yang, born of the One, and meet it again in his essay, “Man, Android and Machine”, where he deals with Time.

What we need to deduce from this is that the *wu* is only the visible product of the cosmic process, just as a pot is only the end product of the contrary directions of the potter’s wheel and the shaper’s hand. In *The Three Stigmata* Hawthorne makes this very point:

‘Don’t tell us, Barney, that whatever entered Palmer Eldritch is God, because you don’t know that much about Him; no one can. But that living entity from intersystem space may like us, be shaped in His image. A way He selected of showing Himself to us. If the map is not the territory, *the pot is not the potter*. So don’t talk ontology, Barney; don’t say *is*.’ (Chapter 13)

This is Dick telling us, as he so often does in his work, to look at the metaphorical *meaning* of his *leitmotifs*. We must never accept the literal *is*; never accept the simple surface entertainment. *The map is not the territory*. Indeed, it is wrong-headed to approach Dick in the manner that, for example, Bruce Gillespie does in his essay, ‘Mad, Mad Worlds: Seven Novels of Philip K Dick’, and say, of *The Man In The High Castle*: “If Dick adopts this structure in order to present a composite picture of a fully imagined world (in which Japan and Germany won the Second World War and together occupy America) then I would say he fails completely”, because it was never Dick’s intention to present such a composite picture. We must go back to Juliana Frink’s words that opened this essay – “He told us about our own world, she thought ... What’s round us now.” When we forget that, in reading Dick, then we are liable to end up in Horselover Fat’s condition – “insane, mad, irrational, whacked out, fucked

up, fried, psychotic”; in short, *occluded*. He leitmotifs give us a map of the terrain, but we have to read them metaphorically to understand their true significance.

Even so, reading Dick’s work in this manner is far from easy, not least because he chooses to provide us with real and honest responses to the moral dilemmas he sets his characters. They are not ciphers in a philosophical game, reacting predictably to stimulate (as many of Dickens’ characters might be said to do). They are much more like Dostoevsky’s haunted protagonists in *The Devils*, capable of the most debased and also of the most saintly acts, and yet never able to see things clearly for more than the briefest of moments. Indeed, characters like Rudolf Wegener would be at home in the landscapes of Dostoevsky’s Russia, caught between utter despair and a curious, almost visionary hope:

He thought. We can only hope. And try. On some other world, possibly, it is different. Better. There are clear good and evil alternatives. Not these obscure admixtures, these blends, with no proper tool by which to untangle the components. We do not have the ideal world, such as we would like, where morality is easy because cognition is easy. Where one can do right with no effort because he can detect the obvious. [*The Man In The High Castle*, Chapter 15]

Yet it is with these “obscure admixtures” that Dick, as moral teacher, *must* deal. And, to his credit, he presents his moral alternative – the Yang route out of the Yin labyrinth – with a genuine clarity and simplicity that avoids the twin traps of sentimentality and bathos that Dickens so often fell foul of. In presenting his “solutions” to the moral dilemma I wish to begin with the one suggested by Hnatt in *The Three Stigmata: Empathy*.

When a character “falls” in Dick’s work, as Jason Taverner does in *Flow My Tears*, it is not so much a question of Hubris punished by Nemesis, not a lesson in humility, but an unveiling of occluded eyes and a lesson in understanding how others live. Hell, for Dick, was the isolate self. Other people are a *necessity*. The true evil of Palmer Eldritch’s Chew-Z for instance, is that it does not, like Can-D, allow the experience to be shared.

Isolation is another form of madness in Dick’s work, and the ultimate in isolation breeds the ultimate in madness, as Manfred Steiner’s autistic visions of the Gubbler prove. When a person is isolated, they begin to see things from a solipsist viewpoint; each distinct person becomes merely a datum in their percept-system –as Taverner became in Alys Buckman’s. Yet the worlds Dick’s characters inhabit are *designed* to isolate: that is their *purpose*; to cut human beings off from one another. It is not surprising, therefore, that, in the Yin world of metal and machinery, the cure to isolation should need to be disguised, and the Yang element of Empathy be contained in a machine, as in *Do Androids Dream*:

“But an empathy box”, he said, stammering in his excitement, “is the most personal possession you have! It’s an extension of your body; it’s the way you stop being alone” (Chapter 6)

It is not merely a dramatic externalization of an inner (and immeasurable) human force, but a beautifully ironic recognition of the connection between Yin and Yang worlds. *Do Androids Dream*, is a battleground between the two contending principles of the One mind, yet it is also a novel in which the distinction between Yin and Yang

worlds are constantly blurred. Each uses simulation. Buster Friendly, the television and radio personality is an android. Wilbur Mercer, the religious leader, is, in reality, “an elderly retired bit-player named Al Jarry” (Chapter 18). The surface distinctions between the two are not, therefore, immediately discernible, and J.R. Isidore does not at first recognize that only one of them is truly benevolent. Yet the distinction, when it is made, is clear cut: it is between death and life, nothingness and plenitude. Two quotes will suffice to demonstrate this:

...an android trait, possibly, he thought. No emotional awareness, no feeling – no sense of the actual meaning of what she said. Only the hollow, formal, intellectual definitions of the separate terms. (Chapter 16)

and,

So this is what Mercer sees, he thought as he painstakingly tied the cardboard box shut – Life which we can no longer distinguish; life carefully buried up to its forehead in the carcass of a dead world. In every corner of the universe Mercer probably perceives inconspicuous life. Now I know, he thought. And once having seen through Mercer’s eyes I probably will never stop. (Chapter 22)

It is clearly a distinction between the intellectual, scientific *understanding* of a thing and the nebulous *experience* of a living emotion. Yin-vision *is* occluded: it is a fixed stare which cannot see beyond surfaces – which is why even though Mercer himself is scientifically proved to be a fake, it does not invalidate the experience of Mercerism. *The pot is not the potter*. Yang-vision, however, implies a sudden awakening to the plight of others – seeing what *they* see and going beyond the bounds of self interest:

He made me take her seriously, Asher realized ... It was as if I imagined that she was making up her illness... What does that say about me? He asked himself. Because I really knew she was sick, not faking it. I have been asleep, he said to himself. And, while I slept, a girl has been dying. (*The Divine Invasion*, Chapter 4)

It is this same experience – what we might call “seeing through Mercer’s eyes” – that Jason Taverner undergoes in *Flow My Tears*. Taverner was asleep, he had forgotten – had blanked out – the struggles of his own past. In the novel he is forced through the dilemma of his “non-existence” to see what he had refused to see from the safety of his celebrity:

It would be funny, he thought, if this were happening to someone else. But it’s happening to me. No, it’s not funny either way. Because there is real suffering and real death passing the time of day in the wings. Ready to come on any minute. (Chapter 5)

And the suffering is there because of the fragmentation of the communal world that happens inside the Yin labyrinth. The only possible solution is to combat that fragmentation at source, through simple human connection. In *VALIS*, the young “Messiah”, Sophia, when she reads from the *Sepher Yezirah*, states explicitly: “What you teach is the word of man. Man is holy, and the true god, the living god, is man himself. You will have no gods but yourselves...” (Chapter 12). And in *The Divine Invasion* in describing the Torah to Herb Asher, Elias embellishes this idea:

“Torah is the totality of divine disclosure by God... Without it the world could not exist ... ‘Whatever is hateful to you, do not do it to your neighbour.’ That is the entire Torah. The rest is commentary...” (Chapter 8)

It is the simple tenet that underlies Christ’s teachings, and it is implicit in all of Dick’s writing. But Dick, like Christ, knew it was not enough simply to say “Understand; see as others see; empathise; and ‘Do unto others...’, but believed that the connection is active. Herb Asher and Jason Taverner must not merely wake up to the real suffering, but must *act* upon their realization:

“This is what it’s for; this is the goal...” The parable about the tree that died. The tree had died in isolation, and perhaps the Morec of the packet was confused and obscure. But to him it came over clearly enough; a man was primarily responsible to his fellows, and it was with his fellows that he made his life. (The Man Who Japed, Chapter 4)

This is the *essential* moral purpose of Dick’s work. It is the one and only route out of the isolating labyrinth. And this is why “connecting” figures, such as the Anarch Peak in *Counter-Clock World* (with his “*Sum tu*” creed – “I am you”), Mercer in *Do Androids Dream*, Felix Buckman in *Flow My Tears*, Molinari in *Now Wait For Last Year*, and Tagomi in *The Man In The High Castle*, are so vitally important. In *Dr Bloodmoney* we are given a choice of solipsist visions, between the insane physicist, Bluthgeld, and the paranormal cripple, Hoppy Harrington. In a world blighted by these two, the positive force is supplied by another such connecting figure:

What was it about Dangerfield, sitting up there above them in the satellite as it passed over them each day? Contact with the world ... Dangerfield looked down and saw everything, the rebuilding, all the changes both good and bad; he monitored every broadcast, recording and preserving and then playing back, so through him they were joined. (Chapter 7)

The biblical undertone is clear. And this responsibility to (one’s) fellows”, this simple active connection, stems from a reverence for life, from *agape*, and from a care and esteem for it, from *caritas*. *Agape* and *Caritas* are forms of love; of that “true giving” Charley read about in the pamphlet in *Our Friends From Frolix 8*. But Dick never neglected the problem of a more basic, fallible love, of *eros*, particularly as it applies to that most fallible of human institutions, marriage. That in itself could be the subject of an essay as long as this one. Here I wish only to deal with two aspects of it that are related to this matter of empathy and connection.

Father Faine said, “Does it have to do with adultery?”
...”Hell no,” Tinbane said... “You see – there’s this situation I can profit from. But at someone else’s expense. Now, whose good should come first? If theirs, then why? Why not mine? I’m a person, too. I don’t get it!”
(*Counter-Clock World*, Chapter 5)

It is a question that is partly resolved in the novel through the selfless sufferings of the Anarch Peak on behalf of Sebastian Hermes. But is selflessness or altruism something to be desired? In *Flow My Tears*, Jason Taverner is faced with the problem of human love:

“Then why is love so good?” He had brooded about that... “You love someone and they leave. They come home one day and start packing

their things and you say ‘What’s happening?, and they say, ‘I got a better offer somewhere else, and there they go, out of your life forever, and after that until you’re dead you’re carrying around this huge chunk of love with no one to give it to.’

Ruth said, ‘Love isn’t just wanting another person the way you want to own an object you see in a store. ... When you love you cease to live for yourself; you live for another person.’

“And that’s good?” It did not sound so good to him. (Chapter 11)

It is *eros* – human love with all its selfishness, bitterness and jealousy – that confuses and obscures the demands of *caritas* and *agape*. And yet Dick’s recognition of this obscuration of the simple tenet “Whatever is hateful, do not do it to your neighbour”, is what makes his work so powerful and so *real*. There are no simple platitudes: everything, even what seems best of the Yang world, must be questioned. And yet for all of Dick’s very human scepticism, there *is* a moral certainty that surfaces time and again; a belief in simple compassion and a defiance of destructive evil. It is this that Dick expressed in a letter of 9 September 1970 to *SF Commentary*:

Everything is on a small scale. Collapse is enormous; the positive little figure outlined against the universal rubble is, like Tagomi, Runciter, Molinari, gnat-sized in scope, finite in what he can do ... and yet in some sense great. I really do not know why. I simply believe in him, and I love hm. He will prevail. There is nothing else. At least, nothing else that matters. That we should be concerned about. Because if he is there, like a tiny father-figure, everything is all right.

And this “tiny father-figure”, this connecting-figure, is always seen to use his finite strength in the service of his fellow men and against the forces of the Yin world.

They are *interveners*, like Runciter in *Ubik*, providing Joe Chip with notes and clues and eventually even a can of Ubik, the life-force itself. Or, like Nick Appleton, in *Our Friends From Frolix 8*, they are there “in God’s name ... to stare you down... Because you and those like you must pass away.” (Chapter 26). Or again, like Felix Buckman in *Flow My Tears*, they are “fighting for a coherent society” (Chapter 10) – for *connection*. And their only resource against the all-encompassing labyrinth, the “Black Iron Prison” or Yin world, is an eternal optimism (Wegener’s “Hope”, even as he is driven away to his death), and a belief in some immeasurable, essential spark which equates with that which is truly human in Man, the –

...something *in* me, that even that thing Palmer Eldritch can’t reach and consume because since it’s not me it’s not mine to lose. I feel it growing. Withstanding the external nonessential alterations, the arm, the eyes, the teeth – it’s not touched by any of these three, the evil, negative trinity of alienation, blurred reality and despair that Eldritch brought back with him from Proxima. Or rather from the space between.

(*The Three Stigmata*, Chapter 13)

Or, as Tagomi said – “when yin lies everywhere, the first stirring of light is suddenly alive in the darkest depths...”

Whilst Dick called himself a Christian, his work followed no dogma but reflected what he said was “*my* idea of what (Christianity) is” (Science Fiction Review interview). That “idea” was not limited to a biblical exegesis, and spanned many

different theological and philosophical theories. But beneath all is a passage from *Ecclesiastes* 12; a passage which provides, along with the already quoted passage from Chapter 3 of *The Man In The High Castle*, a perfect description of the Yin world:

Remember also your creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh ... before the sun and the light and the moon are darkened and the clouds return after rain; in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look through the windows are dimmed, and the doors on the street are shut; when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the voice of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low; they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms; the grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails; because man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets; before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.

And yet the grasshopper does not always drag itself along, does not always *lie heavy*, as another version of this passage reads. The human spirit is not part of the Yin world, but moves with the Yang of the potter's wheel in an opposed direction.

In the world of the tree that died, Dick told us of the grasshopper who fiddled:

The grasshopper who fiddled. That was Bonny. In the darkness of the war, with its destruction, its infinite sporting of life forms, Bonny fiddled on, scraping out her tune of joy and enthusiasm and lack of care; she could not be persuaded, even by reality, to become reasonable. The lucky ones: people like Bonny who are stronger than the forces of change and decay.

(*Dr Bloodmoney*, Chapter 9)

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Ursula LeGuin

Portland, Oregon, January 1983

Letter to Foundation editor, David Pringle. Printed in Foundation 27

Dear David,

David Wingrove's piece on Philip K. Dick in *Foundation 26* is most admirable. I only wish he had used the phrase "the Yin world" with more caution or qualification. He seems to accept as standard Phil's peculiar usage of the phrase in certain books, where it means what "the tomb world" meant in Phil's earlier vocabulary. But I think Phil knew that the equation of yin with evil is a profound perversion.

In Taoist thought, of course, the negative is not inferior to the positive, and yin is not "bad" while yang is "good". Yin is, however, dark, wet, low, passive, soft, etc – all

qualities that Western/technological civilization neglects or contemns in favour of the yang qualities bright, dry, high, aggressive, hard, etc: yin is also, and this may be the important point, female.

There was a while, after *Ubik* and through *The Divine Invasion*, that – under St Paul’s influence? – Phil seemed to deny and fight against the feminine in his spirit and in his work. During this period he wrote an anti-abortion story so grossly and uncharacteristically unjust and hateful as to cause a great deal of pain to some of his admirers. In the same period he wrote that he had discovered the *I Ching* – which is at the very heart of *The Man In The High Castle* and other books – to be totally evil and destructive. This was the period when he was, pretty literally, wrestling with his angel. Small wonder if he was off balance. I would disagree that he held to the cosmogonic myth of *Valis* throughout his life. I don’t think this breaking of the Taoist whole into a Christian dualism of light/god/superior against dark/evil/inferior was a major element in his thought until late in his life; and then not at the end.

The reappearance of yin, and with it of the Taoist wholeness, in his last book and his first woman narrator – the dark angel of *Timothy Archer* – is to my mind a rebirth in the spirit on a new turn of the spiral/helix/caduceus, a revalidation of his pre-visionary works, and a coming back together of the yin and yang of Phil’s own way, on the threshold of death, and across it.

ENDS