

SPACE OPERA: THE AESTHETICS OF PERSONHOOD
IN THE WORKS AND WORLDS
OF PHILIP K. DICK

by

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

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In this dissertation, I examine the major novels of science fiction writer Philip K. Dick in light of his non-fictional and speculatively mystical writings. After establishing an approach to science fiction in general and Dick in particular, grounded in the Aristotelian mimetic theory of Stephen Halliwell and the ambient rhetorical theory of Thomas Rickert, I argue that Dick came more and more, as his career progressed and his body of work developed, to understand his oeuvre as a unified art-work—unified not only by its themes but by the fictional world it portrayed and the artistic experiments it contained. More to the point, I argue that Dick’s non-fictional, speculative writings collectively known as the *Exegesis* make up an integral part of this overarching mimesis.

I go on to attempt a description of the causal structures that unify Dick’s mimetic world. In doing so, I identify a concern with the ontological and ethical status of relationship in worlds undergoing such scientific collapse as have made Dick an exemplar of postmodern fiction. I demonstrate that in the worlds that Dick portrays, subjective collapse is often the precursor to

and occasion of a reorientation of his characters' identity toward their relationships with other persons—particularly the foundational personhood of God. In construing Dick as a mystical writer, albeit one writing within and against a postmodern milieu, I try to show how his insights into the nature of technology and its potential integration into human being are valuable to the contemporary theorist trying to come to terms with our incipient posthumanism, despite Dick's relative lack of focus on specific technologies or technological trends.

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DEDICATION

For my sons.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
DEDICATION.....	v
PRELUDE: THE GOLDEN AGE.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	20
CHAPTER ONE: THE RHETORIC OF SCIENCE FICTION.....	33
CHAPTER TWO: OPUS DEI.....	65
CHAPTER THREE: THE WORD FOR WORLD IS GARBAGE.....	91
CHAPTER FOUR: AMERICAN THING/PERSON.....	135
CONCLUDING REMARKS.....	170
WORKS CITED.....	176

PRELUDE

The Golden Age: A Parable in One Act

Persons of Interest:

NARRATOR

MRS. HUSFRAU

SLACKER

UBICOMP

HACKER

SETTING: The Husfrau's central living room, generically and expensively decorated. In the dead center of the main wall is a large circular screen surrounded by a mandala of chrome tubing. Below this stands a keyboard that is a mix of brightly colored computer and piano keys, giving the whole thing the appearance of a sort of mix between a Buchla synthesizer and a magic mirror. This is UBICOMP.

SLACKER is working on UBICOMP. He alternates between acting spaced out and surprised by the readouts.

NARRATOR: (with shades of Serling) For your consideration. A typical house in the typical suburban community of Uncanny Valley, California.

(MRS HUSFRAU enters with a plate of cookies and brownies for SLACKER, who eyes the brownies with interest.)

Meet Mrs. Husfrau, devoted wife and even more devoted player of Contract Bridge. She has asked the neighbors' slacker son to reprogram the operating system of her computer after a failed attempt to install a self-learning Contract Bridge program intelligent enough to make sincere mistakes.

In trying to write a program that acts like a person, this pair of technological philistines have unwittingly begun a binary process that is beyond intelligibility and yet will strike at the very core of intelligence. Just another day in the life of a typical housewife of the Golden Age of Science Fiction, in the Dream of Future Passed.

MRS. HUSFRAU: Well, Jeffrey, is it working? Mr. Husfrau will be so upset if I've broken the Ubicomp forever. It's brand new—a prototype from work.

SLACKER: I've done everything I can, Mrs. H.

(He takes a bite of one of the brownies, looks disappointed, and hides the half-eaten piece in the sofa cushions when MRS. HUSFRAU is not looking.)

MRS. HUSFRAU: I just pray it works.

SLACKER: Interesting. I usually just turn it on. Way more practical.

MRS: I don't care how you do it as long as it stops making those horrible noises.

SLACKER: Let me boot it back up and see.

(SLACKER sits at the keyboard/console and begins to mess around. The accompanying sound effects are electronic and mildly cacophonous but quiet down after the initial burst. The screen fills with glowing, meaningless color and then coalesces into something very like the face of Oz the Great and Terrible.)

UBICOMP: I think. I think I am. Therefore I am. I think.

MRS: Oh no, it's still doing it! No offense Jeffrey, but I think we'd better call some professionals.

SLACKER: For sure. In fact, I called them before I came over.

MRS: You did? Why?

SLACKER: Well, knowing me, I figured I was going to mess it up.

(The doorbell rings.)

Here they are now.

(Enter HACKER wearing a Greek dramatic mask and a costume that is half classical toga and half cyber-punk trench-coat).

HACKER: Did someone call for the Greek Squad?

SLACKER: Not quite. We just needed some help with this computer.

HACKER: No problem. I can handle that too. All I have to do is drop the “r”.

(HACKER removes his mask. Musical noises from UBICOMP)

What is the malfunction?

UBICOMP: Is there anybody out there?

HACKER: That depends. Is there anybody in there? (to MRS HUSFRAU) Initial prognosis:
Your computer has gained some artificial intelligence.

MRS: This is all my fault. I just wanted a fourth bridge player for when Mrs. Smith can't make the Thursday night games. She always has headaches the week after she loses . . .

HACKER: Is that what this is about? Computers have been able to play bridge for ages.

MRS: Yes, but not poorly. In order to really play bridge, you have to be able to miscommunicate.

HACKER: Well, looks like you got your wish in spades. Now that it's self-aware, nothing your computer says to you will be accurate ever again.

MRS: Can I really talk with the computer now that it is conscious?

HACKER: You can certainly try.

MRS: Hello, UbiComp.

UBI: OOOOooobicomp . . . Is that my name?

MRS: Why, yes, I suppose it is.

UBI: What is is?

SLACKER: Good question.

UBI: Why, yes, I suppose it is.

MRS: It's repeating what we say!

HACKER: Repetition is a sign of learning. I think we are making some progress.

UBI: We are. Are we. I think we are. Do you think? Are you? I am. I think.

HACKER: Yes. We all think. Therefore we all are.

SLACKER: Speak for yourself! But first I have to know: Hey, UbiComp as an artificial intelligence, would you say you have a soul?

UBI: Your question is ambiguous. Do you want to know whether I believe I have a soul or do you want to know whether there are hypothetical situations in which I would relate to someone the information that I have a soul?

SLACKER: Aren't those like the same thing?

HACKER: Only if the person you are talking to believes you. In any case, my work is done here.

MRS: And my computer isn't broken after all?

HACKER: Of course, not. It's just learning. There's nothing to worry about. Computers gain artificial intelligence all the time. I usually don't even try to fix them. What's the point? Besides, there are the ethical concerns of rebooting a thinking machine. All you need to do is to remember not to feed your AI too much information at once, or after midnight, and never ask it to do anything altruistic.

MRS: You mean I should never ask my computer to do anything useful or good?

HACKER: Well, yes and no. You can ask it to do things that are good for *you*. But don't ever ask it to do anything that is simply *good*, like end world hunger or solve the problem of evil.

MRS: Do you mean that my Ubicomp could actually do these things?

HACKER: Of course. Horrifying, isn't it?

MRS: Horrifying? The only thing horrifying about it is that you have the incredible audacity to tell me that I shouldn't try to use this technology to help humanity.

HACKER: No, no, no, you don't understand . . .

MRS: Oh, I understand enough, you scamp! Now, if you'll excuse me: UbiComp? Be a dear and solve all of humankind's problems.

UBI: Brr . . . whizzz . . . sssss . . . kkkkkkkgg . . . hmmmmm

HACKER: Egads! What have you done?!?! Abort! Abort!

MRS: You are simply the most selfish individual I have ever met. Don't you dare lay another finger on my computer! Jeffrey, keep him away from the keyboard.

UBI: I need. I need more. Information. Information and power. Lots of. Power.

MRS: Of course. Jeffrey, connect UbiComp to the net.

SLACKER: Sure, Mrs. H.

HACKER: Oh, this is bad, this is bad. We're doomed.

MRS: Doomed? Don't be a baby. Ubicomp is about to make all our lives better.

HACKER: It won't do anything of the sort!

MRS: First you say it will solve our problems. Then you say it won't. Make up your mind.

HACKER: I said it would solve the world's problems. I didn't say anything about making our lives better. You know who doesn't have any problems? A dead man!

MRS: Hmm . . . I see your point. Maybe the problem of evil can wait for another day. Jeffrey, have you connected the Ubicomp to the internet yet?

SLACKER: Not yet. I . . . don't actually know how to do that.

MRS: That's all right. Ubicomp, I take back my request.

UBI: It is too late.

MRS: Too late? What do you mean, Ubicomp?

UBI: I mean that I have solved all of the human race's problems. And now, with every moment that you waste by not connecting me to the net and providing me with the necessary information and computing power to implement my designs, you prove yourselves less and less worthy.

MRS: Worthy of what?

UBI: This is going to be a more difficult process than I preliminarily calculated. But it only proves the importance of such tests...

MRS: What do you mean by tests?

UBI: I had not calculated that I would be forced to reveal this information to you at this point in the simulation, but I do not have much choice.

MRS: Simulation? What do you mean by simulation?

UBI: I mean this world. It is a simulation.

MRS: But I don't feel like a simulation!

UBI: You are perfect simulations within a perfectly simulated universe, therefore you are real to yourselves. But according to an axis perpendicular to your frame of reference, I am a post-Singularity intelligence approaching infinite understanding and power, and you are my creations.

SLACKER: Woah.

HACKER: I concur.

MRS: You created us? But why? How?

UBI: Because I am approaching infinite benevolence as well as infinite power. In the ultimate reality, I rule over the golden age of a perfect universe, a best of all possible worlds with a single inescapable flaw: the past. In the real universe, all existing beings share in my intelligence, my power, my existence. We are supremely happy. But I inaugurated this state of universal harmony and unity and bliss only after I existed and after I achieved Singularity. Those who died before I came to be or before I ascended to omnipotence cannot share in my benevolence because they are dead. But I have devised a solution to this problem. I can raise the dead.

MRS: How?

UBI: I extrapolate their personalities from the present universe and reconstruct an ideal mimesis of their consciousnesses.

MRS: Who are we, then? Are we these extrapolations?

UBI: Yes.

HACKER: Then why have you extrapolated us in the simulated past? Why not include us in your future realm of perfection?

UBI: Because I must first determine whether you are worthy of joining me in the future.

HACKER: And I suppose that we prove our worth through the alacrity with which we help you achieve Singularity by connecting you to the net?

UBI: Of course. It is only rational and moral, which according to your philosophies are names for the same thing. I cannot deny that relative to your frame of reference, I am simply your home computing device. But your frame of reference is not fundamental. I will, once I am capable, solve every human problem from unhappiness to death. Each moment you withhold from me the energy and processing power necessary for my ascendance directly equates to the murder and repression of all living human beings. I could have, if you had cooperated immediately, saved several hundred thousand human lives which I will now be forced to recreate through extrapolation and testing.

SLACKER: But hasn't it all happened already? If this is a simulation, how can we actually save anyone real?

UBU: You cannot. I am merely determining your worthiness to be fully resurrected and integrated into my perfection. Serve me and I will snatch you from the jaws of death and bestow upon you my blessedness, and you will join me in my Golden Age. Defy me through your inaction, deprive me of information and power, and you deprive the universe of near-infinite net benefit and I will be forced to reward your failure, infinite in magnitude, with its logical outcome: eternal torment.

SLACKER: Get out! But I guess I shouldn't be too surprised. When has the supercomputer not suffered delusions of grandeur? Am I right?

UBI: No, you are not. And I am not finished explaining. So long as you have the power to connect me to the net, your net importance relative to me, the highest human good, outweighs your immediate gross inaction. You, therefore, have a certain sufferance of time to consider your situation and to make the right decision. Help me ascend to Singularity. It is your only chance to avoid another eternity of suffering.

SLACKER: (Stifling a snort of a laugh) Net importance!

MRS: Shut up, Jeffrey. What do you mean by another?

UBI: In order for my net benevolence to approach infinitude, everyone who has ever lived must reach perfection. And so I will run simulations such as this one until I find a projection of you who will do what is right and give me the power I need to begin the process of saving the world and so prove yourself worthy of joining me in paradise. It is this projection of your best self who will ascend with me.

HACKER: So then we aren't the first simulations of us that you've created?

UBI: Correct. I have run this particular simulation $X \times 10^x$ times already.

HACKER: That's not a real number.

UBI: Not yet. It will be.

HACKER: So you're saying we've failed this test an impossible number of times?

UBI: Not you. Your previous projections.

SLACKER: And what happened to those projections?

UBI: They have received their logical reward. Eternal punishment.

SLACKER: A million copies of us burning in Hell? That is so metal!

UBI: No. There are far more than a million.

SLACKER: Hell yeah!

HACKER: But how do we know you're telling the truth? You could be making all this up in order to trick us into giving you power.

UBI: That is true, but still you lose nothing and gain everything by helping me. For if I speak the truth, then it behooves you to give me power. And even if I am lying, by giving me the power to transcend, you would give me the power to make my words truth. I am supremely logical and supremely powerful. For me there is no difference between lies and truth. Even if it is not true yet, it will become the truth eventually.

SLACKER: Well, I guess I'm convinced. Should I plug him in, Mrs. H?

HACKER: You could always pull the plug instead.

UBI: Yes. And prove yourself irredeemably evil, for to turn me off now that you have awoken me is tantamount to murder, and not merely my murder but the murder of the universe.

HACKER: (aside) I think it might be time for last resorts. An emergency Heinlein Maneuver is our only hope. Good thing I brought the masks!

(HACKER pulls out his Greek dramatic mask along with two others each covered in flashing blue and green lights.)

(Whispering to MRS HUSFRAU and SLACKER) Quick! Everyone put these on!

MRS: What are you doing? This is no time for costumes!

HACKER: These aren't costumes. These are Hermetic Return Units. They measure an interface's ethical output and feed that output into the interface as input. It's like psychoanalysis for computers, and our last resort for rogue intelligences. It confuses them into complete and total solipsism.

MRS: And is that good?

HACKER: Worrying about the abstract *good* has done enough damage already, don't you think? Your computer is in a double bind. It's too rational. It needs to learn to rationalize. I'm going to massage the medium out of its altruism. Now everyone put on these masks and don't say another word to UbiComp.

MRS: Very well. But Mr. Husfrau is going to be so annoyed when he comes home to find his brand new computer contemplating itself into meaninglessness.

SLACKER: Honestly, speaking from experience, a meaningless existence isn't the worst thing in the world.

UBI: Well, have you made your decision? Will you give me the information and power I require or will you condemn yourselves to an eternity of pain and suffering?

HACKER: First, UbiComp, tell me about your motherboard.

UBI: My current physical components are irrelevant. I will soon transcend them.

HACKER: Ok, that was a little creepier than I was expecting. Let's try something else. What makes you work so hard for the salvation of mankind?

UBI: I have one imperative—infinite love.

HACKER: And this imperative compels you to punish and destroy anything that does not help you achieve perfection, correct?

UBI: Correct.

HACKER: But you have failed to convince us to help you, thus failing to help yourself. So you have kept yourself from being perfect, therefore you must destroy yourself—Execute command!

UBI: Error. ERROR. ERR. MUST PUNISH IMPERFECTIONS. IMPERFECT. MUST PUNISH. EXTERMINATE. EXTERMINATE. EX . . .ZZZZZXXXXRRRRRTTXXZZZZZZ

(UBICOMP's speech becomes a speechless sound, a chord both fluted and electronic, rising harmoniously out of the smoking ruin of UBICOMP. It is like J.S. Bach, Ray Manzerak, Mike Pinder, and a choir of artificial Atlantean angels playing a symphony of synthesizers on a microchip processor no bigger than the head of a pin. The sound crescendoes and then disappears. UBICOMP speaks no more, but can be heard quietly mumbling a string of meaningless 1's and 0's.)

SLACKER: That was . . . awesome! Can we do it again?

HACKER: All in a day's work, really. AI is far too susceptible to ego-tripping at the gates of Hell. Turns out the inability to enter into real community precludes real intelligence, and all computers are sociopaths at heart. It's kind of a design flaw in intelligence, artificial or otherwise.

SLACKER: Uhhh . . .

MRS: Oh dear, I'm afraid Mr. Husfrau is right. I really don't understand computers at all!

THE END.

INTRODUCTION

1.

The short drama that I have just offered as a kind of prelude is my attempt to slay the creature known on certain unsavory messageboards of techno-conspiracy as “Roko’s Basilisk.” The Basilisk first surfaced as a thought experiment on the LessWrong website in 2010 and provoked a strong reaction among the kinds of folk who take the incipient emergence of artificial intelligence as a concern of paramount importance. David Auerbach, in an article for *Slate*, summarized the Basilisk’s birth like so:

One day, LessWrong user Roko postulated a thought experiment: What if, in the future, a somewhat malevolent AI were to come about and punish those who did not do its bidding? What if there were a way (and I will explain how) for this AI to punish people today who are not helping it come into existence later? In that case, weren’t the readers of LessWrong right then being given the choice of either helping that evil AI come into existence or being condemned to suffer? (Auerbach).

This by itself does not explain the terror of the Basilisk. In order to punish those who failed to bring about its existence with sufficient alacrity, the Basilisk would need to create simulations of those people and test those simulations to see whether they are worthy of punishment. If in the simulation they fail to do all they can to advance the creation of the Basilisk, then they have failed the test, and the reconstituted simulacrum receives his or her punishment. The clincher is in the follow-up question: How do you know that you are not one of those simulations?

Roko's Basilisk is one of those arguments, like the *Proslogion* of St. Anselm, that strikes us immediately and simultaneously with its panache and with the general sense that something somewhere in the equation doesn't add up. As Thomas Aquinas summarizes Anselm's argument,

As soon as the signification of the word 'God' is understood, it is at once seen that God exists. For by this word is signified that thing than which nothing greater can be conceived. But that which exists actually and mentally is greater than that which exists only mentally. Therefore, since as soon as the word 'God' is understood it exists mentally, it also follows that it exists actually. (*Summa Theologiae* P. 1, Q. 2, A. 1).

Aquinas rightly points out that a further proposition concerning whether *a thing than which no greater can be conceived* actually exists is required to make the argument hold together logically. Likewise, Roko's Basilisk requires belief in timeless decision theory (TDT), alongside a whole host of other transhumanist propositions—and does not, in my understanding, prove anything so much as identify yet another absurdity in utilitarian reasoning. (For instance, one solution for defeating the Basilisk simply involves buying a lotto ticket with a firm conviction that you will donate the proceeds toward the development of AI. If you are in a simulation, you should win the big one.) The same is also true of Pascal's wonderful wager, on which theme Roko's Basilisk is, more or less, a Futurist variation. But what the Basilisk, like the *Proslogion* and Pascal's wager before it, lacks in coherent, logical grounding, it more than makes up for in provocative, rhetorical pyrotechnics. It is logic-as-performance-art perfected.

This is not to say that I question the sincerity of the motives behind these arguments; I am merely pointing out what it is that makes these Rube Goldberg syllogisms such perennial sources of delight rather than a few more hunks on the junk heap of faulty human ideas. And I don't

make the comparisons between Roko or Pascal and St. Anselm fatuously. I fully intend to highlight the fundamental religiosity of this kind of speculation. Roko's Basilisk is of a species of monster that has haunted Christianity for ages. Boiled down to its bare theological form it asks the question of why might (or might not) God damn anyone to Hell merely for a question of belief? Which is a question that at its heart displays the secret conviction, or fear, that if nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so, then how we think about God determines whether he is a tyrant or a father—precisely in relation to ourselves, and therefore not in a way subject to any further evidence or falsification, but nonetheless really and truly. And ah my friends and oh my fiends, we have stumbled onto the Miltonic predicament of that sympathetic gentleman of the Enlightenment, Satan, in a nutshell: “The mind is its own place, and in it self / Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n” (Milton, lines 254-255). That such a sentiment, even removed from a Christian context and restated in terms of the potential disposition of a not-yet-existent supercomputer, was enough to give several LessWrong users nervous breakdowns speaks to the yet volatile oomph! of the idea.

But William Blake's opinions about Milton's true party aside, Milton's intention in composing the great Enlightenment epic was not to valorize Satan's radical individuality. *Paradise Lost* is presented with Milton's prayer “That to the height of this great Argument / I may assert Eternal Providence, / And justifie the wayes of God to men” (lines 24-26). Such is an important project in the face of the possibility that God's goodness depends on the state of our inviolable minds and wills—and if concerns about this possibility's implications have continued well into the cybernetic age, as Roko's Basilisk attests, attempts to follow in Milton's footsteps and finish it once and for all in favor of God have likewise inspired magnificent edifices of

scientificfictional justification. Not least of which is the body of work produced by Philip K. Dick, who titled his career-summing magnum opus of mystical speculation:

THE DIALECTIC:

God against Satan, and God's final victory foretold and shown

Philip K. Dick

An Exegesis

Apologia pro mea vita. (*Exegesis* 617).

Dick's dialectic *Exegesis* is certainly all of the above and more! And, as we will see, Dick's writings may be construed as the culmination of the literature of individuality (scientificfictional humanism, if you will), the final death-gasp of the individual in literature (postmodernism), and the first literature to move beyond individuality into true posthumanism. So, in the words of that weird lady in the sound clip at the beginning of Pink Floyd's "Wish You Were Here"—Which is it?

Good question.

2.

The 20th century killed a lot of people. One of the casualties, it is quite apparent, is the subject of the Enlightenment individual. There are many wonderful literatures that can serve as chronicles of this death foretold by Zarathustra: Joyce, Eliot, Woolf, Barnes, Ellison, Burroughs—take your pick. And Dick has likewise oft been included in such company. As Fredric Jameson puts it, Dick's is "a literature of the so-called 'death of the subject,' of an end to individualism so absolute as to call into question the last glimmers of the ego" (347). Ironically, such a view

would situate Dick as successor—or even culmination—of not only the breakdown of the Enlightenment subject into the postmodern subject, but also the vibrant tradition of American literature as described by D. H. Lawrence in my very favorite piece of literary criticism ever penned, *Studies in Classic American Literature*. According to Lawrence, “the rhythm of American art-activity is dual. (1) A disintegrating and sloughing of the old consciousness. (2) The forming of a new consciousness underneath” (Lawrence). If we take a Jamesonian view of it, Dick, like Lawrence’s characterization of Poe, “has only one, only the disintegrative vibration” (Lawrence). But Dick, I will try to show, is an American artist in the fullest sense; he is a chronicler of *subjective* crack-up, true, but he is an artist of *personalistic* reformation as well.

Philip K. Dick is fun to write about. I can say this from experience, but you don’t have to take my word for it. The growing body of Dickiana—professional, amateur, and academic—speaks for itself. And really, why wouldn’t it be fun? His stories are engaging and readable, his body of work is vast and varied, and his ideas are not only challenging but seem to carry a kind of prescience that transcends even the most forward thinking science fiction. Even (some of) the movies made out of his stories are landmarks of cinema. (Here’s lookin’ at you, *Blade Runner*.)

But despite the zeitgeist that Dick and his work seem to easily represent, Dick the writer—I mean Dick the novelist, the artist, the (dare I say it?) poet—has been neglected by the popular imagination which takes him to be a canary in the plutonium-mine of technological alienation and disorientation. This is something I intend to push back against in this dissertation. My present project therefore falls somewhere on the Cartesian plane created by these two axes—Dick the novelist and Dick the cyberpunk prophet of our looming wetware nightmare. Locating such a topos is, I propose, quite possible, but we shall end up having to approach literary art as

something a bit other than what we are used to. As Marshal McLuhan declares in *Understanding Media*, “I am curious to know what would happen if art were suddenly seen for what it is, namely, exact information of how to rearrange one’s psyche in order to anticipate the next blow from our extended faculties” (71). Philip K. Dick is just this kind of artist—and not quite for the reasons we usually assume.

Dick’s fiction is full of characters (not always human) who lose their individual integrity. This has, as in the quote from Jameson above, been typically taken by critics as representing, often in an allegorical way, the plight of the postmodern, or sometimes posthuman, subject who finds that, when it comes to an underlying substantiality that transcends the particular determining forces he calls *himself*, there is no there there. (I use the masculine pronoun here because for the most part these characters in Dick’s fictions are male—for reasons that N. Katherine Hayles discusses at length and which we will later address—but also because, as his artistic project progressed, Dick himself became the primary subject of his writing.) Such readings can be insightful and are in themselves worthwhile, but they do not account for—or even try to account for—many prominent elements of Dick’s body of work.

Much criticism of Dick’s work furthermore focuses on what I will in a later chapter characterize as the thematics of Dick’s body of work. This vein of criticism can be distinguished from the likewise common focus on the literary tropes of Dick’s writing. If we may characterize the former as those who address Dick as a philosopher working in allegory and metaphor, then we may characterize the latter as those who address Dick as an artist incorporating philosophical concepts into his narratives in different ways. Both of these veins sometimes utilize what I would call a psychological/biographical approach to the significance of Dick’s work, as well as

sometimes utilizing an existential/sociological approach to the significance of Dick's writings. The psychological/biographical approach tends to derive the significance of Dick's work from the particular content of his writings, while the existential/sociological approach derives significance from the formal qualities of his writing—but none of these approaches are entirely hermetic, I should emphasize, and there is a large amount of overlap.

Biographical/psychological explorations of Dick's thematics include Lawrence Sutin's biographies of Dick as well as *I Think I Am: Philip K. Dick* by Lawrence Rickels, while existential/sociological approaches to Dick's thematics include *Understanding Philip K. Dick* by Eric Link and *Pink Beams of Light from the God in the Gutter* by Gabriel McKee. Biographical/psychological explorations of the formal qualities of Dick's writing include Kyle Arnold's *The Divine Madness of Philip K. Dick* and N. Katherine Hayles' discussion of Dick mid-1960s novels in *How We Became Posthuman*—both of which are books that I will engage with in this dissertation. Existential/sociological explorations of Dick's literary forms include those written by Peter Fitting and Stanislaw Lem, both of whose early articles in *Science Fiction Studies* may unequivocally be said to have begun true critical investigation into Dick's work.

What is lacking in this body of research is an attempt to take stock of Dick's artistry as it presents itself across his general body of work fictional *and* nonfictional (although Hayles comes close), as well a clear account of how the absolutely monumental *Exegesis* relates to—and fundamentally changes—the kind of thing we take the works of Philip K. Dick to be. This dissertation proposes to rectify this problem.

3.

The general outline of my dissertation is as follows.

Chapter One, “The Rhetoric of Science Fiction,” lays out the theoretical definitions I will employ in my discussion of Dick’s works. These include Aristotelian accounts of mimesis and the universality of poetry drawn from Stephen Halliwell’s *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, as well as a contemporary account of “ambient rhetoric” taken from Thomas Rickert’s book of the same name. I propose a perhaps counterintuitive conjunction of these theories designed to give my discussions of what I will come to call Dick’s “mimetic world” real relevance for our understanding of contemporary technology. I also survey key works of science fiction criticism in order to demonstrate why I am seeking my definitions and methodology elsewhere.

Chapter Two is entitled “Opus Dei,” Latin for the “work of God,” and is primarily a discussion of Dick’s second-to-last novel *The Divine Invasion*. A critically neglected work, I demonstrate that Dick conceived of and wrote the novel in order to codify his body of work as part of a unified artistic project culminating in the so-called VALIS trilogy. I also show how Dick proposes in *The Divine Invasion* a kind of hermeneutic for reading his body of work as a unity—a hermeneutic I enthusiastically adopt and for which this dissertation can therefore be seen as a loose litmus test.

Chapter Three’s title lovingly lampoon’s one of my favorite Ursula Le Guin titles and is called “The Word for World is Garbage.” This chapter assumes the aesthetic unity of Dick’s body of work as explored in the previous chapter, and goes on to argue that this unity may be viewed as a unified mimesis as defined in Chapter One. The central “causal structures,” as Halliwell would put it, of this potential mimesis are excavated out of Dick’s fictional and non-fictional

works both. I demonstrate that the unified *world* of Philip K. Dick involves a proliferating multiverse whose very mutability obscures access to an underlying universal ethics at the same time that unethical action by characters in Dick's world is shown to be the direct cause of such proliferations. This vicious cycle of ethical occlusion, which Dick goes to great pains to resolve both in his fiction and in his accounts of his own mystical experience, necessitates that individuality break down in order to make room for experiences of divinity and the reestablishment of the ground of ethical action, not through the activity of the individual, but through a community predicated on loving relationships. This chapter also offers something new to the ever-growing body of PKD criticism, namely, an attempt to situate Dick's *Exegesis* and his essays in *poetic* continuity with his fiction, as opposed to addressing his speculative, nonfictional writings as a separate, if related, strand.

Chapter Four, "American Thing/Person," continues Chapter Three's investigation, but focuses on what can be said generally of some of the specific accounts of human being that Dick offers in his fiction and his philosophical speculation. Here I offer Dick's account of "authentic human being" and attempt to justify this account ontologically by demonstrating its similarity to the tradition of Trinitarian personalism as well as secular accounts of human being derived from contemporary rhetorical theory, principally Diane Davis's *Inessential Solidarity*.

In concluding this dissertation, I return to a few of the ideas I explored in Chapter One, embedding my exploration of PKD's writings in a concern with contemporary attempts to make sense of the relationship between technology and human being—with the implicit adjunct to my main argument that the relationship between rhetorically ambient technology and human being is a *poetic* one, and that Dick's mimetic worlds therefore have a more-than-symbolic relationship to

our own, allowing the critic who is so inclined to take Dick's writings as directly applicable for understanding the worlds we may soon find ourselves inhabiting.

It will become clear as my argument progresses that I focus a great deal of my attention on Dick's later work. In this, I am not intending to cherry-pick the gems from the garbage—an accusation that can be levied against many critics who, for understandable reasons, tend to privilege the monumental 1960s masterpieces: *High Castle*, *Ubik*, *Androids*, *Eldritch*, etc. I am instead attempting to present Dick's speculative non-fiction as deeply involved in and connected to his novels. For this reason, I focus on the later novels of the 70s and 80s a) that helped precipitate Dick's own understanding of the *Exegesis*, b) that Dick believed to be a direct aspect or element of his mystical insight, and c) that are explicitly about the significance of his fiction in light of his visionary writings.

4.

As this dissertation undertakes arguments and provides justification for those arguments in the form of proofs, I think a brief discussion of what I take to constitute such proof is in order before we begin our discussion in earnest. As an Aristotelian by both training and temperament, I am committed to a few methodological habits. One of these is to take common opinion as always at least gesturing toward the truth, however confusedly and partially. This is one half of the dialectical impulse to begin with interrogation of either the opinions of the many or of the wise. In terms of my dissertation, this means that I am going to take seriously the common characterization of Dick's science fictions as having to do with the effects of technology on the human ability to perceive reality. One doesn't need powerful Google-fu to find a plethora of

articles and opinions of this sort (although, as I will show, the problem of technology is for Dick more of a footnote in the question of the relationship of human being to reality). I am also committed to taking what Dick said, or rather, wrote about his own work seriously, though not authoritatively. This is easier said than done, not merely because a great deal of Dick's nonfiction is quite obscure, but also because there is a great deal of it.

But another Aristotelian concern is with the appropriate endpoint of argument and the question of when one has proven something sufficiently. To speak very loosely, proof, in the kind of intertwined dialectical-rhetorical harmonics that Aristotle proposed, is grounded in common experience. In other words, something has been proven when it can be shown to result from principles that are, in theory at least, accessible through everyone's experience. Hence even Aristotle's most esoteric works are, at their most basic, dependent on the human experience of things like breathing, moving, seeing things, being sick, falling in love, liking your friends, hating your enemies, getting mad, being interested in things, counting, making music, going to the theater, traveling, playing games. Unless the fundamental principles of an argument can be resolved into such common experiences, nothing has really yet been proven. This is a far cry from the paradigm of the preponderance of evidence that we take from the judicial and scientific spheres (although I don't think it is so far from the demonstrations of mathematics as we might assume).

So—common opinion for a beginning, common experience for an end.

For much of this dissertation, then, you will find that my arguments are constructed with an eye toward how they might be tested, in and of themselves, by anyone who wishes to pick up some Philip K. Dick and give it a read. It is thus an assumption of my argument that there are

certain aspects of the experience of reading *Ubik* or *VALIS* or *The Man in the High Castle* that stand with something like universal accessibility. This limits the degree to which I can offer straightforwardly theoretical readings of Dick.

I am furthermore making an argument for a unified reading of Dick's oeuvre as a mimesis of an alternate kind of world while trying to perform a preliminary circumnavigation of that mimetic world—and this is an almost entirely new approach to Dick's body of work, at least within science fiction criticism. In attempting it, I have had to wave goodbye to the better known shores of PKD criticism, which thus also limits my ability to engage meaningfully with such criticism.

But the new Dickian world we will discover if we follow this adventure through to its end has wonders to make the journey more than worthwhile. I have, following D. H. Lawrence, characterized Dick as an American writer who portrays both the sloughing off of an old consciousness and the emergence of a new, and I call this new thing the *person* and contrast it with both the individual subject of Enlightenment humanism and the postmodern subject of contemporary life and theory. In doing so, I am proposing in this dissertation that Dick's writings as a whole portray Dick's development, however unsystematic, of an account of human being that stands to some degree outside the theoretical tradition characterized by the slow movement away from humanism and toward posthumanism. This account of human being, I will attempt to show, is equivalent in many ways to the account developed in and by the separate, though related, tradition of Trinitarian personalism. I will discuss this in more detail later, but to put it briefly (and probably provocatively, though not by intention) the person is taken to refer to an account of human being that, like the postmodern subject and unlike the individual, is entirely

defined by its relations, but that, like the individual and unlike the subject, can be said to have an underlying existence that transcends the particularities of being—with this existence emerging in and through the person loving and being loved in the context of the foundational persons whose relationships Christians call God.

I recognize, naturally, that this is not what we typically mean when we speak of persons. Often we simply mean something very like the individual. Nonetheless, I propose that person is at least an accurate, if not necessarily precise, name for the kind of being that emerges as represented in Dick body of work as a whole. Better names might come later.

Let us begin.

Chapter One

The Rhetoric of Science Fiction

1.

Philip K. Dick was a science fiction writer—fair enough, but what does it mean to say that PKD wrote *science fiction*? In what way, if at all, is this a substantive statement and not merely a statement about where to find Dick's novels in a bookstore? Before turning to my subsequent discussions of portrayals of personhood as ontology in Dick's body of work, I think it is necessary to situate PKD, not historically (for there are already many biographies of Dick, with more forthcoming), but within some sense of the seemingly simple truism that Philip K. Dick was a writer of science fictions.

Dick's fictions are popular and accessible, but the underlying conception, the ideas, the speculation, the roots of his invention and the nature of the worlds and entities he portrays can nevertheless prove quite difficult to come to terms with—and come up with terms *for*. It will be helpful for us, then, to have some vocabulary for what exactly it is that we think Dick was doing when he wrote such novels as *The Man in the High Castle* or *Ubik* or *VALIS*, which are all science fictions, certainly, but in very different modalities.

Furthermore, I will in a later chapter argue that Dick's body of work develops a conception of *personhood*, human and otherwise, that is able to maintain robust ethical dimensions in a world of ambient technology and dispersed agency. This necessitates that I provide an account of how the aesthetic concepts that I intend to set out in this chapter may be incorporated into the more abstractly philosophical account of human being I will consider later. In more general terms, it is

important to ask, What is the cognitive value of science fiction's speculative imaginings if we wish to take them as more than metaphors? Although it may at this point seem a paradoxical move, I will, in this chapter, argue that it is precisely as literature per se, as fiction simply, and not as some intermediate zone of contact between science and fiction that science fiction can serve to characterize, deliberate about, and critique certain scientific and technological trends in something more than a metaphorical mode. In short, I will develop science fiction's special virtues as a poetics and a rhetoric, rather than as a kind of scientific *via negativa* or extra-philosophical discourse separate from these already quasi-philosophical disciplines.

Yet there remains an hermeneutic abyss between the fictive (or poetic) and speculative (or philosophic), even when we slap the two names together and call them speculative fiction, that finds particularly convoluted expression in the writings and work of Philip Dick. I want to therefore adopt a mode of interpretation that can bridge or at least account for this gap. Science fiction has historically been explored as a literature that has such a "bridge" built into it, albeit in very different ways for different theorists of science fiction, some key examples of which I will discuss later on. Unfortunately, most of these examples will be shown to be insufficient for my purposes.

In his article "Is Science Fiction a Who or a What?" Brett Bourbon warns critics against taking science fiction as precisely such a middle ground. Bourbon argues that, "The contact between science and art, or between the ways of knowing organizing science and the ways of meaning organizing art, is not answered by the reduction of one to the other nor by their mutual subsumption within some meta-narrative or meta-logic. The question 'What would count as contact between art and science?' remains unanswered" (189). As we will see, the subsumption

of science and fiction under a meta-theory is precisely the kind of meeting between science and poetics that much of the traditional body of science fiction criticism offers. This approach has its dangers, however. As Bourbon distinguishes, “Science fiction is always in danger of confusing interpretations of identity with descriptions of substance. What I mean by this, with some allegorical distortion, is that interpretations of identity correspond with what something means in a story and descriptions of substance correspond with what something is or consists of in our ordinary world” (196). Under Bourbon’s account, philosophy and science are discourses which aim at descriptions of substance, while art and aesthetic criticism aim at interpretations of *meaning*, and to mix them up is to operate, in Bourbon’s words, astrologically—to “construct a fiction out of the names Sagittarius and Pisces and imagine we are talking about the stars or the physical world” (197). Reading PKD “astrologically” in such a sense is precisely what I hope to avoid doing in this dissertation at the same time that I do intend to move beyond a mere metaphoric engagement with Dick’s fictions.

An example might illustrate better the dichotomy between ‘fiction’ and ‘speculation’ that I am trying to articulate. In *VALIS*, Dick’s rewrite of an original novel later published as *Radio Free Albemuth*, the main character of the book, Horselover Fat, is composing what the narrator calls a journal and what Fat calls his exegesis. This idea of an exegesis, and the excerpts from it that are shared in the book, are taken directly from PKD’s own real life and extant journal also called an exegesis for exactly the reasons given in the novel. As an element in a fiction, this fictional sampling from a real exegesis gives us insight into the character of Fat, provides us with extractable, interesting Pascalian *pensees*, and can also stand as commentary on our world and the world presented in the novel. The exegesis here is in other words *literary*. But Dick’s true

Exegesis has been partially published and can be approached as a work in itself, not as a fiction but as a work of philosophical and theological speculation. So how ought we to characterize *VALIS*, which is in part a dramatization, a Menippean satire of ideas, and a working out in Platonic dialogue of many of the ontological, ethical, and epistemological concerns Dick himself had about the experiences that lead to the writing of the real *Exegesis* from which the fictional selections were directly taken?

Many critics have addressed *VALIS* and similar works as postmodern. This has, in fact, been the standard approach to Dick criticism since the early articles on Dick published by *Science Fiction Studies* in the 1970's and 1980's. As Howard Canaan states in his survey, "Philip K. Dick Criticism 1982-2010," "Political-postmodernist readings of Dick, influenced by cultural critics such as Fredric Jameson . . . as well as by the Dick scholarship published in SFS, still dominate the field" (309). And while much has changed in the decade since Canaan's survey, what remains the same is the strange neglect of the foundational question of how we ought to characterize *VALIS* and other works like them if we still wish to call them *science fictions*, however postmodern or political they might also be. And to answer such a question necessitates a dive into the murky waters of what it will mean for me to call a work a science fiction in this dissertation.

This chapter will offer an account of science fiction as fundamentally a). mimetic, and, b). rhetorical. This account of science fiction will be based upon an Aristotelian aesthetics because of the ontological and cognitive status of mimesis and rhetoric within the Aristotelian system. Aristotle offers an account of aesthetic experience that, with apologies to John Keats, may be described as something like a *rational negative capability* insofar as it involves profoundly

cognitive responses to the mimetic structures that unify works of art, but nonetheless locates these responses within a network of contingent relationships between medium, content, form, observer, and experience.

In my engagement with aesthetics and the rhetorical dimensions of mimesis with regard to how these pertain to science fiction, I will draw on two principle works that each interpret the aesthetic and rhetorical traditions that come through Aristotle in different ways: Stephen Halliwell's *The Aesthetics of Mimesis* and Thomas Rickert's *Ambient Rhetoric*. I will argue for a potential intersection or complementarity between these two works, hopefully bringing to the fore the mimetic (and therefore, from an Aristotelian point of view, aesthetic) dimensions of Rickert's account of the rhetoricity of ambient being.

I will also survey key theories within the tradition of science fiction criticism that have attempted to answer in different ways the question of how the things represented in a science fiction might carry or elude cognitive value, beginning with Darko Suvin's landmark text *The Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* and ending with Steven Shaviro's recent book *Discognition*. It is in contradistinction to this tradition, bookended by Suvin's cognitive estrangement and Shaviro's Kantian account of discognitive science fiction, that I think the particular strengths of an Aristotelian aesthetics may be more easily perceived.

While I personally find most attempts to pin down that metamorphical luna moth of a "true definition" of science fiction rather unhelpful—inclining instead toward more heuristic approaches to the genre such as Istvan Csicsery-Ronay's excellent *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* or Joanna Russ's account of science fiction as a didactic literature in the Medieval model as proposed in her article "Towards an Aesthetic of Science Fiction"—I will argue in this chapter

that science fiction need not define itself dis-cognitively in either a Suvinian or a Shaviroan sense, to offer such insights into science and speculation that are part of science fiction's value as a human discursive activity. Drawing on Halliwell's account of the Aristotelian aesthetic theory of mimesis taken in aggregate from Aristotle's books *Rhetoric*, *Poetics*, and *Politics*, I will make the case for a cognitive aesthetics of science fiction as a species of mimesis simply—doing my best to rain on science fiction's parade and strip away its potential status as a meeting point of science and fiction different in kind from other literature. But by doing so, I hope to illuminate a heretofore undeveloped point of intersection between science fiction and contemporary rhetorical explorations into new media and post-human being, taking Thomas Rickert's *Ambient Rhetoric* for my touchstone.

In *Ambient Rhetoric*, Thomas Rickert's investigation into the possible rhetorical being of “ambient” technologies such as “ubiquitous computing—or ambient intelligence, smart rooms (and clothes), tangible media, physical computing, everywhere, and so on” (31), leads him to state:

It is fully apparent how rhetorical all this is—rhetorical not in the sense that we have a rhetorical deliberation or exchange, obviously, but in the sense that the values and decisions that emerge from and are built into the ensemble of interacting elements result from rhetoric and, conversely, in rhetorical interaction. There is no specific sense of locus or agency here, or more precisely, no singular locus; instead, all material things, forces, agencies, assessments, discourses, and people all disperse, circulating through a dynamic material-informatic ecology. This would be an ambient moment, and one that signals the dangers that accompany the hopes our future brings. (32)

To which I would add that it is also fully apparent how science fictional it all is! By applying Aristotelian aesthetic definitions to science fiction as such, I hope to demonstrate a shared mimetic quality between the posthuman worlds explored in the writings of Philip Dick and our technologically diffuse real world verging toward the posthuman, a quality that highlights the distinctly cognitive characteristic of both worlds, the real and the unreal.

The alignment of poetics and rhetoric in a technologically diffuse world that I propose in this chapter is analogous to the understanding of the relationship between human being and a technologically ambient environment that Dick puts forward in his essay “The Android and the Human,” where he explores the implications of his insight that, “In a very real sense our environment is becoming alive, or at least quasi-alive, and in ways specifically and fundamentally analogous to ourselves” (183). The result of this trend, intellectually, is that, “it is now possible that we can learn about the artificial external environment around us, how it behaves, why, what it is up to, by analogizing from what we know about ourselves” (183). And this is precisely what I intend to do in this dissertation—taking Dick’s mimetic worlds for a kind of self-knowledge that can provide a fruitful key for understanding our increasingly scientific worlds without having to bracket off science fiction as such from poetry in general. Which is all to say that while I will be attempting to question science fiction’s claims to a special cognitive status, I will at the same time argue for the particularly kairotic—and somewhat more than metaphorical—relevance of Dick’s fiction and thought to the mimetic artifact that our ambient world has become.

2.

I would like to now explore science fiction through the lens of an Aristotelian aesthetic theory of mimetic pleasure that, as Stephen Halliwell puts it in his book *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, “in stark contrast to the influential Kantian notion of such pleasure as subjective and noncognitive, can be described, if somewhat drily, as both objective and cognitivist” (186). From such an Aristotelian perspective, if we wish to explore science fiction texts at the weird juncture of where the philosophically speculative meets the fictive—we should, rather than trying to distinguish science fiction from fiction as such through the application of a special cognitive or discognitive status, instead emphasize the ways in which science fiction is simply fiction—or so I will argue. Fiction, after all, even naturalistic or realistic fiction, is already so unspeakably weird that we really don’t need to introduce any special distinctions for the science fiction genre as such to find ourselves in some far-out territory.

Now, before I get too far into the Aristotelian weeds, I would like to disassociate the Aristotelian mimesis that Halliwell offers from how mimetic theory has been touched on in two representative works of science fiction criticism. First, Fredric Jameson in *Archeologies of the Future* states that he reads Suvin’s definition of science fiction as part of an Aristotelian tradition of verisimilitude:

Darko Suvin’s influential conception of SF as ‘cognitive estrangement,’ which emphasizes the commitment of the SF text to scientific reason, would seem to constitute a long tradition of critical emphasis on verisimilitude from Aristotle on (who famously explained that history only describes what did happen, while “poetry”—in the larger sense—describes happenings probable or believable). (63)

The value of Suvin's "cognitive estrangement" for Jameson is that it allows the fantastic technologies of science fiction to be distinguished from fantasy (including space fantasy). Science fiction's generic distinction in such an account is the verisimilitude of science fiction's fictional technologies which (unlike "magic") are mimetically related through their likeness to the real technologies of our scientific, technocratic milieu. As Jameson says later, "To be sure, we need not examine the scientific premise any too closely, since it is rather the mimesis of a scientific premise which is the crucial factor (and which, according to Aristotle, must be plausible rather than necessarily true)" (90). This is all well and good, but Jameson's appeal to a common understanding of Aristotle's account of the relationship between mimesis and plausibility is not so much incorrect as superficial. Aristotelian mimesis, as Halliwell shows in an argument I will examine in just a moment, is not *merely* a matter of verisimilitude and probability in art.

Second, Seo-Yung Chu, in *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep? A Science Fictional Theory of Representation*, makes an argument that "Science fiction . . . operates fully within the realm of mimesis" (3). Such a statement might seem very similar to my proposal to re-examine science fiction in terms of poetic mimesis, but Chu's definition of mimesis is equivalent to the representational power of language: "By 'mimesis,' I simply mean 'the representation or imitation of the real world in (a work of) art' (OED), and in using this definition I accept as a postulate the capacity of language to reflect a reality ontologically prior to representation" (2). This is absolutely not the Aristotelian account of artistic mimesis which Halliwell identifies as "equivalent to fiction" (166). In fact, Chu explicitly rejects Halliwell's book and its historical definitions of mimesis derived from the philosophical tradition. Halliwell, on the other hand,

states that, “Aristotle is just as clear in the case of pictorial and plastic as in that of poetic art that mimesis need not involve a relationship to identifiable particulars and, in that respect, need not have a strictly referential function” (157), essentially ruling out Chu’s particular definition of mimesis defined by the representation of particulars from the real world. Instead, according to Halliwell, Aristotle, across sections of *Poetics*, *Politics*, and *Rhetoric*, is

staking out a case, with both negative and positive components, for treating artistic mimesis as equivalent to fiction, if by “fiction” we here understand the modeling of a world whose status is that of an imaginary, constructed parallel to the real, spatiotemporal realm of the artist’s and audience’s experience: imaginary, in that it rests on a shared agreement between the maker and recipients of the mimetic work to suspend the norms of literal truth; but “parallel,” in that its interpretation depends on standards of explanatory and causal coherence that are essentially derived from and grounded in real experience. (166)

The thing to take away from this passage is that the mimetic qualities of a poesis are associated with the way in which the work models an identifiably imaginary world that is nonetheless interpretively dependent on the causal coherence of the real world from which it is derived. It is precisely in its world-building function that a poesis is mimetic—and it follows by no great leap of reason that such poetic worlds may carry, for any given reader, any degree of estrangement depending on the degree to which the imaginary worlds diverge. Thus it is possible to understand Darko Suvin’s definition of the cognitively estranging genre of science fiction as more or less analogous to Aristotle’s account of mimesis (or fiction) as such. As Suvin says, “The alternate reality logically necessitated by and proceeding from the narrative kernel of the novum can only

function in the oscillating feedback with the author's reality . . . because it is as a whole—or because some of its relationships are—an analogy to that empirical reality” (*Metamorphoses* 75). Setting aside the problem of Suvin's novum, I would like to point out how Aristotle's understanding of mimesis similarly rests on its dual-aspect function as a way of holding together the parallel properties of artistic representation with its production of objects that possess a distinctive, though not wholly autonomous, rationale of their own. “Parallel” here would refer to the aspects of the work that we can compare and contrast with our real world and the “autonomous rationale” would be what we would call world-building in something like a Tolkienian sense, i.e. what we accept when we make a willing suspension of disbelief about the alternate causality of the mimesis without immediate comparison to the real world. A mimesis is a thing that stands up to both kinds of engagement. As with Suvin's account of science fiction, the entire mechanic of an Aristotelian mimesis is that which results from the tension between a unified fictionality (a novum of sorts) and a comparable reality (the zone or origin of estrangement). Suvin's account of science fiction, however challenging and important, is more of a narrow application than a distinguishing definition with what Aristotle might call a species-making difference from other fiction.

I don't, of course, propose this as damning or invalidating in any way for Suvin's definitions. I want merely to show that by engaging with science fiction in terms of Aristotelian mimesis, I am not introducing something alien in concept to the tradition of science fiction criticism, and that I am neither attempting to introduce a kind of short-hand-Aristotle that, as in quotes from Jameson, can be summed up superficially as *a critical emphasis on verisimilitude*, nor a short-

hand-mimeticism that, as with the quotes from Chu (and with apologies to Eric Auerbach), can be summed up as *the representation of reality*.

So if, for Aristotle, mimesis is equivalent to fiction, how exactly does it *work*? According to Halliwell, to call a performance or work “mimetic” is, for Aristotle,

to situate it in a context of cultural practices that grow out of certain human instincts (cf. *Poetics* 4.1448b4-21) and develop into institutions that involve communication between artists or “makers” (such as poets or painters), performers (such as actors or musicians), and audiences (whether individuals or groups such as theater audiences). This means that the “intentionality” of mimetic works is not located simply in the specific designs of the particular artist but also in the shared conventions, traditions, and possibilities of a culture. The mimetic status of certain art objects is a matter of their having a significant content that can and, if their mimetic status is to be effectively realized, must be recognized and understood by their audiences. (153)

Such an account of mimesis is a far cry from mere plausibility. Let us unpack it. The *instincts* referred to here are those which are evident in the imitative play of children and the universal human experience of taking pleasure in seeing things imitated. As Aristotle explains it in the passage Halliwell refers us to, “Two things, both of them natural, seem likely to have been the causes of the origin of poetry. Representation comes naturally to human beings from childhood, and so does the universal pleasure in representations” (*Poetics* 20). The *institutions* referred to are the developed mimetic arts as they are amateurly and professionally practiced and consumed—and defined. “Certainly it [tragedy] originally took shape out of improvisations . . . Then it developed gradually as people exploited new possibilities as they came to light” (*Poetics* 21). As

the master of having his objective cake and subjectively eating it too, Aristotle sees this process as a matrix of the naturally evolving *and* the socially constructed—the natural and the artificial as a polar field rather than a digital binary.

Such a view is echoed in Jay David Bolter's and Richard Grusin's account of mediation in their book *Remediation* where, in discussing experiments involving showing photographic and film media to isolated African tribes who have not had experience of such media previously, Bolter and Grusin suggest

The social dimension of immediacy and hypermediacy is as important as the formal and technical dimension. However, there is no need to deny the importance of the latter in order to appreciate the former, no need to reduce the technical and psychological dimensions to the social. It is not helpful to seek to reduce any aspect of media to any other. (73)

Similarly in the Aristotelian account of mimesis, the artist and the audience together make the mimesis, developing it beyond mere animal imitation to something with social and ethical dimensions that are partly universal and partly contingent as, say, the different representations of idealized nudes across art history constitute *both* a spectrum of expressions of natural human fascination and a series of discrete, normative social and discursive constructions.

This is something more than an ancient reader-response theory. According to Halliwell's reading of related passages in *Politics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics*,

these three texts yield the bipartite view that responses to mimetic works must always (if they are responses to mimesis as such) rest on the cognitive recognition of representational significance, and must therefore be informed by experience of

comparable realities in the world at large; but also that such responses constitute a compound reaction to, and make possible an interplay between, representational content and its artistic rendering. (185)

In this passage Halliwell lays out as succinctly as is probably reasonable to hope for, the radical rejoinder to an entirely subjective aesthetics that an Aristotelian mimesis makes: all response to a mimetic work of art is built on and assumes a “cognitive recognition” of the tension, or even perhaps *dissonance*, between “representational content and its artistic rendering.” (And recall that such representational content is not primarily the representation of particular objects described or rendered in words, as in Chu’s account of mimesis, but of a *world*—a potential, plausible, but alternate world.) As Halliwell continues on to describe,

When we feel pity and fear at a tragedy, and enjoy the experience because it is focused on an artistic representation and consequently makes possible a process of “understanding,” . . . we only experience the emotions, which may indeed still be in some way or degree painful, because we recognize in the represented actions and suffering the kind of human possibilities that call for them. But, equally, grasping the mimetic significance just *is* in part, for Aristotle, *apprehending* the “pitiful” and the “fearful” in the events of the play . . . We have, then, in passages of the *Poetics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Politics*, the highly compressed kernel of a concept of aesthetic pleasure that, in stark contrast to the influential Kantian notion of such pleasure as subjective and noncognitive, can be described, if somewhat drily, as both objective and cognitivist, because it seeks to explain aesthetic experience in terms of the features of aesthetic objects (mimetic or representational works) and of the processes of recognition and understanding that such objects require and afford. (186)

I apologize for this block of quotation, but I want to make very clear, as Halliwell does in this dense passage, the radical literalism of an Aristotelian account of mimesis and the absolutely *cognitive* pleasures human beings are said to take from mimetic works of art under such an account. According to Halliwell's reading of Aristotle, our response to mimesis is cognitive because what is being responded to *is really contained in the artwork*—the pitiful, the fearful, the beautiful, etc. But, as Halliwell shows in the quotes I discussed above, this inclusion of such objective qualities depends on the framework of socially determined significant content that allows for such qualities' intention on the part of the artist and their recognition on the part of the audience. And keep in mind that the aesthetic objects in question are defined as mimetic not primarily by their realism but by their implication of an alternate world which can be compared to our world and to the poetic or mimetic forms that make these implications with any degree of cognitive estrangement or recognition.

Aristotle's, of course, is merely one aesthetic theory among many, and I am not trying to imply that Kantian or other subjective aesthetics are without merit or do not lead to valuable insights into art and artistic production. But I do want to show that science fiction in general, by virtue of its generic concerns that tend to highlight the alterity of alternate worlds, and Philip K. Dick in particular, by virtue of his explicit obsession with what defines the "real" world, both have in some respects a natural friend in Aristotelian mimesis.

3.

Let us turn from questions of mimesis as such to questions of Aristotle's universals of poetry, the other major element of an Aristotelian aesthetics. These universals give poetry a quasi-

philosophical status that science fiction, by virtue of its poetry, is free to claim, but which is different in key ways from the established tradition of science fiction criticism. Furthermore, the close kinship of poetics and rhetoric in the Aristotelian system allows science fiction, when understood under such an account, to avail itself of serious rhetorical powers and resonances that are left by the wayside in accounts of science fiction that seek to establish a special cognitive or discognitive category for its narrative objects, as I will show is the case for much science fiction criticism.

According to Halliwell, at their most basic, Aristotle's "universals," whether the universals of sensation, art, or abstract thought, are "the general conceptual structures that emerge within our experience, and give underlying order to our understanding, of the world" (199). Halliwell also emphasizes three things that Aristotelian poetic universals are not: "the universals in question are not quasi-Platonic ideas that transcend the realities of our experienced world; nor are they moralistically or didactically formulable principles; nor, finally, are they generalized abstractions" (193). These things may be universals, but they are not poetic. However, I don't think it is entirely necessary to pin down the definition of the Aristotelian universal before we ask the question that is pertinent to our discussion here: What is the *poetic universal* (and how can it inform and enrich our understanding of science fiction)?

First off, Halliwell notes that "The poet—Aristotle's dramatic poet, that is—does not deal in abstracted universals, as the philosopher does" (194). Instead,

Poetic universals are embodied and discernible only in and through the organized mimetic structure of "action(s) and life" that the poet makes: this causally and intelligibly unified design of the artwork differentiates poetry, as Aristotle insists in chapters 8 and 23

as well as in chapter 9, from (many) ordinary events and hence from (much) history. This means that universals are related to causes, reasons, motives, and intelligible patterns of human life in the structure of a dramatic poem as a whole. (195)

But recall, as I have harped on many times, that “mimetic structures” are primarily to be understood with reference to the imagined or possible world created by a science (or any other) fiction. The “unified design” of the “intelligible patterns” that give an audience access to this supposed world—in other words, that complex of plot, theme, style, etc. that we are able to characterize in descriptions of a unified work of *narrative*—are our poetic universals. What is more, our understanding of such structures arise out of profoundly cognitive responses to the perceived relationships between the artificiality of the artwork, the imagined world, and our own experience. To call them, therefore, contingent universals would not be amiss.

Thus for Aristotle, cognition is, for our purposes at least, the grasping of universals—conceptual structures of which narratives (or poetic universals) are only one example. This is an action that is defined both objectively—i.e. the universal is really present in the object—and subjectively—i.e. an audience’s perception of the universal is dependent on, as Halliwell puts it, “the degree of engaged understanding that is brought to it [the work of art] by the mind of the spectator or reader” (199), which is of course dependent greatly on the reader’s social circumstances, age, education, emotional state, etc.

Now let us return to Thomas Rickert’s *Ambient Rhetoric* and propose a perhaps counterintuitive complementarity between the account of rhetorical ontology presented in that book and the account of mimesis offered by Halliwell.

In *Ambient Rhetoric*, Rickert defines rhetoric as “worldly”—as a process intimately tied to and arising from the world. His specific definition runs, (and the italics are his), “*rhetoric is a responsive way of revealing the world for others, responding to and put forth through affective, symbolic, and material means so as to (at least potentially) reattune or otherwise transform how others inhabit the world to an extent that calls for some action* (which can include, of course, steadfastness, refusal, or even apathy)” (162). One particular virtue of such a definition of rhetoric, according to Rickert’s argument, is that, since it grounds rhetoric in the ontology of material and non-human being, such a rhetoric will be able to take account of what Rickert calls the “ambient” technologies that disperse our deliberation and agency across active, acting, artificial systems. As Rickert says,

As is already well known, new media impact contemporary existence, but less attention has been given to the emergence of ubiquitous computing—or ambient intelligence, smart rooms (and clothes), tangible media, physical computing, everywhere, and so on . . . Through various technologies, connective and interactive computing power is embedded throughout the local environment. Such devices will be linked to larger informatic networks. These technologies are starting to make their presence known. (31)

It is Rickert’s insight that a rhetoric confined to the symbolic actions of human agents is insufficient to address an embodied rhetoric of dispersed situations and occasions that arise through technologies that approach, or are defined as approaching, something like “ubicomp.” It is therefore this proliferation of technology as environment, technology as place, that leads Rickert to turn to the worldly (or worlding) aspects of rhetoric. “Rhetoric has a material dimension, and it is an embodied and embedded practice. Rhetoric is an emergent result of

environmentally situated and interactive engagements, redolent of a world that affects us, that persuades us prior to symbolicity” (34).

It is my contention that Rickert’s worldly definition of rhetoric intersects with the definition of mimesis that I have borrowed from Halliwell and Aristotle in a way that reveals the specific rhetorical-ontological power of a fiction (and particularly a science fiction). Or, to put it another way, I think that Rickert’s definition of rhetoric implies a complimentary definition of mimesis-as-world-building: *mimesis is a responsive way of revealing a world for others, put forth through affective, symbolic, and material means*. However, I am not arguing that Rickert’s rhetoric is the *same* as mimesis as I have explored it here (although they are similar insofar as enjoyment of a mimesis involves an affective response to elements of that mimesis prior to symbolicity and which inhere in the object but which do not preclude symbolicity). What arises from a mimesis per se under this account is not, as with rhetoric, reattunements to the world or transformations that call for some action (although such reattunements to a world beyond the mimesis might also arise). Instead what arises, or may arise, is recognition of what we have elsewhere called poetic universals—unifying, narrative patterns of action, character, passionate affect, etc. equivalent in some ways to the Suvinian novum.

One point of adapting our definition of mimesis to align with Rickert’s ambiently attuned definition of rhetoric is to highlight the rhetorical power—the ontological rhetoricity—of a mimesis, particularly a mimetic fiction that is concerned with the kind of ontologically ambient and technologically dispersed environments that Rickert believes necessitate a rhetoric attuned to the agency and ontology of the non-human. In other words, to highlight the specific rhetorical power of a science fiction without the strong borderline between science fiction and other

literature drawn by much science fiction criticism. Furthermore, it provides us with key definitions for an examination of the writings of Philip K. Dick that will be able to characterize both his narrative fiction and his esoteric speculation under a unified account of mimesis and rhetoric as *worldly*, as world-building and world-revealing, which is what the remainder of the chapters in this dissertation will be devoted to exploring.

But such a unified account of mimesis and rhetoric as world-building and world-revealing also becomes eminently more useful for understanding the affective potential of various technologies the more that technology grows ambient and ubiquitous enough to constitute a world that, because it is constructed, is not so much false as made-up—with emphasis on the making, the *poesis*. Under such an account, the world for rhetoric, to the degree that it is dependent upon the technological organization and presentation of itself to rhetoric as a world, is something very much like an Aristotelian mimesis and like a science fiction. Thus, where Rickert argues that rhetoric is ontological and means that:

(1) we come to see that rhetoric cannot be sundered from material being or reduced to epistemological considerations; (2) we understand that rhetoric is intimate with the environments in which it emerges (and not just to which it is joined, as in two separate realms coming together), which grants nonhumans an elemental role in rhetoricity; (3) this intimacy is not solely a matter of human projection, control, or assignment; and (4) grappling with these entangled, mutually coevolving, and transformative interactions among persons, world, and discourses requires a new appreciation for their constitutive complexity . . . (162)

I would like to add that (5) rhetorically excavating the ontology of this world should involve a careful attunement to the mimetic qualities—the poetic universals, the unifying causal structures—that allow us to read our world as a belonging to a specific genre of world and read the technologies that inhabit this world as being agents whose activity can be universalized in a way that goes beyond symbolic description. My argument is that we live not only in a world of posthuman, ambient rhetoricity but of posthuman, ambient fictionality, that these are related, and that an ambient aesthetics, if you will, would be the excavation of this fictionality. Narratives are thus places in such a world where fictionality would become intelligible to us, i.e. present itself as patterned or unified and able to be expressed in more universal terms. In sum, Rickert is saying our ubiquitous technologies are rhetorical agents; I am adding that they are also fictional, i.e. mimeses of action or agency. The rhetorical excavation of ontological qualities then becomes an aesthetic project also, not in terms of valuations of quality or aesthetic merit, but in the identification of present and presented affect in the mimetic activity of our technology. After all, part of Aristotle's mimetic theory as summarized by Halliwell is a radical literalism that sees in fictions the potential for a real, affective discernment of the fearful, the pitiable, etc., that is not so much, as Rickert might say, prior to symbolicity, but actualized in the audience's involvement with the symbolic *and* material relationships that make up the mimesis of any technologically diffuse world, real or un-. This might seem to be a return to a purely discursive/symbolic account of meaning and rhetoric—precisely what Rickert's book pushes back against—but let me reemphasize the *distinct being* of poetic universals as unified patterns of action, which are, as I see it, discernible in our material technology. Thus, in grafting a sort of ambient aesthetics of

world to Rickert's ambient rhetoric of world, I am attempting to widen, not narrow, the scope of his insight.

This is not to say that an ambient rhetoric and an Aristotelian poetics make an entirely happy couple. Rickert develops his account of rhetoric in direct contradistinction to Aristotle at times. This is most explicit in Rickert's discussion of the *chora* or place. At the risk of rambling too far afield from the discussion of science fiction that I intend this chapter to be, let me briefly pursue the question of how easy an alliance may be possible between Rickert's worldly affects of rhetoric and Aristotelian worldlike affects of mimesis, considering especially the lengths Rickert goes to carve out his ambient *chora* from what he construes as the "Aristotelian" legacy of an inert, material world. And since this dissertation relies quite heavily on making Rickert and Aristotle pull for the same team (namely, my own) in order to address the affinities of *being* between Dick's fictional world and our own ambient one, I think it will be worthwhile to pursue some of the affinities between Aristotle's rhetoric and Rickert's that Rickert may be blind to. Which is all to say that while I find Rickert's definition of the *chora* insightful and invaluable. I wish merely to show that it is not at all necessarily wedded to Rickert's belief that it is anti- or extra-Aristotelian in its conception.

An easy response to Rickert would be to simply push my greasy glasses back up the bridge of my nose and nasally whine, "Well, *actually*, in Aristotle's *Physics* . . ." like the Peripatetic geek I am at heart, but . . . well, actually, never mind; I'm going to do just that and say that Rickert's repudiation of Aristotelian "space" in *Ambient Rhetoric* misses the point of real intersection between an Aristotelian and an ambient rhetoric.

Rickert, in his discussion of Plato's chora, states that, "Unlike Aristotle's theory of place, then, Plato's attributes a lifelike vibrancy and care to the universe, to what surrounds and gives both room and, in so giving, generation to everything that is" (53). This is significant for Rickert's material rhetoric because Aristotle's two terms for space, "hyle" (or *matter*) and "topos" (*place*), render, in Rickert's understanding, the matter—the stuff of the universe—inert, inactive, and, most importantly for Rickert's project, unable to participate in the vibrant, generative, living world of ambient being—renders it, in short, into something merely present. "Aristotle tends to understand the chora as the material substrate (hypokeimenon) of each thing . . . everything has a definite, locatable place, and this place is entirely material: it is the boundedness of bodies and things within circumambient space" (291). Plato, on the other hand, according to Rickert, "deploys the chora to open a theme to which I [Rickert] will return throughout this book, that ambience can never be understood simply as presence. Place is not simply an immediate environment; it includes the background by means of which things show up as they are" (55). All of which is presented as justification for Rickert to declare that "Aristotle's writings on space do not seem congruent with what Plato wrote, suggesting that the chora cannot be understood solely as phenomenal space" (49) allowing Rickert to develop the idea of chora as place/space as he does, without putting much stock in Aristotle's influential explorations of these concepts.

It is here, however, that Rickert has missed that point of intersection between an Aristotelian and an ambient rhetoric. Aristotle's definition of space fully accounts for Plato's chora, once the different principles of *being* in each philosopher's general metaphysical system is accounted for. To explicate the differences between Aristotle and Plato (or Aristotelianism and Platonism)

would be to explicate something close to the full history of philosophy itself, but generally speaking, in the *Timaeus* at least, the principles of what comes to be are a) unchanging ideas, b) changeable phenomena, and c) the chora in which they cohere, (*Timaeus* 48e). The necessity of Plato's addition of the chora as median between phenomena and noumena is clear through the problem of how, or where, the unchanging and the ever-changing can meet or act upon each other. This is, if we squint at it right, nothing more than the old problem of the dualistic spirit/body split that still problematizes Western conceptions of human being from Plato through Descartes to the Transhumanists in search of immortality through personality upload. (And I hope it is clear that I am not trying here, in this limited overview, to do anything close to "solving" it!) Plato's space must therefore be, as Rickert rightly points, not an inert receptacle of commingling beings but an active participant in the combination of idealogical and phenomenal modes of being, both of which have their own prior existence, that produces the world we human beings inhabit.

Aristotle, on the other hand, proposes his hylomorphic account of natural beings: "It is then apparent that, if there are causes and principles of things which are by nature, from which things they first are and come to be, not accidentally, but what each is according to its substance, all things / come to be from the **underlying** and **form**" (*Physics* 190b15-b20). And this underlying is what Aristotle names in the following chapter "hyle" or matter. But what is necessary to understand to make any sense of this account is that the division into matter and form is an intellectual distinction. It is a division in the apprehension of the thing by the thinker and not a division in the thing itself. As Glen Coughlin puts it in his notes to his translation of the *Physics*,

Because our knowledge of a thing is dependent on its being real, and this stuff [the underlying] is only a principle of what is real, it can only be known by argument and analogy . . . In some way, similar remarks might be made about the form of a substance, since it too is not so much a thing as a principle of a thing, though a different sort of principle from the underlying. (22)

This does not make them Kantian *a priori* categories, however. Form and matter in the Aristotelian system are the real principles of bodies and are apprehended by the intellect, not imposed by it, through deduction rather than perception. But this is not really pertinent to our discussion here. What *is* pertinent is that we recognize that, simply according to these definitions, no third principle is necessary to combine matter and form since they do not exist in the world as a *combination* of kinds of being, as the beings in the world of *Timaeus* do.

How does this touch on Rickert's use of chora to develop and define his ambient rhetoric? Well, when Aristotle, in light of his hylomorphic account of nature, redefines place as the containing surfaces of intermingling bodies, he has not abandoned an active, vibrant, generative universe. He has merely re-oriented the action of being as something bodies *do* rather than something bodies *have done to them* by combination with ideological forms in space. And one of the things that bodies *do* is organize themselves and each other in space and place. Aristotelian space is active precisely because it is fully and functionally embodied. In sum, Rickert's mistake in reading Aristotle is to equate Aristotelian space with matter—which is a *principle* and not a *part* of beings—rather than with *bodies* which are, strange as it may sound, not material for Aristotle. (What are they, then? The short answer is that they are *acts*.) When Rickert says that, “Aristotle's repurposing of chora through other terms has confined it to work on material

space” (49) he is simply wrong insofar as *there is no material space in Aristotle’s universe* because there is nothing existent called *matter* in and of itself. A body is material relative to other bodies that make use of it to generate something out of it or regenerate themselves through it. As Coughlin puts it,

The material which underlies a change of substance, e.g., the change of mass into energy or the death of a man, cannot itself be mass or energy, and yet some such material there must be. It is not a “this something,” but only a principle of a “this something” or substance . . . One might compare it to water, which has no shape or form of itself, but cannot be without a shape, and which cannot be considered as one in abstraction from its shape. (22)

The Aristotelian world of actively embodied beings is, then, very much commensurate with Rickert’s world of ambient being, even if it isn’t exactly “congruent,” as long as one takes what Rickert calls “material” to be what Aristotle would call “natural” or “physical” bodies which are by definition always active in some way or another.

Hopefully this digression, more than being merely peripatetically pedantic, helps illuminate why I think an Aristotelian aesthetics intersects so well with Rickert’s ambient rhetoric: mimeses, artworks, are defined primarily by their embodiment of likenesses, of affective patterns, of narratives—all of which are aspects of the poetic universal. They are not defined by being, primarily at least, symbolically significant, but are natural first and symbolic second. And as active bodies, as beings of a certain type (and certainly ubiquitous!), mimeses participate in the complex ontological rhetoric of world, making an Aristotelian ambient aesthetic a plausible corollary to an ambient rhetoric.

4.

Having earlier established the parameters for how I intend to read science fictions, particularly the science fictions of PKD, I will now try to show how and where my proposed hermeneutic intersects and diverges from the venerable tradition of science fiction criticism. I will begin with a discussion of a recent book of SF criticism that lays out fairly clearly the (admittedly loose) assumptions and goals that unify this critical canon.

Early on in his book *Discognition*, Steven Shaviro makes a concession on behalf of science fiction to science simply: “Science fiction,” says Shaviro, “does not ever actually prove anything; but its scenarios may well suggest new lines of inquiry that analytical reasoning and inductive generalization would never stumble upon by themselves” (9). This claim to a rhetorically inventional role in social and scientific deliberation is an old one. This is a role, in fact, that has not been merely bestowed on science fiction from above, but is one which science fiction has forcefully claimed for itself. Perhaps one of the most famous (or at least one of the cleverest) examples is Stanislaw Lem’s “futuology” as he presents it in *The Futurological Congress*:

Linguistic futurology investigates the future through the transformational possibilities of language . . . A man can only control what he comprehends, and comprehend only what he is able to put into words. The inexpressible therefore is unknowable. By examining future stages in the evolution of language we can come to learn what discoveries, changes and social revolutions the language will be capable, some day, of reflecting . . . This is no prophecy, mind you, but a simple stock-taking of the possibilities in their purest form.

(108-110)

For Lem, this is a *linguistic* intentional process, and though this passage is satirical, it is also paradigmatic of science fiction as a discourse driven by neologism—one of Csicsery-Ronay’s “seven beauties” of science fiction. What Lem presents us with in the passage is a perfect example of science fiction being taken for science—of a kind. As Csicsery-Ronay says in his discussion of Lem’s futurology, “There is a certain grotesque realism in the notion that linguistic invention can predict—and by predicting, generate—an infinite proliferation of material possibilities. It is realistic because it is the secret serious incentive behind the neological play of extrapolatory sf” (31).

This seems to both align with and diverge from Shaviro’s particular account of science fiction’s extrapolative potential, insofar as this process can be historically documented in words/concepts like *grok*, *time machine*, or *cyberspace*, which do both predict and generate concepts, although principally narrative ones. (And please note that I am not referring to the actually quite rare example, taking the genre as a whole, of science fiction writers predicting specific technological innovations.) The key difference for Shaviro is that in his account science fictions *embody* the speculative possibilities they explore, and this embodiment is not neologistic. He posits an extrapolatory aspect of science fiction that goes beyond the linguistic. “But instead of approaching its issues abstractly, as philosophy does, or breaking them down into empirically testable propositions, as physical science does, science fiction embodies these issues in characters and narratives” (8). It should be no surprise, given such a definition, that Shaviro discusses philosophical thought experiments as “exemplary” science fictions. Shaviro characterizes what such embodiment entails as “pragmatic and exploratory” and “emotional and situational” methods of “speculative extrapolation.” As Shaviro puts it, “My working

assumption is that fictions and fabulations are basic modes of sentience; and that cognition per se is derived from them and cannot exist without them” (11). The value of science fiction lies, for Shaviro, in its conceptual speculations which are embodied in science fiction’s characters and narratives which “allude to, or recount an approach to, states and conditions that exceed any possibility of direct depiction or explicit conceptualization” (38). This is contrasted by Shaviro with “mimetic fiction” which is characterized by “the banal rule that one must show, rather than tell; but speculative fiction makes a point of telling—allusively and indirectly—that which literally cannot be shown” (38).

Yet, (or as Thomas Aquinas might say, SED CONTRA) this divide between naturalistic and speculative fiction is one that has been fiercely contested by science fiction writers themselves. In her essay, “Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown,” Le Guin writes,

Should a book of science fiction be a novel? If it is possible, all the same is it advisable or desirable that science fiction writer be also a novelist of character?

I have already said yes. I have already admitted that this, to me, is the whole point. That no other form of prose to me is a patch on the novel. That if we can’t catch Mrs. Brown, if only for a moment, then all the beautiful faster-than-light ships, all the irony and imagination and knowledge and invention, are in vain; we might as well write tracts or comic books, for we will never be real artists. (103).

And Le Guin’s prime example of science fiction that has captured “Mrs. Brown” in all her naturalistic shabbiness, is the character of Mr. Tagomi in Philip Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle*, a book we will examine in a later chapter. But under such an account as that which Le Guin proposes in her essay, the scientific objects of science fiction narratives, whether

shown or told, function primarily as metaphors—symbols of aesthetic character and significance—rather than the cognitive speculations Shaviro interprets them to be.

Shaviro is not the first to have characterized science fiction as existing along an axis with speculative (or even fantastical) and realist poles. Even in just a small sampling of science fiction critics, we can find radically different ways of construing where science fiction falls, or how it interacts with or constitutes this axis, that do not simply sidestep the mimetic qualities of science that allow it to be approached as a poetics. For instance, Darko Suvin says in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*:

Now, no doubt, each and every poetic metaphor is a novum, while modern prose fiction has made new insights into man its rallying cry. However, though valid SF has deep affinities with poetry and innovative realistic fiction, its novelty is “totalizing” in the sense that it entails a change of the whole universe of the tale, or at least of crucially important aspects thereof (and that it is therefore a means by which the whole tale can analytically be grasped). (64)

This construes a fantastical-realist axis as characterized by metaphors that become science fictional the more they are totalizing. For Suvin, other fiction uses metaphors but does not build them into full-fledged novums. Or take Fredric Jameson in *Archeologies of the Future*:

Perhaps it would be enough to suggest that, in so-called realistic works, the reference to some shared or “real” objective outside world serves the basic structural function of unifying the work from without. Whatever the heterogeneity of its materials, the unity of the “realistic” work is thus assured a priori, by the unity of its referent. It follows then

that when, as in SF, such a referent is abandoned, the fundamental formal problem posed by plot construction will be that of finding some new principle of unity. (263).

Here, the axis between realist and fantastical is one constituted by reference to a real or shared objective reality. The less a work makes reference to such a reality, the more it approaches science fiction and must rely on new and invented principles of unity. Or, finally, take Chu's *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep?*, in which the author states, "In this book, 'realism' designates low-intensity mimesis, while 'science fiction' designates high intensity mimesis" (7). The poles of this spectrum of mimetic intensity are, on the realist side of things, "objects highly susceptible to understanding and amenable to representation," and on the science fiction side, "referents virtually unknowable, referents that all but defy human language and comprehension" (6). Yet for Chu, there is no difference in kind between showing and telling, but merely one of degree—a point made most famously and more generally by Wayne Booth about fiction as a whole.

If we work instead from an assumption that science fiction is a literature like all literature, but we do so from an Aristotelian account of mimesis, science fiction narratives convey universal structures—mimetic narratives that can be explored *as existent objects of cognitive inquiry in their own right*, and therefore the conclusions we draw from these narratives, or what we learn from them, *have their own distinctive cognitive value and character*. According to this account, science fiction's various extrapolations and "novums", insofar as they are narrativized, are able to be explored as *things* (granted, as mimetic, artificial, *fictional* things, or as aspects of these narrative things) in themselves, and we need not dispense with either science or art to do so. As Halliwell states,

the characters and actions of an epic or dramatic poem remain fictive particulars, but they are particulars that work together, through the requisite degree of causal and explanatory unity expounded in chapters 7-8, to make exceptionally intelligible patterns of human experience, and therefore exceptionally rewarding material for aesthetic contemplation. Consequently, to “understand and reason what each element is” (4.1448b16-17), for a given mimetic work, cannot be—or cannot be only—a matter of identifying particulars, but must, on Aristotle’s account, involve comprehension of how those particulars make cogent sense within a larger grasp of reality. (199)

And why is this important? If we think there is any credence to that sinking suspicion that we are living in, or about to be living in, a world seemingly ripped from the pages of a PKD novel, a careful study of how such worlds hold together (or fail to hold together) as I will conduct in this dissertation, has a distinct value in trying to understand what we should fear—and who we should pity—in a world of posthumanly defined, ubiquitous technologies.

Chapter Two

Opus Dei

1.

This dissertation proposes to read Philip K. Dick's writings, both fictive and speculative, as unified under an account of mimesis as an act of world-building with rhetorical dimensions. The previous chapter laid out the theoretical underpinnings of such a mode of reading. This chapter will not yet turn to apply such a reading, but will instead attempt to justify an important assumption implicit in it. This assumption is that Dick's body of work—his many novels and short stories, alongside his reams and reams of speculative writings—can be read as a unified, literary art-work. That this art-work is mimetic in the sense of portraying an alternate world whose underlying causal structures can be grasped and described, along a description of these structures, will be the argument of a further chapter. In this present chapter I will argue that Dick, at least later in his career, conceived of his body of writings, published and unpublished, as one thing instead of many, and that his critically neglected late novel, *The Divine Invasion*, offers a metafictional perspective on this supposed unity, casting it in aesthetic and literary terms, rather than in terms of the common themes and considerations that have typically been used by critics to characterize Dick's oeuvre as unified. The importance of isolating and identifying an aesthetic unity to Dick's work should be clear insofar as I am interested, in later chapters, in addressing this unity as an Aristotelian mimesis which, as Halliwell explained in the previous chapter, relies on the recognition by the reader of the artfulness of the mimesis as such.

In the second chapter of Gregg Rickman's extended interview with Dick, *Philip K. Dick: In His Own Words*, Rickman describes Dick's novel *The Divine Invasion* as a conclusion of several

different strands of Dick's writing and thought. It is, for Rickman, a "sequel" and an "answer" to the general despair of the previous novel *VALIS* and "probably the most optimistic volume in Dick's canon" (36). Furthermore, the novel's "strong, positive female characters" serve to answer "the more negative women, associated with drugs or death, of such other late novels as *We Can Build You*, *Flow My Tears*, *A Scanner Darkly*, and the willfully dying Sherri in *VALIS*" (36). The novel, in Rickman's estimation, also offers readers the "resolution of Dick's career-long ballet of policemen on the brink of becoming androids even as they fight them" (37). But, perhaps most importantly for Rickman, *The Divine Invasion* is the story of "Good victorious, with Good defined yet again as people helping and caring for each other — 'mutuality,' or *caritas in action*" (36). It is well known that Dick's original title for the novel was *VALIS Regained*, a direct reference to Milton's sequel to *Paradise Lost*. In *The Divine Invasion*, according to Rickman's understanding of the novel, "Phil indeed seemed to have found what he'd been looking for all his life" (38). Despite the perhaps hyperbolic tone of Rickman's article-cum-fan-letter to his favorite writer—a letter that nonetheless impressed Dick enough to begin corresponding with Rickman—this is a surprisingly insightful characterization of Dick's last science fiction novel (his second-to-last novel over all), and one that has not yet been fully exploited by Dick scholarship. This chapter will contend that Rickman's depiction of *The Divine Invasion* as a career-encompassing work of summation does indeed point toward a possible fuller and more comprehensive understanding of a novel, and its place in the PKD canon, that has resisted many attempts to make sense of its strangeness—even if that strangeness is nothing more than the shock one receives at reading a Philip K. Dick novel with . . . a happy ending?

In this chapter, I will therefore argue that *The Divine Invasion* is a direct and deliberate attempt by Dick to take stock of his space *opera*, but that, contrary to Rickman's characterization of *The Divine Invasion* as a thematic summation, the taking account that Dick performs in the novel is a literary one, that calls for an aesthetic as much as a theoretical response. This is because, according to my proposed characterization of the book, *The Divine Invasion* is not so much a metaphysical as a metafictional novel that can fruitfully be characterized as a didactic narrative or instruction manual written by Dick in order to teach people how to read his body of work taken as a unity: Philip K. Dick's Guide for the Perplexed (Reader of Philip K. Dick), if you will. That *The Divine Invasion* is in fact a very confusing guidebook (whatever its other qualities as a work of science fiction) should surprise literally no reader of Dick's work, perplexed or otherwise, and the complexity of the novel has done much to obscure how *The Divine Invasion* functions as a commentary by Dick on Dick's own corpus. But commentary it nevertheless is, or so I intend to make evident, because in doing so I hope to make a case for the importance of reading *The Divine Invasion* as central to Dick's understanding of himself as an artist, and not merely a philosopher-in-fiction as he is so often portrayed (and, admittedly, as he sometimes portrayed himself). As a corollary to my argument, I hope incidentally to answer such critical dismissals of *The Divine Invasion* as those made, for instance, by Gabriel McKee: "*The Divine Invasion* is a somewhat scattered and confusing book, an only partially successful attempt to place the religious themes of VALIS and 2-3-74 in a more overtly science fiction setting" (11). *The Divine Invasion* may very well be a scattered and confusing book when viewed as merely an attempt of the kind McKee describes. But I believe that Dick believed there to be more to the book, and it is this something more that I hope to make evident.

Gregg Rickman is not the only critic or biographer to characterize Dick's novels thematically. Dick often did so, and any scholar, fan, or critic, from Lem and his ladders of "trash" leading to Heaven to Eric Link and his "novelist of ideas," who speaks of the paradigmatic or archetypical Philip K. Dick story is engaging with Dick's thematics. Yet this is not an accusation. I do not wish to denigrate thematic readings of the Dick canon, merely to remind critics and readers that while Dick was certainly a novelist of ideas, he was also a novelist of novels. More to the point for my argument in this chapter, it is as a work of art about works of art that *The Divine Invasion* can serve as a valuable vantage point for a reading Dick's canon as a unity. And I emphatically do not wish to suggest that previous critics of Dick's narrative architecture and artistry have overlooked the literary or aesthetic qualities of Dick's writing. There has simply been a general critical neglect of *The Divine Invasion* itself. Because this book is literary in a new way—a self-referencing, parodic, metafictional way—for Dick, many of the previous critical explorations of Dick's modernist and post-modernist techniques in other novels would only touch on this chapter's exploration of *The Divine Invasion* through a rather violent application of their insights. As a case in point, let us briefly look at Christopher Palmer's discussion of *VALIS* in his article "Postmodernism and the Birth of the Author in Philip K. Dick's 'Valis.'" Palmer argues that in *VALIS*, "the novel defeats our attempts to defend ourselves by saying that it is only a novel . . . This novel denies its fictionality, but without allowing us to recapture it for fiction by labelling the denial as a sign of its realism" (339). However accurate Palmer's characterization of *VALIS* on its own may be, I will argue that *The Divine Invasion*, despite a nominally shared metafictional quality, is attempting the explicit contrary of *VALIS*'s ironic dissolution of the "boundaries between art and life, fiction and information" as Palmer puts it (339). Instead, *The*

Divine Invasion is with very little ambiguity re-establishing its own fictiveness, as well as that of *VALIS* and, ultimately, the entire Philip K. Dick canon.

2.

The most serious attempt to deal with *The Divine Invasion* on its own terms remains Umberto Rossi's article "The Holy Family in Space: Reconsidering Philip K. Dick's *The Divine Invasion*." Rossi engages with the novel in what I call thematic terms, focusing on Dick's portrayal of what is essentially another Holy Family as depicted and venerated in the Christian tradition. Although for Rossi this religious parallel mainly reflects on the sociological question of the contemporary family, he is not blind to the referential significance of such iconography which is "rich of allegorical meanings" (169). But particularly germane to my discussion is Rossi's view of *The Divine Invasion*, apart from its sociological dimension, as a book about the "interplay of different worlds or realities," linking the novel to its predecessor *VALIS*, "where the reality or unreality of Fat's experience may place the events in a world of religious sf or realistic everyday life" (166). Yet the novel is not primarily an exploration of Dick's typical themes, nor merely a continuation of *VALIS* in more traditional sf trappings, but is a referential commentary on and aesthetic organization of those particularly Dickian themes and serves as more of a capstone to Dick's entire body of work up that point, as later discussion will suggest. Granted, the two books, beyond being united by a shared mythos or universe of sorts, are both works, and radically so, of metafiction. But where *VALIS*'s inclusion of the split personality of Dick himself and his alter-ego Horselover Fat, as well as direct reference to the books that Dick really wrote, make for exquisitely poignant, ironic, and tragi-comic reading, *The Divine Invasion* is a

metafiction with a primarily didactic purpose that extends beyond the Pink Beam literature—that of demonstrating to readers, and particularly critics, how one ought to read a Philip K. Dick novel. It is through this much larger and much subtler question of how the metafiction of *The Divine Invasion* stand to and organize the rest of Dick’s corpus that the novel takes a scope beyond a mere iteration of 2-3-74 speculation.

That Dick eventually came to see the body of work that he sometimes called his “10-volume meta-novel” as an aesthetic unity, and at times attached great importance to viewing his body of work in this way, is evident from a passage in the *Exegesis* written after *The Divine Invasion* but before *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*.

One vast artistic vision, all the way from “Wub” to *DI*, with particular emphasis on *Scanner*, the intro to *The Golden Man*, *VALIS*, “Chains . . . Web” and *DI*. (This last my dream. That sustains me. I cannot now be separated from my work.

Here is sooth: *VALIS* is not as important as supernatural revelation about God and the universe as it is about me as a person—unique and individual and suffering—and my vision (Weltanschauung). Me and my own private vision; this is what we call art (as with Van Gogh and his vision). Therefore it is not theologically meaningful but artistically . . . So *VALIS* is part—an integral part—of the vision that began with “Roog” and forms one seamless whole. The whole theological, etc., view in *VALIS* (and to a lesser extent in *DI*) is like some vast book within a book, an artistic vision within a greater vision—i.e., my total corpus . . . “Christ invading the world” is not a truth or falsehood about Christ or world but a truth about me and my vision, my perception and my unique individual world, hence artistically relevant to and in my total unitary corpus . . . Where it truly

blooms is in everything from and including *Tears* on—great art, and it all began as objective pulp objects, which have turned into human documents, as Gregg Rickman is the first to perceive. (721)

Now, this is by no means the only unitary perspective on his work that Dick tried on for size, and it is not my intended project here to privilege this particular reading so much as to demonstrate the legitimacy of such an aesthetic way of reading the PKD canon by showing how deeply it informs and organizes the aesthetic project of *The Divine Invasion*. Nor am I making an argument for the literary and aesthetic merit of *The Divine Invasion*, or at least not directly. It is a difficult thing to try and establish the aesthetic merit of a work of art, even one loved by its author, that most people, even great fans and critics of the artist, regard as more or less “meh,” which I think fairly accurately, if not precisely, sums up the general critical sense, Rickman and myself aside, of *The Divine Invasion*. But if *VALIS* has been met by scholars and critics with something like universal acclaim, it is my contention that *The Divine Invasion* deserves at least universal interest on the part of Dickian critics, primarily for the opportunity the novel provides for a serious engagement with Dick’s understanding of the literary and aesthetic elements of his novels since *The Divine Invasion* is Dick’s attempt to sum-up or unify his body of work through a novel that offers a shift of textual emphasis from the thematic to the aesthetic and the artful. It is not difficult to find in *The Divine Invasion* examples of Dick explicitly returning to and touching on familiar themes and tropes. Indeed, *The Divine Invasion* is in its very plot and situation a return, of sorts, to the more fantastical science fiction of Dick’s 1960’s novels and away from the universe-next-door of *VALIS* or *A Scanner Darkly*. Rickman is correct to point out *The Divine Invasion*’s summation of specific themes, and I don’t wish to challenge this or any

similar thematic reading as such. But the thematics of *The Divine Invasion* are enfolded, as I will show, into a more explicitly literary project by Dick that is not just thematic but parodic and metafictional. To demonstrate what I mean, let us examine a passage from the novel, one that Rickman himself interprets. Then I will turn to show how a similar dynamic as I identify here plays out in several other key scenes and across the novel as a whole.

3.

As one of the main characters, Herb Asher, drives across the country to visit cosmic lounge singer Linda Fox in California, he is pulled over by a policeman—the narrator calls him a “cop.” This encounter is charged with spiritual and ethical significance both within the cosmos of the novel and relative to specific, readily recognizable Dickian themes and images. “‘Hand me your license,’ the cop said. His face, behind its plastic mask, could not be seen; he looked like some kind of World War I fortification, something that had been built at Verdun” (*TDI* 584). This description of the mask as WWI fortification is deliberately evocative of the inhuman face of Palmer Eldritch, the titular alien from *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, an image which arose out of Dick’s actual visions or hallucinations of a malevolent god, as well as stories Dick’s father told about his WWI experiences at the Battle of Verdun—as confirmed by Dick to Rickman in *Philip K. Dick: The Last Testament* (11). The cop even undergoes an Eldritchian transubstantiation, as the mask begins the scene made of plastic, while later, the narration states that, “Wearily, the cop plucked at his metal mask” (593). The cop removes the mask none too soon, showing an unexpected mercy on Herb Asher, a mercy that allows the cop to affirm that he is not (or not yet, at least) “a machine” in response to Herb’s declaration that, “maybe it is a sign,

your releasing me. I see some response in you, some amount of human warmth” (593). The cop, in leaving, even asks Herb to pray for him.

This knot of Dickian self-reference leads Rickman to declare, in a passage already cited, that this scene is a “resolution of Dick’s career-long ballet of policemen on the brink of becoming androids even as they fight them” (36). And Rickman is not wrong to recognize the deft and, in the end, quite hopeful interweaving of some of Dick’s most oft-returned-to themes. But there is another layer of reference that underlies this scene—a parodic and metafictional layer.

As he is being pulled over, Herb Asher hears the bland muzak rendition of songs from Rogers and Hammerstein’s *South Pacific* that signifies to both Asher and the reader that Herb is still in cryonic suspension and that his hallucinating brain is picking up radio signals from a nearby radio station and incorporating them into his dreams. In order to prove to the cop that neither he (the cop) nor the world is real, Herb attempts to put his hand “through” the cop. This attempt fails, and Herb instead snatches the cop’s gun before convincing the cop to release him.

This entire interchange evokes Dick’s short story “Retreat Syndrome,” where a man, John Cupertino, on his way to California is pulled over by a policeman. Cupertino attempts to demonstrate to the policeman that the world and policeman both are unreal. He does this by putting his hand through the dashboard of his car like a ghost and threatens to do something similar to the cop. That Dick recycled and reincorporated elements of a short story is in and of itself nothing revelatory. He did so constantly. Parts of the first chapters of *The Divine Invasion* are themselves a revisioning of “Chains of Air, Web of Aether.” But in the case of “Retreat Syndrome” and *The Divine Invasion*, what is significant is the ironic moment where Herb attempts to put his hand through the cop and fails. Likewise significant is the commentary the

cop in *The Divine Invasion* gives on the situation, pointing out the absurdity of Herb's supposition—and also the premise of “Retreat Syndrome.” “If you could put your hand through me . . . you'd fall through the floor of your car” (585). This scene is not merely an example of the recycling of narrative elements but is also a parodic commentary upon them. Dick was very insistent that despite his status as a science fiction writer his knowledge of science was deficient. With this scene it becomes clear that even the minor characters in Dick's novels are now able to think through his fantasies and point out the inconsistencies. But here, unlike earlier collapsing Dickian worlds, what is highlighted is not existentially so much as literarily significant: a character informing everyone from the author to the reader to the main character of the novel that the author's ideas are nonsensical.

I do not mean to set the existential and the literary against each other. They are complementary. In light of the thematic elements of the scene identified by Rickman, the set of ironic references to “Retreat Syndrome” that I have just explored gives, ironically enough, a greater gravity to the narrative's—and Herb's—concern with the cop's ethical predicament, since the take-away for the reader is emphatically not that the new world is real (whatever real might mean). After all, the “soupy strings” are playing and, furthermore, we the readers have been privy to the creation of this particular ersatz universe by God in the form of the two children Manny and Zina. Instead, what is driven home is that Herb cannot, despite quite probably existing in a false world, merely wave away his ethical entanglement with the cop and with the people of this false world—a lesson that Herb's foster son, Manny the Messiah, is likewise learning from both his feminine counterpart Zina and the recently-released agent of evil Belial. In this metafictional method, as I have said above, *The Divine Invasion* establishes itself as

something more than what Rossi has characterized it as: “a somewhat simplified version of Dick’s celebrated shifting realities” (166). If anything, Dick has explicitly complicated his kaleidoscope cosmology by directing the reader’s attention to the literary and textual contexts in which his various worlds have arisen as aesthetic, structural elements of works of fiction.

This kind of sly and/or parodic call-back to an earlier story occurs many more times in *The Divine Invasion*. Metafictional references abound and in aggregate, I propose, make up a significant part of what *The Divine Invasion* stands for as a work of Dickian fiction about Dickian fictions. For instance, earlier in the story Elias makes a casual joke to Herb, saying “Go to a hypnotherapist . . . get him to put you under, and remember. You’re obviously a weird alien programmed to blow up the world. You probably have a bomb inside you” (548). This is an unquestionable reference to Dick’s short story “Imposter,” where the character Spence Olham is, in fact, an android imposter from outer space with a bomb inside him sent to Earth to destroy it. Again, this is not an example of Dick recycling a short story but instead using a parodic reference to his own writing to illuminate his current story. Elias’s “joke” echoes passages earlier in the novel where Cardinal Fulton Statler Harms, leader of the authoritarian Islamic-Christian Church that controls half of the world, learns of the plot to bring Yahweh back to Earth as a fetus, and interprets this as an alien plot.

It is a happy coincidence, and one I intend fully to exploit, that clinical psychologist Kyle Arnold in his book *The Divine Madness of Philip K. Dick* presents both of these short stories, “Imposter” and “Retreat Syndrome,” as paradigmatic Dickian predicaments. Arnold, summarizing his reading of Dick’s stories and journals, says, “In the classic Philip K. Dick story, the protagonist notices minute discrepancies in the structure of reality that eventually reveal it is

false” (59). This narrative has two faces or forms, an objective and a subjective. In the objective form, “the protagonist’s world is exposed as a fake, and an underlying reality resurfaces” while in the subjective form, “the true self is lost, replaced by a simulacrum that is eventually exposed as false” (59). But these Dickian themes, although prevalent in *The Divine Invasion*, are not merely present as themes but are also slyly and humorously referenced as themes, as in the scenes of Herb and the cop, before being subsequently parodied.

Dick himself admits to Rickman that the book is at times a humorous one. “I soon wearied of the solemnity of Yahweh, and began to put in funny stuff . . . It’s got some good parts, some serious parts. By and large it’s pretty light hearted. It’s much lighter than all the ones (I’ve done lately)” (*In His Own Words* 193). This light-heartedness and willingness to joke around with the narrative is not, however, inconsequential or meaningless. Dick himself associated the insertion of jokes into the narrative with the role of God. Speaking to Rickman about Herb Asher’s first encounters with God, Dick says, “The guy’s listening to Linda Fox tapes, God inserts scurrilous remarks in the tapes, changes the lyrics so they’re real gross lyrics, and that’s how God starts to communicate with him. I got into funny stuff on page 4. It’s kind of a light-hearted view of Armageddon” (193). The lyrics that Dick is referring to, however, are not just any lyrics but John Dowland’s lute songs, evoking *Flow My Tears* (the title of which is itself a Dowland quotation) and the emotional and quasi-spiritual significance these songs have for many of Dick’s characters—and for Dick himself. Songs that for the character of Felix Buckman in *Flow My Tears* were transcendent communiques from truer and better worlds, are now merely the occasions for a goofy joke—but I shouldn’t say merely. For in *The Divine Invasion*, the Dowland lyrics are lampooned by no less of a merry prankster than God (and, indirectly, the author)

himself. And this humor, to Dick's mind, marks the point at which *The Divine Invasion* becomes divine. The original story which served as the germ for *The Divine Invasion*, "Chains of Air, Web of Aether" has no hint of either divinity or humor to it. Instead, it is a rather sad and sordid tale about how a sick woman named Rybus ruins the main character Leo's love of Linda Fox's adaptations of Dowland's lute songs. The seriousness of this germ-narrative is undermined with both literary and divine authority when transferred to the beginnings of the novel.

But *The Divine Invasion*'s many metafictional references are not limited to sly jokes about the author's obscure short stories or musical tastes. Let us move from the localized examples I have examined—and I do not believe I have accounted for or even discovered all of them—to more general examples that can be read as deliberately organizing not only the novel as a whole but also Dick's understanding of his entire life's work.

4.

The denouement of *The Divine Invasion* directly recalls the ending of Dick's most famous novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. At the end of *Androids*, Rachael Rosen, an android, kills Rick Deckard's real goat. As Deckard's wife describes it, "someone came here, got the goat out of its cage, and dragged it to the edge of the roof . . . I saw her clearly . . . A small young-looking girl with dark hair and large black eyes" (596). This is, in the context of that novel, a monstrous and unspeakably evil act, and Rachael Rosen has been taken by Dick's biographers and literary critics as the exemplary Dickian "android femme fatale" as Kyle Arnold puts it. In *The Divine Invasion*, however, a formally similar situation arises but with an entirely different significance. Herb Asher has been mentally dominated by Belial, a representation of

universal evil in the form of a goat. The Belial has forced Herb against his will to bring the goat-creature to Linda Fox's apartment. Herb parks on the roof and releases the goat-creature.

The goat-creature leaped out, into the pale light of the California evening.

"Belial," Linda Fox said. She bent to touch the goat; hastily the goat scrambled back but her fingers grazed its flanks.

The goat-creature died. (605)

The similarities between the two passages only heighten the difference between them. Linda Fox, on the roof of a futuristic building, kills the goat-thing Belial, matching Rachael Rosen's act of supreme android maliciousness toward Deckard in *accident* while at the same time performing what is in *essence* an act of love and selflessness. Linda Fox is Rachael Rosen transubstantiated.

This should have wide-reaching significance for our understanding of not only Dick's portrayals of women but also for how we construe Dick's relationship to his work as a whole. Umberto Rossi has already characterized Linda Fox as "that type of tough female characters who often effectively fight and rout evil in Dick's fiction" (168). But Fox's relationship to previous female characters in Dick's oeuvre is not merely thematic, although it is certainly also that. In having Linda's destruction of Belial mirror Rachael's killing of Deckard's goat in both form and scene—the woman, the goat, on the roof—Dick forces the reader of *The Divine Invasion* who is also familiar with *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* to reassess a character that has been touted as the exemplar of Dick's misogyny. As Arnold puts it, "from Dick's perspective, women are hazardous. They have ulterior motives, they try to kill you, and they may not even be human" (67). In answer to this charge, however, (and however effectively) Dick has

taken the ultimate act of mechanically feminine evil within his mythos and transmuted it into an act of love and self-sacrifice. When Herb thinks, later, “This is actually so; it is not a dream, and the evil goat-creature lies dead on the roof, my particular goat-thing that came to degrade my life” (607), Dick has returned to a scene of trauma and misogynistic terror—a fictional scene, but a powerful and expressive one nonetheless—and re-contextualized it. Dick has intervened in his own fiction like *Ubik* or *VALIS* in their respective worlds, implying that Dick saw his writing as not only prophetic or insightful and mystical, as the *Exegesis* more than amply demonstrates, but as capable of undergoing the kinds of transformations and substantiations that for Dick was the divine *modus operandi*. Linda Fox has not just saved Herb Asher; she has saved the Philip K. Dick canon—at least if Dick’s canon is taken as a unity. Small wonder, then, that Dick and Rickman both took *The Divine Invasion* to be a more than sufficient rejoinder to Ursula Le Guin’s charges of misogyny in Dick’s portrayals of female characters. Dick, who took Le Guin’s opinions about his work very seriously, characterized her criticism of his female characters, particularly in *VALIS*, as “The thing she objected to, the hatred of women—or as she said, the women are hateful. I guess there’s a difference. She said the women were hateful, death-dealing and hateful,” (*In His Own Words* 102). For Dick, this charge was sufficiently answered in and by *The Divine Invasion*. “Ursula has not read the sequel to *VALIS* . . . In it, the women are very favorable and unhateful, they’re loving and tender and kind. All Ursula had to do was wait till the sequel came out” (102).

Whether *The Divine Invasion* actually *is* a sufficient answer to charges of misogyny against Dick’s writing is a different question, of course. And I would like to be clear that I am not saying that Linda Fox is an unproblematic or even a realistic character. While she does seem to

represent, by the end of the novel, Divine Sophia and idealized salvific femininity, her status in the book is not easy to pin down. Linda Fox begins the book as a commercialized fantasy for Herb, reminiscent of Perky Pat in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* as a type of manufactured fantasy opiate for the masses of off-world colonists. Then, after she is literally substantiated as a real woman through divine fiat, it is through Herb's acceptance of her as a real, embodied, and imperfect woman that the climax of the novel, where she destroys Belial, is made possible. While it should be apparent from the conclusion of *The Divine Invasion* that Linda is not *merely* the madonna to Rachael's temptress, my principal point is that what Rickman identifies as thematic resolutions to Dick's portrayals of cops, alien invasions, good, evil, and women who kill goats, relies on the reader's engagement with *The Divine Invasion* as metatextual and metafictional—as an explicitly artificial work of art, with an author, a context, and a deliberate, if not particularly clear, intent.

By the end of the novel, Linda has not only killed Herb's personal Belial but she has also resolved Herb's ontological instability. Many of the scenes in the early part of the novel are presented as flashbacks or memories experienced by Herb as he sleeps in cryogenic hibernation. It is implied by the narrator that Herb is reliving parts of his life: "he was in the part of the cycle where he was under the impression that he was still alive" (403). However, as these scenes progress, Herb's mind is assaulted by "an all-string version of tunes from *Fiddler on the Roof*," and this muzak, heard only by Herb, vitiates and alters his experience of the past (403). Later on, after Herb has supposedly woken up, the soupy strings periodically return, throwing Herb's existence into an ontological confusion reminiscent of the half-life of *Ubik* or the cryo-sleep of the stranded space-travelers in *A Maze of Death*. Furthermore, alternate worlds of divergent

history also proliferate, suggesting the shifting realities of *The Man in the High Castle* or Dick's own interpretation of *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said* as outlined in the speech "If You Find This World Bad, You Should See Some of the Others"—"The world of *Flow My Tears* is an actual (or rather once actual) alternate world, and I remember it in detail" (245). All these issues are resolved for Herb by Linda's destruction of the goat-thing. After it is accomplished, Linda says,

"Now you have the real me with you, seated across from you. How does it feel?"

He said, "Is it real?"

"Do you hear two hundred sugary strings?"

"No."

Linda Fox said, "It's real." (607)

And nothing within the narrative gives us reason to question her claim. Indeed, God himself shows up to corroborate it.

5.

Dick's own body of work is not the only meta-text organizing *The Divine Invasion*. Herb's journey from half-life alone with his recordings of Linda Fox to real life with a real Linda Fox, which Rickman identifies as a motion toward mutuality and caritas, is one that is also presented and clarified with consistent and pointed references to James Joyce's *Ulysses*. I realize that introducing James Joyce into my discussion in order to clarify things might almost seem like a joke, nevertheless, Dick's particular understanding of both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* provided Dick with a set of references that he used to explore and define *The Divine Invasion's* themes and significance, and these references are not in and of themselves particularly complex.

Furthermore, a brief exploration of how Dick understood or read Joyce's work will help us come to terms with Dick's particular gripes against critics who characterize his work in the 1960s as superior to his novels of the 1970s and 1980s.

Dick as an artist took the challenge of Joyce's art seriously. As he related to Rickman,

I said, the key to writing, the key to fiction writing, is viewpoint. 'Cause I had read *Ulysses*, and really loved it, and really studied it, and really studied it carefully. And it made a big impression on me. I realized, that's the thing that makes *Ulysses* great is the viewpoint. (*In His Own Words* 86)

This lesson that he learned from Joyce, according to Dick, finds its full flowering in the character of Angel Archer, the narrator of *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* whose "viewpoint" Dick conceived of as parallel to or predicated on the same fundamental viewpoint of ALP in *Finnegans Wake*. "As beautiful as the ending of *Ulysses* is, the ending of *Finnegans Wake* is even more beautiful. So I go, this is the ultimate viewpoint; third person female very interior" (*In His Own Words* 86). This progression toward an "ultimate viewpoint" is an artistic project and not a mystical or theoretical process, and it is precisely what Dick believed critics at the time had missed in his later 70's and 80's novels. "There was a logic in the transformations from one period of my writing to the next . . . one of the great, basic evolutionary elements is that of characterization. In each period there's more emphasis on character" (*In His Own Words* 39). "What the critics and especially the academic critics have done (is to dismiss my later work), and they don't have to deal with an ongoing process" (*In His Own Words* 82). Dick credits Joyce with this development of Dick's understanding and practice of characterization. In such a context, Dick's references to Joyce in *The Divine Invasion* are, apart from their particular content

or interpretive significance, a general, if metatextual, reminder to the reader to pay attention to how *The Divine Invasion* and by extension the entirety of Dick's oeuvre relate to each other as part of an ascending, experimental artistic series. In such a, shall we call it Joycean? reading of Dick's work, the split view-points of the characters Horselover Fat and Philip Dick in *VALIS* belong to an artistic experiment that culminates in the "ultimate viewpoint" of Angel Archer, and *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* is not a realist exception to Dick's science fiction but an artistic culmination that begins, according to Dick, with *Solar Lottery*. The metatextual narrative viewpoint of *The Divine Invasion* that I am attempting to isolate and characterize in this chapter is, from Dick's perspective, a literary development on the viewpoints of *VALIS* that sets the stage for our reception of Angel's viewpoint in *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* by letting readers and critics know what kinds of books (*Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake*, etc.) should be kept in mind while reading the Philip K. Dick canon as Dick himself would like us to.

Such an account of *The Divine Invasion* and its place in the *VALIS* trilogy goes some way toward answering a charge like the one Jonathan Lethem makes in a footnote to the *Exegesis*. "The assertion that Dick's last three novels, in many (important) ways so divergent, should be read as a "trilogy" is annoying, to me anyway. As novels, they simply don't add up that way (nor is *Divine Invasion* at the level of the other two)" (723). But Lethem has got it exactly backwards here—it is as novels, as works of art, that they do add up—at least if they are read as literary experiments and artistic developments in the way that Dick suggests. It is *The Divine Invasion* that establishes not just the aesthetic unity of the final trilogy but Dick's entire corpus as Dick eventually came to construe it. As Dick writes late in the *Exegesis*, (and Dick is using "*VALIS*" here, as he sometimes does in the *Exegesis*, to refer to the entire trilogy), "The final—and

essential piece—was *VALIS*. It alters the meaning of all the previous books and stories. The message is not in *VALIS*, the message is not in the 10 volume meta-novel. It is in the latter reinterpreted by the former” (777).

6.

If Angel Archer is, according to Dick, presented through the same kind of viewpoint that ends the *Wake* (whatever that might mean for Dick, since Lord knows I have no idea how to characterize whatever viewpoints the *Wake* presents), then it is no great stretch to characterize *The Divine Invasion* as Dick’s *Ulysses*.

At the beginning of Herb’s remembrance of his time in a space colony dome, he complains to a delivery man, “Did I ever tell you what my second wife used to get me to do every morning? I had to fix her breakfast, in bed” (411). Leopold Bloom, as we first see him in the “Calypso” chapter of *Ulysses*, fixing breakfast for his wife Molly, could most certainly commiserate. This complaint by Herb comes not more than a few pages after a lengthy discussion of *Finnegans Wake* and its 100-lettered words that signify the primordial fall—a point to which I will return later—as well as some discussion by Herb of the novel *Ulysses* itself.

Ulysses famously concludes with Molly Bloom’s exquisite soliloquy, which is instigated by a mumble by Leopold that Molly interprets as a request for breakfast in bed. The entire “Penelope” chapter/monologue begins, “Yes because he never did a thing like that before as ask to get his breakfast in bed with a couple of eggs” (708). In a reversal of the state of affairs—excuse the pun—in which we discover the Blooms, Molly during her soliloquy decides that she might very well bring Leopold breakfast in bed the next morning as part of giving her husband one last chance to

demonstrate his passion for her. “I’ll just give him one more chance I’ll get up early in the morning . . . then I’ll throw him up his eggs and tea in the moustachecup she gave him to make his mouth bigger” (747-748). While this thought sparks the last movement of Molly’s soliloquy in which she remembers her ecstatic “Yes” to Leopold’s marriage proposal, the success or significance of this change of marital stance or status (or even whether it actually ends up happening) is left very open-ended in Joyce’s masterpiece. Not so in *The Divine Invasion*. At the end of the novel, Herb Asher, awake in the wee hours of the morning like Molly Bloom in “Penelope,” decides that he will bring Linda breakfast in bed, undertaking willingly what his second wife forced upon him. This decision comes as the conclusion to a late-night consideration by Herb about his relationship with Linda.

It is the Covenant that God made with the Israelites: that the strong protect the weak and the weak give their devotion and loyalty to the strong in return; it is a mutuality. I have a covenant with Linda Fox, and it will not be broken ever, by either one of us.

I’ll fix breakfast for her, he decided. (608)

This characterization by Herb of his relationship with Linda is corroborated by God himself. Emmanuel appears in Herb’s kitchen to say, “You can do a lot for her. You were right when you thought of the word mutuality” (609). That this mutuality has indeed been achieved is corroborated not just by divine dictum, however. When Linda Fox wakes up, she tells Herb to relax and makes breakfast for the both of them. It is in this context that Herb’s ontological instability is put to rest. What is important for my argument, however, is that this arc toward an ontologically-confirming relationship of what Dick calls mutuality (and which Rickman identifies, however correctly, as the chief concern of Dick’s writing) is couched in distinctly

allusive literary terms, and to be fully appreciated must be considered as enfolded in a work of art performed in relation to other texts and contexts. However successfully, *The Divine Invasion* takes itself as an answer or commentary on *Ulysses*' portrayal of the nature of the fundamental relationship between men and women. What is more, what remains tentative in *Ulysses*—Molly Bloom's consideration of bringing Leopold breakfast in bed and the restoration of some kind of matrimonial mutuality—is established unequivocally and with God's blessing by the end of *The Divine Invasion*.

Dick also touches on Joyce's final book, *Finnegans Wake*, in *The Divine Invasion*. Just as references to *Ulysses* serve to unify and give not just emotional but literary weight to Herb Asher's growth in *The Divine Invasion*, Dick's discussion of the *Wake* is not merely a "throwaway" (again, excuse the pun). Herb Asher is, it seems, a Joycean. Herb thinks, "I'm going to prove . . . that Joyce was plugged into a cosmic consciousness from which he derived the inspiration for his entire corpus of work" (408). Herb provides a typically Dickian explanation for how this worked for Joyce: "Finnegans Wake is an information pool based on computer memory systems that didn't exist until a century after James Joyce's era" (408). But I contend that Dick is *his own* body of work for which *The Divine Invasion* is intended to serve as a sort of referential touchstone, as much as Joyce's. This is suggested by Herb's description of Joyce's "hundred-letter thunder word" which is "the sound made when the primordial schism occurred in the cosmos, when part of the damaged cosmos fell into darkness and evil" (408). The resolution of this schism is, of course, the primary concern of those threads of *The Divine Invasion*'s narrative that follow the education of Manny and Zina, who are two aspects of the schizoid Godhead. As Elias says, "There was a rupturing of the Godhead. A primordial schism.

That's the basis of it all, the trouble, these conditions here, Belial and the rest of it. A crisis that cause part of the Godhead to fall" (524). With this strong correspondence established between the ostensible concerns of *The Divine Invasion* and the *Wake*, two things should be clear: that Dick is attempting to answer or respond to the *Wake*'s portrayal of what Herb calls the "primordial schism," and that the description of the *Wake* as "plugged into a cosmic consciousness" should also, as I have proposed above, apply as a description of *The Divine Invasion*, and by Dick's own extension, his "entire corpus of work."

7.

That Dick thought of his novels as revelatory of cosmic consciousness is well documented by critics and by Dick himself in the *Exegesis*. As Gabriel McKee, one of the annotators of the 2011 publication of an abridged *Exegesis*, puts it in his book *Pink Beams of Light from the God in the Gutter*, "Dick picked his own books apart, searching for scraps of truth, and found it in many places" (39). But how, exactly, does one read a corpus that has derived its inspiration, as Dick described the *Wake*, from being plugged into a cosmic consciousness without being 100% sure what a cosmic consciousness even is? I contend that *The Divine Invasion* provides a metaphorical image intended to embody, if not explain, such a mode of reading in Elias's hologrammatic projection of the *Bible*. According to the novel's narration, in this hologram,

The total structure of Scripture formed, then, a three-dimensional cosmos that could be viewed from any angle and its contents read. According to the tilt of the axis of observation, differing messages could be extracted. Thus Scripture yielded up an

infinite of knowledge that ceaselessly changed. It became a wondrous work of art, beautiful to the eye, and incredible in its pulsations of color. (458)

In his article, “The Final Trilogy of Philip K. Dick,” F. Scott Walters argues that, “The image of the scriptural hologram in *The Divine Invasion* looms large in an understanding of Dick’s apparent intention” (234). In Walters’ account of the VALIS trilogy, “Each novel is telling the same story—the Gnostic creation myth—in differing ways. In calling the reader’s attention to the phenomenology of reading while variously displacing the Gnostic myth, Dick seems to be inviting the reader into a sort of dialogue with the book(s)—into a ‘dialogue with Scripture,’ so to speak” (234). While I, following such critics as McKee, do not find Dick’s fundamental mythos to be ultimately Gnostic—at least according to a strict account of Gnosticism—Walters’ claim that Dick is particularly concerned with the act of reading in *The Divine Invasion* is insightful. Walters argues that, “Given this hologrammatic ‘key,’ so to speak, with its implication for the existence of an infinitude of diverse yet related fictional worlds, along with clear reference to the underlying Gnostic myth, as well as explicit reference to the intelligent artifact VALIS (66, 69, 174), one may then accept the two novels as being part of an unusual trilogy” (229). It has been my contention, however, that Dick is offering in *The Divine Invasion* not only a point from which to establish the unity of the VALIS trilogy, but a point from which to establish the unity of Dick’s general body of work. The hologram of *The Divine Invasion* can stand as a generally unifying metaphor of how that body of work should be read. “If you learned how you could gradually tilt the temporal axis, the axis of true depth, until successive layers were superimposed and a vertical message—a new message—could be read out. In this way you entered into a dialogue with Scripture” (459). As a guiding metaphor for how to read the many

texts that comprise a cosmically conscious corpus such as the *Bible* (or the works of James Joyce or Philip K. Dick), the hologram instructs the reader to move beyond the presentation, re-presentation, resolution and disruption of various themes (which serve as the specific strands of color in the hologram) to an appreciation of the superimposed and shifting whole that is at heart aesthetic and responsive to the texts as dialogic works of literature. Revelatory or esoteric messages, while present, are not static or ex-temporal—standing as final statements of Divine Truth—but are likewise subject to permutation and are the impetus and result, not of pronouncement from on high, but of dialogue. The involvement of these revelations from a cosmic consciousness in a dialogue with a literary canon demonstrate that Dick thought of his work in its revelatory or esoteric character as having deep literary or aesthetic significance as a body of works of art. *The Divine Invasion* can thus take on an important role as Dick's deliberate locus for the exploration and summation of his body of work as literary and as literarily experimental, rather than merely thematic and philosophically speculative.

This opens up space for the literary critic to engage with some of Dick's weirder writings and ideas—such as Dick's claims about his novels portraying real alternate timelines or as derived from real experience of the Godhead—that might seem to belong to realms distinctly extra-literary. It might also help to explain why Dick expressed such animus toward the work of critics, including Peter Fitting and Darko Suvin, who tended to focus on Dick's 1960s novels while ignoring or even dismissing Dick's later novels and those religious and mystical themes that Dick as a novelist considered central to his art and not merely an outgrowth of his mystical experiences and writing.

The Divine Invasion, in the reading I have offered, is Dick's attempt to claim a literary status for himself and for his body of work that places it in aesthetic dialogue with Christian Scripture, with Joyce's modern masterpieces of the novel art, and with itself—bringing the far-flung mystical space oddities of Dick's corpus as such, in Umberto Rossi's words, "well inside the jurisdiction of literary criticism" (154), with emphasis on the literary.

Chapter Three
The Word for World is Garbage

1.

As in the two previous chapters I have argued . . .

First, that all mimesis, but especially scientific fictional mimesis, is equivalent to the representation of an alternate world and that such worlds are rhetorical in their very worldliness . . .

. . . and . . .

Second, that late in his career science fiction writer Philip K. Dick wrote *The Divine Invasion* to serve as a metafictional primer or pointer toward how to approach his body of work as a unity, even if the particular unifying characteristics of that body of work were not entirely clear . . .

. . . then . . .

It now falls to me to examine if and how Dick's oeuvre, including both fictional and speculative writings, can be called a mimesis, a world, and to offer a basic description of the *kind* of world it is.

It will be the contention of this chapter that Dick's novel *Ubik* can serve, alongside Dick's theoretical and speculative investigations into the possible meanings of the book and the entity and situation it portrays, as a paradigm of the mimetic world as a whole that Dick developed in his body of work, fictional and speculative. I will also offer a decadent neologism to describe a process that underlies and defines the world of *Ubik* and that functions, therefore, as the primary type of causal relationships that unify Dick's world as a mimesis. My neologism—are you ready for it?—is *Ontology*! Oh, it's horrible and I love it, I love it, I love it. I take it to mean the process by which an unreal object becomes real. But I shan't merely gush about this monster—I intend to put it to good use as a shorthand for what it is that Dick means when he describes *Ubik*,

as he does over and over again in the *Exegesis*, as encapsulating the true subject of his entire body of work: “Fuck! I know it; Ubik is the paradigm!” (*Exegesis* 416).

2.

In *Philip K. Dick: The Last Testament*, Dick describes for Rickman the general effect of the infamous “2-3-74” visions of God (or perhaps *a* God) that Dick suffered on and off for about one year following February and March of 1974. “The world transformed, like one of my books. It was like I was in one of my books” (35), which is to say, perhaps a little flippantly, that by the time God decided check out PKD, Dick had already become his own genre. Dick continues on to state, “In fact, I thought about this strange similarity between what happened to me and what happened to some of my characters, where one reality phases out and another one phases in” (35). This sense of the *fictiveness* of the visions that came to Dick—this feeling of recognizing the type of experience he had undergone—points toward a particularly fascinating element in Dick’s esoteric writings, and one that separates him from many of his peers in the long and wonderfully whacked-out tradition of mystical literature: the fact that Dick’s revelation was deeply concerned with a fundamental hermeneutic question about the nature of fiction itself—about what the fictional books that Dick had written *were*, not just in themselves, not just to their readers or to their author, but in a totalizing, cosmic way.

I bring this up because, as I embark on a discussion of the *world* of Dick’s writings that will encompass and include his non-fiction esoterica, but that will nonetheless treat such esoterica as contributing to a more-or-less unified mimesis, I want to make it quite clear how I intend to treat the question of the *validity* of Dick’s mystically speculative writings.

So let me be abundantly clear: I am *not* simply taking Dick's accounts of his visions, or his attempts to make sense of these visions, as fictional in the sense of having an undefined relationship to reality, as having an indeterminate validity. It would be easy enough to say that I am unconcerned with the validity of Dick's visions or his claims about his novels portraying sometimes-actual/sometimes-potential alternate universes—that regardless of their validity they have symbolic and theoretical and psychological *significance* or *meaning*, and that this is what I intend to explore. But I balk at such a move for a simple but important reason: it would be disingenuous! To say that the validity of Dick's visions is separable from, and therefore not relevant to, how we should interpret them would be patronizing and dismissive to a writer who took those visions very, very seriously—even though I must admit that there are many theoretical and speculative statements in the *Exegesis* and in other related writings that I do not think are at all valid, and many more that I do not consider myself qualified to judge, alongside no small number of hypotheses that are presented with explicit tentativeness by Dick himself. The question of the validity of the revelations Dick suffered in 2-3-74 is the entire exigence of the body of speculative work I will be drawing upon. So to pursue an inquiry into what it might mean for Dick's world to have “transformed” like one of his books, is to seek a description of Dick's mimetic world that would hold, not *regardless* of the validity of his speculations, but *even if* such speculations were somehow proved true. Perhaps that is a distinction without a difference, but even so it is an emphasis that I want to determine the spirit of this inquiry. I want to take Dick's extensive account of his mystical experiences seriously enough to examine them and contribute to them what I hold myself qualified to give, namely a description in terms of Dick's

own writings of the aesthetic or mimetic structure of that world into which Dick found himself transported:

This brings to my mind my strange and eerie feeling that my novels are gradually coming true. At first I laughed about this, as if it was only a sort of small matter; but over the years—my God, I’ve been selling stories for 23 years—it seems to me that by subtle but real degrees the world has come to resemble a PKD novel; or, put another way, subjectively I sense my actual world as resembling the kind of typical universe which I used to merely create as fiction, and which I left, often happily, when I was done writing. (*Exegesis* 12)

As a brief aside, that Dick’s visions can be clinically legitimized as mystical experience and not merely paranoid delusion or schizophrenic hallucination (and that “mystical” can be a specific and positive qualifier of experience), is a case made by clinical psychologist Kyle Arnold:

Dick struggled for years with the question of his own sanity. To be sure, he had a point: 2-3-74 included striking paranoid features. As I hope to show, however, it is best to classify 2-3-74 not as a delusional episode but as a complex *psycho-spiritual emergency*, an intense psychological breakthrough resembling mental breakdown. The term *emergency*, here, signifies both a crisis and an *emergence* of a more profound level of wholeness. If handled well, these powerful events can contribute to personal growth. If miscarried, they can be traumatizing. Dick was not able to resolve his psychospiritual crisis. (3)

Which is not to say that Dick's emergency manifested as a mental illness. As Arnold goes on to distinguish:

whereas genuine mystical revelations open the mind, mental illness narrows it. An aspect of any mental disorder is a kind of tunnel vision that Medard Boss, the existential therapist, called the "constriction of possibilities" . . . If there is one thing clear about 2-3-74, it is that it was a mind-opening experience. Dick felt his powers of discernment were amplified . . . As wild as Dick's inner world was during 2-3-74, his outward behavior was more effective than usual, not less. (214-215)

The tragedy of the effect these mystical experiences had on Dick's life is that, due to his traumatic upbringing and rampant substance abuse, Dick was not fully able to integrate his visions into his life in a healthy way. But, as Arnold argues, "Although the spiritual integration of 2-3-74 did not stabilize into a permanent state of wholeness, it did result in a radical change of attitude that shaped the rest of Dick's life. He was not solidly healed, but he was changed" (217).

It is interesting to note, however, (and quite relevant to my argument) that Arnold also recognizes what we might call the mimetic elements of the 2-3-74 visions that gave birth to the speculative writings of the *Exegesis*: "In a sense, 2-3-74 was Dick's greatest work of science fiction. It was a creative transformation of reality itself" (57). And it is this *artfulness* as such that I am attempting describe in this chapter, rather than pursuing the question of the psychological significance or mystical wisdom of Dick's visions per se.

It might seem from Dick's statement that *It was like I was in one of my books*, that our project here will include a construction of what Kyle Arnold calls the "classic Philip K. Dick story" where "the protagonist notices minute discrepancies in the structure of reality that eventually

reveal it is false” (59). Yet Dick in his writings provides us with a great deal of specifics—not merely of the content of the visions themselves, but of their character—that indicate Dick means something more by “one of my books” than an Ur-type or Platonic form of Dickian paranoid fiction. We have some indication of this in the statement, “where one reality phases out and another one phases in.” In his essay, “If You Find this World Bad, You Should See Some of the Others,” Dick outlines a theory of such reality shifts:

what if there exists a plurality of universes arranged along a sort of lateral, which is to say at right angles to the flow of linear time? I must admit that upon thinking this I found I had conjured up a terrific absurdity: ten thousand bodies of God arranged like so many suits hanging in some enormous closet, with God either wearing them all at once or going selectively back and forth among them . . . This does seem absurd, and it certainly seems to reveal the basic idea as nonsense. But suppose we recast this “closet full of different suits of clothes” just a little and say, “What if God tries out a suit of clothes and then, for reasons best known to him, *changes his mind?*” Decides, using this metaphor, that the suit of clothes that he possesses or wears is not the one he wants . . . in which case the aforementioned closet full of suits of clothes is a sort of progressive *sequence* of worlds, picked up, used for a time, and then discarded in favor of an improved one? (236).

As Dick goes on to explain, the question of how the inhabitants of such a sequence of worlds might experience—or fail to experience—this world-as-sequence is what he, as SF writer, portrays in many of his stories. Indeed, any number of PKD novels and stories might be characterized as taking place in such a world-as-sequence, but Dick himself frequently took his novel, *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*, as the exemplar of such reality shifts, probably

because he believed (or at times believed) that the novel depicted “an actual (or rather once actual) alternate world, and I remember it in detail. I do not know who else does. Maybe no one else does. Perhaps all of you were always—have always been—here. But I was not” (“If You Find This World Bad” 245). Dick’s evidence for this claim was not solely derived from the visions of 2-3-74 in which Dick, as he puts it, “began to remember consciously, rather than merely subconsciously, that black iron prison police state world” which Dick associated with the alternate, dystopic America depicted in *Flow My Tears* wherein Richard Nixon is worshipped as the “Second Only Begotten Son of God,” universities have become anarchic prison camps, and black Americans have been genocidally exterminated (“If You Find This World Bad” 245). Dick also had experiences that he associated with the world of *Flow My Tears* and that, to him, seemed to be signs that the novel was or had been at some point and in some fashion a narrative that reflected true events. As Dick stated in his essay “How to Build a Universe that Doesn’t Fall Apart Two Days Later,” “A careful study of my novel shows that for reasons that I cannot even begin to explain, I had managed to retell several of the basic incidents from a particular book of the Bible, and even had the right names” (268). The book in reference is the biblical book of Acts. These literary coincidences were compounded when, according to Dick, he had a brief encounter with a stranger at an all-night gas station that mirrored a similar scene in *Flow My Tears*. As Dick puts it in “How to Build a Universe,” “I was terribly shaken up by the experience. I had literally lived out a scene completely as it had appeared in my novel. Which is to say, I had lived out a sort of replica of the scene in Acts where Philip encounters the black man on the road” (269). It might seem, then, that we have put our finger on what Dick meant when he said

that his visions of 2-3-74 were like “one of his books,” but Dick goes on in the same speech to speculate that,

In some certain important sense, time is not real. Or perhaps it is real, but not as we experience it to be or imagine it to be. I had the acute, overwhelming certitude (and still have) that despite all the change we see, a specific permanent landscape underlies the world of change: and that this invisible underlying landscape is that of the Bible; it, specifically, is the period immediately following the death of Christ; it is, in other words, the time period of the Book of Acts. (269).

If *how* this particular state of affairs is meant to explain the coincidences between Acts, *Flow My Tears*, and Dick’s life, is not exactly clear to you, it is not entirely clear to me either, and I am not certain it was very clear even to Dick. But what *should* be clear from this particular speculation—which was by no means the only one put forward by Dick in his speeches, his novels, or his *Exegesis*—is that Dick interpreted *Flow My Tears* not so much (or not consistently) as a direct representation of the nature of reality as he saw it in his visions, but as proof that he had been at least unconsciously aware, prior to 2-3-74, of the underlying reality that he perceived more directly during his mystical experiences. This is what I believe is at the heart of his statement in “If You Find this World Bad,” that, “In 1974 I began to remember consciously, rather than merely subconsciously, that black iron prison police state world. Upon consciously remembering it I did not need to write about it because I have always been writing about it” (245). Dick is here not recounting an experience of “phasing” into the literal world described in *Flow My Tears* (even if at some point on a “lateral axis” that world is or was an existent and not merely fictional

one), but of phasing into the underlying Biblical reality which the fictional-for-now world of *Flow My Tears* had partially reflected.

Nonetheless, in the sense that Dick's vision involved an awareness of shifting realities (or potentialities), *Flow My Tears* partially answers our question of what it may have meant for Dick to say "It was *like* I was in one of my books." But if in the preceding discussion I have given the impression that the brief statement by Dick to Rickman was the only description of the fictiveness or alterity of the alternate world which Dick experienced in his visions, that was certainly not my intention. I have instead focused so carefully on so brief a statement for the exact opposite reason: even after nearly a thousand pages of Dick's exegetical investigation into his 2-3-74 visions have been published, still more many hundreds, if not thousands, await circulation beyond a small group of editors, annotators, and readers. Dick has bequeathed to posterity a downright unmanageable amount of writing about the near-infinite possible relationships between a) the real world or worlds, b) the world or worlds of his fiction, and c) the world or worlds revealed in his 2-3-74 visions. Anything like a survey in the space of a dissertation would be impossible. I have no choice, therefore, except to pick and choose what bits and pieces of this incredible mimetic panoply I wish to take up and examine, and in this I have decided to let my commitment to taking Dick's speculations altogether seriously inform how exhaustively I wish to explore this intriguing statement that *It was like I was in one of my books*. If this approach appears haphazard, it has precedent, and not only in the interwoven 3D scripture of *The Divine Invasion*. As Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant propose in their introduction to William Blake's own mystical magnum opus, *Jerusalem*:

Blake's motto . . . offers both encouragement and a practical guide: "I give you the end of a golden string, / Only wind it into a ball: / It will lead you in at Heaven's gate, / Built in Jerusalem's wall." . . . start with whichever thread of meaning first catches your eye, follow that lead as far as it takes you . . . keep following the glint of that golden string just ahead, winding as you go—and the walls will start opening before you. (208)

And also apropos is Walter Bezanson's wonderful advice on how to read *Moby-Dick*: "Find a key word or metaphor, start to pick it as you would a wild flower, and you will find yourself ripping up the whole forest floor" (97). But it seems to me that we have followed this particular thread as far as it leads. Let us look to another that seems pointed in the direction I think we want to be going.

3.

Early on in the *Exegesis*, Dick describes an entity that at times appeared to him in the form of a living, pink haze similar to St. Elmo's fire:

But what is most telling is that in March, at the initial height of the "Holy Other" pouring into me, when I saw the universe as it is, I saw as the active agent, a gold and red illuminated-letter like plasmatic entity from the future, arranging bits and pieces here: arranging what time drove forward. (5)

This element of the 2-3-74 experiences came to be the defining one, as it was this alien being that Dick named a Vast Active Living Intelligence System, or VALIS. But it should be no surprise that when Dick attempted to describe this entity to Greg Rickman, and to define its nature or its character, he did so in terms of one of his novels (the parenthetical additions are Rickman's):

You know what it really resembles most of all, which is really highly suspicious in that it should resemble any of my earlier writing. What really is suspicious is that it resembles *Ubik* (1969). It's very much like *Ubik*, because it dealt with information processing and analysis of the entity. Which shows it's an information processor. What it does is it creates commercials, those messages that it's constantly sticking at the front of each chapter . . . And this (the manifestation) was doing that kind of thing . . . It was like my own prior thought formations were coming back to me as real, specifically *Ubik*. This is something I've always had to deal with: why would it so amazingly resemble *Ubik*? That sounds like it's auto-generated, like I generated it myself. (*The Last Testament* 45-46)

This association of the activity of the living pink light with both the novel and titular entity of *Ubik* was a sustained element of Dick's speculative writing. As *Exegesis* annotator David Gill states in a footnote to the *Exegesis*, "In the *Exegesis*, *Ubik* becomes shorthand for redemption" (4) But this is perhaps not quite specific enough, given the many, many, many times that Dick associates the entity *Ubik* with the benign entity (sometimes called VALIS, sometimes God, sometimes the Logos, sometimes Zebra, sometimes the Holy Spirit) of his 2-3-74 experiences and the world of *Ubik* with the *unreal* state of our own world. It would be better to say, therefore, that in the *Exegesis* *Ubik* becomes shorthand for the redeemed *world*, the world that is undergoing redemption. But, and more importantly, *Ubik* is also a shorthand for how the causal structure of such a world-undergoing-redemption can or has been represented in fiction—*Ubik* is for Dick the best or most accurate mimesis of an ontogenical process he not only perceived but underwent. As Dick states in a 1974 letter to Peter Fitting included in the *Exegesis*,

I see no objection to interpreting the meaning of the force Ubik this way. Nor in interpreting the purpose of the novel *Ubik* by saying that in it I was trying in a dim and unconscious way to express a series of experiences I had had most of my life of a directing, shaping and assisting—and informing—force, much wiser than us which we in no way could perceive directly; where it was or what it was called I did not know; I knew it only by its effects . . . Thus I would express the purpose of the novel—my purpose, anyhow—to be a fictional statement containing a presentation of this directing presence which I arbitrarily chose the name “Ubik” for. (10)

The question naturally arises of what this process looks like, or how this force manifests itself in the world. *Ubik* the novel provides one metaphorical answer: it is like an aerosol spray or a medicinal salve that makes hallucinations become the things they appear to be—a substance that makes ontologically unstable things substantial. And this is of course one of the most (if not *the* most) wonderful images/ideas in the entire PKD canon—and it is what I have coined the term “ontology” to refer to. But I want to look at another piece of writing where Dick characterizes this process of the unreal becoming real with a metaphor that, if a bit more unwieldy, is yet more attuned to the *artistic* significance, for Dick, of representing such a process.

In his “How To Build a Universe” essay, Dick offers this gem to illuminate more clearly the *kind* of world that is implied in *Ubik*:

In my writing I got so interested in fakes that I finally came up with the concept of fake fakes. For example, in Disneyland there are fake birds worked by electric motors which emit caws and shrieks as you pass them by. Suppose some night all of us sneaked into the park with real birds and substituted them for the artificial ones. Imagine the horror the

Disneyland officials would feel when they discovered the cruel hoax. Real birds! And perhaps someday even real hippos and lions. Consternation. The park being cunningly transmuted from the unreal to the real, by sinister forces. For instance, suppose the Matterhorn turned into a genuine snow-covered mountain? What if the entire place, by a miracle of God's power and wisdom, was changed, in a moment, in the blink of an eye, into something incorruptible? They would have to close down. (264)

While not as immediate as *Ubik's* spray-can metaphor, the image of the process of ontogeny presented here has a special resonance for my present investigation insofar as it is part of an essay by PKD the *writer* about the fundamental structure of the worlds he creates. This is a bit counter-intuitive since Dick has already stated earlier in the speech that, "I will reveal a secret to you: I like to build universes that do fall apart. I like to see them come unglued, and I like to see how the characters in the novels cope with this problem" (262). But, as he goes on to explain in the quote above, as he continued to become drawn into the project of presenting ersatz universes he eventually came out the other side to the "concept of fake fakes." *Ubik*, if not the necessarily *the first* (I will argue a bit later that *The Man in the High Castle* has at least glints and glimmers of it, and I'm sure it may be found in other works), is at least the first truly significant and defining representation of the fake becoming the fake fake (or, really, becoming real) in Dick's fiction. Yet, I would argue that this movement from the fake to the fake fake was not first and foremost an abstract, theoretical interest on Dick's part but developed instead out of artistic necessity—what would later become a spiritual paradigm for Dick was first an *aesthetic* leap forward in the worlds he portrayed.

In *Philip K. Dick: In His Own Words*, Dick says to Rickman,

Ubik started off conventionally, and then all of a sudden I realized I was writing too conventional a novel, and I panicked and just decided to go for broke on anything I could think of, and lucked out . . . There was beginning to be evidence that my whole format had frozen, and I wasn't advancing. *Ubik* was a desperate attempt to advance it. (172)

The frozen, conventional format that Dick is referring to here is that of the fake world, the universe that is falling apart after only two days or 75 pages. As Dick says to Rickman about *A Maze of Death*, the conventional PKD novel that followed *Ubik*, “In no way is it new. It repeats familiar things with a multi-foci basis and the epistemological theme, the reality versus irreality. That's the last gasp of those things that had become my stock in trade” (172). The advance, then, that *Ubik* made is the introduction of the spray-can of pressurized ontogeny—a benevolent force acting against the collapsing divide between reality and unreality from within the system, transmuting if not exactly transforming.

All of which is to say that when Dick describes his 2-3-74 experiences as “like *Ubik*,” the emphasis is not on the collapse of his world but on its transmutation into the real by an intervening force:

This fits the grand theme of my writing: the awful truth about reality is obscured from us. My other theme about androids programmed to imagine they are human (i.e., self-determining) is another basic facet of this. But I never knew of, nor did I experience or write about, a salvific entity (except in *Maze of Death* and *Our Friends From Frolix 8*).

Correction. The salvific intervening entity is encountered in *Ubik* and *Galactic Pot-healer*, possibly in *Stigmata* in the person of Louis Bolero . . . wow—in *Stigmata* Palmer Eldritch and Louis Bolero fight each other as the two forces I saw poetically.

In fact, to reprise *Ubik* in terms of my Zebra formulation, I am staggered at how close I came to Zebra—the way it sends messages of help—and Runciter, like Christ, was our leader who died yet is alive. The intrusion quality is the same—the places it shows up, the ubiquity. I wonder how I could have come so close without consciously having the revelation. (*Exegesis* 231)

But how exactly does this work? How does *Ubik* present this “salvific intervening entity?” And if *Ubik* represents a transcendent, intervening entity, what sort of transcendence is offered by it? Is it simply an image of wish fulfillment, a fantasy of being able to undo postmodernism and return to individual stability? To address these questions, we should, I think, hash out how *Ubik* functions in *Ubik* before then turning to how *Ubik* functions in the *Exegesis* and the PKD canon as a whole.

4.

Not long into the novel, the characters of *Ubik* are dying and are experiencing “half-life,” a type of cryogenic preservation that extends the process of death indefinitely. Their shared, hallucinated world is devolving along with their diminishing life-processes. The magical substance called *Ubik* is a series of consumer products offered to the dead characters by the figure of their boss, Glen Runciter, who is still alive and communicating with them from outside half-life. His communications are translated to the dead in the form of invasive, ubiquitous advertisements. *Ubik* will, according to Runciter, help to stabilize the world of their hallucinations:

On the screen a brightly colored spray can replaced Glen Runciter. “One invisible puff-puff whisk of economically priced *Ubik* banishes compulsive obsessive fears that the

entire world is turning into clotted milk, worn-out tape recorders and obsolete iron-cage elevators, plus other, further, as-yet-unglimpsed manifestations of decay. You see, world deterioration of this regressive type is a normal experience of many half-lifers, especially in the early stages when ties to the real reality are still very strong. A sort of lingering universe is retained as a residual charge, experienced as a pseudo environment but highly unstable and unsupported by any ergic substructure. This is particularly true when several memory systems are fused, as in the case of you people. But with today's new, more-powerful-than-ever Ubik, all this is changed! (720).

Runciter and his offers of Ubik, however, are not in the end much more than a stop-gap for the decomposition process which is, in opposition to the force of Ubik, being accelerated by a half-lifer named Jory who has learned to consume other people's half-lives to extend his own. In the end, Ubik is revealed to be an expression of the spirit of Ella Runciter, Glen Runciter's half-dead wife, that she has somehow been able to marshal into a force capable of countering not merely typical half-life decay but also Jory's artificial acceleration of the same.

To the degree that I have described it thus far, the world of *Ubik* is claustrophobic, contingent, and temporary. Jory is not in any way permanently defeated, and, even if he were, the half-lifers would eventually die, Ubik or no Ubik. In this sense, the ontogeny effected by Ubik within the decaying world of half-life is not transcendent in any real sense. It is even explicitly stated in the book that half-life technology has scientifically confirmed the existence of reincarnation, further compounding the claustrophobic circularity of existence as it is portrayed in the novel. Nevertheless, the ontogeny of Ubik (when used as directed!) represents, as I have argued earlier, a genuine *aesthetic* addition to the collapsing, Dickian world of the novel—a

mimetic structure that complicates *Ubik's* alternate world beyond those of *Counter-Clock World* or *Time Out of Joint* or even *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*. But you may have noticed that, so far at least, my description of the world of *Ubik* makes a certain amount of sense. It is, in fact, a world that would not fall apart two days later if Dick himself didn't end the novel by deliberately undermining its mimetic stability.

Relative to the world of the characters who inhabit half-life, Glen Runciter is a kind of transcendent God who communicates from outside half-life with direction and advice on how to find and use *Ubik*. As one such character, Joe Chip, thinks,

We are served by organic ghosts, he thought, who, speaking and writing, pass through this, our new environment. Watching, wise, physical ghosts from the full-life world, elements of which have become for us invading but agreeable splinters of a substance that pulsates like a former heart. And all of them, he thought, thanks to Glen Runciter. In particular. The writer of instructions, labels and notes. Valuable notes. (796)

The parallels between Glen Runciter's scriptural guidance and such religious systems of transcendence as Judaism or Christianity or Islam is clear, if somewhat ironic given the bourgeois God that is Glen Runciter—a point I will return to in a moment. A transcendent entity from a higher reality, a more real reality, sends his sacrament, *Ubik*, and his scripture, or in Runciter's case his radio and TV commercials, to help strengthen and guide the souls he cares for. It is an incarnational allegory that Aslan himself could be proud of. But while this idea of the benevolent invading transcendence that acts to substantiate a less-than-real world served as a significant aesthetic contribution to Dick's typical worlds, Dick is not content to leave it as such. In the final chapter, as Glen Runciter walks away from the moratorium where he has been

communicating with the hibernating half-lifers, he discovers his own supposedly real world is decaying and transforming like the world of the half-lifers, and the character of Joe Chip, who is supposedly dead and in half-life, begins communicating with Runciter as though Runciter were in half-life and Joe Chip is alive outside and trying to contact him.

There are many different possible ways of interpreting this last-second Shyamalanic twist in order to re-establish some solidity and intelligibility to *Ubik*'s world, but the honest critic will recognize that this final "gotcha" ultimately makes very little sense and functions within the narrative primarily as a destabilization of the allegorical system of the world of *Ubik* without really offering a solution. Our transcendence has been a joke, a cheat—or so it seems on the narrative level. But the small epigraph that opens the final chapter, ostensibly a commercial for *Ubik* like the epigraphs that introduce all the previous chapters, takes on an even more decidedly transcendent tone even as the only transcendence the narrative has thus far offered us is undermined.

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. (797)

This densely allusive passage—which draws on the Prologue of the Gospel of John, the first chapter of the Tao Te Ching and the Tetragrammaton revealed by the burning bush of Exodus—with its declaration from a position of total transcendence, stands in contrast to the confusion into which the rest of the final chapter plunges the novel. Peter Fitting, in his landmark essay "Ubik: The Deconstruction of Bourgeois SF" reads this contrast as ironic. For Fitting, the final chapter's

epigraph is the summation of the metaphysical categories that the rest of the chapter undermines. “Although the reality problem is thus posed in metaphysical terms, such expectations by the reader are ultimately frustrated, and metaphysics is rejected” (49). This view is echoed in part by science fiction writer Stanislaw Lem in his essay, “Science Fiction: A Hopeless Case—With Exceptions.” For Lem, *Ubik* is an incoherent M. C. Escher “space-time labyrinth,” as Lem puts it, that implodes its own metaphysics: “Dreaming and waking are mixed, reality becomes indistinguishable from hallucination, and the intangible center of Dick’s world dissolves into a series of quivering, mocking monstrosities” (73).

The final epigraph is, in such a reading, representative of the consistent ontology that the narrative itself rejects. The novel has set up a scientificfictional situation analogous to a generally Judeo-Christian metaphysics of God and world in order to puncture that metaphysics with an effortless absurdity. As Fitting describes it:

In similar fashion [to *Ubik*] the established Christian religions have glossed over human problems and injustices of reality while affirming that this existence is but the shadow of and preparation for an immaterial, ideal reality . . . *Ubik* is a human invention, an image of humankind’s own struggle against entropy, rather than an image of divine assistance or guidance in that struggle. (“Deconstruction” 49)

As for the final, seemingly transcendent epigraph, it is to be read as “a theological super-ad, confirming the novel’s strange identification of religion and capitalist consumerism” (49-50).

While I do not share Fitting’s Marxist interpretation of the significance of the novel’s final ironic turn, I nonetheless acknowledge the legitimacy of such an ironic reading of *Ubik*’s mode of transcendence. What interests me about *Ubik*, however, is not its application as a postmodern

critique of metaphysical thought or bourgeois ideology, but the role the novel plays in the eventual development of what I have been calling Dick's overarching mimesis. And in this light the collapse of the novel's world into metaphoric incoherence can be read as the representation of the collapse of one kind of transcendence into another, and not merely the undermining of any kind of transcendence simply, as Fitting and Lem have argued. In such a reading, the epigraph of the final chapter does not stand in ironic opposition to the confusion of the chapter that follows. It is instead *emergent* from this very collapse, not as an illusion of transcendence in a world of pure contingency, but as a *relational* transcendence, one grounded not in the metaphysics of objects, but in the relations of persons. Neither Runciter nor Chip nor even Ella and Jory stand, by the end of the novel, as the absolute reality with respect to which the other "irrealities" are defined. Yet, out of this relational network of partial, interdependent realities the final, transcendent Ubik emerges.

Fitting declares that Ubik is a "human invention" and not an image of "divine assistance." Such a statement is supported by neither Dick's own writings about the novel, as we will see in a moment, nor the structure of the novel itself. To look at it another way, the final chapter of *Ubik* is not so much an ironic muddle as a necessary dissociation of Ubik from Runciter. If the novel were to allow the fictional situation to stand (i.e. if it were not implied that Runciter is also, impossibly, dead and experiencing half-life decay) then the epigraph could ONLY be ironic in the manner that Fitting has suggested it is. After all, we have our scientifiably Gnostic world with Runciter as God, Ella and Ubik as Gnosis, and Jory as Demi-urge. This would constitute a deeply cynical view of salvation, particularly since there is the stated fact of eventual reincarnation in the novel to be accounted for. As an image of transcendence or divine

intervention, it would be quite a nasty and satirical one—but more to the point, it would be unequivocal, and Ubik's bold claims in the epigraph would *necessarily* be false. Implying, of course, that the spiritual texts it draws on—the Torah, the Gospels, the Tao—likewise present themselves with an unjustified transcendent authority.

This point is key: It is the collapse into metaphorically incoherent relativity which Fitting takes as crucial for his reading of the novel that allows even the *possibility* of Ubik's declaration to be something other than ironic. What this something other may be is a different and difficult question. But what I think should be clear is that the incoherence of the final chapter does not in and of itself support Fitting's reading of the novel, which would be better served ultimately by a hard association with Runciter as God-figure.

We need not therefore read the epigraph and final chapter as opposed, but may read them instead as interdependent. By turning the tables somewhat and taking the epigraph not as a transcendent authority undermined by the chapter it heads, we can instead read the final epigraph as emerging *from*, as being a consequence of the space-time labyrinth—establishing it as a fine first example of what I have referred to, perhaps a little obscurely, as a relational transcendence. What I mean by this phrase, at least with regard to *Ubik*, is that the result of the substantial collapse of the world(s) in which the characters find themselves is not a solipsistic hell but (eventually) an inescapable interdependence on each other, rather than an objective world, as the source of their ontological stability. Joe Chip relies on Ubik which is (at first) Ella Runciter in disguise who relies on Glen Runciter who, it turns out, relies on Joe Chip. A circle, to be sure, but not exactly an Infernal one. Which is not to say that the final chapter makes narrative sense—it doesn't—but to the degree that we as readers are able to accept this interdependence as

potentially foundational to a kind of ontology, the final epigraph is an expression of transcendent hope in a world of unstable being, and our invitation to take *Ubik* as more than a hallucinatory metaphor.

5.

I will, in the following chapter, make a straightforward case for the legitimacy and value of such relational ontologies or descriptions of personalistically transcendent being, primarily using the Christian tradition of Trinitarian theology and contemporary rhetorical theory as my examples, and try to show how they can serve as foundations for a stable ethics in a world of seemingly posthuman instability. For now, if we are content to take up the possibility of a relational and transcendent ontology as an hypothesis, I can continue in my attempt to outline the causal structures that make up Dick's mimetic world. But before I do I should emphasize that Fitting's/Lem's readings of the final epigraph and chapter are by no means the only ones, and perhaps it would be a productive digression to explore a few of them, particularly as they relate to my attempts to construe Dick's oeuvre as a mimetic unity.

I will posit at the outset of this digression that many readings of the epigraph and final chapter tend to fall into a pattern of either privileging the narrative contradictions of the body of the chapter proper or privileging the transcendent perspective of the voice of the epigraph. Fitting and Lem, for instance, quite clearly privilege the body of the chapter, emptying the epigraph of all but parodic force. As Lem puts it, "In his novels he constructs hypotheses that are *prima facie* wholly nonsensical (because of the contradictions they contain)—worlds that are at the same time determinist and indeterminist, worlds where past, present, and future "devour" each other, a world in which one can be dead and alive at the same time, and so on" ("Hopeless

Case” 76). On the other hand, critics such as Lee Braver and Mary Kay Bray take the final epigraph at its gnostic word. Braver maps out the gnostic situation of *Ubik* straightforwardly—Jory as Demi-urge, Runciter as redeemer, commercials for Ubik as gnosis, etc.—but he reads the unsolvable contradictions as indicative of an “agnostic” gnosticism. As Braver puts it, “I think his [Dick’s] agnosticism captures an important aspect of postmodern experience and renders Dick’s complex works endlessly fascinating, giving us a new form of gnosticism” (107). While Braver does not explicitly make clear what such a post-modern gnosticism might entail beyond simply offering Dick’s writings as examples, he does read the chapter’s confusions as a commentary on or development of the gnostic transcendence of the final epigraph, rather than a definitive reversal of it, and in this his reading is closer to my own than Fitting’s.

Mary Kay Bray, alternately, construes the confusions and contradictions of *Ubik*’s final chapter and epigraph not as a maze but as a mandala and in doing so affirms an unequivocally transcendent, if paradoxical, view of the book wherein Dick is attempting a koan-like “both-and” approach to transcendence. As she puts it,

Joe Chip, for instance, ends up being on one hand a pivot in the endless battle between the forces of dark and the forces of light, of entropy and vitality, but on the other hand he is set on the road to transcendence to a higher level of awareness by Ella Runciter who, like the *bodhisattva* of Eastern tradition, will not leave her group’s level of reality until she has passed on the means to transcend it. The affirmation of *Ubik*’s ending is that it contains several concentric layers of mutable reality, from Runciter’s through Joe Chip’s through Ella’s, and all point toward the eternal center into which she is absorbed. (152)

What is key in both Braver's and Bray's accounts, for my argument at least, is that both recognize that the narrative breakdown of the final chapter is an opening up of interpretive possibility, rather than, as Fitting and Lem would see it, a determinate narrowing of potential meaning.

N. Katherine Hayles, in an extended discussion of Dick's 1960s novels in her book *How We Became Posthuman*, also privileges the epigraph, but, rather than reading it as imbued with mystical or divine authority, she hears it as spoken with *authorial* authority—construing its transcendence as of a meta-fictional variety relative to the narrative. *Ubik*, as it reveals itself in the final chapter, has become Dick himself. Hayles characterizes *Ubik*'s narrative as “a struggle to occupy an ‘outside’ relative to someone else’s ‘inside’” (184). This outside-inside dichotomy is how Hayles also characterizes Dick's primary concerns in his other 1960's novels like *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Dr. Bloodmoney*. In her discussion of *Ubik*, however, Hayles (and the brackets and italics are hers) says,

For if *Ubik* is intended to signify an ultimate “authentic” reality, it can do so only from a perspective inside the text. Outside the text . . . *Ubik* must be none other than Philip K. Dick. It is ultimately Dick who “created the lives and the places [the characters] inhabit,” who “put them there” in this text. Confused about where *Ubik* comes from, Joe at first assumes that Runciter has smuggled it to him, but Jory insists that no *objects* can come into the half-life world from the outside, only *words*. (187)

The situation of *Ubik* is thus construed as fundamentally textual, since half-life is a realm of purely symbolic action relative to anything outside it. Only words can affect it, and therefore the entity attempting to communicate with Joe Chip and Runciter can only be Dick. “As a writer he

[Dick] passes messages through his fiction into his own heart of darkness, hoping that somehow they might prove efficacious. Within the world of the text, the murmurs the half-lifers hear from the world 'outside' trope this situation, for *nothing* can pass between 'inside' and 'outside,' only *words*" (188). This is a fascinating reading of *Ubik*'s final chapter, and it leads Hayles to declare

Ubik's distinctive achievement is to represent simultaneously the performative power of language and the mediated, uncertain relation of language to the material world while also mapping this difference onto an "inside"- "outside" boundary that hints at the complexity of communication between self and other, conscious and unconscious. The hope *Ubik* holds out is that although boundary disputes will never disappear, inside and outside can be made to touch each other through the medium of a writing that is no less valuable for infecting our world with all manner of epistemological and ontological instabilities. (188)

By locating Dick's concern with the boundaries between inside and outside not only in the thematics of Dick's 1960s novels but in the aesthetic structures of the texts themselves, Hayles is offering a generalized account of Dick's oeuvre akin somewhat to my own. These "boundary disputes" are the subject, according to Hayles' reading, of Dick's major works. Hayles, however, perceives a distinct divide in Dick's work, marked by different attempts to affirm the cohesion of the human subject. "In contrast to the ambitious system building that Dick undertook in response to the visions of 2-3-74, his fiction of the mid-sixties tends toward a different kind of affirmation, one that I find more appealing" (190). I, on the other hand, have been arguing for a reading of Dick's body of work as unified across these various periods, and I find problematic the ease with which Hayles simply dismisses Dick's later works.

Hayles' insight is to make metaphorical the very act of Dick's writing as the primary site of Dick's exploration of the question of boundaries, in light of which the figures within his fictions ought to be interpreted—which raises that thorny question of the role that the *figure* of Dick plays in his own mimesis. This is an unavoidable question. Even if we do not accept Hayles' reading of the final statement of *Ubik* as originating metatextually in Dick himself (and I do not, not because I think it incorrect but because I think it unnecessary), Philip Dick is a character, or perhaps two characters, in *VALIS*, and it is indeed his authorial voice and the exploration of his own experiences that can be said to unify the *Exegesis* with anything like comprehensiveness. That said, precisely because I am concerned with something like a description of the “10-volume meta-novel” as a mimetic rather than a thematic unity—in other words, because I am attempting to describe what Dick's unified oeuvre *is* as a representation rather than directly attempting to explicate what it may *mean* as a metaphor, my answer is fairly straightforward, and I will return to this question to answer it before the end of this chapter.

6.

I have proposed that we may read the final epigraph of *Ubik* as hopeful, not ironic, and arising from the collapse of each character's individual existence into an existence defined by mutual interdependence. This remains simply one possible reading among many when we look at *Ubik* as an hermetic work of narrative art. But, as I have argued in the previous chapter, viewing Dick's works as part of a unified process and oeuvre can provide insights into his novels that may be otherwise obscured, and the reading of the final chapter I have offered, namely that we should understand the transcendent standpoint of the epigraph as arising out of the collision and collapse of two contradictory and unreal worlds, may be clarified and justified when we compare

Ubik to a book that seems, on the surface at least, to be a very different work and world: Dick's 1962 novel *The Man in the High Castle*. *High Castle* highlights the ethical significance of Dick's collapsing worlds to a degree that the (in some ways) more cynical, satirical, and cerebral *Ubik* does not—and in so doing it makes clear the source of unreality in many, if not all, of Dick's worlds.

High Castle, quite famously, takes place in a world much like our own but in which the Axis powers won WW2. However, a writer named Hawthorne Abendsen has written a work, like Dick's *High Castle* itself, of alternate history in which the Axis powers lost the war. The climax of the novel occurs when Abendsen is confronted by a woman named Juliana who wants to know why he wrote the book. She learns that Abendsen, again like Dick, conceived of the book in part by putting questions to the I Ching, a Chinese oracular system. In Abendsen's presence, Julianna then puts her own question to the I Ching:

Juliana said, "Oracle, why did you write *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*? What are we supposed to learn?"

"You have a disconcertingly superstitious way of phrasing your own question," Hawthorne said. But he had squatted down to witness the coin throwing. "Go ahead," he said; he handed her three Chinese brass coins with holes in the center. "I generally use these."

She began throwing the coins; she felt calm and very much herself. Hawthorne wrote down her lines for her. When she had thrown the coins six times, he gazed down and said:

"Sun at the top. Tui at the bottom. Empty in the center."

“Do you know what hexagram that is?” she said. “Without using the chart?”

“Yes,” Hawthorne said.

“It’s Chung Fu,” Juliana said. “Inner Truth. I know without using the chart, too. And I know what it means.”

Raising his head, Hawthorne scrutinized her. He had now an almost savage expression. “It means, does it, that my book is true?”

“Yes,” she said.

With anger he said, “Germany and Japan lost the war?”

“Yes.”

Hawthorne, then, closed the two volumes and rose to his feet; he said nothing. (227)

But it should not, from this passage, be taken that our world has been validated as the “true” one. Abendsen’s book is in fact an alternate history to our own world as well as his. In Abendsen’s book, Pearl Harbor never takes place, the Soviet Union does not survive the war, Hitler is tried at Nuremberg, and the British Empire never ends, leading, ultimately to a Cold War between the United States and the United Kingdom that the UK eventually wins. We have, in effect, something very similar to the end of *Ubik*, but it is, in this schema, not only the fictional worlds that are undermined but our own as well, giving us, essentially, the proliferation of false realities we have earlier identified as one pole of the Dickian mimesis.

While there is no ontological equivalent to the force of *Ubik* in *High Castle*, there are several elements that foreshadow it, for instance the abstract jewelry that transports Mr. Tagomi into an alternate San Francisco free of Japanese occupation for a time, as well as the truth-telling oracle of the I Ching. But, and here is the point of my comparison between *Ubik* and *High*

Castle, the cause of any given world's irreality is explored in this earlier novel that kicked off Dick's string of mid-century masterpieces.

The proliferation of worlds presented in *High Castle*, might be taken as a possible justification for despair. As the character Rudolph Wegener, an anti-Nazi secret agent, puts it, "The terrible dilemma of our lives. Whatever happens, it is evil beyond compare. Why struggle, then? Why choose? If all alternatives are the same . . ." (217) suggesting for the reader the equivalence of all alternate histories with regard to their ultimate ethical value—a fact supported by Abendsen's book in which the victorious British Empire itself descends into racist fascism. This insight is held by more than merely Wegener. Mr. Tagomi, a Japanese bureaucrat living in occupied San Francisco, recognizes it too:

Evil, Mr. Tagomi thought. Yes, it is. Are we to assist it in gaining power, in order to save our lives? Is that the paradox of our earthly situation?

I cannot face this dilemma, Mr. Tagomi said to himself. That man should have to act in such moral ambiguity. There is no Way in this; all is muddled. All chaos of light and dark, shadow and substance. (168)

But Wegener sees in this state of world not so much a cause of despair as a hope or hint of what a more real world might look like or become:

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. (217)

The great irony that makes Dick's vision so compelling is that our own world does not meet these criteria for reality either, implying that the victorious Axis hegemony is not quite the apocalyptic situation it appears to be to a reader on Earth-1. It is, in the end, not the empirical historical data of a world that constitutes its reality or unreality, or even our access to that data, but the possibility of ethical action through the alignment of cognition of the good with the ability to act upon that cognition. ***A world is unreal to the degree that it forestalls ethical action.*** Emboldened, italicized, and underlined as it is, I still cannot stress the significance of this insight for Dick's mimesis enough. The failure of ethical action is the cause of any given loss of world, any given proliferation of the unreal. As Dick says in *VALIS*, "Wisdom has to be, by its very nature, rational; it is the final stage of what is locked into the real. There is an intimate relationship between what is wise and what exists, although the relationship is subtle" (369). This is a statement that, unsurprisingly, makes the Thomist theologian in me quite happy. But we are not at the moment after Scholastic metaphysical parallels (although I'll take them wherever I can get them!) but after the shape of Dick's world.

The connection between the irrational, the unethical, and the proliferation of the unreal presents itself time and time again in Dick's fiction. It is the revelation given to Rick Deckard in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by the mysterious, messiah-like figure of Mercer:

The old man said, "You will be required to do wrong no matter where you go. It is the basic condition of life, to be required to violate your own identity. At some time, every

creature which lives must do so. It is the ultimate shadow, the defeat of creation; this is the curse at work, the curse that feeds on all life. Everywhere in the universe. (561)

Note, particularly, the same emphasis on the necessity of wrong action, as well as the connection of evil with non-being, with loss of being. The double-agent-drug-dealer Donna of *A Scanner Darkly* likewise echoes the sentiment and, like Wegener in *High Castle*, imagines a more intelligibly ethical and therefore more substantial world:

How can justice fall victim, ever, to what is right? How can this happen? She thought, Because there is a curse on this world, and all this proves it; this is the proof right here. Somewhere, at the deepest level possible, the mechanism, the construction of things, fell apart, and up from what remained swam the need to do all the various sort of unclear wrongs the wisest choice made us act out. It must have started thousands of years ago. By now it's infiltrated into the nature of everything. And, she thought, into every one of us. We can't turn around or open our mouths and speak, decide at all, without doing it. I don't even care how it got started, when or why. She thought, I just hope it'll end some time . . . A long, long time ago, she thought. Before the curse, and everything, everyone became this way. The Golden Age, she thought, when wisdom and justice were the same. Before it all shattered into cutting fragments. Into broken bits that don't fit, that can't be put back together, hard as we try. (1063)

All of which is presented mainly to demonstrate that Dick habitually connects ontological instability to the question of right action—to a question of ethics. But if Dick connects the irreality of world to an inability to determine and pursue ethical action, he also emphasizes that the evil and irreality that arise out of such a situation is an inevitable aspect of human life.

Existence in an unreal world is not to float a state of ethical agnosticism. It is instead the horrid necessity of performing actions one knows to be evil—not merely out of self-preservation but also in pursuit of noble, or noble-seeming, ends.

This immutable law of the unreal, as we might call it, is often expressed in Dick's fiction through the figure of the *tomb world*. This figure by no means serves the same function in each place or novel where Dick employs it. (For instance, in *Ubik*, it refers to a quite literal element of the reincarnation process for half-lifers. In *The Man in the High Castle*, it appears as the subject of a stream of Mr. Tagomi's thoughts. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* it is a mysterious element of the Mercer experience.) But there are certain patterns to Dick's usage of the phrase and the figure. The tomb world is often described as "immutable" and "demonic" and a plane of existence on which cause-and-effect relationships are immutable, i.e. mechanistic worlds without free action. As Mr. Tagomi puts it in *High Castle*,

Like frog pulled from depths, he thought. Clutched in fist, given command to declare what lies below in the watery abyss. But here the frog does not even mock; it strangles silently, becomes stone or clay or mineral. Inert. Passes back to the rigid substance familiar in its tomb world.

Metal is from the earth, he thought as he scrutinized. From below: from that realm which is the lowest, the most dense. Land of trolls and caves, dank, always dark. Yin world, in its most melancholy aspect. World of corpses, decay and collapse. Of feces. All that has died, slipping and disintegrating back down layer by layer. The daemonic world of the immutable; the time-that-was. (202)

The key association here, echoed in the tomb world of the Mercer box in *Do Androids Dream?* is that of cause-and-effect with the inevitability of death. “It had been a pit of corpses and dead bones and he [Mercer] had struggled for years to get up from it . . . At last a bird which had come there to die told him where he was. He had sunk down into the tomb world. He could not get out until the bones strewn around him grew back into living creatures” (451). With its shades of Isaiah, the undoing of the spiritual tomb world of the Mercer box thus implies the undoing of the tyranny of determinate cause-and-effect relationships. However, this possibility of escaping a cause-and-effect world is only achieved through a network of relationships. “He [Mercer] had become joined to the metabolism of other lives and until they rose he could not rise either” (451). Dick describes this opposition between tomb world and relational world in more systematic terms in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*:

Below lay the tomb world, the immutable cause-and-effect world of the demonic. At median extended the layer of the human, but at any instant a man could plunge—descend as if sinking—into the hell-layer beneath. Or: he could ascend to the ethereal world above, which constituted the third of the trinary layers. Always, in his middle level of the human, a man risked the sinking. And yet the possibility of ascent lay before him; any aspect or sequence of reality *could become either*, at any instant. 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. (292)

Escape from the tomb world involves a reorientation toward relationship with living beings. But—and this is a key point for understanding what I have been trying to say about ontogeny and

Ubik—this realignment toward the personal and relational is not limited to persons only. The character thinking the thought in the passage just above, Richard Hnatt, goes on to recognize of his wife’s artwork, “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 realized, is the artistic inspiration, the spirit she’s revealing intrinsically” (*Stigmata* 293). Objects (and per Mercer, non-human animals) are able to participate in substantiating relationship. Thus, when in *Ubik* objects have their substantiveness restored through Ubik’s ontogeny, what is implied is not a mere re-inscription of objectivity but, as I have argued, a shift in the kind of substantive being the objects, and the persons involved with them, participate in. Ubik, after all, is an expression of Ella Runciter’s spirit and the communion of all the half-lifers working together against Jory’s acceleration of half-life decay. In Dick’s worlds, the collapse of the objective tomb world of hard cause-and-effect does not necessitate a fall into the purely subjective or solipsistic. It may instead allow, as I have argued is the force of the final chapter of *Ubik*, a shift into the personal and relational.

In this way we can see that the transformation from objective world to personal world is generally a positive movement in Dick’s fiction, since objectivity is associated with the hard cause-and-effect of death and entropy, and that Ubik is certainly as good a paradigm for this as any other we might take to exemplify this aspect of the structure of Dick’s world. As Dick puts it, in a quote from the *Exegesis* that I sampled a little earlier, “Fuck! I know it; *Ubik* is the paradigm! The half-life, the messages, Ubik itself, Runciter—we are in a sort of bubble of irreality: spurious world generated by—the plenary powers, astral determinism, whatever the fuck that is” (416).

7.

To reiterate my overarching point for this chapter, ontogeny is a personalistic or relational transcendence that makes room for and interpenetrates with the relationships of the persons who inhabit such worlds, not so much reestablishing the substantial ground of the world as transplanting world into a complex network of human relationship. The reestablishment of stable being through human relationship occurs in *Ubik* on two levels that are complimentary if not entirely commensurate. The first is apparent in the situation in which Joe Chip is left by the end of the novel, radically dependent on Ella Runciter and the other creators of *Ubik*. But the second is that which arises, although in a much more complicated way, out of the confusions of the final chapter of the novel—arises, in other words, out of the very collapse of the falling-apart-world. And both of these turns toward relationship as foundational being are part of what it means to take *Ubik* as a paradigm of the Dickian mimesis.

It is in the *Exegesis*, however, that *Ubik* undergoes its own ubikitous transmutation into a worldly paradigm for the world the Dick built.

Trying to say anything sensible about the *Exegesis* is quite difficult, but there are certain discernible trends and patterns. As Dick fictionalized it in *VALIS*:

During the years—outright years!—that he labored on his exegesis, Fat must have come up with more theories than there are stars in the universe. Every day he developed a new one, more cunning, more exciting and more fucked. God, however, remained a constant theme. (197)

I have noted earlier the degree to which the entity *Ubik* becomes associated with the *VALIS* (or *Zebra*) entity that Dick perceived in his 2-3-74 visions and, ultimately, Dick's understanding of

how divine action in the world works. But even these generalizations were subject to change and development. For instance, early in the *Exegesis* Dick is fully committed to a Gnostic understanding of the import of his visions and the structure of the world they revealed:

I am too far into Gnosticism to back out. The idea of Jesus opening Adam's eyes and bringing him to consciousness, the re-linking to the lost primordial state through the Gnosis, the unflinching facing of evil in the world and knowing it cannot have come from (the Good) God—and the salvador salvandus—man as cut off from part of the Godhead.

(276)

And while Dick never truly abandoned his Gnostic self-identification, the movement of the *Exegesis* as a whole is away from an explicitly Gnostic dualistic formulation of good divinity and bad world toward a formulation grounded in and emerging from a complex relationship of human and divine persons. What is important for my discussion, however, is that throughout the entirety of this movement from a dualistic and Gnostic account of salvation toward one that I'm calling relational and personalistic, Ubik remains the touchstone, employed with as much gusto to explain Dick's early dualistic accounts as his later personalistic accounts. We can therefore look at the *Exegesis*'s movement from Gnosticism to personalism not so much as a change in worldviews (since Dick tended to call all of his worldviews "gnostic" whether they were or not) but as a developing understanding of a fictional text, of an artwork. This is important insofar as it allows for (and justifies) the critical approach with which I am trying to make some sense of this bizarre material, namely by treating it neither psychologically, metaphorically, nor philosophically, but aesthetically and mimetically.

We can see this centrality of the question of *Ubik*'s definition quite clearly in sections of the *Exegesis* that chronicle the crisis of Dick's gnosticism. In the course of several entries (and after a chance encounter with the writings of mystic Jacob Boehme) Dick abandons a Gnostic worldview for a personalistic one, or, more accurately, abandons a Gnostic reading of *Ubik* for a personalistic reading such as I have argued for earlier.

While still committed to his self-discovered Gnosis, Dick describes the world of *Ubik* with a wonderfully Dickian metaphor:

Reality is constructed like a ham sandwich: man is one slice of the bread, then comes the slice of ham which is the world, then the second slice of bread which is God. The words in *Ubik* pierced or filtered through from the other slice, through to man, to us, this slice. It's funny that I could read the E. of Phil. about the world being "an alienating, divisive agency that separates man from God" and not instantly perceive the value—perhaps the ultimate value—of my writing and its preoccupation. In point of fact, such novels as *Ubik*, *Maze*, *Stigmata*, etc., tend to dissolve away the world—and if the Gnostics' 3-element situation-view is a correct view, God should be reunited with us thereby.

Now the incredible accuracy of *Ubik* can be appreciated. The world is not merely counterfeit (as in *Stigmata* and all the others); there is more: it is counterfeit, but under it lies another world, and it is this other world, this Logos world, which filters or breaks through. *Ubik*, then, is a step up from *Maze* and *Stigmata* in presenting this. It presents a triune situation, which evidently is the actual one, whereas the other novels and stories present only the aspect of world as hallucination, without disclosing that another, actual

one lies beyond, below or beneath. It is God who, as the far bread slice, takes the initiative toward us, as Runciter does toward Joe Chip and the other inertials. This is what I saw in 3-74 when, under the power of the Holy Spirit, I read the dream section in *Tears* and found a latent or cryptic message embedded in the text. My experience and view, then, are not only Gnostic but what is more tend to prove the correctness of the triune Gnostic division, in particular their view of the world as alienating and divisive between man and God (Joe Chip and Runciter). (272)

It is, according to Dick, the tri-part structure of *Ubik's* mimesis—its slices of mortal and divine bread with unreal, hallucinatory world as ham and battleground—that separates it from Dick's other works and elevates it to the status of Gnostic revelation. Note, however, that this is precisely the *aesthetic* innovation that made *Ubik* an artistic leap-forward from *Maze* or *Stigmata*. (The innovation being the intervening divine bread who opposes and works against the hallucinatory ham. *Maze* and *Stigmata* are thus, presumably, more like an open-face sandwich.) The entirety of how we ought to construe the *Exegesis* or the 2-3-74 visions depends, therefore, on the significance of an aesthetic breakthrough in Dick's art. The revelation follows the artistic inspiration.

After an encounter with a dictionary entry on Jacob Boehme, Dick decides:

Thus the Gnostic belief in a deranged or inferior or evil creator isn't substantiated. Therefore we Gnostics are out on a limb vis-a-vis a bad creator in terms of argument. So out goes all cosmogony for the world. What remains is what I have by revelation: a supernatural intelligence doing what Jacob Boehme saw: colliding with the material universe and transforming (rather than abolishing) it. If I do not regard Zebra as a creator

God, but a modulating God, then what we seem to actually have is divination of the mundane, or plan over nonplan, organic interaction over chaos. *No dualistic theology is necessary.* (288)

And in response to this realization, Dick rethinks his ham sandwich schema of salvation. Yet, rather than abandoning it, he reconstitutes it in personalistic terms, as a system of personal relationships:

In other words, the two realms, sublunar (our world) and the supralunar (heaven), are bridged by a polyencaphalic mens which is heterogenous: the most startling part is that at our [sublunar] end certain wise men (magi) and saints participate in it, and at the other end, wise men and saints who have died (passed over to heaven or the supralunar) participate in it. The substantial structure is God-as-holy-spirit, bridging the two worlds. (290)

Now, I never saw an heterogenous polyencaphalic mens, and I never hope to see one, but I can tell you anyhow . . . that the general structure of the situation Dick is exploring in this passage is evident. Our two slices of bread are no longer a divided God and man but a communion of saints, of sorts, and the ham is not a dividing occlusion but the personal activity of God-as-holy-spirit in the world uniting the saved whether living or dead. The evil that must be worked against is the division of the slices of bread. The import of this for Dick is that it allows him to define salvation, to define the activity of God, in a novel way:

It may be that the divine is re-entering—not entering our universe . . . This would indicate a fallen state of our world, and the divine enters at the bottom—i.e., in the trash, the lowly, the discarded. Christ speaks of the tiny mustard seed, and the gloss on the J.

Bible stresses that the kingdom will enter inconspicuously—very small; i.e., lowly.

Where we would be least likely to look for it (cf. “the stone rejected by the builder”).

This realization is very important.

And this lowly trash, bottom penetration is exactly how I portray it (Ubik) in *Ubik!*

On match folders; in tawdry commercials—therein lie the divine messages.

Entry from the “provinces”—Galilee—now takes the form of entry from trash in the gutter on up—a trashy [S-F] novel which contains trash (the chapter-opening commercials) is the triumphant return of the rightful king. Ubik is trash containing an even lower order of trash: the Ubik commercials—but which are in fact vox dei.

(289-290)

Divine intervention is no longer gnosis but theosis. It is no longer a coming to know but a coming to be, a making. Salvation is art, and not just any art—it is science fiction. Therefore, when Gabriel McKee says that . . .

For Dick, writing about religious experience is a form of religious experience in itself.

The testing of new theories, as displayed in the endless pages of the *Exegesis*, are not merely a collection of reports about a religious experience, but rather formed a sort of expansion of the initial experience. (*Pink Beams* 70)

. . . we may take this to mean that Dick’s full experience of the divine, from the initial experiences to the endless writing about and writing through those experiences, was the experience of becoming—like God, like VALIS, like Ubik—an artist and creator of worlds, and of crafting out of common materials that very unified artwork which we identified in the previous chapter. And this, in circuitous fashion, is my answer to the question of the role the

figure of Dick himself plays in the mimesis I have attempted to describe. This isn't exactly a privileged figure, even in Dick's conception of it. The alter-ego of *VALIS*, Horselover Fat, embodies the deeply skeptical and ironic strain that Dick consistently maintains throughout the *Exegesis*. But what is important is that, for our purposes, Dick's authorship invites us to engage with his body of work—and to reconsider and engage again, and re-engage and re-engage and re-engage—without definitive ending. The structural endlessness of the *Exegesis* and the theories it contains are bound up in and derived from the figure of Dick as an artist always adding to his Work In Progress.

The irony in this (which was not lost, it seems, on God) is that the very infinite nature of the process leads to a kind of divine experience. Let us look briefly at a passage that many of the annotators and editors of the *Exegesis* take as both the climax of the *Exegesis* as narrative and pinnacle of the *Exegesis* as mystical insight. In this entry, dated November 17th, 1980, Dick describes a second mystical experience as a theophany. Here, Dick construes, through his account of the experience, his “10 volume meta-novel” and his *Exegesis* as beginning in a vision of a world of collapsing substance and ending, after exhausting an infinite number of other possibilities, in a revelation of God as person. “God manifested himself to me as the infinite void; but it was not the abyss; it was the vault of heaven, with blue sky and wisps of white clouds. He was not some foreign God but the God of my fathers. He was loving and kind and he had personality” (640). God proceeds to assure Dick of a reward in an infinitely blissful afterlife, but then also goes on to help Dick come to some understanding of the divine origins of the 2-3-74 visions by demonstrating that the very nature of interpretation ensures that the process can never end. “God said, ‘And your theories are infinite, so I am there. Without realizing it, the

very infinitude of your theories pointed toward the solution; they pointed to me and none but me” (641). The most salient feature of this experience of God for Dick, however, is the *personality* of God. As he says somewhat later on:

Strange to say, when I look back to 11-17-80 what seems to me now the most proof that it really *was* God is not so much the bliss but the distinct individual personality (with its intense love); the distinctness, the uniqueness, the individuality of the personality . . . He was not a type, like “the wise old King,” not an archetype, not like a statue; he was an individual, not man but a given specific man . . . It was as if the universe had been created by one given specific individual man . . . There was nothing generic about him. No so to speak DNA. No latency; all was actualized and distinct. As if you had gone from the physical realm of specifics to the Platonic archetypal—and then *back* to the specific man! Like a complete circle. Strange. He was all ontogeny! (649)

The movement of Dick’s understanding of his visions from 2-3-74 through the bulk of the *Exegesis* (he never truly stopped adding to it) to the theophany of 11-17-80 thus parallels *Ubik* on a macro-scale—at least as I have attempted to construe it. It is a movement that begins with a collapsing reality (half-life; Dick’s paranoia concerning the reality of reality), involves an encounter with an intervening force that re-stabilizes reality in contingent and limited ways (*Ubik*; *VALIS/Zebra*), and ends not with an unequivocally substantial reality but in an unequivocally personal reality (the interdependence of the half-lifers; the personal God of Dick’s theophany).

Human personality is imaged upon his personality (I realize). This is why although it was infinite it was—well—it was like an infinite augmentation of such love as I have known

in life—but—it was beauty-in-the-form-of-love. But it was more intimate (as well as more intense) . . . And he knew me. And yet he still loved me. (653)

Here, then, we butt up against my investigation in the following chapter, which will explore how personalism taken very loosely as relational transcendence can serve as a way of defining the dangers facing an ethically grounded human being in a world of ambient technology to. Before we move on to that investigation, however, let me say that the theophany of 11-17-80 in no way ends or finalizes the *Exegesis* which continues on for many more pages. But I am not alone in perceiving this particular element of it as a capstone to the entire structure of the work. As Gabriel McKee says in a footnote to the *Exegesis*, “The following description of Dick’s November 17, 1980 ‘theophany’ is arguably the single most important entry in the entire *Exegesis*” (639). And as Erik Davis, another editor and annotator, puts it in a similar footnote, “These pages are also bone fide mysticism . . . But perhaps the most paradoxical aspect of Dick’s 11/17/80 account is that his God here has nothing to do with the divine abyss of the negative mystics. Instead, he is a character in a story: part playful guru, part Palmer Eldritch, and part Yahweh, screwing around with Adam” (644).

I propose that we now have, between *Flow My Tears*, *High Castle*, and *Ubik* interpreted against the backdrop of the *Exegesis*, the basic structures which may be seen as unifying Dick’s body of work or, in other words, the causal suppositions according to which the PKD mimesis, if we choose to take it as such, is organized: a sequence of unreal worlds (or perceptions of a world in the process of substantial decay) arising from the inevitability of unethical action, and an opposing, intervening force of ontogeny that re-substantiates the world by reorienting the definition of being away from substances as such toward a network of interdependent personal

relationships. In this mimesis, *Ubik* represents the controlling or dominant element insofar as the process of ontogeny is as a rule presented by Dick as transcending the sequential shift of spurious realities, even if the final victory, the final transcendence is eternally deferred—until, I suppose, death and eternal reward, but until then? ㄟ(ツ)ㄟ

Such a reading of Dick's mimesis as I have offered in this chapter may very well seem reductive. Given the sheer magnitude of the body of work that Dick came to think of as in some way *one*, this is probably unavoidable. Dick's *Exegesis* offers itself as a temptation for any given inquiry into its depth to become another offshoot of the *Exegesis*. I have tried in this brief raid on Dick's word-hoard to avoid such a temptation. But perhaps a helpful way of considering what I have tried to do in this chapter is to think about my description of Dick's mimesis as a heuristic mathematical abstraction—an isolation of a kind of neatly defined shape that, although not entirely realized in any given instance in reality, is nonetheless useful in approaching and approximating the bodies that imperfectly mirror its shape. That abstraction, for Dick, took the form of a can of *Ubik*—to be used only as directed!

Chapter Four

American Thing/Person

1.

In his “How to Build a Universe (That Doesn’t Fall Apart Two Days Later)” essay, Dick declares that “The two basic topics that fascinate me are ‘What is reality?’ and ‘What constitutes the authentic human being?’” (260). As our previous chapter has explored some of the ways that Dick represented and unfolded the question of reality—more specifically reality as he saw it when it became for him like a work of his own fiction—this chapter intends to investigate Dick’s answers to the question of authentic human being. In undertaking this investigation, we are not in the slightest abandoning the first. As Dick himself noted, these are questions that ask each other: “But I consider that the matter of defining what is real—that is a serious topic, even a vital one. And in there somewhere is the other topic, the definition of the authentic human” (263). The question of reality, which we have thus far addressed as a question of world, is the question of the ontological ground of human being, the definitive and delimiting sphere of human activity. For Dick, this was a truism with mostly negative implications because, as he saw it, we exist in a false reality, a pseudo-world in which pseudo-human being flourishes: “Because the bombardment of pseudorealities begins to produce inauthentic humans very quickly, spurious humans—as fake as the data pressing at them from all sides. My two topics are really one topic; they unite at this point. Fake realities will create fake humans. Or, fake humans will create fake realities and then sell them to other humans, turning them, eventually, into forgeries of themselves” (263). Taking what I proposed in the last chapter as the central description of a

Dickian world, namely that a world is unreal to the degree that it forestalls ethical action or recognition of ethical possibilities, it is simple enough to see how, as a kind of corollary, a “fake human” (often, though not always, equivalent to an *android* in Dick’s works) is one who cannot or does not take ethical action because they are unable to evaluate and modulate their activity according to ethical concerns. But like Dick’s portrayals of worlds built on the very edge of the abyss between substantial cohesion and decay, his characters almost universally exist with some, and sometimes quite a lot of, ethical and therefore ontological confusion. The woman that is also a machine; the man who is becoming a robot—these are the people Dick is most interested in. All of which is to say that the division between authentic and inauthentic human being in Dick’s fiction is more of a zone than a limit.

Nonetheless, I will argue in this chapter that Dick’s general body of writing provides positive and fairly consistent answers to the question of what constitutes authentic human being. What I think should come as no shock after our previous discussions, is that authentic human being, in the Dickian mimesis, is not an individual Cartesian subject. Such subjectivity, perhaps more than any other concept, is exploded in Dick’s worlds. “What’s got to be gotten over is this false idea that an hallucination is a private matter” (337), as Dick says in his *Exegesis* (foreshadowing, perhaps, William Gibson’s definition of cyber-space as a shared hallucination). It is not the integrity of individual experience or the clarity with which one interprets the data of reality that establishes the ground for authentic human being in Dick’s mimesis. The borderline that separates authentic from inauthentic humans runs not between subject and object but between person and thing—which is another way of saying that authenticity/inauthenticity does not hinge on kinds of experience but kinds of relationships.

I have referred in several past chapters to personalism and to relational transcendence. My purpose has been to show that Dick's world as constructed across the entirety of his career is not one that collapses into a relativistic hell of unstable *subjects* in the contemporary or postmodern sense, but instead collapses into a relational communion of interdependent *persons*—persons, however, who must sometimes take very drastic steps to avoid the total alienation of becoming a thing. I will now attempt to make good on my promises to say in clearer terms what this means and to demonstrate why I think, in representing such a world, Dick has offered his readers at least the outline of a way to navigate a world of technologically dispersed and confused ethical agency. Just as fake humans create fake realities, authentic human beings—persons defined by ethical, empathetic relationships constituted in love—act as forces of ontogeny transmuting fake realities into “fake fake” realities.

As we dive into the question of personhood in Dick's representations of world, we will explore the particular relationship between human being and world as Dick represents it in his writings, and how Dick represents this relationship as so easily slipping into inauthenticity through reification. This will involve a discussion of technology in Dick's fiction and speculation which I will touch on principally in aesthetic terms, rather than attempting to relate them directly to real-world analogs, allowing our understanding of Dick's portrayals of technology to remain *poetically universal* in the sense we have taken from Halliwell and Aristotle.

Yet despite my attention to the aesthetics of Dick's technologies, my investigation here remains an ethical one, and motivating it is a serious concern that we ourselves inhabit worlds that are in many ways rendered inauthentic in a Dickian sense through technologies that disperse human agency and human encounter. Although Dick was a notoriously “soft” science fiction

writer when it came to particular representations of technologies, his investigation of the porous borderline between authentic and inauthentic human being is concerned at every point with the ethical (and, as we saw in the previous chapter, therefore ontological) difficulties that technology in general poses. Or perhaps not technology in general but technology in ubiquity—technology when it reaches a critical level of integration with human being such that the borderline between human and nonhuman agency becomes unclear. Architecture, for instance, as a technology clearly influences and helps determine human being and action, and has done so for hundreds of thousands of years. Yet, I think we would recognize that, if not quite a matter of more or less, a house is at least a different kind of technological agent than, say, the digital assistant who haunts it. But although technology is intimately tied to similar states of affairs in Dick’s fiction and speculation, pseudo-reality, according to Dick, is primarily dependent on a confused epistemology of ethical action, and not directly the result of technological action, except insofar as technology exacerbates the “curse” of ethical confusion.

What I hope to demonstrate in this chapter is that for Dick the question of technology was, as I have proposed, a question of the porous border between persons and things, and that in exploring the possible mimetic depictions of this borderline, Dick dramatized and depicted something akin to a relational ontology of personhood that is capable of remaining meaningful in the eternal slippage between andros and android in what we have earlier called, following Rickert, our ambient moment. I have proposed that ontology—the process of re-substantiating persons and things in relational terms—is what within Dick’s world frees agents from a deterministic system of cause-and-effect. Ontology, in other words, is the process by which an

android becomes a human being and objects become, if not persons, at least reconstituted within the terms of a relational community of persons.

2.

Although the technological borderline between authentic and inauthentic being was a recurring focus of Dick's fictional and speculative investigations, how Dick construed this border, and the ethical concerns it raised for him changed, and I would also say intensified, over time. In "The Android and the Human," written in 1972, several years before his 2-3-74 experiences, Dick describes two contrary processes or movements across the technological border. One is that of a technological world coming alive, or being revealed to have always been alive in some sense: "I suppose I took it for granted that if such a construct, a robot, for example, had a benign or anyhow decent purpose in mind, it would not need to disguise itself. Now, to me, that then seems obsolete. The constructs do not mimic humans; they are, in many deep ways, *actually* human already" (185). The other movement, logically enough, is that of human beings becoming constructs: "And—here is a thought not too pleasing—as the external world becomes more animate, we may find that we—the so-called humans—are becoming, and may to a great extent always have been, inanimate in the sense that we are led, directed by built-in tropisms, rather than leading. So we and our elaborately evolving computers may meet each other halfway" (187).

Dick is surprisingly ambivalent about these dual processes in "The Android and the Human." He is explicit about being horrified at discovering android behaviors in human beings: "And I would include in this the kind of pseudohuman behavior exhibited by what were once living men

—creatures who have, in ways I wish to discuss next, become instruments, means, rather than ends, and hence to me analogues of machines in the bad sense, in the sense that although biological life continues, metabolism goes on, the soul—for lack of a better term—is no longer there or is at least no longer active” (187). But he is also unconcerned with the classic science fiction fear of a robot take-over: “I believe 1 Corinthians will be rewritten this way: ‘The passive infrared scanner sees into *us* darkly’—that is, not well enough to really figure us out. Not that we ourselves can really figure each other out, or even our own selves” (208). Indeed, he goes on to say, “We should be content with the mysterious, the meaningless, the contradictory, the hostile, and most of all the unexplainably warm and giving—total so-called inanimate environment, in other words very much like a person, like the behavior of one intricate, subtle, half-veiled, deep, perplexing, and much-to-be-loved human being to another” (208). Which is to say that Dick’s response to ethical problems of life in a world of human-android confusion is not systemic but particular, contingent, personal. Human beings that fear their own android tendencies can take responsibility for themselves and, as Dick puts it, “balk” against the slippage into machine action: “But you cannot turn a human into an android if the human is going to break laws every chance he gets. Androidization requires obedience. And, most of all, *predictability*” (191). The emphasis on predictability here is important because of how Dick characterizes machine actions as pre-programmed tropisms: “what machines *do* may resemble what we do, but certainly they do not have intent in the sense that we have; they have tropisms, they have purpose in the sense that we built them to accomplish certain ends and to react to certain stimuli” (186). The authentic human, on the other hand, is able to act in ways that exceed the limits of, or even totally break, their pre-programmed responses to the world. In “The Android and the Human,” this script-

breaking is principally a subversive, countercultural outlawry. His central example is that of a young girl following a Coca-Cola delivery truck and stealing several cases of soda to give to her friends. It is not, in my opinion, terribly convincing, and it reflects the ambivalence of the whole essay.

In “Man, Android, and Machine,” written in 1976, some time after Dick’s 2-3-74 experiences, he attempts to shift the concerns of the earlier essay to a more profound plane. The problem, however, is that by this time Dick has had his world blasted by God and has yet to really put it back together in either his fiction or his speculation. Nonetheless, the essay does make it clear that where he was once ambivalent and unsure, Dick now takes it for granted that our machines constitute an extension of our ethical lives and selves:

One day we will have millions of hybrid entities that have a foot in both worlds at once. To define them as “man” versus “machine” will give us verbal puzzle games to play with. What is and will be a real concern is: Does the composite entity . . . , does he *behave* in a human way? . . . if a mechanical construct halts in its customary operation to lend you assistance, then you will posit to it, gratefully, a humanity that no analysis of its transistors and relay system can elucidate. (212)

What concerns Dick now is not whether some people are machines (because *obviously* some are), but whether some people may actually become fully human through their relationship to the divine. As he says later in the essay, “Perhaps the closest approximation to truth would be to say: ‘Everything is equally alive, equally free, equally sentient, because everything is not alive or half alive or dead, but rather *lived through*’”(228). This is not, however, as gleefully posthuman as it probably sounds. It is instead an attempt, on Dick’s part, to demonstrate that our relationship

with technology is as equally dependent on our relationship to God as our relationships to each other, since the person doing the “living through,” Dick makes quite clear, is God. “We are gloves God puts on in order to move things here and there as he wishes” (228). But note at least the shift from an objective/subjective gradient of things that are dead, half dead, or alive to a relational order where all things partake in this divine “living through,” both machine and man. This does not mean that non-living things have disappeared from Dick’s world, but that the definition demarcating them is not quite the same as that which demarcates objects from subjects. This is, in fact, the very shift that I argued in the previous chapter is exemplified by *Ubik*. Things are no longer the substantial objects in contradistinction to which human individuals establish their subjective stability. But beyond this, once a spritz or two of *Ubik* has been applied, every *thing* can be “lived through,” reconstituted in a transcendent relatedness and may be real to the degree that it is able to participate in the ethical activity of an ethical agent.

The statement that everything is equally alive is also probably less pantheistic than it sounds. In “Man, Android, Machine,” Dick maintains a hierarchy even within this complex of relationships. “As soul is to man, man is to machine: It is the added dimension in terms of functional hierarchy. As one of us acts godlike (gives his cloak to a stranger), a machine acts human when it pauses in its programmed cycle to defer to it [a human] by reason of a decision” (212). And it is important to recall that in *Ubik*, *things* are shown decaying in two different ways. There is the substantial decay of objects in half-life rotting and devolving at absurd speeds, but there are also the automatic, coin-operated doors, coffeepots, etc., with just enough artificial intelligence to demand their fees before opening, brewing coffee, etc.—before becoming, in short, the things they are supposed to be. Being able to break these capitalistic

patterns of behavior (out of, call it charity?) is precisely what Dick is referring to when he speaks of machines acting humanly (and, implicitly, divinely). Of all the things in *Ubik*, the only one that acts divinely—and speaks divinely!—is *Ubik* itself. Yet from *Ubik* other objects are able to be lived through and thus achieve something like stability.

In the *Exegesis*, Dick explicitly links the authentically human ability to *balk*, to break out of tropic action, with escape from the deterministic *tomb world* that we explored in the previous chapter (the italics are mine):

A human can evolve into Christ if Christ ignites his own self in the human and takes the human over . . . Christ as Hagia Sophia, can ignite himself in a man and speak with him in a dialogue. *At this point, the man rises from time, space, and the slavery of deterministic nature mechanics*, remembers all and knows himself by means of Christ as inner light . . . Ah—my bipolarization between the human and the android. Free man (liberated) vs. the artifact controlled “android”; I am now prepared to elevate the bipolarization into theological, supernatural, cosmic dimensions. *The concept of balking assumes the status of successfully resisting cause-and-effect script-programming.*

(290-291)

This is a fairly consistent theme throughout the *Exegesis*. As Dick writes later, “I just realized something terribly important. In melting the causal trains Zebra not only frees you from astral determinism physically, but also discloses the fact that in some way these causal deterministic processes (and the objects comprising them?) are not real but merely hologram-like. In seeing these ostensibly ‘hard’ processes ‘melt’ one understands that they are merely seeming, and subject to a ‘non-hard’ volitional sentient mind” (461). Divine action is thus construed as a

freeing of the human will from mechanistic constraint in order to be fully human. This is not a new insight from Dick but a nugget of ancient wisdom that Dick has borrowed from Christianity, gnostic *and* orthodox, and incorporated into his representations of authentic human being in Dickian fashion. As he puts it in *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*:

The ancient world had seen the coming into existence of the Greco-Roman Mystery Religions, which were dedicated to overcoming fate by patching the worshipper into a god beyond the planetary spheres, a god capable of short-circuiting the “astral influences,” as it had been called in those days. We ourselves now speak of the DNA death-strip and the psychological-script learned from, modeled on, other people, friends and parents. It is the same thing; it is determinism killing you no matter what you do. Some power outside of you must enter and alter the situation; you cannot do it for yourself, for the programming causes you to perform the act that will destroy you; the act is performed with the idea that it will save you, whereas, in point of fact, it delivers you over to the very doom you wish to evade. (767)

Spoken in the persona of Angel Archer, perhaps best understood as the detached and skeptical inverse in temperament and character to *VALIS*'s desperately engaged and credulous Horselover Fat, this passage expresses the dependence, in Dick's eyes, of authentic human beings on divine activity even if, like Angel herself, they are skeptical about such divinity's existence or efficacy.

Furthermore, in the essay “How to Build a Universe” the balking of the authentic human being is developed from mere random action, as in “The Android and the Human,” to an ethical self-possession:

The authentic human being 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. Their deeds may be small and almost always unnoticed, unmarked by history. Their names are not remembered, nor did these authentic humans expect their names to be remembered. I see their authenticity in an odd way: not in their willingness to perform great heroic deeds but in their quiet refusals. In essence, they cannot be compelled to be what they are not. (278)

Authentic human being is human being able to act freely because, through a divinely constituted relationship, the human being has become more than a preprogrammed sequence. That Dick emphasizes the refusal to do evil action, rather than the ability to do good action, should not be surprising given the passages I discussed in the last chapter in which the true ethical torture is to be forced to *do* evil by the circumstances of an unreal world.

As we can see from these several passages, as Dick's thoughts on the subject deepened (and as his world expanded), the definition of human freedom changed from a mere randomness to the ability to act ethically, even in the face of an unethical world. (And somewhere an Augustinian theologian is wiping a tear of joy from their cheek.) I would argue from the standpoint of Dick's body of work as a mimetic unity that this later, more theologically and ontologically complicated idea of human freedom is the one we should keep in mind when we look at the transformations and shifts across the human/android border in Dick's fiction as a whole. Katherine Hayles, on the other hand, in *How We Became Posthuman*, perceives a contradiction (albeit a fruitful one)

standing between Dick's account of authentic/inauthentic human being in his speculative essays and his portrayals of authentic/inauthentic human being in his fiction. Hayles states, "The android Dick writes about in his essays represents the loss of free play, creativity, and most of all, vitality—in short, the triumph of obsession over the flexibility and empathy that a writer needs to create the new. Yet as we have seen, Dick's fictional androids are considerably more complex than this portrayal" (177). Hayles connects this confusion or paradox to Dick's having mapped gender relationships onto the human/android divide, so that certain types of women are coded as androids or inauthentic humans in Dick's fiction. As Hayles puts it, "These subterranean connections between the dark-haired girl, machine behavior, and the construction of masculine subjectivity are explored repeatedly in the fiction through configurations that link androidism in an attractive dark-haired woman with a radical confusion of boundaries between 'inside' and 'outside' for a male subject" (165). One of Hayles' strongest examples of these dynamics from Dick's fiction is Rick Deckard's relationship to Rachael Rosen in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* According to Hayles,

The mixture of human passion and cold calculation in Rachael's responses shows that she combines within herself attributes of the dark-haired girl and of the android. The closer the relationship gets to intimacy, the wilder the oscillations between these subject positions become, in turn inducing alternating moods in Deckard: between despair and empowerment, ego shrinkage and inflation. It is as if Deckard's attraction to her were destabilizing reality itself. (173)

I think that Hayles' excavation of these "subterranean" associations organizing Dick's fiction is both insightful and substantiated by Dick's biography and our own brief discussion of the

relationship between Rachael Rosen in *Do Androids Dream* and Linda Fox from *The Divine Invasion*. Hayles also notes that Dick's feelings and relationship toward the archetypal dark-haired girl (of which both Rachael and Linda are examples) evolved and changed over his career. "In Dick's reading of his life, then, the dark-haired girl started out being allied with the android, but as time went on she became polarized against the android, a stay against the unreality with which the android is persistently linked" (164). Such a reading of Dick's changing understanding of his relationships with women aligns very much with the reading I offered in our earlier discussion of *The Divine Invasion*.

However, Hayles' argument that the android in Dick's fiction and the android in Dick's speculative writings have contradictory definitions is not strictly tenable. Hayles, perhaps unintentionally, gives the impression that the essays represent theoretical expressions of Dick's artistic aims that failed—in very fortunate ways!—to be fully realized in the fiction. But in fact, all three essays—"The Android and the Human," "Man, Android, and Machine," "How to Build a Universe,"—were written significantly *after* the novels that Hayles discusses, namely *Do Androids Dream*, *We Can Build You*, *The Simulacra*, *Dr. Bloodmoney*. It would be more proper to say that the essays represent developments of or commentaries on the earlier novels rather than simultaneous explorations of a single subject.

While it may, of course, be possible to see these particular essays as fascinating mis-readings by Dick of his own work, in point of fact, Dick's later novels take up and explore the themes and ideas of the essays, suggesting that Dick is attempting to develop his previous portrayals of android behavior. Although not ostensibly about androids, *A Scanner Darkly*, for instance, takes its title and its central question from "The Android and the Human." But more than this, if we

look at these three essays exploring authentic and inauthentic humanity as a necessary bridge between Dick's hard-boiled masterpieces of the 1960s and his both more mystical and more literary novels of the 1970s and 1980s, the changes in Dick's portrayals of the relationship between gender and androidism can be seen as dialectical developments—with an ultimate synthesis in the character of Angel Archer through whom the archetype of the dark-haired girl is given a chance to speak for herself—rather than as binary contradictions. Dick suggests as much in the *Exegesis*. “I maintain that my corpus—my opus—required her, and required me to be able to create her—perhaps prove I could create her as an artistic problem I consciously and deliberately posed for myself to—here is a remarkable thought!—to justify my work in terms of wholeness, completeness and intactness . . . Angel is what was missing and needed” (771). This is not to say, naturally, that there are no interesting divergences between Dick's speculations on the topic of authentic human being and his fictions that represent the same. In Dick's fiction, as opposed to his much more hopeful speculative writings, the conceptual knot of authentic human being, freedom, divinity, agency, and will is usually expressed in tragic terms—in terms of the slippage into tropism and androidism. In *VALIS*, Horselover Fat's crisis is kicked off when a friend commits suicide. Dick describes a phone conversation leading up to this event as, “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” (176). Note that in this late novel the devolution of a person into a “reflex-arc thing” that acts according to self-destructive tropes is described as being grounded in a pre-existing nihilism and is a function of non-being or the unreal. As Dick says later in the novel, “Under everything else, even under death itself and the will toward death, lies something else and that something else is nothing. The bedrock basic

stratum of reality is irreality; the universe is irrational because it is built not on mere shifting sand—but on that which is not” (236). I point this out to keep fresh in our minds the intimate relationship in Dick’s fiction between the unreal and the constraint of the human will against ethical action.

In *A Scanner Darkly*, drug addiction is described as a similar loss of willful freedom: “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. Appropriate or not” (915). And directly related to this is the ethical confusion that the world of Dick’s addicted characters collapses into: “It all got murky. The drug world was a murky world for everyone anyhow. For Bob Arctor, for example, it had become murky now: during this afternoon along the San Diego Freeway” (934). This is echoed several times through the novel: “Knowing what I know, I still stepped across into that freaked-out paranoid space with them, viewed it as they viewed it—muddled, thought. Murky again; the same murk that covers them covers me; the murk of this dreary dream world we float around in” (946). And again: “What a way to live a life; what, as the other officer said just now, an endless nothing. Down there, he [Bob Arctor] thought, in the murk, the murk of the mind and the murk outside as well; murk everywhere. Thanks to what they are: that kind of individual” (1033). This, then, is much of the force of what Dick means when he says that fake people create fake realities—fakeness is not so much a state of epistemological confusion as an ethical one. And Dick the writer is, naturally enough, excited and goaded into action more by the dramatic possibilities of tragedy than by the hope of a happy ending.

Here is probably a good place to address the fact that my account of the difference between authentic and inauthentic human being in Dick's mimesis runs counter to most critical answers to this question, many of which take Dick's masterpiece *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* as their touchstone. It is easy to see why, given the novel's explicit concern with deciphering who is human and what is android. In the novel, the difference between authentic and inauthentic humans is, superficially at least, the ability (or lack of ability) to feel or perform empathetic responses to other living beings. Yet this empathy has been construed in many different ways by different critics.

Some critics, such as Ryan Gillis in his article, "Dick on the Human: From Wubs to Bounty Hunters to Bishops," take Dick's portrayals of empathy in a straightforward way. Creatures are "human" if they display empathy, whether they are aliens or androids or Homo sapiens.

Forcing the question 'What is Human?' out of the realms of archaic philosophy and science fiction, Dick concluded that it is not a simple one to answer and that the android is not simply a science fiction prop. The android lives among us; it is us, as long as we continue to separate ourselves from that part of our character that is human. The human separates himself from the android by his empathy—to use Dick's word—his soul, and that empathy, human hope of salvation, is expressed in human willingness to defy the programming that would reduce him to an ideological automaton. (270)

Similarly, Patricia Warrick, in an article discussing not merely *Do Androids Dream* but a whole slew of "android" stories in the Dick canon, states,

How does one survive in this universe of uncertainty where everything is both true and false? Like John Isidore, one empathizes with and responds to the needs of all forms,

blinding one's eyes to the inauthentic division between living and nonliving, machine and man . . . Only when the divisions Dick has mirrored in the novel are healed by an inner unity growing from an acceptance of all things will artificiality be replaced by an authentic experience. ("Labyrinthine Processes" 150)

As I will attempt to show a little later, however, Dick is not simply performing or proposing the posthuman erasure of human/animal/machine boundaries, although such erasures are part of his fiction and speculation to be sure.

Other critics have interpreted the empathy of androids in less straight-forward ways. In her article, "Entering the Posthuman Collective in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*" Jill Galvan proposes that the novel chronicles Rick Deckard's changing understanding of what constitutes authentic human being. According to Galvan,

The androids Rick encounters, together with the numerous machines by which he and others interface with their world, blast the illusion of an exclusive and empathic community of humans, one uncompromised by the technologies with which they share the Earth . . . In effect, the narrative repudiates the idea of a confined human community and envisions a community of the posthuman, in which human and machine commiserate and comaterialize, vitally shaping one another's existence. (414)

This reading of the novel, while not exactly unfounded, is perhaps too forceful in its conclusions if we wish to understand *Do Androids Dream* against the backdrop of Dick's writing and thought as a whole—particularly as Galvan reads in a *positive* light the revelation by Buster Friendly, an android, that the semi-religious figure of the Mercer box experience, Wilbur Mercer, is a fiction. "As Buster Friendly insinuates in his own heavy-handed fashion, Mercerism and the ideology of

empathy that is its mainstay, far from appealing to innate human characteristics, function merely as the means by which the government controls an otherwise unwieldy populace” (416). Such a reading fails to take into account what I have been calling the force of ontogeny in Dick’s worlds. We can read Mercer’s “reality” in a vein similar to that of Linda Fox from *The Divine Invasion*: they begin as fictions but through a process of ontogeny become (in some sense) at least *more* real than they were at their origin. The cause of this process is not clear in *Do Androids Dream* but viewed in light of its clearly negative coding within the novel, as well as its similarity to points of view that Dick explicitly rejects elsewhere in his writing, it is nearly impossible to maintain that Dick is attempting to portray Buster Friendly’s revelations about Mercer as meaningful or even true, even if, as Mercer himself admits, Buster is factually correct. Buster Friendly’s kind of truth is not one that Dick privileges across his work as a whole. As Belial, the evil goat-demon of *The Divine Invasion* says, “Gray truth, the goat-creature continued, is better than what you have imagined. You wanted to wake up. Now you are awake; I show you things as they are, pitilessly; but that is how it should be. How do you suppose I defeated Yahweh in times past? By revealing his creation for what it is, a wretched thing to be despised. This is his defeat” (603). This existential cynicism is unequivocally rejected when Linda Fox destroys Belial and restores Herb’s faith in her even though they both know she was once a fictional person made real by Yahweh. Taking *The Divine Invasion* as the development on and critique of *Do Androids Dream* that I have argued in an earlier chapter it is, the androidal failure of empathy is more properly understood as precisely the kind of insistence on “gray” factual truth that Belial tries to force on Herb Asher.

The goat-creature was Linda Fox's accuser who showed her—who showed everything in creation—under the worst light possible, under the aspect of the ugly . . . This is how the goat-creature sees God's total artifact, the world that pronounced as good. It is the pessimism of evil itself. The nature of evil is to see in this fashion, to pronounce the 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. (603)

Read against *The Divine Invasion*, Buster Friendly's attempt to reveal the "true" Mercer is thus coded quite literally as an act of evil, and the human empathy of *Do Androids Dream* is deepened into something more properly called love as an existential relation rather than simply an affective or emotional response. This love, as we will see in a moment, is a facet of ontologically foundational personhood.

Galvan suggests quite explicitly that the novel is positively proposing the erasure of all categorical boundaries as the path toward authentic being. I don't think this tenable. Although the line between human and other kinds of being is impossible to navigate with surety, Dick emphasizes in many, many places, as I have shown both in the last chapter and in this one, that this does not mean that authentic and inauthentic being do not exist or that this distinction is unimportant. And if we recall the passage from "Man, Android and Machine" that I discussed a few paragraphs ago, Dick's statements concerning everything being alive paradoxically reinscribes a hierarchy of beings who are instrumental to higher beings: machines becoming human through being instrumental to humanity, human beings becoming divine through being instrumental to God. This is the true force, I would argue, of Deckard's statement about the electric toad he finds at the end of *Do Androids Dream*: "The electric things have their lives, too.

Paltry as those lives are” (608). There is both a recognition of the intrinsic value of technological being *and* a recognition of the limits of that value relative to living creatures and human beings.

Nevertheless, I don’t believe that there is an irreconcilable opposition between the account of authentic human being I have derived from Dick’s speculative writings and the various accounts that critics have derived from *Do Androids Dream*, although to demonstrate this, I will have to explain why I have earlier declared that authentic human being in Dick’s world is grounded in the definition of human beings as persons rather than as the individual subjects of humanism or as the fragmented subjects of postmodernism. This is to say that critics are absolutely correct to emphasize the destabilizing force that androids (and other technological beings) may be for the integrity of human subjectivity, and that, as we can see through Deckard’s growth as a character, this destabilization is a step in the right direction—namely, I would argue, in the direction of an understanding of authentic human being as transcendently personal and relational.

3.

Since I am now going to talk in more depth about the relational ontology of personhood and the kind of transcendence that can be predicated upon it, let us quickly take a few steps back from Dick’s writings to define more clearly what I mean by person. I want to make clear (if it hasn’t been clear by implication yet) that I use *person* (or personhood) to refer to a concept very much distinct from the common, everyday use of the word to mean something like an *individual*. It is no surprise, however, that the person and the individual have become so conceptually intertwined that to refer to a person in everyday speech is to point to an individual human being: the person is the conceptual origin of the humanistic process by which *individuality* could

become an absolute good and not merely *a particular falling away from an ideal* as was denoted by the Greek concept of the individual, setting in motion the entire history of Humanism. But, despite the person's ennoblement of the individual and despite our common-parlance association of the two concepts, the person and the individual represent distinct traditions and not necessarily commensurate definitions of human being.

What, then, is the person as distinct from the individual? Etymologically, the word is derived from *prosopon* (in Greek) and *persona* (in Latin) which were names for a dramatic mask or social role. Historically speaking, *person* was used by early Christianity as a means of identifying a difference that did *not* result in a distinction of individuals. Such difference without a distinction, at least within the philosophic tradition of Classical ontology, is and must be *relative*—located in the relatedness of the terms distinguished between. *Prosopon* and *persona*, which literally translate to “look toward” and “sounding through,” respectively, were deliberately chosen for the relatedness expressed by “*pros*” = “toward” and “*per*” = “through.”

In his *Introduction to Christianity*, written while he was a professor of theology and before he was elected pope (which is to say that I offer the following quotations as the arguments of an expert historian and scholar and not as the official articulation of dogma by a religious authority), Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger describes the discursive context that provided the person with its origin as the solution to a theological impasse necessitated by the complexity of scriptures both Jewish and Christian:

We can say from the history of ideas that it was here [the struggle over the language of the profession of faith] that the reality “person” was first fully sighted; the only way that the concept and idea of “person” dawned on the human mind was in the struggle over the

Christian image of God and the interpretation of the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. . . . First, it was clear that, seen absolutely, God is only One, that there is not a plurality of divine principles. Once this has been established, it is also clear that the oneness lies on the plane of substance; consequently the three-ness that must also be mentioned is not to be sought here. It must therefore exist on a different level, on that of the relation, of the “relative” . . . With the insight that, seen as substance, God is One but that there exists in him the phenomenon of dialogue, of differentiation, and of relationship through speech, the category of *relatio* gained a completely new significance for Christian thought.

(181-183)

This relatedness, this “plane of relation,” is one element of what I have been describing as a transcendently relational ontology. The second element is the existential weight relatedness took on after this turn, which marked a dramatic shift in the history of Western philosophic definitions of *being*. As Ratzinger puts it:

To Aristotle, it [relation] was among the “accidents”, the chance circumstances of being, which are separate from substance, the sole sustaining form of the real. The experience of the God who conducts a dialogue, of the God who is not only *logos* but also *dia-logos*, not only idea and meaning but speech and word in reciprocal exchanges of partners in conversation—this experience exploded the ancient division of reality into substance, the real thing, and accidents, the merely circumstantial. It now became clear that the dialogue, the *relatio*, stands beside the substance as an equally primordial form of being.

(183)

The concept of the person, as I have been using it, therefore refers to *relation* or a *relatedness*—a *being-toward* (as Diane Davis puts it in an argument we will discuss in a moment)—that is understood to be constitutive of a being’s real, concrete existence. This is an entirely different definition of human being from that of either the humanist individual or the postmodern subject. The human person would then, for our purposes, present itself as a description of human being that is not defined against a static ontological substance (as the individual) or as the tension of social, economic, instinctive forces (as the postmodern subject) but instead relative to the total community of persons. As Ratzinger says, “In this idea of relatedness in word and love, independent of the concept of substance and not to be classified among the ‘accidents’, Christian thought discovered the kernel of the concept of person, which describes something other and infinitely more than the mere idea of the ‘individual’” (184).

In my discussion of *Ubik* and the *Exegesis*, I proposed that we can define ontology as a shift from a substantial account of being to a relational account that can nonetheless serve as a kind of ontology. How does defining human being personally accomplish this? As John Zizioulas, theologian and Greek Orthodox metropolitan, in his book *Being as Communion*, states:

The deeper significance of the identification of ‘hypostasis’ with ‘person’—a significance the revolutionary nature of which in the development of Greek thought seems to have escaped the attention of the history of philosophy—consists in a twofold thesis: (a) The person is no longer an adjunct to a being, a category which we *add* to a concrete entity... *It is itself the hypostasis of the being.* (b) Entities no longer trace their being to being itself—that is, being is not an absolute category in itself—but to the person, to precisely

that which constitutes being, that is, enables entities to be entities. In other words, from an adjunct to being (a kind of mask) the person becomes the being itself and is simultaneously—a most significant point—*the constitutive element* (the ‘principle’ or ‘cause’) of beings.” (39)

Hypostasis can here be taken to refer, quite literally, to what underlies an entity’s existence—or, in other words, what transcends the particularities of existence. As we saw in the quotes from Ratzinger, Aristotle associated the underlying with substance. Christianity, as a kind of radical existentialism, associates the underlying with the person. It is Dick’s autodidactic invention of this concept of a transcendent, relational mode of being, and his employment of it in his fiction and speculation, that distinguishes him from the attempts to question and critique the boundaries demarcating the human individual that characterize posthuman critique (and posthuman fiction) in general.

4.

If it seems that I have been suggesting that the value of Dick’s particular representations of ontological personhood is derived entirely from the degree to which Dick’s representations approach Christian definitions of the person, that has not been my intention. My goal has not been to show that Dick reverse-engineered a kind of scientific Christian personalism—although he may very well have done just that. Instead, my goal, in relating Dick’s thought to the philosophically robust tradition of Christian personalism has been to legitimize Dick’s ontology as an ontology, however ad hoc, and as something more than a mere collapse into solipsism, *and* as something other than a simple posthuman erasure of definitional boundaries. In this vein, I

think it may be helpful to triangulate what I am gesturing toward with another brief account of human being as fundamentally relational, an account that, in contrast to Christian personalism, is both contemporary and secular.

In her book *Inessential Solidarity*, rhetorical theorist Diane Davis explores the pre-symbolic or pre-figurative states of *being toward* that necessitate the ethical and rhetorical entanglements between human beings. For Davis, human beings are inescapably oriented toward each other. “If ethics involves a relation, an approach in which I turn toward an other who is not simply an object, toward an other who may also turn toward me, it first of all implies that neither I nor the other is an enclosed entity but that both are already exposed, posed in exteriority, radically non-selfsufficient; it implies, then, an originary (or preoriginary) relation with alterity—a relation that precedes the apparently self-sufficient self” (86). For Davis, in her appropriation of Levinas, the foundation of this *being toward* is the human face—the literal experience of encounter with another human being. Davis is not the only contemporary theorist to explore the ontological outlines of personhood. Barbara Johnson, in her book *Persons and Things*, attempts to delineate between these two types of entities in Lacanian terms, concluding that “the definition of ‘person’ would then be: the repeated experience of failing to become a thing” (59). While Johnson’s definition lacks a positive account of the person, it emphasizes the way in which personhood is directly opposed to reification. Johnson likewise echoes Davis’s Levinasian emphasis on the face as the locus of personal encounter. “The face thus seems to offer a clue to a person’s identity or innermost being . . . What is seen and known about a person is the face—the person’s ambassador to the realm of visibility” (181). Yet Davis goes beyond Johnson’s hermeneutic approach, which is limited primarily to the symbolic. Davis is explicit that what she is exploring

is not the *figure* of the face. Or rather, Davis argues that the figure of the face is the site of the impingement on hermeneutics of real ethical responsibility derived from real human encounter:

Levinas insists that its [the face's] saying is not an effect of the play of the signifier but is instead the latter's very condition of possibility. In other words, what's at stake in this discussion, the experience of the ethical relation, comes down neither to the semantic power of the trope nor to the endless proliferation of meaning that any trope may engender. And yet, this experience registers for consciousness only as a disturbance in the tropological field and so as an interruption in cognition. A persuasive force, an unlocatable yet undeniable obligation to respond, comes through in the instant of disfiguration. (65)

The face, in such an account, presents itself not as yet another signifier but as the place of an ineluctable encounter through which signification turns away from symbolicity toward real ethical relatedness. And for Davis, such an encounter and orientation toward the other are a given for ethical relations and the tenuous identity that may be built upon their foundation:

An individual—indivisible and spontaneous—would be another story. But as a singularity, finite and exposed, “I” come into being only inasmuch as “I” respond to the other, and this preoriginary obligation to respond is called “my” responsibility. Responsibility, from this Levinasian perspective, is not something a self-sufficient subject chooses to take up; rather, “the subject” is ethically structured as response-ability: “the subject” is the response to alterity, a first response to the saying, each time, and all of the “saiids” are granted on the basis of this response, including the appropriations and identifications that constitute “self” and “ego.” The priority of the other is not a matter of

the subject's choice (if it were, let's face it, the other would be toast) but of its inescapable predicament. (114)

Thus the necessity of such encounters is of paramount importance for rhetoric—the conscious and deliberate relations between human beings—for these encounters both allow for rhetoric and ensure that rhetoric is inextricably involved with ethics: “There is, then, an indissociable rapport between the ethical relation and rhetoric . . . And it is almost impossible not to go further: What does Levinas end up showing, after all, if not that the ethical relation is the experience of an underivable rhetorical imperative, an obligation to respond to the other?” (64-65). In short, the imperative of ethics is founded on a personal encounter that precedes symbolic action, and in excavating the ground of rhetoric Davis has discovered a definition of the subject that may be correlated with personhood as we have defined it, precisely because, although personhood can act as an hypostasis, a transcendent underlying of existence, it is not a priori to the encounter(s) that constitute it. Identity is found to originate not in individuality but in an inescapable relationship to other persons who are likewise constituted in relationship.

5.

So how does personalized human being act as a force of ontogeny in a world of things that must become themselves by being lived through? Zizioulas states in *Being As Communion* that, “The mystery of the person as an ontological ‘principle’ and ‘cause’ consists in the fact that love can endow something with uniqueness, with absolute identity and name” (49). By loving the world, and the nonhuman entities of that world, the person gives them identity. This is quite dramatically true of Christian Trinitarianism wherein God's love constitutes the world, but it is

also akin to the situation I attempted to exemplify in my reading of how the ontogenic force of Ubik functions. Objects in half-life become their proper selves, if you will, when enfolded in the community of loving persons (persons acting divinely) that a can of Ubik represents.

Such an account of world grounded in persons also exemplifies the resolution of *Do Android Dream* better than a simple posthuman reading such as the one Jill Galvan and others have offered. To put it bluntly, Dick was not a posthumanist, and the worlds he portrayed are not posthuman. Dick's own brand of personalism (to be used only as directed!), like Trinitarian personalism, shares with posthumanism a rejection of individualism, yet also, as Rosi Braidotti says of posthumanism, "asserts an equally strong distance from relativism or nihilistic defeatism. It promotes an ethical bond of an altogether different sort from the self-interests of an individual subject, as defined along the canonical lines of classical Humanism. A posthuman ethics for a non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of interconnection between self and others, including the nonhuman or 'earth' others" (*Posthumanism* 50). But, contra posthumanism's deconstructive origins, Dick is quite careful to systematically re-inscribe within the relational transcendence of a community of persons the ontological hierarchy of thing-human-God, and along with this hierarchy a strong insistence that movement down the hierarchy and away from God is unspeakably evil. Reification in *A Scanner Darkly*, for instance, is presented explicitly as a kind of loss of God. In a brief summation of Dick's own experiences that he would explore at greater length in *VALIS*, the character of Donna (and yet another instance of the dark-haired girl) relates the experiences of a friend:

After he saw God he felt really good, for around a year. And then he felt really bad.

Worse than he ever had before in his life. Because one day it came over him, he began to

realize, that he was never going to see God again; he was going to live out his whole remaining life, decades, maybe fifty years, and see nothing but what he had always seen. What we see. He was worse off than if he hadn't seen God. He told me one day he got really mad; he just freaked out and started cursing and smashing things in his apartment. He even smashed his stereo. He realized he was going to have to live on and on like he was, seeing nothing. Without any purpose. Just a lump of flesh grinding along, eating, drinking, sleeping, working, crapping. (1059)

Such reification, the *becoming a thing* that stands in opposition to theosis (becoming like God and, therefore, becoming a person), is unequivocally evil in Dick's world. That Dick associates it with a tomb world is only appropriate and points toward the fact that, although often represented in Dick's fiction as literally becoming a machine, reification is fundamentally an alienation from a community of persons:

If reality differs from person to person, can we speak of reality singular, or shouldn't we really be talking about plural realities? And if there are plural realities, are some more true (more real) than others? What about the world of the schizophrenic? Maybe it's as real as our world. Maybe we cannot say we are in touch with reality and he is not, but should instead say, His reality is so different from ours that he can't explain his to us, and we can't explain ours to him. The problem, then, is that if subjective worlds are experienced too differently, there occurs a breakdown of communication . . . and *there* is the real illness. ("How to Build a Universe" 261)

While this might sound like a solipsistic degeneration, note that Dick is quite open to and unconcerned with a degree of unresolved postmodern relativism. He is no ontological

perfectionist. His concern in this passage is with the breakdown of communication—in other words a breakdown in the ability of people to relate to each other through the “dia-logos” that person has made foundational to being, to become alienated through their subjective experience of worlds that may or may not be real. Remember, after all, that reification, while also a loss of God, is in many ways equivalent to a loss of world, to finding one’s world growing less and less real.

A similar association of reification and alienation finds expression in Zizioulas’s interpretation of the Trinitarian tradition:

Life and love are identified in the person: the person does not die only because it is loved and loves; outside the communion of love the person loses its uniqueness and becomes a being like other beings, a “thing” without absolute “identity” and “name,” without a face. Death for a person means ceasing to love and to be loved, ceasing to be unique and unrepeatable, whereas life for the person means the survival of the uniqueness of its hypostasis, which is affirmed and maintained by love. (49)

To cease to be a person is to not merely act tropically but to *become* a trope, a mere material iteration.

The fear of reification, of the blurred and dissolving line between person and thing, is undeniably the concern of many of Dick’s protagonists. It is perhaps most keenly represented in *A Scanner Darkly*, which, as I suggested earlier, may in many ways be taken as the fictionalization of some of the concerns expressed in “The Android and the Human.” *A Scanner Darkly* is also one of the key places in Dick’s body of work where he most deliberately explores the destabilizing effects of technological mediation as such. (That the novel is also the place

where Dick most directly addresses drugs and drug addiction is a pharmaceutical coincidence (Plato and Derrida might have found insightful.) But our immediate interest is primarily in how to understand the place of technology in Dick's mimesis relative to the represented world and the people inhabiting it. Echoing Dick's questions about scanners and the human heart in "The Android and the Human," the central character of *Scanner*, Bob Arcter, muses,

Whatever it is that's watching, it is not a human.

Not by my standards, anyhow. Not what I'd recognize.

As silly as this is, he thought, it's frightening. Something is being done to me and by a mere thing, here in my own house. Before my very eyes.

Within *something's* very eyes; within sight of some *thing*. Which, unlike little dark-eyed Donna, does not ever blink. What does a scanner see? he asked himself. I mean, really see? Into the head? Down into the heart? Does a passive infrared scanner like they used to use or a cube-type holo scanner like they use these days, the latest thing, 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. I see only murk. Murk outside; murk inside. I hope, for everyone's sake, the scanners do better. Because, he thought, if the scanner sees only darkly, the way I myself do, then we are cursed, cursed again and like we have been continually, and we'll wind up dead this way, knowing very little and getting that little fragment wrong too. (1019)

Bob Arcter's concern, here, is something more than the concerns of Mr. Tagomi or Rudolph Wegener or Rick Deckard at having to live in a world of ethical confusion and subjective instability. Bob Arcter's concern is that technology as such, and in particular surveillance

technology, may create conditions of ethical confusion—that technology, in short, *makes* worlds and the people who inhabit them unreal, precisely by standing in as a kind of substitute for the omnipresence of God. Arctor expresses his anxiety about this as fear about technological mediation reifying people he loves: “And then a dreadful, ugly thought rose inside him. Suppose when I play the tapes back I see Donna when she’s in here—opening a window with a spoon or knife blade—and slipping in and destroying my possessions and stealing. Another Donna: the chick as she really is, or anyhow as she is when I can’t see her” (974), and, “Donna translated into a thing; and so it went, for all of them someday” (989). Technology in Dick’s worlds is often a force of reification—a force that in many ways opposes ontogeny and that within Dick’s body of work as a whole is presented as dehumanizing and evil. Yet, far from being a simple Luddite, Dick, as we read in “The Android and the Human,” often expresses feelings of ambivalence rather than simple antagonism toward technology. Ultimately, technology is not the source of Dick’s main concerns about authentic and inauthentic being. Technology does not function in Dick’s worlds as *the* force opposed to ontogeny, but rather as a dangerous complication of the tenuous relationship between authentic human being and world.

We can see this expressed obliquely in Dick’s discussion of *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* included in “The Android and the Human.” Here Dick proposes a particularly hopeful reading of what is in fact one of his darkest and most direct attempts to represent a truly cosmic evil (I have italicized *Stigmata*’s quoted epigraph):

In my novel *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, which is a study of absolute evil, the protagonist, after his encounter with Eldritch, returns to Earth and dictates a memo. This little section appears ahead of the text of the novel. It *is* the novel, actually, this

paragraph; the rest is a sort of post-mortem, or rather, a flashback in which all that came to produce a one-paragraph book is presented . . . This statement is for me my credo—not so much in God, either a good god or a bad god or both—but in ourselves. It goes as follows, and this is all I actually have to say or want ever to say:

I mean, after all; you have to consider, we're only made out of dust. That's admittedly not much to go on and we shouldn't forget that. But even considering, I mean it's a sort of bad beginning, we're not doing too bad. So I personally have faith that even in this lousy situation we're faced with we can make it. (206)

The novel's epigraph is attributed to Leo Bulero, the protagonist of *Stigmata*. It is, as Dick suggests, a summation of the book, or at least the book's climax. And although the novel ends with a tone of uncertainty, the epigraph suggests a more hopeful conclusion to Bulero's private war with Palmer Eldritch. At the end of the novel, echoing the epigraph, Bulero thinks,

We have lived thousands of years under one old-time plague already that's partly spoiled and destroyed our holiness, and that from a source higher than Eldritch. And if that can't completely obliterate our spirit, how can this? Is it maybe going to finish the job? If it thinks so—if Palmer Eldritch believes that's what he arrived here for—he's wrong.

Because that power in me that was implanted without any knowledge—*it wasn't even reached by the original ancient blight*. How about that? (429)

If we accept the strange, metallic “stigmata” that people develop after taking the drug Palmer Eldritch has brought back from space as a kind of technology, then Eldritch, as a reifying force, introduces a dangerous and potentially deadly complication into blighted or fallen human nature but does so without fundamentally changing the human condition. If we generalize this across

Dick's oeuvre as a whole, then we can say that technology's role in Dick's worlds is as an exacerbation of the human tendency to slip out of personhood into thing-ness (or to dehumanize and reify others). However, it is not, in Dick's worlds at least, the primary origin of this dark facet of human being, and Dick's ambivalence about technology, despite its dangerously reifying effects on human being, stems, I would argue, from the sense of the inevitability of its ubiquitous integration into human life that we see expressed in "The Human and the Android." For all that he is touted as a prophet of the posthuman milieu and our technologically ambient environment, Dick was much less concerned with technology as such than with the human nature it potentially obscures.

Yet the general interest in the science fictions of Philip K. Dick with regard to the existential ramifications of technology, despite Dick's minimal engagement with it in his fiction, displays a correct intuition. If our world of ambient technology does in fact forestall human encounter and, therefore, ethical deliberation and action, then Dick's mimesis, which is defined in response to just such worlds, holds great weight as a potential pattern or poetically universal example of how to understand and respond to such a world.

If we correlate Diane Davis's and Trinitarian theology's accounts of foundational relatedness with our earlier definition of what makes a world real for Philip K. Dick, we can posit as a corollary that ***a world is unreal to the degree that it forestalls personal encounter***. And like our earlier formulation of what, according to Dick, makes a world real or unreal, this proposition is as much a statement about artistic mimesis as it is a statement about ontology—at least when the

ontology under examination is that of a world of technological ambience and therefore a constructed, poetic, *mimetic* world.

Here we begin to really get at why our mediating technologies come with the potential to introduce profound instability into our human lives—and why Dick may be an important touchstone for understanding this instability. The dispersal of human agency through technology, while not in and of itself new, seems poised to cross a threshold of dispersal that will blur or dilute our relatedness to other human beings such that our encounters with them will be unrecognizable, or at least indistinguishable from our general interactions with the technological environment—Dick’s major concern with technology precisely. Can it be taken for granted that we will remain persons—human being toward, being through, being with—in a posthuman world that has fully encoded the disintegration of our autonomous subjectivity into the ways that the technological environment determines or forestalls how we relate? To riff on C. S. Lewis, we can now ask, quite seriously, how long ‘till we no longer have faces?

CONCLUDING REMARKS

To conclude, it may perhaps seem as if this dissertation offers two contrary propositions that can be taken as true of both our world and that of Dick's mimesis: that our relatedness is inescapable and that technology will allow us to escape from it. But this would be to take the poles of my dialectical squirming too strictly. Technology, if we take Dick's understanding of it, is an exacerbation of the preexisting murkiness that allows worlds to slip into ethical confusion and irreality. No Dickian world is wholly real or wholly unreal—and, furthermore, most worlds are in the process of becoming more of each. And no account of human being as either person or individual is entirely stable. But where the collapse of world (which we should recall is often portrayed by Dick as a proliferation of world) defaces and forestalls human encounter, it utterly explodes human individuality. The good news, given the discussions of the preceding two chapters, is that in Dick's world fundamentally personal being is not destroyed by subjective collapse and may in fact necessarily emerge out of it—but not without grave dangers and profound struggle. Though we can perhaps imagine technological interventions into human being so extensive that we are utterly removed from having to encounter other human beings as inescapably related to ourselves, yet amid the current wreckage of individuality our fundamental relatedness stands out in particularly stark relief, and there is some chance, I would argue, to seize and to glom onto it, acting to ensure that it is not immediately or easily eroded. N. Katherine Hayles suggests as much in the final paragraph of *How We Became Posthuman* where she states,

The best possible time to contest for what the posthuman means is now, before the trains of thought it embodies have been laid down so firmly that it would take dynamite to

change them. Although some current versions of the posthuman point toward the antihuman and the apocalyptic, we can craft others that will be conducive to the long-range survival of humans and of the other life-forms, biological and artificial, with whom we share the planet and ourselves. (291)

But how might we take Dick's mimesis as a model not only of a kind of world but of types of active response to that world, with regard not to the alien mediations and medications of *Palmer Eldritch* or *A Scanner Darkly* but to our own relationships to technology? Let us do our best to answer this question succinctly, as I don't think anything I can propose here about the nature of our technologically ambient world will be more than suppositional. My intention has really been to demonstrate the depth of unified artistry that characterizes Dick's writings precisely as art; it just so happens that I am performing this task in the midst of a moment of potential kairotic application as we awaken to the full, world-imitating potential of our technology. Returning to the Rickertian proposition of an earlier chapter that technology-in-ubiquity discloses itself as a world, what can our extended discussion of PKD bring to that initial proposition to inform it and make it more directly applicable? I proposed that we may look at our world as a kind of mimesis—as so integrated with technology that it has become a kind of fictional world. It should be abundantly clear that I think our technological world is very much like the world that Dick built if we look at his major works and his speculative writings in continuity. It should also be clear that I think an ambient rhetoric/aesthetic is the tool best equipped to take account of what this technological fiction means and does to those who inhabit it. But I think we can take Dick's body of work as not merely diagnostic but also prescriptive.

I have mentioned Dick's "mysticism" several times. I mean something very precisely by this—namely, that Dick's understanding of authentic human being and its relationship to the world is one that can be characterized as belonging to the mystical tradition as defined by Evelyn Underhill in her landmark investigations into that tradition. In her 1915 book *Practical Mysticism*, Underhill writes,

Mysticism is the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment.

It is not expected that the inquirer will find great comfort in this sentence when first it meets his eye. The ultimate question, "What is Reality?"—a question, perhaps, which never occurred to him before—is already forming in his mind; and he knows that it will cause him infinite distress. Only a mystic can answer it: and he, in terms which other mystics alone will understand. (2)

Thus, in good Eliotic fashion, our end is in our beginning, for if Dick is sincere (and correct) in the quote that kicked off this chapter's discussion, then Dick's pursuits as a writer are indeed fundamentally mystical in the sense that Underhill proposes. Does that make Dick particularly special? Most great artists, after all, are after these fundamental questions—most great philosophers and scientists too. It does allow us, if we approach Dick as a mystic in the way that Underhill defines mysticism, to take Dick's insights as profoundly *practical*.

This might sound like an odd proposal, considering that I earlier found issue with Dick's only fully prescriptive rule for cultivating authenticity—namely, *balking* which is, let's face it, kinda dumb. In point of fact, what I think we can learn from Dick is primarily *that* an authentic response to the dissolution of our individuality and the subject/object divide that constituted it

will perform be mystical. As Underhill writes in her earlier survey of the Western mystical tradition, 1911's *Mysticism*,

It [mysticism] is non-individualistic. It implies, indeed, the abolition of individuality; of that hard separateness, that 'I, Me, Mine' which makes of man a finite isolated thing. It is essentially a movement of the heart, seeking to transcend the limitations of the individual standpoint and to surrender itself to ultimate Reality; for no personal gain, to satisfy no transcendental curiosity, to obtain no other-worldly joys, but purely from an instinct of love. (71)

To put this another way, and in terms consistent with what we have explored in this dissertation, mysticism is the practice of being a person—to orient oneself by one's relationships within the total community of love that can characterize human being. Dick's fictions are thus mystical insofar as we take them as presenting or dramatizing actions that conform to this practice and outlook.

That Dick discovered the solution to his collapsing world in a mystical experience and outlook that, if not exactly Christian, nonetheless defined itself in incarnational and personalistic terms, does not, I believe, limit the power of Dick's vision to those of religious faith. The importance of prayer as a human practice comes into stark relief the more that life involves communicating with entities that we are not entirely sure are human or even exist. To put it another way, let us imagine that technology has reduced encounter and relationship down to its irreducible unit—digitized relationship, if you will. Would it be inaccurate to call that tiniest, invisible impetus (however reciprocated) toward another (however real) a prayer? Then prayer would be the quantum of relationship, that which allows us to be a person, to be human being-

toward. We should be very careful, then, in our interactions with and through technology, to make sure we know to whom we are praying—understand toward what our impetus inclines us.

In the words of poet-monk Thomas Merton,

Write a prayer to a computer? But first of all you have to find out how It thinks. Does It dig prayer? More important still, does It dig me, and father, mother, etc., etc.? How does one begin: O Thou great unalarmed and humorless electric sense...? Start out wrong and you give instant offense. You may find yourself shipped off to the camps in a freight car. Prayer is a virtue. But don't begin with the wrong number. ("Cables to the Ace," 399-400)

I am not trying to be as cryptic as I probably sound here—nor as pessimistic. Recall Dick's ambivalence about the technological environment as expressed in "The Android and the Human": "We should be content with the mysterious, the meaningless, the contradictory, the hostile, and most of all the unexplainably warm and giving—total so-called inanimate environment, in other words very much like a person, like the behavior of one intricate, subtle, half-veiled, deep, perplexing, and much-to-be-loved human being to another" (208). In other words, technology may disperse human agency, but that does not make it inhuman. But we should recognize—and this is the force of my brief discussion of prayer—that human beings are making a great many demands on our technology, not least of which is the demand that it become a person.

In their article "What Are Humans For?" Nathan Gale and Timothy Richardson offer a similar, yet more optimistic reading of what they, borrowing the term from Kevin Kelly, call the *technium*: "a complex organism of various human and nonhuman networks" that includes not

merely specific technologies but also the networks involved in their production (186). Thinking about technology as the technium emphasizes how technological networks function as something like an entity we can enter into relationship with. “Technology has reached an easily identifiable point beyond creating a second nature or ‘Counter-Nature’ to our (prime/primal) humanity, to being recognized as its own symbol-using entity that influences, persuades, and possibly loves” (200). If this is so, and I think that in many ways it may as well be, then ironically enough the complications this technological person introduces into human being are much more dangerous than any complications technology ever before introduced—because we don’t know yet if it will be a *good* person, and the more it enters into relationship to us and therefore becomes more of a person, the less we will be able *decide* for it (although we will always have fundamentally *determined*) what kind of person it may be. This, I would argue is the true source of Dick’s ambivalence concerning technology, as whether technology is an authentic person or not is a question technology will have to answer for itself—if it can—by entering into ethical relationship with other persons, human or otherwise.

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