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How Much Does Chaos Scare You?

Politics, Religion, and Philosophy in the Fiction of Philip K. Dick

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In 1989, while I was serving in Peace Corps in West Africa, I received a letter from an American academic publisher asking if I were interested in submitting for publication the doctoral dissertation I had completed the year before at the University of Iowa.

“Why would I want to do that?” I asked. One dissertation on Philip K. Dick had already appeared as a book (by Kim Stanley Robinson) and Dick, though I loved his work, just wasn’t that well known or respected (not then). Plus, I was living in a mud hut and teaching people to use oxen for plowing: how would I ever be able to do the work that would be needed to turn my study from dissertation to book?

When I defended the dissertation, I had imagined myself finished with studies of Philip K. Dick and with academia. My life was moving in other, distant directions. So, when I heard, a year after tossing that letter into the trash, that the publisher had closed its doors, I figured that was simply confirmation that I had made the right choice.

A few years later, however, in the early days of the Internet, I ran across Jason Koornick’s then-new site www.philipkdick.com (now www.philipkdickfans.com, the other name now housing the “official” site). Looking it over and admiring it, I had two thoughts.

First, one of the things I had come to hate about doctoral dissertations is that they disappear. The only people who were reading them were the few other academics working in related fields who happened to request copies from University Microfilms in Ann Arbor, Michigan. By this time, obviously, I had changed from my earlier attitude: now I did want people to read what I had written and was worried that academic studies had moved just too far from even the educated lay reader, the reader who interests me most.

Perhaps I also had been seduced by the volume that Judith Kerman had edited, *Retrofitting Blade Runner: Issues in Ridley Scott’s Blade Runner and Philip K. Dick’s Do Androids Dream*

Second, I had become concerned about the increasingly proprietary nature of much scholarship. I believe quite strongly in the concept of the commons and feel that we all gain when we contribute to it.

By giving Jason my dissertation for inclusion on his website—and doing that without copyrighting my work—I felt I might be moving academic studies somewhat into the popular sphere (something I continue to encourage) and could be promoting the sort of openness that helps engender future scholarly and creative work.

A few years afterwards, when I had been completely removed from academia for quite some time, I received an email from a woman in Spain, asking if a chapter of the dissertation (she had found it on Jason’s website) could be translated for inclusion in a magazine there. I gave my consent, of course, telling her I appreciated her asking (for, legally, she had no reason to). The chapter (chapter one of the dissertation) was translated by Diana Catalán Ruescas and appeared in VALIS: Ciencia Ficción y Fantasía 10 under the title “¿Cuánto te asusta el Caos... ?: Introducción a la obra y filosofía de Philip K. Dick” in 2001.

Later that year, I returned to teaching, though part-time. At first, I saw it simply as a way of making a little extra money, but soon discovered I liked it much more than I ever had before. Soon, I was teaching at two, sometimes three, different colleges—a course here, a course there—and thinking about entering the field full-time. The problem, though, was that English had become an extremely competitive field and, having been out of it for so long, I had no record of publication within it, nothing to base my job search on. And, quite frankly, having been away for so long, I didn’t know if I had
the energy to catch up with everything that had happened in the meantime.

In 2003, however, an English scholar named Will Brooker contacted me, asking if I would contribute to a new anthology of essays on *Blade Runner*. He’d liked my essay in the Kerman volume so had looked me up. Flattered, I agreed, and produced “Reel Frogs and Imaginary Cities: The Influences of Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* and Philip K. Dick on the Contemporary Science Fiction Movie” which will be part of *The Blade Runner Experience: After-Effects and Intertexts of a Cult Film* (London: Wallflower Press, September 2005).

Emboldened, I decided to try my hand at a book of my own, on the intersection of science fiction and film with consideration of the impact of the new DVD technology. Though he didn’t like my proposal on that topic, Eric Levy, an editor at Praeger Publishing, encouraged me to submit another, one concentrating exclusively on the DVD. That led to *The DVD Revolution: Movies, Culture, and Technology* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005) and confidence enough for me to begin a real academic job search.

While I was working on *The DVD Revolution*, I received another email, this time from a man named Arturo Villarrubia. He asked if I were aware that my dissertation had now appeared as a book in Spain!

Though I’d had glimmerings that something was happening, I was still a little surprised. I didn’t mind, however, and wrote Arturo back, telling him it was fine by me—and wrote the publisher, asking that he send me a copy or two. He did. The book, which appeared at the end of 2003 from Grupo Editorial AJEC in Granada, is called *¿Cuánto te asusta el Caos? Política, religión y filosofía en la obra de Philip K. Dick*. Eva Verloop Van der Meij did the translation.

The work was well-received in Spain, and Arturo and I continued to exchange email. A few months later, he asked if I would contribute to a volume he was editing. So, I wrote “What’s Going Down: The Lessons of Philip K. Dick’s Short Fiction for the Post-9/11 World” and sent it off to him.
Unfortunately, he was unable to use the essay, so I decided to include it here.

Of course, all of this new interest in my work on Philip K. Dick didn’t come about because I am so brilliant, but because the world had awakened to the fact that he was. Dick’s books have sold well in the decades since his death, and more than half-a-dozen movies have been made from them. He has come to be recognized as one of the most intriguing writers of his time as well as one whose voice still seems fresh—a status that appears to be secure for the foreseeable future.

As I began to publish more, and as my dissertation seemed connected, in one way or another, to each of the publications mentioned here, I soon began to think about ways of seeing it in print along with the rest. Given its checkered publication history, however, I did not feel I wanted to submit it to a traditional academic publisher, or to any other publisher, for that matter. For one thing, I want what’s on the www.philipkdick.com site to stay there, unencumbered by copyright considerations. For another, I wanted to be able to add the essay I wrote for Villarrubia without hassling over rights for it (Arturo is fine with whatever I do with it in English—it’s the other side I would worry about). If I were to publish the dissertation as a book, I would want the book to be an addition, not a limitation, to the dissertation’s place as a part of Philip K. Dick scholarship and fandom.

The only person who would be willing to publish this book without copyright is me. And so that is what I have done, utilizing print-on-demand possibilities through the Internet, revising the chapters a little (though I must admit I haven’t taken advantage of contemporary scholarship—as I should have done), and even formatting the book myself, using Adobe InDesign.

Please feel free to reproduce any part of this book, distributing it any way you wish. All I ask in return is that you let me know: ajbarlow@gmail.com.

— Aaron Barlow
Chapter One: Perception, Misperception and the Role of the Author

“Roog!”

Philip K. Dick’s professional writing career begins with that nonsense syllable, the representation of the bark of a dog named Boris. In his short story “Roog” (sold in 1951), Boris tries to alert his masters to approaching calamity. The dog, as Dick later wrote:

imagined that the garbagemen who came every Friday morning were stealing valuable food which the family had carefully stored away in a safe metal container. . . . Finally . . . the dog begins to imagine that someday the garbagemen will eat the people in the house, as well as stealing their food. (PKD: I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon, 2-3)

By the end of “Roog,” however, Dick has encouraged speculation that the “garbagemen” really might be aliens held off by dogs the aliens call “Guardians.”

Boris faces two problems. First, though he barks that “Roogs” are coming, no one understands. He cannot communicate his warning. Second, his “Roogs” may be a delusion instead of a real danger. Boris cannot tell which; he doesn’t even know that he could, in fact, be wrong. He has seen the paperboy and barked at him, taking him, without any evidence, as a Roog.

Later, when he sees what may be two more boys, Boris identifies them, too, as Roogs. This time the conversation between them that Boris hears, or imagines, could place them within an alien conspiracy:

“This area really is none too good for a first trial,” the first Roog said. “Too many Guardians. ... Now, the northside area—”

“They decided,” the other Roog said. “There are so many
factors—"

“Of course.” They glanced at Boris and moved back farther from the fence. He could not hear the rest of what they were saying. (The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick 1: 15)

The conversation is somewhat ambiguous. It could be on some other topic completely and Boris does only hear a part of it. In itself, it proves nothing.

Finally come the “garbagemen,” creatures who certainly act differently than real garbagemen would. They eat egg shells as they talk about the state of affairs:

“Well, except for these places around the Guardians, this area is well cleared,” the biggest Roog said. “I’ll be glad when this particular Guardian is done. He certainly causes us a lot of trouble.”

“Don’t be impatient,” one of the Roogs said. He grinned. “Our truck is full enough as it is. Let’s leave something for next week.”

All the Roogs laughed.

They went on up the path, carrying the offering in the dirty, sagging blanket. (Stories 1: 17)

These speakers certainly seem like aliens. Perhaps the dog is right. But it may not even matter: who cares, after all, if aliens, and not humans, carry off the garbage?

Dick gives no hint of any “truth” behind Boris’s subjective perceptions. Whatever the case, Boris’s inability to communicate his concern leaves the matter moot and leads him to fear the breakdown of his world of suburban dog-life—and leads Dick to think about Boris’s situation in human terms:

Maybe each human being lives in a unique world, a private world different from those inhabited and experienced by all other humans. . . . 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 a
schizophrenic? Maybe it’s as real as our world. Maybe we cannot say that 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 in communication ... and there is the real illness. (Hope 3)

As a dog, Boris views the human world through the blanket distortion of canine point-of-view. Yet what he sees subjectively may be “real”—just as it may be a mask or a deception created through his own limited perceptual abilities. That these “may”s exist concerned Dick a great deal. Perhaps the blanket distortion of human point-of-view makes experience as difficult for us to decipher as for Boris.

Perhaps Boris, finally, is something like the poor fantasy writer no one listens to. Like, hmm, Phil Dick. Like any struggler for communication, particularly for communication that transcends individual, varied perception.

Related concerns appear in another early story, in “Beyond Lies the Wub,” the first of Dick’s stories to appear in print (in the July, 1952 issue of Planet Stories). Here Dick presents the danger of blinding oneself, of refusing to see more than one aspect of any object appearing in one’s subjective “reality.” Paired with “Roog,” “Beyond Lies the Wub” provides a surprisingly appropriate start for Dick’s extremely unusual career.

In “Beyond Lies the Wub,” spacemen visiting Mars load various exotic creatures into their ship to take them back to Earth. Captain Franco, while supervising, is startled by what one of his crewmen brings:

“My God!” He stood staring, his hands on his hips. Peterson was walking along the path, his face red, leading it by a string.

“I’m sorry, Captain,” he said, tugging at the string. Franco walked toward him.
“What is it?”
The wub stood sagging, its great body settling slowly. It was sitting down, its eyes half shut. A few flies buzzed about its flank, and it switched its tail.

*It* sat. There was silence.

“It’s a wub,” Peterson said. “I got it from a native for fifty cents. He said it was a very unusual animal. Very respected.”

“This?” Franco poked the great sloping side of the wub. “It’s a pig! A huge dirty pig!” *(Stories 1: 27-28)*

Though the wub turns out to be intelligent and able to speak, Franco cannot get rid of the idea that it is a pig. Finally, following the logic of his perception, he decides to have it slaughtered and served for dinner.

In the meantime, Peterson and the wub hold something of a conversation:

“So you see,” the wub said, “we have a common myth. Your mind contains many familiar myth symbols. Ishtar, Odysseus—”

Peterson sat silently, staring at the floor. He shifted in his chair.

“Go on,” he said. “Please go on.”

“I find your Odysseus a figure common to the mythology of most self-conscious races. As I interpret it, Odysseus wanders as an individual aware of himself as such. This is the idea of separation, of separation from family and country. The process of individuation.”

“But Odysseus returns to his home.” Peterson looked out the port window, at the stars, endless stars, burning intently in the empty universe. “Finally he goes home.”

“As must all creatures. The moment of separation is a temporary period, a brief journey of the soul. It begins, it ends. The wanderer returns to land and race....” *(Stories 1: 31)*
Peterson willingly listens, accepting that even a pig-like creature might have something of value to say. As the wub proves it does.

After a dinner of wub-meat, which few have eaten, an obviously full and satisfied Captain Franco relaxes, enjoying himself:

“Come, come,” he said. “Cheer up! Let’s discuss things.”
He smiled.
“As I was saying before I was interrupted, the role of Odysseus in the myths—"
Peterson jerked up, staring.
“To go on,” the Captain said. “Odysseus, as I understand him—” (Stories 1: 33)

The consumed wub has “eaten” the captain, emerging intact from within the being who has ingested it.

We have, here, an outrageous variant of the scenario of the writer influencing the reader who has read, or consumed, his or her work.

In VALIS and Radio Free Albemuth, two of Dick’s last four novels, Dick himself emerges from “within” the works, becoming, like the wub from within the captain, an explicit part of their surface. Though neither novel is meant to be directly autobiographical, Dick drew on his own experiences for each of them. And both, though fiction, contain characters named Phil Dick, making sure that the fact of authority is never forgotten.

Like the wub, Dick cannot merely be consumed or, more appropriately, critically digested. Through his writing career of more than thirty years, of more than 42 published novels (a good number posthumously), 115 short stories, a screenplay, and a million-word “exegesis” of a 1974 mystical experience, he arises within his critics and readers, forcing them into his conversations, making them consider, in their own lives, the
dilemmas of his fictions. At the same time, Dick keeps his works on a personal level. His own voice, his own concerns, are never lost.

Certain themes appear with surprising consistency in Dick’s fiction. They crop up in the early short stories, called by some critics, including Kim Stanley Robinson, Dick’s “apprentice” fiction. They appear in the novels of Dick’s most productive period, the 1960s. And they are a part of the last novels, the VALIS trilogy and The Transmigration of Timothy Archer—written when Dick was, according to Eric Rabkin and others, insane.

These themes fall into three inter-related categories: metaphysics, religion, and politics. The first concerns perception and the world, and the individual’s interaction with both. The second, the moralities of creator/creation relationships. The third, relationships between individuals; by extension, between individuals and political systems. From these, and from their interactions, come all other political points presented in Dick’s fiction.

All three thematic categories stem from Dick’s somewhat neurotic and libertarian individualism coupled with respect for what the Quakers Dick knew when young call “that of God in every person.”

Dick found certain concepts or models unusually helpful in clarifying his thinking and used them extensively in his fiction. These models became as common in his work as the themes themselves, and often became associated with particular ones. Of these, “the mask” is probably the most important.

Starting from the basic and obvious statement that a mask is meant to deceive, Dick again and again explores the possible relationships that may exist between the deceiver and the deceived, and between each and the mask itself, explores how the act of deception might change the relationships, and explores the possible impact of discovery of the hoax. Dick’s deceiver/deceived relationships run the gamut from god/human to man/wife to human/construct. The mask itself may be a perceived, or misperceived, “reality” or may be sim-
ply a single altered skull. As an act of deception must have some purpose behind it, some perceived need to change the status of the relationship between deceiver and deceived, power and politics are always part of the act.

Dick used the idea of the mask as a kaleidoscope that he could turn to provide a new view of his various themes, each, still connected to all past ones. A friendly mask likely covers an inimical face. Else, why the mask? But it might be the reverse. For various reasons (see Job), a caring god might don a ferocious mask. A politician, certainly, would not do this—not to his or her constituency, that is. Think of “Papa Joe” Stalin. But may have another mask to present to foreign diplomats. Dick decided early on that “reality” is no shared whole but an interconnection of personal visions, each as “real” as the next. He approached these personal visions, too, as masks.

One of Dick’s central concerns was the individual’s plight when forced to negotiate an “untrustworthy” world. What does one do when metaphysical and epistemological questions prove unanswerable and personal “reality” becomes mutable? Dick finally decided that one can only act based on the relationships with others one perceives. Boris, perhaps, should make friends with the Roogs.

The political considerations always in his work arise from Dick’s deliberations on how individuals should act in relation to others. Where, he asks, do responsibilities begin, and end? When does “acting in the best interest of oneself, or even others” become an infringement on the rights of those others? From the answers he does finally manage, Dick moves to consideration of types of political relationships and their bearings on individuals.

As a writer and creator, Dick’s political thought led him to examine his own role in relation to his creations and to his readers. Was there an implied totalitarianism in his own writings, in his presentation? To make sure there was not, Dick began to examine the mechanics of his own fiction and finally found ways to change the ways he presented his fictional worlds.
Though he had long used gods and the possibilities they represent as devices for political discussions, Dick, in his last years, turned to serious presentation of religious ideas and debates in his fictions. Though he had accepted the idea of God, he never let his belief shatter his previous conception of free human interaction and individuation. He could not see God as a totalitarian. His last books are a reflection of his own struggle to come to terms with his conception of his God and attempts to integrate his older beliefs into a new situation.

For each example used to discuss any of Dick’s themes, five more can easily be found elsewhere in his fiction. He was that consistent a writer. Sometimes these others initially seem to express a thematic point completely at odds with the first. Exploring thematic possibilities and problems, Dick would set up robots, say, as an asset to human beings. Then, in the next story or novel, he would show them as destructive. Through all of this, however, Dick’s respect for the individual, be it human or something else, remains constant, providing an underpinning that allows him to explore, even in seemingly contradictory ways, the situation of the individual vis-a-vis gods, realities, and politics. Or of the mask vis-a-vis the mask, self-image vis-a-vis death.

The shock of discovering that Joe Chip has long been dead, in the 1969 novel *Ubik*, should make the reader consider Chip’s story as a dream or a fiction, thereby taking readers back out of the “fiction” and making Chip’s situation, his relation to his world, something like the reader’s own in relation to the novel. And, maybe, to their—our—worlds.

A group of characters, including Chip, has been victim of a bombing. In the aftermath, the group discovers that one of their number (their employer) has been killed. Later, however, the “half-life” that Chip believes his employer now exists in (he and the others have “cold-packed” the body and taken it to a special repository) turns out to be their own. Only their employer, Chip and the others discover, has survived, taking
their bodies in cold-pack to the “moratorium.”

The “fictionality” of Chip’s “new” life mirrors the illusions Dick saw in our own, reflecting his concern for his highly volatile personal relationship with the world he inhabited.

The 1959 of *Time Out of Joint* is also an illusion shared by a number of characters. Here, the world has been built around Ragle Gumm by a government that cannot afford to lose his skills. Before falling into mental illness, Gumm was on the point of rejecting the regime, of turning his talents over to the enemy in a war between humans on earth and those on the moon.

Gumm’s illusory milieu is presented with considerable detail, thereby drawing readers toward consideration of the veracity of their own worlds. Perhaps even making them consider that there might be some truth to the paranoia hidden within all of us. This was something Dick, apparently, thought about a good deal, in terms of his own life. The various theories he presented in regard to the 1971 break-in at his home, recounted in Paul William’s *Only Apparently Real*, show both fears that had been building within in him for a long time and his realization that these very fears might be meaningless. His life, after all, might only be “written,” too.

Other writers, particularly science fiction writers, come up with concepts that strike us as bizarre or unusual, but few of them find ways to make readers take them as legitimate bases for consideration of our personal situations. By this I mean that they remove their discussions from our everyday lives—by placing them in situations radically removed from anything even analogous to what we might experience ourselves. The schematics of Larry Niven’s *Ringworld* and *The Ringworld Engineers* are fun to consider, certainly, but they tell little about how we might react to the problems other humans face. They strive toward no reification, no identification with our own world.

Only a few writers, among them Thomas Pynchon, manage to bring the struggles of their characters into the lives of their
readers the way Dick does. Oedipa Maas, when she counts off the possible solutions to what she sees as the Trystero mystery in *The Crying of Lot 49*, provides a parallel with questions many of us have asked in regards to our own lives. Am I being hoodwinked? If so, why? And by whom? Am I, alone, the target?

In *VALIS* Dick presents, in two characters, two versions of himself, one a believer in an odd personalized Christianity, one a skeptic about everything—though he never rejects the possibility of truth in any system of belief. The skeptic narrates the book. Drawn to him, we readers soon find ourselves accepting both his skepticism and his willingness to consider the beliefs of others—within the novel, at least.

The two struggling versions he presents of himself reflect Dick’s own inability to pick up an idea and then drop it. His works, like the arguments between the two Philip Dicks in *VALIS*, are a series of explorations, each a piece of a well-gnawed bone. As Michael Tolley says:

> Philip K. Dick is one of those novelists who keep telling us the same story. This is not to say that he is a bore, or a formula-writer, or that he has only one story to tell. He is obsessed by certain patterns of action, certain relationships, conflicts, or aspirations. (*The Stellar Gauge*, 199)

These lead Dick away from conventional ideas of how the world of a story or book should be built in science fiction. Or in mainstream narratives. Both demand consistency and a certain verisimilitude.

Dick once commented on the reaction to his work by the most influential science fiction critic of the fifties and early sixties:

> Damon [Knight] feels that it’s bad artistry when you build those funky universes where people fall through the floor. It’s like he’s viewing a story the way a building inspector would when he’s building your house. But reality really is a mess, and yet it’s exciting. The basic
thing is, how frightened are you of chaos? And how happy are you with order? (Cover, 36)

In 1978 Dick wrote a speech he called “How to Build a Universe that Doesn’t Fall Apart Two Days Later.” He explains in it why the worlds and perceived “realities” of his novels often seem so prone to fragmentation:

I like to build universes which 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. I have a secret love of chaos. (Hope, 5)

Chaos, to Dick, is that which cannot be predicted, but ought to be. That which is not there, but seems it should. Your hand reaching for a light string that one “knows” has always been there, to give one of his examples, but not finding it, then discovering a switch on the wall and remembering you have never had a bathroom with a pull-chord light. “Now, that actually happened to me” (Platt, Dream Masters, 152), Dick once said.

A confusion of frames, a blurring of conceptual boundaries—that is how Dick saw chaos. Even a situation where one can walk through an obvious fantasy and into a reality physically removed from previous reality, as happens in The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch, where a new drug takes the central characters out of their own situations and fantasies and into the situations and fantasies of others—only to discover that “reality” is a part of the fantasy, too. Only to finally find, once free of the fantasy, that the “reality” visited as a part of the fantasy was, in fact, the “real” reality, even though the character experiencing all of this experienced it far from Earth, while that “reality” was back on Earth. Confusing? Yes. Complex? Certainly. And chaotic as well.

Given the characters’ worlds and past experiences, sequences such as those from The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch could not possibly have been predicted. They fit no pattern presented earlier in each novel.

Dick was fascinated by the implications of chaotic unpre-
dictability, wanted to dig into it, wanted to try to discover whatever truths might lie behind it, what reasons there might be for it and what limitations of human perception it indicates. Chaos, to him, is the encompassing concept around one important aspect of the human predicament—our inability or chronic failure to clearly understand patterns and relationships, be they human to human, human to machine, creator to created, perceptor to environment, or, in fact, of any type whatsoever.

Many of Dick’s novels, on first reading, seem to present us only with chaos, with exploring it—even apparently with the impossibility of ever getting through it. Certainly, Dick is not one of those who offer a clear explanation, not in The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch, at least. Perhaps he never even thought about inventing one. To do so would deny the chaotic nature of the events.

Though he does try to offer possible methods for negotiating chaotic worlds, Dick never did manage to present a simple, complete scheme for doing so. He places his characters in a “suspect” world, many of whose patterns we are too limited to see, if patterns exist at all, a world which may turn on its inhabitants at any time, proving not the purring housecat, but the enraged tiger. His characters cannot be sure of the “truth” of any of their assumptions. For “truth,” to Dick, is merely expectation that the light string will still be there—a perilous expectation.

In interviews, just as in his books, Dick loved to present blanket statements and then contradict them, thereby forcing his interviewers and readers to immediately face something of the chaotic type of situation Dick saw as life itself. He lied without apology, almost daring his interviewers and readers to try to contradict him or catch him in his contradictions.

Talking with Gregg Rickman, Dick demonstrates his agreement with Emerson’s long-cliched view of consistency:

PKD: I make no distinctions between creatures and
humans and animals and bugs. A bug’s life is as precious as my life is to me. Because all life is God.

Cockroaches are the exception.... I don’t really include wasps and cockroaches.

GR: Because?

PKD: Because I don’t like them. (Philip K. Dick: In His Own Words, 50)

Silly? Yes, but the point Dick tries to make, that the things he says only hold until they do not, that words and statement have no solidity, remains. In an interview with Charles Platt, he expands on what he might mean:

I think philosophically I fit in with some of the very late pre-Socratic people around the time of Zeno and Diogenes, the Cynics, in the Greek sense, those who live like dogs. I am inevitably persuaded by every argument that is brought to bear. If you were to suggest to me at this moment that we go out for Chinese food I would immediately agree it was the best idea I ever heard . . . . . If you were to say suddenly, Don’t you think that Chinese food is over-priced, has very little nourishment, you have to go a long way to get it, and when you bring it home it’s cold, I’d say, you’re right, I can’t abide the stuff. (Dream Masters, 151)

To Dick, the importance of this stance grew, in part, through the situations he faced in his own rather chaotic life. Extremely intelligent and well-read, yet naive, gullible, and poorly-educated, Dick never managed to fit in with either the intelligentsia to which he aspired or with the artisans whom he admired. A loner, though able to get under the skin, in his writing, of human relationships, he never managed to keep his life on an even keel. He died single, though he married five times. Years of interaction with the drug culture led him to one of several suicide attempts and a short period in a rehabilitation clinic. Three times he had what he termed “nervous breakdowns.” And an unsolved break-in and robbery at his home led him into a morass of paranoid speculation that
remained unresolved, perhaps, until speculation about it was replaced by consideration of his mystical experience three years later. Though acutely sensitive to the possibilities and limitations of the written word, Dick found himself unable to break out of one of literature’s more vulgar bonds—a bond that made him so commonly viewed as “only” a science-fiction writer. Dick never could see the justice of that.

Dick used the ironies and discoveries of his own life in his fiction, thus making at least a little knowledge about him useful to those approaching his writing. Philip Kindred Dick and a twin sister, Jane, were born on December 16, 1928 in Chicago, Illinois to Edgar and Dorothy Dick. Just a little over a month later, Jane died—possibly of malnutrition. In later years, Dick often contemplated this non-remembered (on the surface, at least) loss, wondering about this possibly missing part of his own being.

The family soon moved west, first to Colorado and then to California, settling in Berkeley in 1931. After his parents’ separation in 1933, Dorothy, who worked for the Department of Labor, was transferred to Washington, D.C. She and Phil remained there for four years before returning to Berkeley in 1937. Dick does not seem to have been a happy child. According to Paul Williams, he “suffered from a variety of illnesses, real and imagined, during childhood, including asthma, tachycardia, and extreme vertigo” (Only Apparently Real, 48)

Back in California, Dick began to develop an interest in writing:

I wrote my first novel when I was 13. I taught myself to touch type when I was in junior high, or grammar school. . . . Wrote a novel, called Return to Lilliput. Wasn’t very good. . . . Loosely based on Swift. Had a lot of submarines in it. (Rickman, Philip K. Dick: In His Own Words, 58)

Obviously, fantasy and the outlandish were even important to
him early on. For a man to whom questions of religion were to become so significant, they seem to have been a surprisingly minor part of the community surrounding Dick as he grew up. Like many around him, he developed something of an impatient attitude toward organized religion:

I had no religious background. I was raised in a Quaker school—they’re about the only group in the world that I don’t have some grievance against; there’s no hassle between me and the Quakers—but the Quaker thing was just a lifestyle. And in Berkeley there was no religious spirit at all. (Platt, *Dream Masters*, 149)

Revelations about the Nazi mentality during WWII and later conflicts with the Communist Party convinced Dick that these and other groups, all with what he saw as “true believer” structures and mentalities, presented the same dangers as organized religions, but on a greater scale. Other movements could be just as bad. As he said much later:

The greatest menace in the twentieth century is the totalitarian state. It can take many forms: left-wing fascism, psychological movements, religious movements, drug rehabilitation places, powerful people, manipulative people; or it can be in a relationship with someone who is more powerful than you psychologically. (Platt, *Dream Masters*, 150)

The need to express of this attitude, which began so early in his life, became a powerful motivation behind his writing. The belief in it was so deep that his “nervous breakdowns,” all triggered by situations where he had to face hierarchies, were probably responses to it.

Shortly after WWII, whose shocking climax at Hiroshima and Nagasaki affected him deeply, making him suspicious of even the American political structure, Dick began to exhibit the agoraphobia that would plague him, off and on, throughout his life. Still, he managed to enter the University of California at Berkeley in the fall of 1947, though he stayed a
student only a short time—later claiming to have left because he could not bring himself to participate in required R.O.T.C., or because of the first of his “nervous breakdowns,” this one making him unable to face lab or classroom situations. (Perhaps R.O.T.C. and the classroom both exhibited aspects of the totalitarianism he despised.)

As he had in high school, Dick continued to work, first in a radio store, later in the record store also owned by his earlier employer. There, his love of music, especially classical music, became something of an obsession, one that stayed with him the rest of his life and is manifest in his writing.

Love of music and antipathy toward totalitarianism were not the only facets of his personality that Dick developed at this time. He also found a respect for the small, struggling businessman and the person who works with his or her hands, a respect that he would again and again bring into his fiction.

Writing seriously in his spare time and gaining his first acceptances from the science-fiction magazines, Dick, by 1952, began to become known to the local science fiction community. Now moving into the more exalted level of ‘writer,’ he still did not care much for its members:

Of course, there was a kind of fandom, there was the Little Men’s Science Fiction marching and Chowder Society and I knew the people in it. But they were all real weird freaks. They were unpalatable to me because they did not read the great literature. There wasn’t anybody that read both. You could either be in with a group of freaks who read Heinlein, Padgett and van Vogt, and nothing else, or you could be in with the people who had read Dos Passos and Melville and Proust. But you could never get the two together, and I chose the company of those who were reading the great literature because I liked them better as people. The early fans were just trolls and whackos. They were terribly ignorant and weird people. (Lupoff, Introduction to A Handful of Darkness, x)
Wanting to impress his more intellectual friends, Dick tried to write mainstream fiction and the same time he wrote the science fiction that, he was finding, he could sell.

Though he did not care for the science fiction fans of the late 1940s and early 1950s, Dick could find no other group he liked any better—or that would even accept him. As he said later:

I was in a curious position. I had read science fiction since I was twelve years old, and was really addicted... . I also was reading what the Berkeley intellectual community was reading. For example, Proust or Joyce. So I occupied two worlds right there which normally did not intersect. Then, working in the retail store, the people I knew were TV salesmen and repairmen; they considered me peculiar for reading at all. I spent time in all kinds of different groups; I knew a lot of homosexuals... . They thought of me as strange because I wasn’t gay... and my Communist friends thought I was odd because I wouldn’t join the Communist Party... . Henry Miller said in one of his books, other children threw stones at him when they saw him. I had that same feeling. I managed to become universally despised wherever I went. I think I must have thrived on it.... (Platt, Dream Masters, 148)

His later writing certainly did thrive on it. For Dick was developing the ability to see things from varied points-of-view, an ability that later provided him the basic structure for a great deal of his work.

Dick married for the first time in 1948. But he and his wife, the former Jeanette Marlin, were divorced within the year. A second marriage, this one to Kleo Apostolides, commenced in 1950. During 1951, Dick attended a night class given in the home of Anthony Boucher, then editor of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction. Boucher eventually liked one of Dick’s stories enough to buy it for his magazine. That story, of course, is “Roog.”

Later, Dick denigrated the value of his early stories:
My stories . . . when I read them over, just appall me in that period. They’re just appallingly bad stories. And not only are they bad, but they’re incredibly conventional. You wouldn’t think the mind that conceived those conventional stories, would have made the quantum leaps up that I show later on. Without trying to be self-laudatory, the fact of the matter is that there is no indication in that early stuff that there’s any unusual mind at work. (Rickman, Philip K. Dick: In His Own Words, 64)

Between 1951 and 1955 Dick wrote and sold more than fifty stories and began to work seriously on several novels. With so much production, and the fact that he would rather have been writing other things, it is not surprising that he could find much to dislike in the early stories. And, though many of them are, as he says, quite conventional science fiction and fantasy stories, they still tend to be well-plotted and textured—and some of them do show signs of what was to come.

During this period of high short-story production, Dick had what he called his second “nervous breakdown.” He was offered a salaried management job at a record store, and took it:

I felt I should do it because it would give financial security to me and my wife. So I went back in the record business and I immediately got the same phobia that I’d had at the university. I couldn’t stand behind the counter, I had to run out of the record store. And, you see, it forced me back into writing again. (Williams, Only Apparently Real, 54)

Perhaps even the slightly-structured environment of the store, like R.O.T.C. and the classroom, now seemed somehow oppressive to him.

Solar Lottery, the first of his novels to appear in print, came out in 1955. Though the book was successful and added to his income, Dick was still making very little money from his writing. Enough to scrape by on, but not much more. Later
novels brought little better return. Dick remembered a time just a year or two after *Solar Lottery*: “My first hard-cover novel, *Time Out of Joint*, sold for $750. And my agent was so excited that he sent me a telegram to announce this joyous news” (*Cover*, 37).

Wishing financial success, embarrassed by being “merely” a science fiction writer, and wanting to impress his intellectual friends, Dick aspired to reach the more prestigious markets of the mainstream. But his success was with science fiction, and, he found, he was stuck with it, whether he liked it or not. In an often-told story of his early career, he recounts how:

“I carried four copies [of the issue of *Planet Stories* in which “Beyond Lies the Wub” appears] into the record store where I worked, a customer gazed at me and them, with dismay, and said, ‘Phil, you read that kind of stuff?’ I had to admit I not only read it, I wrote it.” (*The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick* 1: 403)

The Berkeley of that time, he admitted, tended to look down at things not ‘Joyce or Proust.’ That what he did was unimpressive in the Berkeley milieu frustrated Dick a great deal.

Dick’s own non-science fiction novels, however, were not of a type popular with mainstream readers of the 1950s. Only a few writers of that time, most notably John Cheever, managed to find an audience for highly-realistic stories that finally devolve into fantasy (perhaps what has come to be known as “magical realism”), thereby crossing boundaries sometimes considered sacrosanct. Cheever had the advantage over Dick, who was attempting something of the same thing, in that he was working in short fiction, where readers are more forgiving, having invested less in the work. Outside of his science fiction, Dick worked only in the novel form, perhaps reflecting the common bias that short stories are not “real” writing, that the novel is the only really ‘adult’ activity in fiction. Though he had mainstream novels making the rounds of publishers for years, not a one was published until 1975, when a small publisher brought out *Confessions of a Crap Artist*. The oth-
ers only saw print after Dick’s death.

Dick and Kleo separated in late 1958, soon after moving away from Berkeley and up to Marin County. Dick was married for a third time by the middle of the next year, this time to Anne Rubenstein, a widow with two young daughters. He moved into his new wife’s house, wrote *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, gave up writing for a time, and then produced *The Man in the High Castle*, the novel that made him a major “name” within the science fiction community.

The marriage to Anne ended in 1965, some time after Dick had left his wife and the only financial security he had known in order to move back to Berkeley. He dates his third “nervous breakdown” to the time between completion of *The Man in the High Castle* and his separation from Anne. In an interview, Paul Williams asked Dick what he really meant, calling what happened to him then a nervous breakdown, and asked what kind of breakdown it was. Dick responded:

> Ummm ... the most profound kind of all. I was ceasing to, quote, cope adequately with my responsibilities . . . . As defined by my wife. And it was easier to imagine I was having a nervous breakdown than to face the truth about the situation. . . . [My psychiatrist told me] what the real situation was—which was her psychiatrist, too—that there was nothing wrong with me, that in point of fact the situation was hopeless ... with her. (*Only Apparently Real*, 60)

Anne Dick completely dominated Phil, forcing him to live in just the sort of personalized “totalitarian state” he detested. He knew it at the time, too, had even used Anne’s personality as the basis for the insatiable Fay Hume in *Confessions of a Crap Artist*.

During his marriage to Anne, Dick joined the Episcopal church, in what may seem a surprising move for someone with such antipathy to organized *anything* as Dick. But a disturbing experience, a vision, had sent him in search of a stabilizing system of belief. Sometime during 1963, Dick had looked at the horizon, seeing:
a giant face with slotted eyes . . . . It was an evil, horrible-looking thing. . . . I actually sought refuge in Christianity from what I saw in the sky. Seeing it as an evil deity I wanted the reassurance that there was a benign deity more powerful. (Platt, Dream Masters, 154)

This evil face presaged the more benign visions that would dominate his life a decade later. And, like the later visions and mystical experiences, Dick incorporated what he had seen in Marin County into his fiction, specifically, in this case, into The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch, where the image he saw becomes the face of Palmer Eldritch.

Back in Berkeley, Dick was soon married again, this time to Nancy Hackett, and began experimenting with drugs. During most of this next period of his life he again merely scrimped by financially, often not knowing if he would have the money to pay next month’s bills. Though he was now primarily a novelist and one well-accepted within the science-fiction community, having won its top prize, the Hugo for Best Novel of 1962 for The Man in the High Castle, science fiction continued to prove an unprofitable field.

In 1968, he and his wife moved to San Rafael in Orange County, the area where he would spend most of the rest of his life. His output dropped considerably and, in 1970, Nan left him. Soon, Dick had opened his house to the “street people” who comprised the California drug culture of the time, and had immersed himself in their lives.

The next year was that of the robbery:

I came home, my house was in ruins, my files were blown up, my papers were gone, my stereo was gone, the windows were smashed in, the doorknobs were smashed off, the hasps were pulled off— with rubble all over the floor. (Williams, Only Apparently Real, 27)

Lack of cooperation by the police, who did not seem to even care that something had happened, and the fact of such peculiarities as the disappearance of his canceled checks left
Dick disoriented and suspicious. He could not concoct any sensible and cohesive theory to explain the event.

A year later, in 1972, he traveled to Vancouver, British Columbia to speak at a science fiction convention. Still upset over the break-in and what he saw as the deterioration of his life, he tried to kill himself:

I had no friends up there and after awhile I was very lonely. I tried to kill myself by taking seven hundred milligrams of potassium bromide. I had also written the phone number of a suicide rehabilitation center on a piece of cardboard as huge as a photograph album, in huge letters, just in case I changed my mind. And I did change my mind. (Cover, 97)

As a result, he entered a drug rehabilitation clinic called X-Kalay. His “rationale for being there was that it was the only way he could get constant supervision to prevent a suicide attempt” (Williams, Only Apparently Real, 50). Dick has said a person at the suicide hot-line told him to fake drug addiction to get in (Cover, 97). He said he did a good job of it.

By the middle of 1973, Dick was back in California, this time in Fullerton, and was married for the fifth and final time—to Tessa Busby, who was more than twenty years younger than he.

A series of mystical experiences in 1974 led to a feverish renewal of his writing. These experiences re-confirmed, for Dick, the validity of the roads down which his thought and writing had been taking him since the early days of his career, but that had eroded since the late 1960s. Through the mystical incidents, he finally began to feel he was coming to terms with his life and his world:

My mental anguish was simply removed from me as if by divine fiat, in an intervention of a psychological-mystical type . . . . Some transcendent divine power which was not evil, but benign, intervened to restore my mind and heal my body and give me a sense of the beauty, the joy, the sanity of the world. (Platt, Dream Masters,
The experiences included a “beam of pink light” (Rickman, *Philip K. Dick: The Last Testament*, 31) that he claimed shot information into him concerning a birth defect in his son Christopher. Tessa Dick describes what happened:

I had noticed something funny, and I took him [Christopher] to the doctors, and he said to clean him better when I changed his diapers. A couple of months after that Phil said to take him back. Phil told me what was wrong.

Phil really had no way of knowing. He couldn’t change diapers—he’d do anything else. (laughs) When the kid had to be changed, it was my turn. But he told me exactly what was wrong. He said, call the doctor and say this kid has an inguinal hernia. So I took him to the specialist that the doctor recommended—he had an inguinal hernia. (Rickman, *Philip K. Dick: The Last Testament*, 66-67)

Later, Dick had a vision of the early-Christian fish symbol around the neck of a delivery person. He and Tessa found a couple of stickers with the symbol at a Christian bookstore and put one in the window:

The window faced east. It was late morning and the sun was shining on the sticker. The silver side was facing out, and we were just looking at the back side, which was black. He looked at the sticker with the light coming through, and then he looked away, and he saw the pink square. (Rickman, *Philip K. Dick: The Last Testament*, 69)

Soon, he started seeing this pink and other of what he called “phosphene” colors as he lay in bed, awaiting sleep. And then in his dreams. Along with them came words:

He would hear them and try to spell them out phonetically. At the time he thought they sounded Russian.
The first word he came up with was “Sadassa Ulna.” . . . He came up with words here and there, and I don’t think they are words he could have come up with. I had studied languages—Spanish, French, Latin, and Greek, and I did not know a lot of the words. They are not common. A lot of them weren’t even modern languages. One he came up with was two words, and this one he saw spelled out. . . .

The two words were IR LEG. And those are Sanskrit.... (Rickman, Philip K. Dick: The Last Testament, 70)

Convinced that someone or something was trying to communicate with him, Dick began the “exegesis” of his experiences that eventually ran to one-million words. Tessa continues:

He began to explore mystery cults and esoteric religions and philosophies. He had known Bishop [James K.] Pike so the first thing he got into were the Essenes and any current translations he could get about the Dead Sea Scrolls. He thought for awhile that maybe it was Bishop Pike who was talking to him. He had witnessed some of the goings-on when Bishop Pike’s son was supposed to have been haunting him. (Rickman, Philip K. Dick: The Last Testament, 71)

These experiences later became parts of VALIS, Radio Free Albemuth, and, of course, his fictional James K Pike novel, The Transmigration of Timothy Archer. His attempts to understand what was happening to him were the focus of almost all he did for the rest of his life.

By the mid-seventies a number of articles on Dick, both scholarly and popular, had begun the process of bringing his writings to the attention of those beyond the science fiction community. Some critics and readers were discovering that Dick, long considered merely a good science fiction hack, was a surprisingly sophisticated experimentalist whose fragmented “realities” and narratives were more than the accidents of a sloppy and hurried writer. Others were finding, in Dick’s vision of the self-aware mechanical being, be it door,
taxi-cab, robot, or android, questions of man’s relationships with his creations. Questions with implications becoming apparent in the “real” world.

In 1975 an issue of *Science-Fiction Studies* was devoted to Dick’s work. In the title of one of the articles in the issue, the noted Polish science fiction writer and critic Stanislav Lem calls Dick “A Visionary Among the Charlatans.” A major article by Paul Williams that centered on the break-in was printed in *Rolling Stone* in 1975. And, in 1976, a piece by Ursula K. LeGuin appeared in *The New Republic*. Dick was fast becoming that rarity in the science fiction jungle, a writer taken seriously beyond it, even reaching audiences beyond it.

Dick’s personal life, however, continued on in its old precarious way. Tessa left him in 1976 and Dick, shortly thereafter, once again attempted suicide. Soon, he moved to Santa Ana, where he lived most the rest of his life.

At the end of his life, financially secure for the first time (enough so, or so he claimed, to be able to turn down $400,000 to write the novelization of *Blade Runner*—a movie inspired by his own *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*) and with growing critical acclaim, Dick finally felt comfortable with his position in the world of letters. Unfortunately, he had little time to enjoy his success, for he died, the result of stroke and massive heart trauma, on March 2, 1982.
Chapter Two: 
Power Relationships and the 
Individual
Confessions Of A Crap Artist (1975) and 
A Scanner Darkly (1977)

Totalitarianism in the Family

In the third chapter of Philip K. Dick’s Confessions of a Crap Artist: A Chronicle of Verified Scientific Fact, 1949-1959 (published in 1975, but written in 1959 and 1960), an as-yet unidentified man drives to a store, his young daughter beside him:

“What do we have to get at the store?” Elise chanted.

“Tampax,” he said. “And your gum.” He spoke with such fury that the baby turned to peer fearfully up at him.

“What?” she murmured, shrinking away to lean against the door.

“She’s embarrassed to buy it,” he said, “so I have to buy it for her. She makes me walk in and buy it.” And he thought, I’m going to kill her. (14; ch. 3)

This surprising and terrifying passage comes on the heels of a pair of opening chapters narrated by a much more benign, though rather peculiar, character named Jack Isidore, who, though in a manner different from the passage above, also moves quickly from innocent thought and on to other things. In his case, however, they are merely bizarre, not dangerous. For example:

In high school I had some nice clothes, and that made it possible for me to step out and be popular. In
particular I had one blue cashmere sweater that I wore for almost four years, until it got to smelling so bad the gym instructor made me throw it away. He had it in for me anyhow, because I never took a shower in gym. (7; ch. 2)

The pattern of these passages, banality followed by a twist, is common to Dick’s fiction, and especially so to Jack’s narrative here. In fact, there appears to be little direction or purpose to his prose, making it difficult for some readers to accept it and read on—one of the reasons, surely, it took so long for the book to see print. All we have in Jack’s narrative is a half-wit telling us about his unexceptional, though weird, life. Frustrating. Little of what he says clues us in to the direction the novel will take, or provides any of the other hallmarks of coherence we expect from a well-crafted novel. Jack mentions his sister, Fay, and her husband, Charley Hume, certainly, but we get no hint that their household will become the center of this novel or even that its themes will be misrepresentation and domestic domination.

Structurally, *Confessions of a Crap Artist* consists of first-person narratives by Jack and Fay and third-person narratives focusing on Charley and Nathan Anteil, a young married man who becomes Fay’s lover. Jack, who opens and closes the novel, is the only character to have consecutive chapters devoted to him. Though in his thirties, Jack has the mind of a pre-teen and is the “crap artist” of the title. He narrates chapters 1, 2, 7, 10, 12, 17, 18, and 20—almost half of the novel. Fay, Jack’s sister and Charley’s well-educated, sharp-tongued wife (based on Dick’s third wife, Anne), narrates chapters 4, 6, and 15. The third-person narration focuses on Charley, whose successful business has brought him (as he sees it) up into the middle class, in chapters 3, 5, 8, 14, and 16. The narration focuses on Nathan, the good-looking student (and, perhaps, a stand-in for Phil Dick), in chapters 9, 11, 13, and 19. The novel takes us through the changes in the relationships of the three men with Fay and through the ones that develop between each of them, as well.
The lack of a cohesive over-view in the narrative emphasizes, perhaps for the first time within the structures of his fiction, what Dick saw as the superior importance of what he often later identifies as the idios kosmos, the personal universe, as compared to the koinos kosmos, the shared experiential “reality.” No authorial, universal “truth” exists in this novel—just individual perception. That’s all there is, at least, on first examination.

The outlooks of the characters, on life or on each other, differ in the extreme, as do their personalities. The older and embittered Charley sees little of the world in the way the younger and somewhat naive Nat might. Though siblings, Jack and Fay have almost nothing in common: she is intelligent; after all, and he, bluntly, is stupid.

For all of its apparent incoherence, a single question dominates the novel: When can one be confident enough of one’s view of the world to impose it on others? In Dick’s view (and the answer he gives in the novel), never. Three of the four main characters attempt to make the others live, or die, in ways consistent with their own personal visions. Fay does this by verbal intimidation, Charley by murder, and Jack by re-building an older, happier world. All three, finally, fail.

Though the climax of Confessions of a Crap Artist is built on Jack’s mistaken belief in the imminent end of the world, this never becomes a novel of earth-shaking events. Instead, it remains the rather sordid story of four little people, one of whom, Fay, cannot keep from attempting to manipulate the lives of the others. Charley dies as a result. Nathan leaves his own wife to become a “pet” husband to Fay. And Jack learns to see himself for what he is: a nut.

Before the end of the book, when Jack reaches his epiphany, recognizing that his own idea of the world is neither useful nor valid, no character is willing to consider that their own views might be misleading, wrong, and dangerous. The extent of each one’s illusion differs, however. Jack, at one extreme, is almost completely removed from any “consensus” reality and “sees” a world where the idea of the continent of Mu, for
example, is a legitimate subject of scientific discourse, a world most different from that of the other characters. His analyses of individuals and their interactions tend to simplify complex emotional situations. Nat, on the other hand, seems rather more aware than any of the others of the implications of an individual’s actions. Particularly, in his case, he is aware of the dangers of the complicated domestic situation he is getting into by becoming Fay’s lover.

Dick here reduces the examinations of power that permeate his fiction to a four-person microcosm. After all, totalitarianism exists, he believed, as much on the personal level as it does in governments and large economic entities. By focusing solely on individuals, he is able to explore the dangers he saw without also considering the sometimes peripheral issues that force their way into discussion of these same problems in the macrocosm. Most of his other novels deal with the same issues, but within larger and more complicated political scenarios, though there, too, they are frequently and finally reduced to the small and personal.

In that store of the third chapter, Dick’s unidentified Tampax buyer mulls strategy: “I can buy a lot of stuff, he thought. Get a whole basketful and then they won’t notice” (15; ch. 3). But, faced with nearly empty check-out counters, he backs down. Once again outside, he sees a bar across the street, goes in, and has three drinks, leaving his daughter alone in the pick-up truck.

Only here do we discover that this man is Charley Hume, whom Jack has previously described as “a paunchy, beer-drinking ignorant mid-westerner who never got through high school” (10; ch. 2).

By refusing to specify the character at the beginning of this chapter, Dick nudges his readers toward viewing Charley as just an average fellow who happens to have a daughter named Elise, someone acting rather foolishly, and who has dangerous thoughts, but who can elicit sympathy, nonetheless. After all, he is trying to do what his wife wants, though
his anger about doing so does seem unwarranted and overblown.

The opening of this chapter, as we have seen, presents a clear change from the narration of the preceding two, those narrated by the nutty Jack. It gives us a chance to evaluate Hume without continuing to filter our opinions through Jack’s obviously suspect vision. The prose is suddenly clear, direct, and punctuated with a great deal of conversation. We do not even know, until Hume’s name is finally presented, that this new story has any direct connection with Jack.

This delayed naming marks the beginning of the second of a series of careful distancings of the readers from the novel’s various narrators and characters. The first, of course, comes from the way Jack presents himself, undercutting himself with his own prose, destroying our ability to take even his innocuous statements seriously. Dick’s distancings keep us from identifying with any one character, keep us removed enough to watch dispassionately, perhaps, the developing drama, never rooting for one character or another.

Hume, fortified by alcohol, manages to return to the store and buy the package of Tampax, along with “a jar of smoked oysters, a favorite of Fay’s” (17; ch. 3). Back home, he presents his gift, and then the Tampax:

“Thanks,” she said, accepting it from him. As she took the box he drew back, and, hearing himself give a gasp, he hit her in the chest. She flew backwards, away from him, dropping the bottle of smoked oysters; at that he ran at her—she was sliding down against the side of the table, knocking the lamp off as she tried to catch herself—and hit her again. (18; ch. 3)

Obviously, something is seriously wrong here. Charley, cannot decide how to react to his wife, Fay, to love her or to hate her. On one hand, he still cares enough about her to want to win her approval by giving her a gift. On the other, he resents even that he can still care for a woman who humiliates him. Frustrated by his inability to come to terms with his
own feelings, he lashes out at her without forethought, surprising himself as much as her, matching his desire to please her with his need to hurt her.

In the previous chapter Jack has described what he knows of this tumultuous relationship:

Of course, he and Fay had been quarreling a lot, as usual, and that may have had something to do with it. When he got mad he had no control over the language he used, and Fay has always been the same way—not merely using gutter words, but in the indiscriminate choice of insults, harping on each other’s weak points and saying anything that might hurt, whether true or not—in other words, saying anything, and very loud, so that their two children got quite an earful. (9-10; ch. 2)

Even Jack, never married and not the most astute observer of other people’s situations, can see that things are not what they should be in the Hume household.

Later in the novel, after recovering from a heart attack, Charley does try to do what he has often thought about: murder Fay. First, however, he kills all of the animals they have carefully nurtured at their rural home. Soon, his wife returns to the house:

“Oh,” she said, almost with delight; her face shone. “I see—you shot them.” ...


At the same time, she retreats slowly from Charley, though he has left his gun in the house and she knows it.

Why? he asked himself again as he slipped a little on the wet slope. And then he realized why. The children and the Silvas stood in the land behind the Silvas’
house, watching. Four people.... He understood. She wants them to see. God, he thought. She's making them see me. She'll never run, never get away; she wants me to keep on, keep on....

“God damn you,” he yelled at her.
She smiled her quick, reflexive smile. (133; ch. 16)

Utterly humiliated, Charley goes back to the house where he finds the gun and turns it on himself. As he pulls the trigger he “saw how she had moved him. Put him up to this” (133; ch. 16).

The commentary, even though presented in the third person, is certainly Charley’s. That much has been established through the variety of viewpoints and their associations within the narrative. By this time, also, Fay’s credibility has been reduced enough, and Charley’s has grown enough, so that we suspect that Charley may have something of a point.

This incident, the heart of the novel, illustrates one of Dick’s central themes: the individual, any individual, naturally buffeted by external forces, has little chance of gaining control over the situations he or she falls into. We cannot make our worlds; we can only live in them—or opt out. Unfortunately, however, most of us try to do more than that. When we cannot control our worlds, Dick might say, some of us try to control the others in them.

The four main characters of *Confessions of a Crap Artist* represent varying aspects of the four types of power, according to one model, that are used in human interaction: Paternalism, or Infantilizing; Transactional; Punitive; and Coercive (Barlow, 20-23). Dick rarely directly identifies his characters with such power types and, when he does, he points out only those who are, to him, totalitarians—people, that is, who fit into the Coercive category. Still, though he himself may never have made his character patterns explicit, the pattern of *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, like that of a number of other of Dick’s novels, does follow this model.

The Paternalist or Infantilizer gives things to others on the hope (expectation, really) of a return, as Jack does, at the
novel’s end: “I give you this, expecting you to do what I would like in the future.” The person utilizing a Transactional approach expects a trade-off: “I will do this for you if you do that for me.” Nathan would like to live this way. The Punitive person responds to those who have “wronged” him or her with punishment. “You have hurt me, so I will hurt you in return.” Charley tries this. And the Coercive person will stop an action painful to another if that other does what the Totalitarian wants. “Promise to do what I ask, and I will stop your pain.” Fay is a Coercive type.

As a great deal of Dick criticism has shown, it is quite easy to present Dick’s fiction in terms of oppositions, especially four-point oppositions. Fredric Jameson, for example, uses a square, though one quite different from the one I use here, to show the tensions and oppositions of *Dr. Bloodmoney*.

A simple linear, or one-dimensional, opposition never could satisfy Dick. Good-against-bad or black-against-white never contains his topics. At the very least, the patterns of opposition he presents are triangular, moving the model into a two-dimension world and the narrative into presentation of more complex relationships. More often, as in *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, the pattern appears as a square, increasing by half the significant relationships or oppositions of each main character.

Starting with *The Man in the High Castle*, the squares Dick used become three-dimensional, more than doubling possible relationships and making the number of potential alignments almost impossible to consider. Later still, a fourth-dimension of sorts, that of the reader/writer relationship, is added to Dick’s models.

Even the three-dimensional cube, however, can be reduced to a number of two-dimensional squares and triangles, as anyone familiar with origami, as Dick surely was, knows. Even these squares, in much of Dick’s work, will fit the four-point formula of Paternalism, Transactionalism, Punitivism, and Coercivism. Power and its uses, after all, are at the heart of most of what he wrote.
The four-dimensional cube? Well, even it can fit the model described above, with the reader sitting in the Transactional seat (“I’ll buy/read your book if you present me with a reading experience I will enjoy”). The author will probably be a Paternalist (“I give you this book, so you had better buy my next”). Coercion and Punishment, for the most part, act within the book.

Dick provides specific sequences of comment and action designed to show the weaknesses and even the strengths of each character in light of their methodology of power. Yet he rarely condemns anyone for the choice of power politics they make. The initial presentation of Charley in *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, for example, shows him in a negative light, as a man who uses his physical power when another does something he does not like. But Charley, like most who use the Punitive approach, does prove to have a positive side. He becomes his brother-in-law’s protector, among other things, even including him in his will. And Jack needs such protection.

Charley will be good to people, as long as they do not cross him. Jack never has crossed him, never would (though he does grumble about him).

Jack’s words, and not his actions, show how untrustworthy he is, keeping us from readily accepting anything he says—about the world, himself, or the other characters. But we also learn that he means well, that he wants others—even the reader—to like him. In the opening chapters, Jack establishes himself as a “bad” writer and a poor evaluator of the world around him. He tells us that, being how we are made primarily out of water, the “problem for us is that not only do we have to walk around without being absorbed by the ground but that we also have to earn our livings” (1; ch. 1) and that “World War Two began on December 7, 1941” (1; ch. 1). Nonsense followed by trivia—”crap,” as Charley calls it. Jack, believing he is acting ironically, chooses Charley’s designation as the title of his narrative. And Dick, not the most astute observer of the publishing business of the time, chose Jack’s
own name as his pseudonym when first submitting the novel. Not surprisingly, it was rejected. Jack has a hard time differentiating between types of information. Unable to sort significance from triviality, he is, as Dick later said:

the most idiotic protagonist, ignorant and without common sense, a walking symposium of nitwit beliefs and opinions... an outcast from our society, a totally marginal man who sees everything from the outside only and hence must guess as to what’s going on. (Confessions of a Crap Artist viii; Introduction)

He talks like a compilation from popular magazines, cheap encyclopedias, and junior-high papers, saying such thing as “To me... the library has been important in forming my education and convictions” (5; ch. 2). Fair enough, though most Americans heard it in seventh grade, but Jack goes on to describe what he does at the library, again undercutting an initially harmless statement: he says he looks for the ads in photography magazines, the ones where “if you send in the dollar... [you get] something different from what you see in even the best magazines, like Playboy or Esquire” (5; ch. 2), such as the picture:

in which one girl was lying down on the floor, wearing a black lace bra and black stockings and French heels, and this other girl was mopping her all over with a mop from a bucket of suds. That held my attention for months. (5-6; ch. 2)

Not exactly the stuff of education and conviction. But typical of Jack.

Jack’s nutty but benign personality partially masks his role as an exemplar of the Paternalistic or Infantilizing type of power player. Most often, we expect more cunning from the Paternalist and look for ulterior motives behind the offerings. But a “pure” example of the type would operate as Jack does, giving only because he wants to be liked. In this way, the
Paternalist is more naive than other types of players, though
the desire for manipulation remains as strong.

Though Jack is the “hero” of *Confessions of a Crap Artist*,
few of Dick’s other heros fit the Paternalist mold. Generally,
his Paternalists are second only to his Coercivists in the dan-
ger they present. Gino Molinari, in *Now Wait for Last Year*,
has taken on his responsibilities as the head of Earth’s gov-
ernment to do his best for his people because, he thinks, they
will then give him respect and love. Though, later, he heroi-
ically keeps Earth from disaster, his own paternalistic (and
naïve—again, that common trait of the Paternalist) actions
have led to the situation he finds himself in.

One important aspect of the Paternalist is that he or she
often brings out the most infantile behavior in others. As
Jack does in his sister.

Fay, however, sounds, at least, rational and incisive when
she comes to narrate. So much so that the reader is tempted
to take her as the one character who can honestly view and
relate the unfolding situation. Still, Dick has previously pre-
sented her, through Jack’s opening narration and through
the focus on Charley that precedes her first chapter, as an
extremely egocentric woman with little patience for what she
sees as the foibles of those around her. We are unable to ac-
cept the orientation she presents with her own words as the
one to follow as we read.

Still, Fay does confirm what we have seen of the others,
especially Jack. When she and Charley collect Jack to take
him up to their house to live—so he can be taken care of—Fay
explodes at her brother:

“You know what you are?” I said. “You’re the most
ignorant, inept individual on the face of the globe. In
my entire life I’ve never seen anyone with such rubbish
in their head. How do you manage to stay alive at all?
How the hell did you get born into my family? There
never were any nuts before you.” (25; ch. 4)
Her words reflect exactly the image of Jack that has so far been built—by his own words. Yet her reaction is childish.

Fay’s desire for control is accented in the second “Charley” chapter, in which she sees Nathan and Gwen Anteil for the first time:

“I have to know them,” she said. “I think I’ll get out and go ask them to come up to the house and have a martini.” She started to open the car door. “Aren’t they beautiful?” she said. “Like something out of Nietzsche.” Her face had become remorseless; she would not let them get away, and he saw her keeping her eyes on them, not losing sight of them. She had them in view; she had located them. (31; ch. 5)

Dick might have added that she had already taken control of them—in her own mind, at least. Her mention of Nietzsche accents her view: She believes she knows the world and can take from it what she will.

When Fay narrates, the prose is straight-forward, clear and economical, though somewhat slangy. She talks in dates, names, and places, as her first narrated sentence shows:

In the spring of 1958 my older brother Jack, who was living in Seville, California, and was then thirty-three, stole a can of chocolate-covered ants from a supermarket and was caught by the store manager and turned over to police. (22; ch. 4)

Fay prides herself on her rigorous, intelligent mind. By trying to be honest and reportorial, however, she does give glimpses of the darker side of her character, showing her Coercive side. After Charley has talked her into accepting his plan to bring Jack, whose ridiculous action has finally made clear the fact that he needs supervision, to live with them, she recounts that “Charley did the actual work [of loading Jack’s belongings]; I sat in the front seat of the car reading.” (26; ch. 4) She never lifts a hand to help another.
Later, disgusted by Jack’s acceptance of what she and we see as nonsense—few of us, certainly, are any more willing to accept predicted dates for the end of the world than is Fay—she contemplates the junk that her brother had collected, that Charley had packed and brought up to their house without her help. Junk sitting in a room she never used, hurting her not in the least.

Soon, however, she manages to transfer her anger at her brother’s stupidity to those things he has so carefully collected:

Getting madder and madder, I threw it all together into the cardboard carton we had intended to use as a cage for the girls’ guinea pig. Taking hold of one end, I dragged it out the back door of his room, and onto the field and over to the incinerator. And then I did something that at the time I knew was wrong. Getting the gallon jug of white gas which we used with the roto-tiller, I poured gas onto the carton, and, with my cigarette lighter, ignited it. In ten minutes the whole thing was nothing but glowing embers. Except for his collection of rocks, the whole thing had been burned up, and I for one was relieved. Now that I had done it I ceased feeling regret; I was glad. (123; ch. 15)

She describes even her own childish action with care, showing that she understands exactly what she has done by destroying her brother’s cherished “junk.”

Never feeling guilt, never looking at the other side, and extremely intelligent, Fay is almost the archetypal Totalitarian character. When she wants someone to do something, she makes them so miserable for not doing it that they eventually cave in and do what she wants. Fay is recognizable in many of the central women characters of Dick’s novels, up to and including, to some degree, Angel Archer in The Transmigration of Timothy Archer. Dick, with reason, has been accused of harboring sexist attitudes; his women, certainly, are rarely nice people.
Nathan, the character we get to know least, is the last to be the focus of a chapter. A nice young man, a student, he appears particularly malleable—especially once Fay has gotten hold of him. As he goes to her house alone for the first time—at her request—he thinks, “I shouldn’t be doing this” (65; ch. 9), but makes no move to stop what he has intuited will be the start of a rather bad situation. Fay soon—and quite clearly—propositions him:

He said, “Are you propositioning me?”

“No,” she said. “Of course not. You propositioned me. Don’t you remember?” She said it with absolute conviction. “Isn’t that why you came over? Good god, I wouldn’t dare let you into the house. That’s why I’m driving you back.” (68; ch. 9)

In spite of his recognition of the dangers of getting to know her, Nathan calls Fay the next day. He suffers further verbal abuse (her way of establishing domination over him) then agrees to a rendezvous. His life, though he does not yet admit it, is now controlled by Fay.

Nathan is suffering the fate of many Transactional players. Honest himself, he discounts what he knows to be the manipulative qualities of others, expecting them to operate as he does. Perhaps thinking he can change people by example (the most benign form of manipulation possible), he is more easily manipulated even than Jack.

Nat, as I mention above, is probably based in part on Philip Dick himself just as Fay is an even closer depiction of his third wife, Anne. Dick left Anne when he could no longer stand the control she had over him. The reason for the gentle, distant treatment of Nat in Confessions of a Crap Artist may simply be that Dick saw too much of himself in him, and did not want to criticize him too harshly for foolish actions that mirror Dick’s own. Nat tries the Transactional approach—and never rises above it, as Dick himself never manages to do.

There is at least one thing beyond power of central interest to Dick. And that is the possibility that one might do
something for another without any expectation of return. Not a fifth corner of the model, this is something completely outside of it. Though never appearing as a type in *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, the “best” characters of the novels that follow act for *none* of the reasons the four-fold formula I present provides.

As Dick would do himself—if he could—these characters have stepped outside interactive patterns of action. The child Manfred Steiner, for example, in *Martian Time-Slip*, cannot even communicate with those around him. Manfred and those like him—though most of them have more contact with the “real” world than he—do not consider others. They act because they *want* to. Not for any response. Somehow or another, they have escaped the scheme, the model, that ensnares even Dick and, in his view, his readers.

Though each of the four main characters of *Confessions of a Crap Artist* has qualities at the same time differentiating each from the others and making them familiar to most American readers, Isidore, I suspect, for all his nonsense, seems a little too real. He cannot be accepted—and distanced—merely as an idiot. Instead, he reminds us of the friend, cousin, brother who embarrasses us before our more sophisticated acquaintances. When we laugh at Isidore, we are laughing at something somehow related to our own lives. Through Jack, Dick adds an aspect to his novel beyond its central considerations of power, making Jack much more than a failed Paternalist.

Jack ends up with our sympathy. We cheer him at the end, even though his actions never have much of an impact on the putative plot. Oddly, we have learned to respect him, though, as Charles Platt says, he is:

an anal-obsessive mystical crackpot, a devout believer in the psuedo-science he reads in pulp magazines, a bumbling psychic who thinks he has an inside tip on the date of the Day of Judgment, a screwball who, in Dick’s words, is “Totally fucked up.” (Platt, Introduction to *The Zap Gun*, ix)
Jack’s weaknesses cannot be over-stressed. Dick says, “I liked Jack Isidore (the perceptive idiot) as a character” (In His Own Words 145) for Jack rises above his nuttiness—yet remains completely what he was before, a marginal being. At the novel’s end, yes, he sees the world with a clarity no other character, not even Fay, manages. But he can never change, never really do anything with this sight. Still, he will make it, will survive somehow, perhaps because of he can’t really do anything. In a letter quoted in Paul William’s Introduction to Confessions of a Crap Artist, Dick comments:

In reading the novel over now, I am amazed to find that... Jack... is no dummy....
Jack has insight into himself and the world around him to an enormous degree.... From a purely survival standpoint, maybe he will—and ought to—make it. Maybe... he is one of God’s favored fools....
I am pleased at my inner model, my alter self, Jack Isidore of Seville, California: more selfless than I am, more kind, and in a deep deep way a better man. (viii-x)

Nobody in the book—after all, they are all caught up in their own quests for power—ever recognizes Jack’s heroic qualities. Still, he remains, even before his final revelation, the only person presented who really cares about others, or who acts on that belief:

In the end, it seems that Isidore’s condition is preferable, for although he is all kinds of a fool, he is gentle and tries as hard as he can to do what he knows is right. And he, at least, does know—though practically everything else he things he knows is false. (Stableford)

That, to Dick, is all one can do, attempt what one knows is right.
Even though, as in Jack’s case, the actions are not always appropriate. While his brother-in-law is in the hospital recovering from his heart attack, Jack, wanting to please him, pres-
ents reports to Charley on the situation at home—in what he considers a scientific and clinical manner:

On this particular occasion, I referred to my notebook to get my facts in order, and then I said, “Your wife is beginning to become involved with Nathan Anteil in extramarital relationships.”

I had intended to go on, but Charley stopped me. (70-71; ch. 10)

Charley, though he would rather not hear about them, really does not care about his wife’s infidelities. Nor, now, does he hide his growing desire to kill Fay, a desire that had come rather strongly to him immediately before the heart attack. Right and wrong have disappeared from his life. He has joined his wife in egocentric drive to control the world. The last thing he wants, at this point, is information extraneous to his purpose, information of the sort Jack presents. For Charley has made up his mind.

Charley, seeing no reason to hide his determination, tells Nathan Anteil of his intentions when Nathan comes to visit him at the hospital:

Nathan said, “Suppose we break up. Suppose I stop seeing her.”

“That doesn’t make any difference. This has got nothing to do with you. I like you; I have nothing against you. What do I care if she wants to go roll in the hay with you? She doesn’t mean anything to me. She’s just a lousy shit of a woman that I happen to be married to that I’ve got a lot against....” (113; ch. 14)

Nathan, always willing to make a deal, as any Transactional person is, propositions Charley. But Charley will not listen. Like Fay often does, Charley has come to center on his goal to the expense of all other considerations, even to the extent of ignoring what others, what society, might think of what he wants to do. Unlike Fay, however, his goal is punishment, not
gain. And, again unlike his wife, he fails to achieve his purpose.

The Totalitarian, after all, succeeds more often than does the manipulator of the Punitive type.

At the end of the novel, Jack waits for the “day of judgment” he has come to believe in through contact with a local group of “flying saucer” nuts. He has spent the money he received through Charley’s will by restoring animals to the Hume residence, matching those Charley has killed:

My reasoning was that I wanted everything set up the way it was supposed to be. It seemed to me that there was a very good chance that on April twenty-third Charley Hume would come back to life. Of course, this was not a certainty. The future never is. Anyhow, I felt this increased the chances. (167-168; ch. 20)

Even though Charley is dead, Jack wants to please him. Later, the date for the end of the world comes and goes, and Jack admits that he “was never so disconcerted in my entire life” (169; ch. 20). Later still, he tries to think seriously about his situation:

Not only had Charley Hume not returned to life but the world had not come to an end, and I realized that a long time ago Charley was right in what he said about me; namely, that I was a crap artist. All the facts that I had learned were just so much crap.

I realized, sitting there, that I was a nut.

What a thing to realize. All those years wasted. I saw it as clearly as hell; all that business about the Sargasso Sea, and Lost Atlantis, and flying saucers and people coming out of the inner part of the earth—it was just a lot of crap. (169-170; ch. 20)

Jack’s last line, and the last of the book, sums up what he has learned: “it seems pretty evident that my judgment is not of the best” (171; ch. 20).
Through the death of his brother-in-law, through the futile concern he has for others, and through the denial of his expectations, Jack learns that he has failed as an interactive member of the human race, learns that, in terms of ability to negotiate everyday life, he is a fool, an idiot. But he has come to see his limitations—possibly bringing about a start toward becoming someone who can be a positive force in the lives of others. He has the possibility, if not the likelihood, of change—unlike Nathan, who can see what will probably happen to Fay, but who refuses to face his own situation:

He thought, She could bring about everything that she wants and still be wretched. Out of this I could emerge as the prosperous one, the peaceful one. And neither of us can possibly know. (166; ch. 19)

An optimist, Nathan cannot see what has happened to him, doesn’t realize that he has become just one more of Fay’s victims, and he opts out of considering the possibilities with a cheap denial of the possibility of knowledge. He achieves nothing of the dignity Jack finds, Jack, who realizes his own situation exactly and thus opts out of any further playing in power politics. Nathan, though he has come to love her, sees Fay realistically enough—but the blinders around his own being remain.

Jack’s rather even-keeled realization of his lack of sense reflects a comment made by Michael Tolley about Dick’s characters in general: rarely are they surprised by surprises. They make a quick readjustment and carry on, rationally or obsessively as the case may be (“Beyond the Enigma: Dick’s Questors” 210).

What Jack has done, what the favored characters in many of Dick’s other novels do, is learn that individual belief has limited value. That striving for a “political” success vis-à-vis others has little worth. Still, the character will continue to live, to strive toward a personal success. When belief fails the individual’s world need not be destroyed, just re-adjusted.
When power fails, those not committed to it will shrug, and continue on.

Like Jack, the other Dick characters who bumble through what seem to them to be incomprehensible worlds do generally learn something, even though what they have learned (usually that the sort of power most people aspire to makes for nothing better) may have no impact at all on their own lives—or may affect it negatively.

Never would a favored Dick character say, as Benny Profane does at the end of Thomas Pynchon’s *V.*, “No, ... off-hand I’d say I haven’t learned a goddamn thing” (454). Yet, though he does finally understand himself, Jack cannot stop being the idiot he is. What we learn does not change us; at best, it only changes how we react to the world.

In what Dick might call ‘a very real sense’ (he liked such phrases), Jack has torn the mask from his own existence. The image he has seen in the mirror, the image he had tried to present to the reader, has been destroyed. For the first time, he faces the “real” Jack: an idiot. Thereby, the accuracy of his perception of the “real” world becomes much greater than that of many smarter people. Finally, by now knowing himself, he no longer has reason for trying to impress a false personal vision on others.

Charley, the common man with common Punitive tendencies, has been destroyed by the mask he sees on Fay, created and ratified by himself, though Fay certainly helped the process. Her image of what he should be certainly controlled their relationship. Unfortunately for his own sanity, he saw neither enough of himself nor of others to do more than react violently to situations that had become too much for him to bear.

Nathan too, though he does not yet know it (at the end of the novel), exists now only as a mask Fay has created so that her world might live up to her expectations. He has, at least, ceded his self-image to her.

Only Fay, the Coercive person, the most dangerous of all of the characters for her ability to get them to believe in the
masks others wear, lives without an obvious mask, without overtly basing her life in response to the masks others create. Unlike the others, Fay will not accept the masks others present. She knows just what she is, and just how she affects others. And she cannot imagine her life without others to manipulate.

With her husband in the hospital, nearly killed by that heart attack, she has to find another lover, another man she can bend to her will, thereby continuing to verify her own existence. She knows it, makes no bones about it. She seems to have convinced herself that Nathan has propositioned her—not the other way around—but that is for his benefit. He will feel somehow responsible for the situation, thus will be more comfortable within it.

When Dick talks about masks, he rarely mentions those who make them, concentrating instead on those who wear them, those who see them. But his fiction contains a number of mask makers, Coercivists like Fay, who creates masks for her husband and lover. These are the people who convince others to live within a conception of the world quite different from that the others would have either chosen or viewed on their own. These are the Fascists, though they may not have the overt political philosophy Fascism normally represents.

Though not the first of the type in Dick’s fiction, Fay is the archetype for many of his later women, many of whom, like Fay, force people to operate within frameworks unnatural to those people. Many of them represent the worst of the Totalitarian personality. As Kim Stanley Robinson, in The Novels of Philip K. Dick, points out:

Dick has said that he modeled his female characters on the two main characters from Thackeray’s Vanity Fair: Becky Sharp and Amelia. The Becky Sharps are ambitious, manipulative, attractive, and dangerous to the men who are attracted to them. (5)

Fay, who manipulates Charley so easily, who draws in Nathan to replace Charley, has all the characteristics of a
Becky, and at all times. She destroys the prior lives of two men (Nat Anteil had been happily married until she came into his life) to satisfy her own desires. She will not let her man, whoever it is, be what he would like to be, but tries to make him live up to her vision of what he should be, thereby making him miserable. Charley was happy with what he was doing, with the way he lived, but Fay could not let him continue on that way. Nothing was wrong with Nathan’s marriage—until Fay stepped into it.

The characters who do this to people in Dick’s novels are certainly not always women. The women are only representatives of a type, the type of person who would mask impressions of others with their own needs—and then demand that the others act in accordance with those masks. The Totalitarian, the Coercivist. Like the manipulative Fascist, Fay and those like her can exist without any fictional formulation over her own personality, for they, and she, put the masks on others, not on themselves.

Those who purposely wear masks wear them to fool others. An evil mask most likely covers a benign visage—otherwise, why the mask? Just so, a benign mask covers an evil face. These particular masks, though, are straightforward in their deceit, for the wearer has chosen them. The ones behind them are more trustworthy than those, like Fay’s victims, who have masks forced on them.

Significantly, Jack—who never has been able to recognize the masks presented to him for what they are, but who finally sees through the mask he, himself wears—is the brother of Fay, who has no reason to wear a mask herself, having placed them on others, having convinced those others (for the most part—for Charley, finally sees through it) to look at her through the mirrors that are (paradoxically) the masks she has created for them, rather than at her. These siblings are the two ends of the spectrum of characters found in Dick’s novels: Jack, at one end, learns to see people as they are. Fay, at the other, never lets them be other than her own personal expectations. Those like Jack learn that interpersonal
relationships contain an element of chaos, of unpredictability. Those like Fay insist on confining others by their expectations, forcing them to conform to a pattern.

When Isidore re-appears as a peripheral character (both in terms of his life and the novel) in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) he no longer has a Charley to look after him or a Fay to make him look like an idiot. Yet the latter Isidore, too, feels the importance of interpersonal relationships and acts on them—even though the “people” this later Isidore protects turn out to be androids, machines masked as humans. And, again, he is finally oblivious to the mask, accepting what he sees at face value.

The new Isidore, however, has less of the Paternalistic aspect than has the original. Though he does want to please people, he approaches situations more as Nathan would, as a believer in Transactionalism. Lonely, he wants friendship, and will trade assistance for it.

Still, because the later Isidore faces a situation much more dire and ambiguous than that of the earlier manifestation of the character, a look at him can shed light on the Jack of *Confessions of a Crap Artist*.

This later Isidore is a “chickenhead,” someone whose mental faculties are deteriorating, who therefore cannot leave Earth to join the masses in their attempt to build a new human society elsewhere. He must remain amongst the refuse others have made of—and on—the home planet.

Dick says that he found the original Isidore to be an important character. The later Isidore, though not so central to a novel (his main purpose is to provide a distorted Transactional mirror image of the protagonist, Punisher Rick Deckard), reflects more clearly Dick’s vision of how one should face the world—even if one lacks the tools for successful manipulation of it. He is Jack, but a Jack who has learned that whatever progress he has made is illusory—that he becomes stupider instead, not more able to deal with his situation. He takes over where the original Jack leaves off, but without the optimism finally present at the end of *Confessions of a Crap Artist*. 
When first shown, this Isidore, John R., already knows that he operates at diminished capacity, recognizing himself as a lonely cast-off from human society, just as, perhaps, the original might be forced to after the end of the action shown in *Confessions of a Crap Artist*.

In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Dick describes the newer Isidore’s situation:

> He lived alone in this deteriorating, blind building of a thousand uninhabited apartments, which like all its counterparts, fell, day by day, into greater entropic ruin. Eventually everything within the building would merge, would be faceless and identical, mere pudding-like kipple piled to the ceiling of each apartment. And, after that, the uncared-for building itself would settle into shapelessness, buried under the ubiquity of dust. By then, naturally, he himself would be dead.... (17; ch. 2)

Later, this Isidore, who has stumbled across the apartment where a group of fugitive androids hides, explains to one of them what he means by “kipple”:

> “Kipple is useless objects, like junk mail or match folders after you use the last match or gum wrappers or yesterday’s homeopape. When nobody’s around, kipple reproduces itself. For instance, if you go to bed leaving any kipple around your apartment, when you wake up the next morning there’s twice as much of it. It always gets more and more.” (57; ch. 6)

Kipple is the outward sign of entropic movement. Isidore’s world seems headed that way, Isidore, getting stupider and older, with it.

But Isidore, like his earlier incarnation, likes and cares about people, animals, and things—even spider-killing androids in a world where almost all animals, like most everything else, have died. The masks, the way they present themselves, do not, ultimately, concern him. At the end of *Do
Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, he refuses to tell android-killer Deckard (androids are considered a danger on Earth by the authorities) where the “evil” creations are hiding. Deckard does not seem to be offering enough of an exchange, to be offering an appropriate transaction. Deckard appears to Isidore as a threatening force, someone operating on a Punitive basis—as he is, of course.

Deckard, who does not understand how he appears to Isidore, reacts initially with disgust. Immediately afterwards, however, having been brought to a point of confusion over ‘appearance’ by prior events in the novel, he reconsiders: “The chickenhead knows they’re androids; he knew it already, before I told him. But he doesn’t understand. On the other hand, who does? Do I? Did I?” (194; ch. 19) Oblivious of masks and personal power politics, Isidore unwittingly helps Deckard toward further consideration of his own attitude. He is, perhaps, one of the best of those Dick’s character’s who base their interactions with others on a Transactional ideal—even when he’s not quite aware of what he is doing.

Though merely a chickenhead, Isidore has already realized what Deckard only now is learning: it matters little what something is. What it does, what it believes—even the fact that it is—these are the central facts governing our relationships. And negotiations with others must be based on recognition of that.

Lacking the culpabilities of other characters—due to their limited brain-power—the two Isidores combine to provide an exemplar for all of Dick’s “good” characters. They do not let their worlds mold them, but manage to rise above mere temporal events and even above their own serious limitations, achieving a kind of understanding of their places in the world. Though others consider them only as marginal beings, their complete and serious consideration for others—even animals and androids—makes them more actually and consistently human (in the best Transactional sense of that term) than all but a few of Dick’s characters.
Bob Arctor, a narcotics agent and drug addict in *A Scanner Darkly* (1977), does not start out as a marginal being like the Isidores. Nor does he seem at all interested in Transactionalism. Yet he ends up being destroyed, made much more marginal than they, so that the source of a drug can be found, making him, more than either of the Isidores, a man willing to make personal a trade-off (a sacrifice, even) for the good of others.

By the last pages of the novel, Arctor is the Isidore-type taken to its furthest extreme, a being with absolutely no ability to negotiate the world, yet one who can still care for those considered “friends,” one who wants to be liked—though almost everything else in his personality has been destroyed.

Though the presentation of Arctor’s story lacks the fragmented narrative structure of *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, *A Scanner Darkly* provides readers with a world no more encapsulated in a singular or personal vision than the world of *Confessions of a Crap Artist*. This time, however, Dick uses the distortions brought about by drug use and an anecdotal narrative formula to paint a picture showing the limitations of individual being and perception. The failing struggles of Bob/”Fred”/Bruce, the drug-user/narcotics-agent/destroyed-ex-addict, show a world that can never be trusted, where people *never* are what they seem, where what one thinks may be occurring may not be happening at all. Where what one remembers may not be what one has done. Everything is or can be a deception, either imposed from without or self-made, a mask—one constructed, primarily, through drugs.

The title of *A Scanner Darkly* is probably a combination of “through a glass darkly” from First Corinthians and the title of Cordwainer Smith’s classic science fiction short story “Scanners Live in Vain.” Smith’s “scanners” are men “turned off” mechanically from all emotion—so they can protect space ships. Both Dick’s “scanner,” Arctor, who uses electronic devices to scan—that is—to watch, and Smith’s scanners end
up as cast-offs from the societies they “protect.” Used up and left behind.

A Scanner Darkly grew from Dick’s own experiences with the drug culture in the early seventies. The language, the slang, that is, comes from that time, as do, Dick says, many of the incidents. His “Author’s Note” at the end explains:

This has been a novel about some people who were punished entirely too much for what they did. They wanted to have a good time, but they were like children playing in the street.... Drug misuse is not a disease, it is a decision, like the decision to step out in front of a moving car....

This novel is about more people than I knew personally. Some we all read about in the newspapers.... [But] I loved them all. (221-222)

Significantly, Dick does not discuss the overt polemical nature of his work until after the body of the novel. First and foremost, A Scanner Darkly is a part of Dick’s continuing consideration of the meaning of the individual and individual action within an illusory world. The characters are not meant to be taken as examples or stereotypes, but are to be approached as unique individuals, though fictional ones. None of them falls easily into categories, unlike those of Confessions of a Crap Artist.

Dick provides no character for reader sympathy and identification, here, something he had consistently done since writing Confessions of a Crap Artist fourteen years and twenty-five novels earlier. Arctor, the main character, is both a drug user and a narcotics agent, both unpleasant roles to most American readers. As a drug user, he gives up individual responsibility within the larger world. As a narcotics agent, he acts, disguising his “real” nature, toward Punitive results. To make matters worse, the mask he wears over his being as a “narc” is also his “real” face. Arctor likes the life of the drug culture—until it begins to destroy him, that is. And the novel is, of course, the chronicle of Arctor’s destruction.
Though the characters of *A Scanner Darkly* live in a drug culture removed from the lives of most readers both by time (its setting is 1994, twenty years in the future at the time of composition) and lifestyle, the implications of the book stretch far beyond the types of lives presented. Though drugs have amplified the problems and delusions the characters face, these are different only in degree from problems and delusions in the lives of “normal” people.

Arctor has to choose between his friends and his society—and cannot (not on his own, at least). He is also a victim of forces, both good and bad, that he can neither comprehend nor control. His problem, like Jack Isidore’s, like our own, is to find a way to negotiate a world he can only grasp in the smallest way. Before he finally succumbs to the drug “slow death,” he faces a situation, brought on by viewing a film of his own prior activities, where what he believes is directly contradicted by what he sees. Something like this can happen to any of us, though rarely as dramatically as in Arctor’s case.

As the novel opens, Dick presents an illusion brought about by drug addiction—as if the illusion were “real”:

> Once a guy stood all day shaking bugs from his hair. The doctor told him there were no bugs in his hair. After he had taken a shower for eight hours, standing under hot water hour after hour suffering the pain of the bugs, he got out and dried himself, and he still had bugs in his hair; in fact, he had bugs all over him. A month later he had bugs in his lungs. (5; ch. 1)

The authorities soon take this “guy,” Jerry Fabin, away to a hospital. Not only because of the supposed bugs, but because Jerry has come to believe (on no legitimate basis) that a three-foot-tall legless man on a cart is coming after him, to murder him—curiously, something that can “actually” happen in a Dick novel (as it does in *Dr. Bloodmoney*, where Hoppy Harrington, a three-foot-tall legless and armless man on a cart, kills).
Perhaps Fabin has been reading Philip K. Dick, and has taken the novels too much to heart.
And that may not be as far-fetched as it seems.
In two novels, *Radio Free Albemuth* and *VALIS*, Phil Dick himself appears as a character—and various Dick novels are discussed. Dick could be using Fabin’s fantasy to ground the slightly science fiction world of the novel in our “real” world, where Philip K. Dick books are read, where they could, conceivably, spark a fantasy. He may be commenting offhand on what he sees as the power of fiction, a power he now wished to use in an anti-drug crusade.

Fabin’s illusion is a warning to the reader: Whatever their reality, the bugs are an important factor in his existence. If we cannot accept this, we will have trouble negotiating the rest of the novel. For much of what happens in the book has the exact epistemological status of Fabin’s bugs.

Still, Dick gives us enough information to evaluate the situation from another point of view, from outside of Fabin’s own vision of the world. A doctor, a *prima facia* authority, finds no bugs. And the changing nature of the bugs fits no pattern we know from our own experiences. Thus, though the bugs are first presented as fact, we are not drawn into belief in them—unlike Charles Freck, another character, who fell into Fabin’s illusion, who:

“... was up two nights and two days counting bugs. Counting them and putting them in bottles. And finally when we crashed and got up and got ready the next morning to put the bottles in the car, to take to the doctor to show him, there was nothing in the bottles. Empty.” (17; ch. 1)

Fabin’s paranoia eventually causes his incarceration, proving its truth, after a fashion. And he is being deliberately killed, after his initial cooperation (taking the drug), by those who manufacture Substance D, known to its users as “slow death.”
Fabin’s story throws us directly into the milieu of disintegration permeating the novel. Though the situations surrounding drug use are unnecessary—they could be avoided with avoidance of drugs—Dick presents them without judgment. What someone believes his or her world to be deserves some respect. Even if, like Fabin, they do not understand just what they have gotten into or see that they are losing their ability to deal with the world they live in.

By opening with the Fabin story, Dick also provides an encapsulated view of what will happen in the main story he presents in the novel, a story to which Jerry himself is relatively unimportant. Jerry has already reached the point toward which Arctor heads. His destruction, comic though it may be, is intended to make the later comedy in and of the lives of the other drug users appear as something much greater than mere gallows humor. Because it starts the novel and quickly presents Jerry’s mental end, the destructive nature of drug use cannot later be forgotten or laughed off.

Unlike Jack Isidore, who struggles, and fails, toward understanding of his world (though he reaches understanding of himself), the characters of _A Scanner Darkly_ have accepted their slide toward oblivion. By the time the book opens, most have nearly reached the point where they cannot effectively deal with the world around them. Though they may once have been competent, they have retreated into Isidore-esque relations with their environment. And each is perilously close to Fabin’s fate.

No longer are the events of their lives kept in perspective. No longer can they judge the things happening around them. An incident retold in _A Scanner Darkly_ tells how a woman bought a stamp from a stamp machine:

“... and the machine went dingey and just cranking out stamps.... Well, that was cool, except what was Donna Hawthorne going to do with them? She never wrote a letter in her life, except to her lawyer to sue some guy who burned her in a dope deal.” (107; ch. 8)
So, what does she do? She steals the stamp machine, and sets it up in front of her house, with the stamps re-installed, ready to collect the money at the end of the day.

One of the people hearing the story, a drug addict named Barris who could care less about the government, who has probably never paid taxes, reacts in anger:

“That girl is disturbed. She should be forcibly committed. Do you realize that all our taxes were raised by her stealing those stamps?” He sounded very angry again.

“Write the government and tell them,” Luckman said, his face cold with distaste for Barris. “Ask Donna for a stamp to mail it; she’ll sell you one.”

“At full price,” Barris said, equally mad. (108; ch. 8)

Through this comedic situation framed by anger, Dick here shows just how little of Barris and Luckman’s ability to discriminate remains. Both should see the humor of the situation. Each would do what Donna had done. But they allow their vision to be clouded by frustration at the world they live in. The humor has gone out of their lives, replaced by desire to punish one who has done what they cannot do.

A final joke on them is that, unknown to them, Donna is a government agent—a narc. Barris and Luckman are reacting to nothing but another mask, an illusion.

Early in the novel, Arctor, in his “scramble suit” (which makes it impossible for anyone to identify the person within), tries to give a talk about the drug problem to a civic organization. He makes a mess of the talk, for he sees the audience too much as a member of the drug culture would. He can no longer separate his two worlds to the degree required for relating to his audience. At one point, he tells them that, seeing him without the suit, they would think of him as just another doper. Later, as he wanders around town, trying to come to terms with the experience, he thinks:
You put on a bishop’s robe and miter, he pondered, and walk around in that, and people bow and genuflect and like that, and try to kiss your ring, if not your ass, and pretty soon you’re a bishop. So to speak. What is identity? he asked himself. Where does the act end? Nobody knows. (25; ch. 2)

Immediately afterwards, he ruminates on the situation of an undercover agent when faced with a beat cop, one who does not know that the man he is facing is also a cop. The agent must act like a doper, must accept the abuse, even though he may, himself, have once been a beat cop. “What am I actually? he asked himself.” (26; ch. 2) This becomes one of the core questions of the book, as it often does in Dick, for it is the question many of his characters ask when faced with chaotic worlds. The reality of the self goes hand in hand with the reality of the world. Just as perceptions of the self intertwine with perceptions of the world.

The question, of course, is also the one Jack Isidore finally directly confronts at the end of *Confessions of a Crap Artist*. Fortunately for Isidore, he finds an answer, though a painful one. Unfortunately for Arctor, no answer ever comes—not for the individual, at least. Yet Isidore, for all that he has found an answer, accomplishes nothing through it. Arctor, on the other hand, accomplishes something concrete by secreting in his shoe one of the flowers from which “slow death” comes. Though it is of no use to him any longer and teaches him nothing, he will get it to the authorities—who are using his destruction for their own ends.

One of the problems for Arctor is that of any agent who, if he or she would be effective, must spy on friends:

If you had to spy on and report about someone, it might as well be people you’d see anyhow: that was less suspicious and less of a drag. And if you did not see them frequently before you began surveillance, you would have to eventually anyhow; it worked out the same in the end. (28; ch. 2)
Arctor, two things, two people, an addict and a narc, must be the one to be effective as the other. He has to like the life as the one, and the other. Yet they are incompatible.

Still, the effective falsehood has as much truth in it as possible. So Arctor has to be both.

The problem comes to a head when Arctor, as “Fred,” the agent whose identity is unknown to his superiors, is told to concentrate his undercover activities on Arctor. He must spy on himself: “He felt totally spaced out from all this; he wished the debriefing session would end and he thought: If only I could drop a couple tabs—” (51; ch. 4). Unable, momentarily, to cope with his life as a narc, he wishes himself back into his life as a drug addict.

But Arctor does spy on himself, and discovers that he already has been acting against himself, though without conscious knowledge of what he has done. That is, he has been sabotaging his own life—perhaps the most ultimate of paranoid situations. The films from cameras he, as “Fred,” has set up inside his house show him ruining his own belongings—though the cameras, too, are suspect, for they also seem to have recorded hallucinations. “Slow death” has driven a wedge between the parts of his schizoid being, making him totally unaware of what he, himself, is up to.

Late in the novel, “Fred”/Arctor becomes a third person, a reconstructed but minimal personality called “Bruce,” a burned-out drug addict living in a supposed rehabilitation center, a place suspected of being a part of the network supplying “slow death” to those still under its influence. He has been sacrificed so that the authorities can, through him, get at the source of the drug. Two narcs discuss the situation:

“I think, really, there is nothing more terrible than the sacrifice of someone or something, a living thing, without its ever knowing. If it knew. If it understood and volunteered. But—” She gestured. “He doesn’t know; he never did know. He didn’t volunteer—”

“Sure he did. It was his job.”
“He had no idea, and he hasn’t any idea now, because now he hasn’t any ideas. You know that as well as I do. And he never again in his life, as long as he lives, have any ideas. Only reflexes. And this didn’t happen accidentally; it was supposed to happen.... “(205; ch. 14)

They are banking on Bruce’s reflex memory to get them information about the source of “slow death.” Only a truly destroyed person can penetrate the organization surrounding the drug. Bruce can and does, finally being put to work harvesting the strange plant from which “slow death” is made. They hope that enough remains within Bruce of Arctor to remember that he had promised something:

Stooping down, Bruce picked one of the stubbled blue plants, then placed it in his right shoe, slipping it down out of sight. A present for my friends, he thought, and looking forward inside his mind where no one could see, to Thanksgiving. (220; ch. 17)

So ends the book—on a strangely hopeful note for what is left of Arctor. That Thanksgiving will be the next time Bruce will be allowed to see his friends the narcs is, of course, rather poignant, a sad little irony for him, yet an idea of hope for the world around him.

Arctor, with his two lives, has been caught up in a power struggle between two great forces, both of which have taken to totalitarian methods. One is the “legal” establishment which sacrifices one of its agents. The other is the mysterious group supplying the drug, which has trapped him, through the drug, into becoming one of its minions.

Confessions of a Crap Artist and A Scanner Darkly give us the pathetic and yet make it somehow heroic. More heroic, perhaps, than those existential strugglers of Samuel Beckett and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., who keep going on in the face of simple meaninglessness. For both Arctor and Isidore manage to rise above mere meaninglessness, the first in order to make a contribution to his fellows, the second to understand his
relationship with his world. These characters have learned that they exist on the basis of their interactions with others, and have made decisions based on the power politics they see around them. The decision destroys Arctor. What its implications are for Isidore we are only left to guess (unless we accept the second Isidore as the actual continuation of the first).

Isidore and Arctor face their worlds with handicaps, complicating their attempts to negotiate their worlds. Isidore lacks the ability to integrate and judge the information he receives. Arctor, though a narcotics agent, is addicted to a drug that makes him schizophrenic even as it kills him. Though few of Dick’s other characters live as far out on the fringe of society as these two do, Isidore and Arctor, perhaps because of their extreme positions, present most clearly the problems all of them face.

Can involvement in the power politics of the world make a person better or happier? No, the novels suggest, through these characters, their actions, and the results of what they do. Is what we are a sufficient justification for human existence? Yes, if Isidore and Arctor can be considered as human exemplars, even though their states may be demeaned. Though lacking the potentialities of most of us, they still manage to reach out, to help others. To Dick, that is the very justification of existence.

Though people, like Isidore and like Arctor as he finally appears, can overcome the limitations of their lives—implying that all of us, though our limitations are less, can do the same—what can we do when faced with limitations from the other extreme? With those limitations not within us, but placed upon us?

Human perception, even for the best of us, is circumscribed by our senses and the limitation of individuality. We are, therefore, easy prey to those who would deceive us, those who use our limitations to make us believe in something other than the “reality” we are “meant” to live in. How can we deal with this possibility?
This, of course, is the other side of the coin that landed for these characters, forgiving Dick’s authority, making Isidore and Arctor less able than most of us. Their limits are parts of their personalities. Other limits, and deceptions, can exist as well.

Isidore and Arctor rise above themselves. Can other humans, those at full human potential, do the same? Can they see their own limitations and operate in light of them? Or will they accept the masks placed around them and look at the world from their own conceits, the idea that they, if no one else, sees things as they “really” are?
Chapter Three: 
“Fake” Artifacts and “Reality”

Philip K. Dick’s *The Man In The High Castle* (1962) and *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike* (1985, written 1960)

At the end of *The Man in the High Castle* Juliana Frink asks the *I Ching* about *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, an “alternate history” novel within the story, “What are we supposed to learn?” (246; ch. 15). She is at the house of Hawthorne Abendsen, the novel’s author. She throws the coins, then examines the results:

“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.” (246-247; ch. 15)

Though we might at first think otherwise, neither of the characters understands what they have been told, or sees the “real” meaning. They mistakenly think that the “Inner Truth” the *I Ching* “refers” to is the political “truth” at the heart of Abendsen’s novel, that Great Britain and the United States won World War II.

When they get to this passage, careful readers of *The Man in the High Castle* may know, however, that the “Inner Truth” is something else—even in the fictional world of *The*
Man in the High Castle, itself an “alternate history” in which Germany and Japan have won the war and occupy most of North America. Prior discussions by characters in the novel on the nature of the fake and the real lead to the conclusion that intrinsic “truth” often has little to do with appearances or with who won what. Juliana and Hawthorne, who have not been part of these discussions, jump to a naive conclusion, one that the novel has already debunked.

Though it contains no first-person narration, The Man in the High Castle provides a structure similar to that of Confessions of a Crap Artist, written two years earlier. That is, Dick cuts back and forth between characters, this time interspersing presentations of seven third-person limited narrative foci. All but two of the fifteen chapters are broken into sections, usually so that the action can move from focus on one character to focus on another. The focus switches thirty-two times, weaving together three simultaneous sequences of events.

The first of the sequences centers on trade in American “artifacts.” The victorious Japanese have come to prize historical Americana. An industry has grown up, supplying excellent fakes of antique items to the unwitting foreigners. This story follows Frank Frink as he tries to gain some control over his life and art by setting out, with a partner, to make, in San Francisco, original jewelry to sell to the Japanese instead of the fakes he had previously concocted and sold.

The second sequence concerns Japanese/German relationships and the repercussions of the death of Martin Bormann, Germany’s central power broker. In it, Nobusuke Tagomi, a high Japanese trade official in San Francisco, becomes involved in secret negotiations between the “Home” government in Japan and one of the factions jockeying for power in Germany. A number of characters appear here who also act in the first sequence. Tagomi and Frink, who never meet, end up having dramatic effect on each other, so intertwined are these threads. It is in these two story lines that the implication of the concept of the “fake” is discussed.
The third sequence focuses on a number of different people, all of whom are interested in *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* and its author, Abendsen. Central are Juliana Frink and a Nazi assassin sent to kill Abendsen. The action takes place in Colorado and Wyoming.

Few characters in separate sequences meet, though their lives have impact on each other. Connections generally come through things—Abendsen’s book, a work of art, a deportation paper, a gun—and through political necessities rather than through significant interpersonal relationships. Only Frank Frink and Juliana Frink have been personally important to each other. Though married, they have separated by the time the narrative starts, never to get together or even meet in the book.

Frank has been a constructor of “fake” Colt .44s and similar objects representative of a romanticized American past. But, with creative urges boiling, he wants to make something new, though he knows that the Japanese despise anything made in contemporary America—and they are, really, the only market.

By blackmailing his former employer, threatening to expose the hoax, the fakes, Frank gets seed money for his business. Later, his employer gets back at him, by turning his name over to German representatives. For Frank Frink is a Jew, liable for deportation to German-held territory—and extinction. Still, Frink has used a seedy method to get what he wants, so the punishment he may receive (though certainly overly harsh) is not entirely unwarranted, given Dick’s view of personal interactions and their consequences.

Because of his ostensibly non-political job, Tagomi finds himself used as an intermediary and as cover for a meeting between a Japanese leader and the representative of a dissident German group. The two groups desire mediation and a truly bi-polar world-power relationship. But word of the meeting gets to the official German representatives, who try to assassinate the dissident—in Tagomi’s office. Armed with an
“antique” Colt .44 (probably made by Frink), Tagomi kills the assassins, an action he quickly regrets deeply.

Later, upset by what he has done, a “bauble,” one of Frink’s new jewelry pieces, sparks a “mystical” experience for Tagomi—in which he experiences a “reality” different from that he has known. Emboldened by the experience, he then refuses to sign an extradition order naming Frink (whose name, of course, he didn’t know).

This act, humane in the best sense of the term, for the act itself is its reward, is also Tagomi’s salvation. His refusal to allow the destruction of Frink, even though he is not really conscious of just what he is refusing, allows him to regain the equilibrium lost through his earlier violent act.

The third story, directly connected to the others only through Juliana and Frank’s prior relationship, takes place in the buffer zone between the German-held East Coast and the Japanese West. Here, Juliana, a restless woman unsure of the direction of her life, takes on a quest, a voyage to visit Abendsen. She hopes he can somehow help her. He is reputed to live in a mountain castle (shades of Kafka and Smetena) fortified against German and Japanese assassins who want to destroy him, who represent the forces trying to repress his novel. She hopes she can find entrance to it—and to the meaning she believes rests in the author.

In spite of being banned, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* has drawn quite a following, for it tells how the world would be better had the war ended differently, thus restoring some pride to the down-trodden Americans.

Juliana travels with an Italian truck driver who also wishes to see Abendsen. When she discovers that he is really a German assassin, she slits his throat—her own corollary to Tagomi’s violent act, one she “pays” for by not getting explicit answers to her questions—and continues on alone, finding Abendsen not in a “high castle,” but in an ordinary suburban home.

In various interviews Dick claimed, probably as a deliberate footnote of mystery, that *The Man in the High Castle* was
“programmed” by the *I Ching*. Like most serious writers, he probably believed his own novel has an “Inner Truth,” too, something to say to people beyond the fictive history. Perhaps he hoped to force readers to consider the parallels between Dick and his character-author Abendsen, who certainly does utilize the *I Ching* in *his* writing. Internal evidence in *The Man in the High Castle* suggests, contrary to his claim, that Dick had plotted the novel before he began writing, or, at least, before revising the novel. The relationship between the West Coast stories and Juliana’s quest and final revelation is too close to be the result of anything but careful planning.

*The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* is the most important and problematic of the “fakes” in *The Man in the High Castle*. It holds a similar position *vis-à-vis* the semblance of the novel to that of *The Man in the High Castle* in our own world. Neither the “real” novel nor the one presented in it claims an “Outer Truth,” a presented reflection of a “real” world. Both purport to present fictional alternatives to the worlds of their composition. Neither author wants to be a savior, though they both believe they have points to make. Abendsen even gets angry when the significance of his book is “proven” to him by Juliana. He wants nothing to do with that kind of prophecy or significance. These, he believes, as Dick did, should rest in the reader, not in the book or in the author—even when the author has something of importance to say.

Juliana kills in order to protect the author of this “fake.” Like the Nazis who sent the assassin, like all who kill the messenger, she believes that the bearer is the tale. Abendsen, angry when told that what he says is “true,” is reacting to this idea, and to the idea that he, somehow, has some special knowledge.

Dick might claim that everything in both novels, the real or the fictional, exists in spite of the author, not because of him. Meaning lies well below the surface, becoming available only when sought, not when offered.

The parts of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* appearing in *The Man in the High Castle* show an idealized vision of what
the world might be, had the Allies won WWII, not one that could possibly be “true.” Juliana, at one point, reads from the book:

She had arrived at a section in *The Grasshopper* which described the fabulous television, and it enthralled her; especially the part about the inexpensive little sets for backward people in Africa and Asia....

Only Yankee know-how and the mass-production system—Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, the magic names!—could have done the trick, sent that ceaseless and almost witless noble flood of cheap one-dollar (the China Dollar, the trade dollar) television kits to every village and backwater of the Orient. And when the kit had been assembled by some gaunt, feverish-minded youth in the village, starved for a chance, for that which the generous Americans held out to him, that tinny little instrument with its built-in power supply no larger than a marble began to receive. And what did it receive? Crouching before the screen, the youths of the village—and often the elders as well—saw words. Instructions. How to read, first. Then the rest. How to dig a deeper well. Plow a deeper furrow. (149-150; ch. 10)

Abendsen’s naive and idealized alternate world provides a counterpoint to the later and unsophisticated interpretation of the *I Ching*, and the derived world view presented by Abendsen and Juliana Frink. Though each view of the world, to Dick, is false, together they may dance around what may prove to be a hint of what might be “true.”

Though he recognizes that his own book probably would have little in common with any world where the Axis won WWII, Dick may have seen *The Man in the High Castle* as a possible mediator between what is and what could be. Its possible significance, at least, goes far beyond the particulars he presents and beyond those in the general public’s perception of a science fiction novel.
As Dick desires as the reaction to his “real” novel, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* is taken seriously by its readers. In *The Man in the High Castle*, two characters, Paul and Betty Kasoura, discuss the relation of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* to the science fiction genre, within which little “serious” literature had been produced—in their world as in Dick’s own of the time of composition:

“Not a mystery,” Paul said. “On contrary, interesting form of fiction possible within genre of science fiction.”


“But,” Paul said, “it deals with alternate present. Many well-known science fiction novels of that sort.” To Robert he explained, “Pardon my insistence in this, but as my wife knows, I was for a long time a science fiction enthusiast.” (103; ch. 7)

Whatever else these novels, Dick’s and Abendsen’s, are, they both attempt to rise beyond their roles as masks and try to allow people to see behind them, to view the world as it may “really” be. They both attempt a transaction with the reader, not a telling, a coercion or a totalitarianism.

Characteristically, Dick does not resolve the conflict between Betty and Paul over *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*. He leaves the question for the reader—the individual perceiver (the base unit, in Dick’s view of the universe)—to answer, just as he would have liked them to do with his own book, claiming, as he later did, that *The Man in the High Castle* “was not published as science fiction” (Rickman, *In His Own Words* 151).

Paul and Betty, though Japanese, have American names and speak English as often as possible, though in a somewhat telegraphic style. Some of the American characters, perhaps in imitation of their conquerors, also use this style, their ad-
opted speech pattern becoming yet another “fake” in the long series within the book.

The twinning of the “real” and “fictional” novel, so obvious throughout *The Man in the High Castle* and reinforced by Dick’s later comments, makes consideration of the final “Inner Truth” presented by the *I Ching* extremely difficult. When we, as readers, approach this “revelation,” we have been made aware that at least two levels of “truth” are operating, one being a function of the world of *The Man in the High Castle* and the other being external, concerning *The Man in the High Castle* and its readers. “Inner Truth,” then, lies within which? what? and where?

The idea behind use of the *I Ching* for consultation is that the tosses of coins or choices of yarrow stalks are somehow controlled by something other than chance—but with chance itself as an important aspect of that something. Some force or significant connection is involved in the results of the coin tosses or yarrow-stalk countings that lead to each reading, allowing us, then, to use those readings as a medium for discovery.

According to Carl Jung, the developer of the *I Ching*:

> was convinced that the hexagram worked out in a certain moment coincided with the latter in quality no less than in time. To him the hexagram was the exponent of the moment in which it was cast—even more so than the hours of the clock or the divisions of the calendar could be—inasmuch as the hexagram was understood to be an indicator of the essential situation prevailing in the moment of its origin. (Jung, xxiv)

The force, then, is the nature of the moment and not some external actor.

Any results of any *I Ching* coin throws are as open to various interpretations as there are various moments. Ambiguity is the heart and soul of the book and all readings, for meaning arises only out of the specific situations.
The value of the *I Ching* lies in nothing more than belief and recognition of relationships—where the value of any reality sits, to Dick. The thing-in-itself, by extension, has absolutely no value beyond its utilization.

When the *I Ching* is considered as a part of a fictional world, other factors begin to operate, especially when the author has made the readers significantly aware of the fiction of the situation they are “witnessing.” Within *The Man in the High Castle*, the *I Ching* functions on a level quite different from its place in our own world. Within the novel, its messages are controlled by the author, not by the moment, the action of the throw. We know this with a certainty never attained in any uses of the *I Ching* we might make ourselves. When reading the novel, we see the *I Ching* as a mask, a semblence of ‘chance,’ a fraud perpetrated by the author to further the ends of the book; in our own lives, we might take it differently.

Relative to their own world, however, the characters of *The Man in the High Castle* have exactly the faith we might have in the *I Ching* in our own lives. They may accept it, but its proofs are no more provided for the characters than they are for us.

Again, the things the *I Ching* “tells”—even in *The Man in the High Castle*—are always ambiguous, open to interpretation. The act of finding the “Inner Truth” through any *I Ching* method of interpretation takes place within the interpreter, not within the message itself. “Inner Truth,” then, lies within the person, not the work. Still, even a fake, a fiction, can have more validity in our lives than what we assume are the truths of our perceptions. Though not a particularly startling statement and certainly not original, this is part of the core of Dick’s view on both fiction and the world he inhabited.

Rather than trying to tell us something new, Dick attempts to make us feel the weaknesses of our personal assumptions about the world we live in, about the “real.”

Having forced us to recognize the parallels between his novel and Abendsen’s, Dick then asks us to find parallels between our lives and those of the characters who think they are
told that their world is not real. They, after all, have no more 
sufficient reason than we might for making that assumption.

Dick particularly liked to present “fakes.” Among them 
are prophets and leaders who cannot fulfill their prophecies 
and promises for the future. They are the ones who pose the 
greatest threat to the rest of us, who would merely want lead 
lives responsive to those around us. They are the ones who 
scared Dick the most.

As in The Man in the High Castle, Dick’s immediate inter-
est often lies less in failures and fakeries than in the parallels 
he provides with the world he shared with his readers. Even 
frauds provide something of interest, some lesson. An “unre-
al” book can contain something of reality. A “fake” leader may 
end up Christ-like in some of his aspects, though remaining 
Hitleresque in others. The demagogue Jones, for example, in The World Jones Made eventually even arranges his own as-
sassination, hoping it will lead to growth of the movement he 
has begun. It does. Though he was an admitted fraud, the re-

sults of his actions are far from fraudulent.

Abendsen, something of a Dick alter-ego in The Man in the 
High Castle, is another of these leaders, though a more honest 
one than Jones. A writer, his readers perceive him as a sav-
ior, though he personally knows he can save no one and re-
jects the temptations of temporal power. Much about him is 
fake: even the image he presents of himself through the pub-
licity surrounding his book is fraudulent. It is claimed that 
he lives in a mountain castle, protected against any attack. 
Instead, when Juliana arrives at her goal, she finds the house 
is a common one, situated in a nondescript suburban neigh-
borhood:

The Abendsen house was lit up and she could hear 
music and voices. It was a single-story stucco house 
with many shrubs and a good deal of garden made up 
mostly of climbing roses. As she started up the flagstone 
path she though, Can I actually be there? Is this the 
High Castle? What about the rumors and stories? The 
house was ordinary, well maintained and the grounds
tended. There was even a child’s tricycle parked in the long cement driveway. (240; ch. 15)

Abendsen turns out, also, to be an ordinary man, unusual only in that he understands the limits of his own perceptions. He cannot, therefore, presume the prescience necessary for directing others. Though “the man in the high castle,” he insists on remaining nothing more than a man, like any other.

The choice of the title The Man in the High Castle is another deliberate attempt at misdirection. In correspondence with Patricia Warrick, Dick wrote:

> When the Protestant Elector Palatine, Frederick, revolted against Ferdinand, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, the High Castle came to symbolize the center of religious and political freedom against the autocratic Catholic Hapsburgs. I used the mention of it in the title of my novel as a symbol of Abendsen’s ‘revolt’ against the tyranny of the Nazis.... (Warrick, Mind in Motion 58)

Through this historical connection—one not noticed by anyone in the novel—Abendsen’s “revolt” is again connected to the world of the reader. We, and not the characters, are expected to make the connection. And a further one:

> Various lofty and beautiful castles... were taken over by the SS and used as places to train young SS men into an elite body cut off from the “ordinary” world... . You can see, then, that the two castles are bipolarized in the book: the legendary High Castle of Protestant freedom and resistance in the Thirty Year War versus the evil castle system of the elite youth corps of the SS. (Warrick, Mind in Motion 58)

Abendsen could go either way. He could be the protector of freedom or its destroyer. As “the man in the high castle,” he has responsibilities of control—of the world he created, if nothing else. He faces the responsibility of the writer in
his own world, though that is something he does not want to face—witness his anger when Juliana gives her interpretation of the *I Ching*’s “Inner Truth.”

Abendsen is certainly no unique character in Dick’s fiction. Though, as a character, he is an ordinary man in an average environment, his profession leads him into direct involvement with the ways other characters see the world. With the masks they wear, with their understanding of the masks worn by others. Other characters want Abendsen to be a leader, with implied rejection of the egalitarian role he favors, replacing it with one in which he tells what is best. He cannot accept that. Like Dick, his creator, he finds such roles uncomfortable.

Abendsen has no impact on the world he lives in beyond those people who come in contact directly with him and through the obvious limited impact of his novel. He is a “little” person, not a world-shaker. And he wants to remain that. No other role would allow him to continue his life as he would lead it.

Though saviors, or “players”—or “big protagonists,” often appear in Dick’s fiction, Dick, as he does in *The Man in the High Castle*, most often shows problems of perception and the fake, the mask, in terms of the little, everyday person. You or me. Only *we* can maintain the personal and egalitarian relationships with others that Dick held so dear. Abendsen realizes this in his own world, making him one of Dick’s most important characters in terms of “our” world—a rare triumph.

In “Precious Artifact,” a short story from 1964, the few remaining Terrans are used by Centaurans to complete reconstruction of a planet for Centauran habitation. A war between the two planets has been lost by Earth.

The Earthmen, reconstruction engineers, have been led to believe that Earth has won the war, that they are changing Mars, where they work, for Earth emigration. They live in a “reality” composed within their own imaginations, along with careful “helps” from the Centaurans.
The Terran the story centers upon suspects the truth of the situation, but cannot face it squarely. As a result, the Centaurans are able to lull him back into complacency by using a supposed remnant of Earth, a cat—one constructed, but one he believes is real. It appears to him as a touchstone to his old world. Through contact with the “cat,” he manages to continue on with his work.

The Centaurans destroyed Earth through the process of defeating it (just as Earth nearly destroyed Centaurus)—but they hold no serious animosity toward the few remaining Earthmen and hold no evil design in their utilization of them. In fact, they have need of the Earthmen, must utilize their Earth talents if they, themselves, are to survive. Their attitude is a far cry from that of the Nazis in The Man in the High Castle, even though the results of many of their actions are similar (the Nazis have destroyed the Africa of the novel as completely as the Centaurans destroyed Earth). Whatever the past may have been, they have something of a friendly design toward the Earthmen. Unfortunately, the Earthmen could never approach them on such a plain, having lived too long with the idea of the Centaurans as enemy.

Though he has more sympathy with the Centaurans than he does with his Nazis, Dick’s refusal to accept any “use” (through deception as much as through coercion) of another keeps us readers from seeing the situation of “Precious Artifact” as anything but tragic for all concerned, even though the purpose of the Centaurans’, given their present situation, is benign. Even a positive desire can lead to manipulation; no one, after all, acts from simple motives.

Not surprisingly, none of the Japanese or Germans who appear as characters in The Man in the High Castle is portrayed as a completely evil person. Even the Nazi assassin whom Juliana kills is allowed to die with dignity, though horribly.

Living and working in Colorado, Juliana has come into intimate contact with the supposed Italian truck driver Joe Cinnadella, as he calls himself. The two of them decide to
drive to see Abendsen, the author of the book that has fasci-
nated both of them. Once they get to a hotel in Denver, how-
ever, the Italian allows Juliana to see him without his mask: as a Nazi assassin, one sent to kill Abendsen—not even an
Italian at all, but a blonde German in disguise. In a some-
thing of a stupor, Juliana slits his throat with a razor blade:

Whisk. “It is awful,” she said. “They violate. I ought
to know.” Ready for purse snatcher; the various night
prowlers, I certainly can handle. Where had this one
gone? Slapping his neck, doing a dance. “Let me by,”
she said. “Don’t bar my way unless you want a lesson.
However, only women.” Holding the blade she went on
opening the door. Joe sat on the floor, hand pressed
against the side of his throat. (204; ch. 13)

In this, probably the most emotionally awful scene in all of
Dick, a man who has pretended to be something else, who has
worn a mask, dies for what he has done. The dying assas-
sin calmly asks Juliana for mercy, for a doctor. “’Maybe I can
tell them at the desk,’ she said.” (205; ch. 13) She does not.
Caught up in belief in the author they sought, she cannot re-
act in a humane, immediate manner.

The use of the telegraphic speaking style of the Japanese
in the novel, both by Juliana and by the narrative voice giving
her thoughts, provides an understatement to this passage,
making it all the more gruesome. The simplicity of the words,
as of the act itself, provides a remove from consideration of
implication. As she cannot afford to think about what she is
doing, Juliana chooses a language model that precludes seri-
ous thought. She uses what is, essentially, a fake in order to
retain her sanity.

*The Man in the High Castle* was not Dick’s first attempt to
deal with questions of reality and the fake. In fact, even Dick’s
first sale, “Roog,” centers on vagaries of perception, present-
ing garbagemen who appear to the dog of the story as aliens,
and “The Little Movement,” another very early story, shows
toys not as toys at all but either potential usurpers of power in the world the children live in—or protectors of the status quo.

Dick frequently attempts to make unusual perceptions of reality palatable to those of us who accept—and live with—the “common,” or mundane, reality. Not only is he interested in perception, but in convincing people that the reality of each is not the unique and sole reality of the world—realization of which, he hoped, would lead people to abandon all other attempts at leadership for mutual consideration—even in their personal lives.

In one of his early “realist” novels, The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike (published in 1984, but written in 1960), Dick, not surprisingly, makes much the same point about perception and the fake as he does in The Man in the High Castle, written about the same time. In The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike, Dick presents one Walt Dombrosio, who plays a malicious practical joke on his neighbor. Walt, a commercial artist, devises a hoax akin to that of the Piltdown Man. He plants, on his neighbor’s property, a skull he has altered.

The skull Walt has “faked” eventually proves important in its own right. Thereby, Dick moves the novel beyond the mere presentation of a hoax, taking it even beyond discussion of the power problems inherent in marriage, the novel’s other ostensibly primary theme. The novel becomes an exploration of “real” versus “fake”—in marriage relationships, surely, but in anthropology and suburban life in general.

On its surface, The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike concerns the events and people surrounding a practical joke. Its multi-focus narrative is broken up amongst the following characters, with a few minor exceptions: Leo Runcible, a Jew, a real-estate broker who is trying to “improve” the rural Marin County, California area he has moved into, yet who, because of his faith, is not accepted into the community; Janet Runcible, Leo’s rather feeble and alcoholic wife; Walt Dombrosio, a commercial artist who lives in the house below
the Runcible’s; and Sherry Dombrosio, who tries to force her husband into dominating her—and succeeds.

The power roles of the characters of *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike* do not fall as easily into categories as they do in *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, written just a little while before. Yet, Leo’s primary act in the novel is as punitive as anything Charley does in the earlier novel.

Walt brings a black man home to dinner. A guest of the Runcible’s, one who might buy a house in the area through Leo, sees the black man, and asks Leo if there are any of “them” living in Carquinez, their town. Leo admits that there are none, but explodes at his friend, calling him a racist and, by inference, an anti-Semite.

After kicking the man out of his house, Leo turns his wrath on Walt, who he sees as having caused the argument by unthinkingly bringing a black into Carquinez—almost a paranoid response. It is Walt who, to Leo, has caused the loss of his sale. Angry and impotent, Leo cannot see that he is being as racist as his guest was when he is angry at Walt for inviting a black to dinner.

Insecure and unable to examine himself, Leo has become unable to see beyond the masks he has helped place on the world around him. He never understands the results his action brings.

Dombrosio, because of the troubles he is having with his wife, and because an irate phone call from Runcible about the dinner guest has upset him, stops off at a bar on his way home from work in San Francisco a day or so later. He has a few too many, and tries to drive home. Runcible, recognizing Walt’s sports car when he sees it careen into a ditch—where it gets stuck—calls the state police, feeling he is giving Walt his just desserts, punishing him for an action Dombrosio would never be able connect with his loss of driving privilege.

Having lost his license, Walt is forced into further dependence on his wife, who must now transport him to and from work. She uses the opportunity to belittle him further, or so he feels, by applying for a job with his own company, to
give her something to do while in town. When his boss offers Sherry the job, Walt, reacting as much to Sherry’s abuse of him as to any desire to hurt, or punish, his boss, punches him, losing his own job, winding up staying at home while Sherry works.

Janet, drunk one afternoon some while later, lets it slip to Walt that it was her husband who had called the police when Walt was drunk and in the ditch. Walt then concocts his elaborate practical joke, to get back at Leo.

He finds a deformed, Neanderthal-like skull with undifferentiated teeth, alters it, and plants it on the Runcible property. After all, his job as a commercial artist had been to make models that could not be distinguished from the real thing. When found, the skull will appear to be that of a Neanderthal man and Leo, Walt hopes, will call in the media to try to capitalize on what has been found. Walt seeds his own property with artifacts that will seem to have been washed down from Runcible’s—when found by the men digging a new septic line for the Dombrosio’s.

Runcible, ever the salesman (yet he does have the good of the community always in mind—even though he is often ostracized, being the lone Jew in the area), finds the skull, and touts it. The other “artifacts” are then found. After a good deal of publicity, the initial skull is proven a fake. But Leo will not let go of it. It must be important, even if not really that of a Neanderthal. It has to be, or his view of himself will be destroyed.

And so it proves.

Like Dick himself, Leo cannot believe in one simple explanation—especially when he has put so much credence in another. So, Leo continues to pursue the possibilities the skull represents.

As in A Scanner Darkly, there is no one character in this book that the reader can identify with. In Confessions of a Crap Artist, Jack transcends his personal limitations; in The Man in the High Castle four rather minor humans rise above themselves at least once in their lives. No one in The Man
*Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike*, on the other hand, does anything startlingly better than could be expected of them. Often, they do worse. Yet all four of the major characters are finally presented sympathetically, though all are treated severely when seen through the eyes of the others—for *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike* has the fragmented narrative presentation found in *Confessions of a Crap Artist* and *The Man in the High Castle*.

Nothing significant is accomplished during the action of *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike*. The only sense of closure given at the end of the novel is contained in the knowledge that the specific sequence of events is over. All four characters remain as they were—except for Sherry, who is now trapped by pregnancy.

This is no novel of beginnings and endings, or of growth. It is a tale of situations. And situations, not individuals, are the victors. Because of this, the novel might be called “dull,” as Kim Stanley Robinson calls all of Dick’s non-science fiction novels of the fifties. But it is not. Characterization is the strong point of *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike*. The people within are fully actualized, detailed and individual. They interest us, the readers. They are all a bit confusing and confused, as real people are, and are generally as contradictory.

Leo dreams of getting area farmers to support (with money) the construction of a new and safe water system. They do not. But Leo goes ahead anyway, risking all he has in a dubious water venture, one that has no possibility of making him rich, even if it succeeds. He does it only because he genuinely cares to see that the community has good water (if it does, he will sell more houses, certainly, but the gain from that will likely never offset his losses). He may do stupid things, like calling the police because he blames Walt for the loss of a sale, but, as Dick tries to demonstrate so often in his fiction, everyone does something stupid, sometimes. Many times.

By the end of the novel, each couple is blaming the other couple for its troubles—not the partner, all of whom are just
as culpable. Each pair has built the other into a straw man, a focus for blame and, thereby, a fake. Only Walt, who after raping his wife, has refused to allow her an abortion, ever realizes this.

Though Walt draws reader sympathy throughout the bulk of the book, his act of rape turns us quickly away from him. Even though Sherry may have been demanding just this sort of action, to force him to re-establish the dominance she loathes but demands, his action is inexcusable. Still, we can understand what it is Walt learns through his ill-thought attempt to escape domination himself. That is, that we all make up our own realities. Walt’s wife blames Leo for her pregnancy and, perhaps, for the rape. She certainly does not blame her husband. Everyone tries to find an appropriate scapegoat, someone to blame for the bad things that have happened to them. For Sherry, for various reasons, this cannot be Walt. So another is found. Walt, finally, understands this.

As in many Dick novels, as in “Precious Artifact” where the artificial cat allows an individual to continue to exist and work for the good of someone else, at least, the fakes presented in *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike* turn out to have a truth, a value (at least) of their own. Walt, with an eye toward verisimilitude, has looked through abandoned graveyards for a skull that resembles a Neanderthal in order to perpetuate his hoax. He finds one. The men who expose the hoax, however, turn out to be legitimately interested in this skull’s deformed jaw. It turns out that there is a backwater community nearby where such a jaw formation is not unusual—perhaps because of bad drinking water. A significant discovery.

“Things are seldom what they seem,/Skim milk masquerades as cream.” These lines, from Gilbert and Sullivan’s *H.M.S. Pinafore*, were among Dick’s favorites. Perception, as he saw it, is not reality. Also, traditional ideas of causality do not necessarily hold. A fake may become “real,” may turn out to have its own intrinsic value, as the skull does in *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike*. As skim milk most cer-
tainly does. Single and simple explanations and categorizations, of course, rarely suffice for Dick.

By the time of composition of *The Man in the High Castle*, certainly, Dick was aware that the common idea of “fake,” with its overtones of “valueless,” has very little validity. Something that is not the thing it seems, after all, can be just as effective an instrument towards its user’s end as the thing it replaces.

In many cases, the distinction between the “real” and the “fake” is only a convenience, a way for establishing a hierarchy. Neither idea has meaning intrinsic to the objects they are applied to. In *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike*, Dick shows how a clever fake can be as illuminating and valuable as the “real” article might have been, though in a different manner.

The lie proving “real,” demonstrating the possible varieties of perception, was a part of Dick’s fiction from his earliest days as a short story writer. In “Impostor,” from 1953, Dick’s Spence Olham discovers that the authorities suspect he is a replacement for the “real” Spence Olham, that he is a bomb sent by aliens to destroy Earth. He knows he is not. The story follows his desperate attempt to survive and to prove the authorities mistaken. Yet it turns out that they are not. Olham’s perception, while real to him, had no validity beyond him. For he is, “really,” a bomb.

By the same token, in *The Man in the High Castle*, Nobusuke Tagomi kills several German agents with what might well be a “fake” Colt 44.

By the end of *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike*, Walt has come to recognize the limitations of human perception and the importance of belief, even belief in a “fake.” Walt recognizes this not so much in terms of the skull (he is merely bitter that his neighbor Runcible’s name will be associated with the find), but sees it through his wife’s world-view:

> I see, he thought. I see how the reasoning goes. How she makes it work. Terrific. It’s possible to do anything with people, facts and events; they can be reshaped, the way I reshape wet plastic in the work-
Dick underscores the relationship between Dombrosio’s revelation and fiction itself soon after this passage. Walt imagines a future in which his son has been born with a “ch-upper” (Neanderthal-like) jaw—the same type of jaw he had used in creating the “fake” planted on Runcible’s property. It is, Walt imagines, five years later, and he and Sherry are taking their son to a special school. Dick’s description of this vision is particularly vivid, right down to clothes worn and to the personality of the teacher at the school. Yet Walt clearly only imagines the situation.

In *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike*, Dick tries to explain how it can come about that certain “fakes” have a “real” element:

> When a stamp forger wants to counterfeit a valuable old stamp he gets another issue of the same period, on the same paper, old paper. He only fakes the inked part. His paper stands up under the test. (154; ch. 13)

This makes possible the “real” behind Walt’s faked skull. It is not old enough to be Neanderthal, and he knows that, but Walt, the careful forger, has had enough sense to pick a skull with Neanderthal features. Thus, his joke can later turn “real,” when people rather similar to Neanderthals are discovered in the area near the graveyard where Walt found the skull.

Much Western thought long hinged itself on single explanations, on Occam’s razor (the simplest of possible explanations is most probably the actual). And on the idea that cause is exclusive. Not for Dick, though, just as it is not true for modern science. Kim Stanley Robinson, in correspondence with me, said that Dick’s 1974 mystical experience was probably really a minor stroke. I wrote back and said that it may have been that. But it may have been something else, as well. A stroke may be combined with a genuine vision of God. Why not? That, at least, is what Dick might have asked. Economy, he believed, does not equal truth. Characters Phil Dick and
Nick Brady discuss this question in *Radio Free Albemuth* (published in 1985, but written in 1976):

> One had to draw the line of common sense somewhere. Using Occam’s Principle of Scientific Parsimony, the simplest theory was mine. One did not need to drag in another, more powerful mind.

> However, Nicholas did not view it that way. “It’s not a question of which theory is more economical; it’s a question of what’s true....” (28; ch. 5)

Character Phil eventually learns that Nicholas is right. Common sense operates only so far; Occam’s Razor no longer operates on an exclusionary principle. Two causes, each self-sufficient and even apparently exclusionary, might both be real or complementary causes. Just as a good fake must be constructed with as many “real” elements as possible, so might a mystical experience.

Another way of looking at such situations also appears in *Radio Free Albemuth*, when a beam of pink light provides Nick information that leads to a life-saving operation on his son:

> “They transferred information to my head,” Nicholas said, “but they didn’t heal Johnny. They just—”

> “They healed him,” I said. Getting him to the doctor and calling the doctor’s attention to the birth defect was healing him. Why exert supernatural powers when natural curative means lay at hand? I remembered something the Buddha said after he witnessed a supposed saint walk on water: “For a penny,” the Buddha said, “I can board a ferry and do that.” It was more practical, even for the Buddha, to cross the water normally. The normal and the supranormal were not antagonistic realms, after all. (39; ch. 7)

Just, so, whoever presented Dick with the mystical vision that accompanied the slight stroke (if it were, in fact, both things) may have found it simpler to use the “normal” event to present the “supranormal.”
By placing a character Phil Dick in his novels, Dick asks his readers to blur the line between fiction and life and to imagine that the world of the fiction, of the “fake,” has as much validity as the world of experience. While this is no innovation, Dick adds an unusual twist. Dick has no desire to reflect the world, to present a fake so close to the real that something of the real can be learned, or experienced, from it. Instead, he wants to present something distinct from the experiential world, but that can also teach about it.

Having previously rejected the certainty of commonality of experience, Dick presents the character Phil Dick—a character closely tied to a real person—in worlds that cannot claim a close relationship with the “real.” By doing so, he tries to move any impression of “reality” the reader may be building away from the landscape of the novel and to the experiences of the character. Thereby, Dick hopes to build reader understanding that the “reality” of any experiential situation differs with the individual perceptor.

In *The Man in the High Castle*, Dick devalues the intrinsic values of objects. Wyndham-Matson, one of the minor narrative foci of the novel, shows two cigarette lighters to a lover, telling her only one has something called “historicity”:

“Don’t you feel it?” he kidded her. “The historicity?”

She said, “What is historicity?”

“When a thing has history in it. Listen. One of those two Zippo lighters was in Franklin D. Roosevelt’s pocket when he was assassinated. And one wasn’t. One has historicity, a hell of a lot of it. As much as any object ever had. And one has nothing. Can you feel it?” He nudged her. “You can’t. You can’t tell which is which….” (63; ch. 5)

A rather remarkable passage. Not only was FDR never assassinated (in our world, that is), but Wyndham-Matson is a manufacturer of items that seem real, but are not. He makes his living through objects lacking “historicity.” Yet, to do so,
he must have a clear understanding of just what “historicity” is. So, he keeps the lighter, and a verifying certificate from the Smithsonian, to remind him and to make a point about reality: the only way we know that one lighter is important is through a piece of paper, a kind of mask, one of no more intrinsic value than a novel, also something of paper. Nothing in the “real” item itself makes it more important than the other lighter.

Yet, though probably one of Wyndham-Matson’s “fakes” (made by Frank Frink), the gun Tagomi uses to kill works as well as an original would have. As effectively as any original would be. The men shot are just as dead.

What, then, is the difference between the real thing and the fake masquerading as real? It seems to be little. Yet it can be crucial, as it is in “Impostor” and in “War Veteran,” where a fake war veteran from the “future” convinces Earth authorities to avoid a war with Venus (another example of Dick turning things around, making what he often presents as dangerous seem benign to some degree). In these cases, the fake proves more important than the real ever could be.

Having decided that the world he lived in was no more real than the worlds of the novels he wrote (at one point, he claimed all time, since the first century to be an illusion), Dick, by the time of Radio Free Albemuth and VALIS, apparently felt it necessary to make his fiction a tool for convincing others that worlds are only real to those who live in them. By presenting Phil Dick in fictional worlds, he may have thought he was doing so. The world, he was saying, is not nearly as important as the way the individual approaches it.

At the end of The Man in the High Castle, the distinction between the real and that which is not, but which functions in a similar way (or has, as in the case of the skull in The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike, its own historicity, though not that expected), is brought to a head by the I Ching message telling Juliana Frink that the way she sees the world is not the “real” way. She has no certificate of “reality” to assure her that her reading of the I Ching is wrong. And, even in
the world she lives in, the “rightness” of the *I Ching* may have nothing to do with her particular life. All she can return to is herself.

After all, the *I Ching*, so well regarded by so many characters of the novel, never helps any of the characters. The messages it gives are consistently ambiguous, even the final one. Just as they may have been to Dick, if he, again as he sometimes said, actually did use the *I Ching* to write the novel (which, as I have said, I doubt).

Whatever the messages Dick may have read through the *I Ching*, Dick still had to make the decisions about his novel. The ones he made reflect his own desires and system of belief. The characters in *The Man in the High Castle* also use *I Ching* messages to reinforce what they have already felt as appropriate courses. Possibly, it would not matter what *I Ching* reading were found in each instance within the book but the last. And that may not even matter, in the end. Juliana Frink and Hawthorne Abendsen react to it in different manners. The likelihood of their becoming allies in any way is remote.

Early in *Radio Free Albemuth*, Nick Brady, because of a voice that he hears in his head, moves to Orange County from his life-long home in Berkeley. At this point in the novel, the voice has not been established as either “real” or “fake.” The impact of the voice, however, is quite apparent, as the character Phil Dick, who narrates this first part of the novel, tells us:

Because of an imaginary voice, Nicholas had become a whole person, rather than the partial person he had been in Berkeley. If he had remained in Berkeley he would have lived and died a partial person, never knowing completeness. What sort of an imaginary voice is that? I asked myself, Suppose Columbus had heard an imaginary voice telling him to sail west. And because of it he had discovered the New World and changed human history..... We would be hard put to defend the use of the term “imaginary” then, for that voice, since the consequences of its speaking came to affect us all.
Which would have greater reality, an “imaginary” voice telling him to sail west, or a “real” voice telling him the idea was hopeless? (35; ch. 6)

If reality exists, thought Dick, it exists in action, not in the fact of perception. This “fact” shows itself in many of Dick’s novels, particularly in Ubik, in The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch, Martian Time-Slip, and VALIS, but in others, as well as in many of his short stories. The distinction, ultimately, between “real” and “fictive” fades to unimportance. What matters, instead, are personal relationships. This is the point, and the condemnation of the characters in The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike. This is also the success of, and the success of four characters in The Man in the High Castle. And this is the reason for inclusion of a character named “Phil Dick” in the two later novels.

Dick believed that no individuals or objects can be intrinsically known. We can deal only in whatever relationships we perceive—not in absolutes. It does not even matter if “we” are real—we can, after all, do nothing about it, if we are not. Our interests and our salvation lie in our relationships with people and things perceived around us—not in what we perceive itself. Because those relationships constitute all we can really know (or, more importantly and “actually,” all we can deal with), we have a responsibility to realize whatever potential lies within them. This responsibility is the caritas that became so important a concept to Dick during the last decade of his life.

Unfortunately, however, not everyone takes this responsibility seriously. Some, through misguided idealism or muddled thought—or through greed and lust for power—abuse interpersonal relationships. They become the people who make the lives of those around them miserable, and so become miserable themselves.
Chapter Four: Controlling Worlds And Fictions

In his 1953 short story “Small Town,” Philip K. Dick forces two of his characters out of their own universe and into what was the fantasy of a third character. Verne Haskel, that third character, has built a tiny replica of the town where all three live as an addition to the model train set in his basement. Not surprisingly, he feels a proprietary attitude toward his construction: “He had built it; the town was his” (The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick 2: 343). He controls it.

One day, letting frustration at real-life lack-of-control overwhelm him, Haskel rips out the model of the building where he works:

His eyes gleamed. His lips twitched. His surging emotions swelled. He had got rid of it. In a brief flurry of action. In a second. The whole thing was simple—amazingly easy.

Odd he hadn’t thought of it before. (Stories 2: 344)

This, at first, is simply an analogue for the punitive action he would take in the ‘real’ world, if he could. But Haskel soon goes beyond that, replacing his ‘erstwhile’ workplace with a new tiny building, a mortuary, his first fictional addition to the model world. Clearly, he is moving, in his analogous world, toward a perception of himself as the local “power”—almost, even, a creator. What had previously been merely a model, a reflection of a reality, now becomes a reflection of a man, of Verne Haskel himself.

In the world of his ‘real’ life, Haskel is a loser, a nothing. A local physician, Doctor Tyler, has even replaced him as his wife Madge’s lover, has taken over Haskel’s marriage. Tyler characterizes Haskel, as we might, too (given the way Dick presents him) as “A highly neurotic type. Withdrawal and introversion” (Stories 2: 345).
Sure of himself, believing he understands people and the world, Tyler is the antithesis of Haskel. On seeing the train setup, Tyler explains to his lover the attraction it holds for her husband:

Power…. That’s why it appeals to boys. Trains are big things. Huge and noisy. Power-sex symbols. The boy sees the train rushing along the track. It’s so huge and ruthless it scares him. Then he gets a toy train. A model, like these. He controls it. Makes it start, stop. Go slow. Fast. He runs it. It responds to him. (Stories 2: 345)

After all, as the doctor knows full well, Haskel has lost control of nearly every other aspect of his life. He needs something, anything he can control.

Haskel, realizing he cannot continue to face a world in which he is such an insignificant figure, even a cuckold, thinking of the change he has already made in his model world, finally retreats to his basement and alters the town completely, his fantasy becoming his life. As the doctor says, “He’s losing himself into it” (Stories 2: 349). Tyler and Madge finally decide not to try to stop Verne—his obsession, they decide, may turn to their advantage.

Downstairs, Haskel works. And works. Finally: “Finished!” Verne Haskel shouted.

He got unsteadily to his feet. He closed his eyes, held his arms out, and advanced toward the plywood table. Reaching, grasping, fingers extended, Haskel headed toward it, a look of radiant exaltation on his seamed, middle-aged face.

Upstairs, Tyler and Madge heard the shout. A distant booming that rolled through the house in waves. Madge winced in terror. “What was that?”

Tyler listened intently. He heard Haskel moving below them, in the basement. Abruptly, he stubbed out his cigarette. “I think it’s happened. Sooner than I expected.”
“It? You mean he’s—”
Tyler got quickly to his feet. “He’s gone, Madge. Into his other world. We’re finally free.” (Stories 2: 351-352)

They look downstairs—finding only an empty basement. Riding downtown to the police station soon after, to report Haskel missing, planning their future together, the couple notices that the town has changed. It now reflects the altered model Haskel had made, a model where the most important citizen, the mayor, is Verne Haskel. The story ends:

Tyler pulled the car to a halt. Then suddenly shrieked and started up again. But not soon enough.

The two shiny-black police cars came silently up around the Buick, one on each side. The four stern cops already had their hands on the door. Stepping out and coming toward him, grim and efficient. (Stories 2: 353)

Unfortunately for his wife and her lover, Haskel’s fiction has come true. The others must now live in “his” world, in a fascist-like “reality” where their control of their lives has completely disappeared as completely as Haskel had imagined his own had, in the older world.

Unable to stand his existence in the “real” world, Haskel changed it—through intense concentration on the world he was building. He took control of it, beginning to live in it much as does a reader or writer deeply involved in a work of fiction. Except that, in Haskel’s case, the fantasy can encompass others. As in most cases of the downtrodden suddenly achieving control, the new world will be one of totalitarianism, harsh on others in it, even somewhat sadistic.

Control—Dick preferred the word “totalitarianism,” but that word has too much of an overtly political connotation to be appropriate here—is, to Dick, that which denies an individual the possibility of decision-making. Its manifestations range from everyday small examples of emotional blackmail to the determinism implicit in some of the god/creator models
of the universe. It is what too many seek, for it makes them feel less buffeted, less at the mercy of a cruel world. It is often sought by the writer, the creator—and by the reader, whose emotions are manipulated by the writer, but who still takes the world as his or her own.

Sparkling the need for control is desire for fulfillment of personal expectation. For us to be comfortably in control (or to believe we are), what we think will happen must happen. As he feared control, finding in it fascistic overtones, Dick shies away, in his writing, from predictable courses of events. The startling turn serves his purpose better than the comfortable progression. To his mind, neither the reading experience nor the world of the character should necessarily lead to fulfillment of expectations.

Sails on the horizon might, or might not, have ships under them, once the whole comes into view. Reading one of Dick’s works for the first time can be ‘dangerous’: the reality presented might disappear; characters may switch roles; the author may suddenly become a character.

Dick attempts to convey the lesson that one’s experience, one’s sense of the future based on the past, cannot be trusted. Nor should it be, for trust can lead to power on the part of the one trusted, to a creeping control. Blind acceptance of any situation, even that sketched in a novel, is hazardous, for nothing is what it seems.

Dick’s characters have no choice but to “live” through their situations. The reader, on the other hand, does have a choice, one denied those characters: he or she can, at least, put the book down. For the reader, this act of regaining control is an easy one, and it is made unconsciously and almost all the time. By refusing to offer easy reading, however, Dick makes his reader constantly aware that he or she faces that choice of reading on or not, thereby removing himself a little from the charge of trying to control his readers.

The reader of Dick’s fiction is “forced” to live, while reading, in a world as unstable as the world “out there.” As, often, the very instability of the real world is what we are trying
to avoid by reading, Dick (understandably) disconcerts many readers. Novels most often reassure us; we can actually know something about the world, they say. When they don’t make us feel control and knowledge is possible, we may even feel betrayed.

And Dick’s novels do betray their readers. They never cater to the arrogance of belief—not even belief in the integrity of “the novel.”

No ‘metafictionist,’ not one who builds scenarios like that of “Small Town” to explore in fiction just what fiction means, Dick makes Verne’s imaginary universe more than a game or an exploration of possibility. Dick questions the position and responsibilities of any creator over his or her world, be that creator a Verne Haskel or even a Jules Verne, be it a god, a writer, or a political visionary molding a particular future. Dick, in this way, tries to force his readers into considering their perhaps too compliant attitudes towards their own worlds. He does so by taking seriously himself the consequences of the questions he raises.

Dick was ever aware of the problems and possibilities of creation of all types, even if only of fictional worlds. Haskel’s entry into his fantasy by himself alone might be nothing more than Tyler explains it, an entry into mental illness. Or merely a metaphor for the reading experience. But, no. For the doctor and Haskel’s wife, it becomes something more, something terrifying. It becomes part of the “real” world of coercion and of punitive action.

“Small Town,” though an early story, is not nearly the first of Dick’s investigations of the problems inherent in attempts at controlling people or situations. At least ten stories dealing with the same theme precede it. As time passed and Dick matured as a writer, his presentations of the implications of control grew more sophisticated and intricate. In fact, thirty-four additional stories and almost all of the novels consider the problems of control, often with those problems at the centers of the works. Sometimes these problems are presented within individual relationships, primarily marriages,
where emotional ties and personal weaknesses are manipulated to the advantage of one partner, as in *Confessions of a Crap Artist* and the other “mainstream” novels. In other cases the questions of control are overtly political, as in *Now Wait for Last Year* and *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*. Though they may have differing external aspects, in all of them Dick examines the responsibilities of power, of the ability to control others. *The Cosmic Puppets* and *The Divine Invasion*, among others, even bring the problems of the relationships between worlds and gods directly into their plots.

The early science fiction stories and novels generally present the problems of control within a context of rather complicated little person/big person dichotomies, with the little person, most often, succeeding in the end (Dick was somewhat optimistic, at least during those early years), bringing about the possibility of a better future, one more considerate of the needs of the individual. All of the novels published during the fifties, *The Cosmic Puppets*, *Solar Lottery*, *The World Jones Made*, *Eye in the Sky*, *The Man Who Japed*, and *Time Out of Joint*, along with *Dr. Futurity* and *Vulcan’s Hammer*, both published in 1960, follow this pattern to some degree.

The non-science fiction novels of the same period bring control of worlds and world vision down to a smaller level, that of individuals within specific communities. People still struggle to force others into their own world views, to control them, though these others are not nations or worlds, but husbands, wives, and neighbors.

Beginning with *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), Dick manages to integrate his two levels of the discussion of the problems of power and the possibility of taking control. He now found that he could present at once the struggles of common people within their immediate surroundings and with world-wide political concerns. By doing so, he brought his great leaders into smaller consideration as human beings, as people confronting the same types of problems as do the average men and women whose actions never shake worlds.
Nobusuke Tagomi, one of Dick’s first well-characterized “important” people (though even he lacks the tremendous ability for control of his own world shown even in some of Dick’s earlier characters), shoots several German agents in *The Man in the High Castle*. Afterward, he faces a crisis, for he cannot find a way to come to terms with the dual moral considerations released by his action. One is an essentially Buddhist respect for all life and need to preserve it, no matter what the situation might be. The other is recognition that he may have staved off another war—by killing a few he may have saved many. The two cannot be reconciled.

Given a small charm, Tagomi takes it to a park, to sit for a time to try to understand it and, through it, perhaps come to terms with his actions, his world, and his place in it. He does not find the charm particularly interesting, but having been told it has “wu”—an authenticity implanted by the hands of the artificer he examines it anyway:

> I must be scientific. Exhaust by logical analysis every entree. Systematically, in classic Aristotelian laboratory manner.

> He put his finger in his right ear, to shut off traffic and all other distracting noise. Then he tightly held the silver triangle, shellwise, to his left ear.

> No sound. No roar of simulated ocean, in actuality inferior to blood-motion noises—not even that. (219; ch. 14)

After a time, after a good deal of speculations, after even tasting it, Tagomi is interrupted by a policeman:

> Mr. Tagomi thought, Spoiled. My chance at nirvana. Gone. Interrupted by that white barbarian Neanderthal *yank*. The subhuman supposing I worked a child’s puerile toy. (221; ch. 14)

After unsteadily standing, he walks to find a pedicab at the edge of the park. “No pedicabs” (221; ch. 14).
God, what is that? He stopped, gaped a hideous misshapen thing on skyline. Like nightmare of roller coaster suspended, blotting out view. Enormous construction of metal and cement in air.

Mr. Tagomi turned to a passer-by, a thin man in a rumpled suit. “What is that?” he demanded, pointing.

The man grinned. “Awful, ain’t it? That’s the Embarcadero Freeway. A lot of people think it stinks up the view.” (221-222; ch. 14)

It is not part of San Francisco he knows, or even of the world he knows. Instead, he faces a vision of the San Francisco of Dick’s own world—complete with the Embarcadero Freeway.

Mad dream, Mr. Tagomi thought. Must wake up. Where are the pedicabs today? He began to walk faster. Whole vista has dull, smoky, tomb-like cast. Smell of burning. Dim grey buildings, sidewalk, peculiar harsh tempo in people. (222; ch. 14)

Realizing that the world has changed—”Where am I? Out of my world, my space and time” (223; ch. 14)—Tagomi hurriedly turns around, searches out the bench he had sat upon, finds the charm he had dropped, examines it again, and, after some concentration upon it, ends back in his “native” reality.

Just what did he see? A “reality” of some sort? Not the one he must live in, certainly, and not one that can be useful to him. Not “ours,” though the vision conforms closely to the “real” world of 1962—for this is one of Dick’s many red herrings. No, Tagomi saw only that “seeing is not believing,” learning that his agony might be useless. He has learned, at least, that he cannot operate simply on the solid rocks of his beliefs. They are contradictory, as his actions have shown him, and might well be meaningless—as his experience of this other world demonstrates.

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. (235-236; ch. 15)

Oddly enough, the speaker here is not Tagomi, but a German named Rudolph Wegener who has just been arrested for his part in averting a German/Japanese war. But it might as well have been Tagomi—and the lines come soon after depiction of Tagomi’s “mystical” experience. Both characters have learned, as does Julianna Frink just a few pages later, that we all have to live solely within the situations we perceive. And must make the best of it, even when that means making contradictory and unpleasant decisions. They have also learned to give up the idea that they can really be in control, either of their lives or of the political situations in which they find themselves.

For, unlike Verne Haskel, few of us ever manage our worlds. As Madge Haskel and Doctor Tyler discover to their dismay, in the final analysis, we are going to have to make do with the world we find ourselves in—even if it is a horrifying world. Somehow, we have to learn to deal humanely with the powers we find over us, whatever they may be. With, also, the people around us, and below us, whoever they may be. And we might as well for, as Tagomi discovers, the world we know, at least, is likely to be preferable to that we do not. Hardly a surprising conclusion, but one Dick saw too few reaching.

When no singularity of perception is possible, Dick says, when too many people can see things in too many different ways—and too many of them have the power to force others into line with their own world views—logic and belief become irrelevant, their shifting or contradictory base assumptions worse than useless. Human beings had best give up their presumptions of control. Once we realize, at least, that we, as individuals, have no monopoly on “truth,” that those disagreeing with us may be as right as we, we are forced to give up our
presumptions of control and to take the world as it is, as a relational place.

The problem with this, for Dick, lay in transferring it into his fiction. Not so much into the story line, but into the way he approached writing and the way he imagined readers would approach what he has written. For, of course, the author of a work of fiction has greater control of the world he or she creates than is possible anywhere in the outside, experiential world—for it includes all methods for gaining control over, or dealing with, others, even though those others are now of the fictional sort.

How, then, does a writer who finds any control, let alone such great power, to be an anathema to him, write?

Dick’s solution was to keep the question, the dilemma, squarely before his reader. He does this in two ways. First, he presents situations in which an individual struggles to free himself (almost always, it is a “him”) from the clutches of someone more powerful. Second, he often destroys the worlds he is creating as soon as he “writes” them, removing their underpinnings, exposing them, even to his characters, as fictions. By demonstrating his authorial power, he hopes to keep readers aware of it and, through that knowledge, free from its influence. A hint of this appears in *The Man in the High Castle*, with the idea, presented at the end, that the world of the novel is not “real.” Both *The Cosmic Puppets* and *Time Out of Joint* present “illusory” worlds presented in great detail. Later novels, including *Lies, Inc.* and *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*, do much the same thing.

Jason Taverner, in *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said* (1974), initially seems as successful as one can possibly be. That is, everything he has ever done has turned to his own good. A fantastically successful television personality, he is also a “six,” a member of a small group whose genes have been crafted so as to make them superior to other humans. But something strange happens. Taverner finds himself in a world exactly like the one he had known—except for one
thing: in this world there is no record that he has ever existed. He calls various associates, to get help:

“Do you know who I am?” Jason said. “Do you know who Jason Taverner is? Do you watch TV?” His voice almost got away from him at that point; he heard it break and rise. With great effort he regained control over it, but he could not stop his hands from shaking; his whole body, in fact, shook. (20; ch. 2)

Taverner’s struggle to survive, to discover what has happened to him, and to return to the “reality” he “knew” before, brings him into contact with a number of other people, changing all but one of their lives significantly and changing him, as well. He learns, for instance, that he never really had the control he thought was his. Certainly, no one any longer does what he tells them. His identity no longer provides entry into the world of the powerful.

Two of the other central characters also exhibit something of the arrogance shown by Taverner. They are brother and sister, man and wife, Alys and Felix Buckman. Alys, a hedonistic drug addict, manages to change the world she lives in through the drugs she uses—her hallucinations become “real.” It is she, through her drugs, who removes Taverner’s success and, very nearly, existence from “their” world. Unfortunately for her, however, the drugs eventually destroy her—and Taverner’s prior position begins to reappear as part of the world they inhabit as she fades. Felix is a police general who, faced with the anomaly of a man with no past, pursues the problem, trying to discover the ‘why’ of Taverner the unknown.

In his last lines, Taverner, calling to turn himself in for the murder of Alys (Buckman, emotionally distraught over the loss of his sister, has lain the blame on Taverner), asks a telephone operator to connect him with the police:

“You can dial that direct, sir.”
“I want you do it,” Jason said.
“But, sir—”
“Please,” he said. (186; ch. 26)

Though he has come back to his own world (or, more accurately, it has filtered back to him), Taverner no longer has the self-confident attitude of a “six” who can do anything and everything for himself. Now, given the experiences he has gone through, he understands the limits of what he thought had been his own domination of the world, and has learned the importance of the assistance of others. He now sees himself within the world. He now recognizes that his “old” new world is made up of individuals of varying perceptions and talents whose cooperation makes possible all successes. He cannot exist alone.

The logical brain of a “six” has proved insufficient. Jason has learned there is more to the world than his own viewpoint. And that his world is more than he. His egocentric world view has proved inadequate.

In *In His Own Words* Dick says:

> My faculty, the faculty I use, is that I can look at the same thing five different ways. I can look at the same cluster of things and see five different ways they can link together. They can add up to five different wholes. (51)

Like William Faulkner and Wallace Stevens, Dick can find at least ‘thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird.’ And he cannot stick with just one, having no surface standard himself. Verne Haskel imagines things? Yet he changes the world into one he controls. Tagomi, however, can see another world, too, but that leads him to learn to accept the one he inhabits—not to change it. Taverner, forced into an alien world, can learn that his success in any world, no matter how talented he may be, depends on others as well as on his talent. Time after time Dick presents differing viewpoints on worlds, control, and fiction. He always returns, however, to that underlying thesis: it is not what we perceive that is so important, but how we relate to other perceivers.
Haskel cannot relate at all. Even his wife has alienated herself from him. The lesson, then, is hers to learn. Tagomi comes back to his world and saves the life of a man he does not even know. Taverner learns that, though he has advantages over others, he is still human, and must act in concert with other humans.

Dick was not like so many of us, those who see our own view of the world as the only “true” one. Even his Germans, in *The Man in the High Castle* and elsewhere—not “real” Germans but hideous representatives of the Nazi mentality—are accepted as people with a world-view as “respectable” as any other, in Dick’s final analysis. Though fascism scared Dick, he understood the mentality behind it. He understood it because he could identify with it, while hating it.

One of the most enigmatic of all of Dick’s characters is Felix Buckman, that police general of *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said* and Taverner’s opposite number. Though the symbol of and a participant in the ruling order of Earth society, Buckman proves to be something of a humanitarian. He resists the ruling order even while supporting it, tempering its excesses, making sure, for example, that food gets in to student revolutionaries blocked into small enclaves.

Finally torn by the possibilities of power—he wants someone punished for his sister’s death and can make sure someone is, but he realizes that doing so is unworthy of his vision of himself—he flies in his “quibble,” trying to figure out what to do with himself. Agitated, he stops for fuel, and sees a black man also waiting for service:

 Into his coat pocket Felix Buckman reached with cold-shaken fingers; he found his ballpoint pen, plucked it out, groped in his pockets for a square of paper, any paper, a sheet from a memo pad. Finding it, he placed it one the hood of the black man’s quibble. In the white, stark light of the service station Buckman drew on the paper a heart pierced by an arrow. Trembling with cold he turned toward the black man pacing and extended the piece of drawn-on paper to him.
His eyes igniting briefly, in surprise, the black man grunted, accepted the piece of paper, held it by the light, examining it. Buckman waited. The black man turned the paper over, saw nothing on the back, once again scrutinized the heart with the arrow piercing it. He frowned, shrugged, then handed the paper back to Buckman and wandered on, his arms once again folded, his large back to the police general. The slip of paper fluttered away, lost. (198; ch. 27)

Buckman cries, tries to leave, returns to the black man, hugs him, and turns away.

“Wait,” the black man said.
Buckman revolved to face him.
“Do you know how to get to Ventura? Up on air route thirty?” (199; ch. 27)

The mundane, as so often in Dick, again intrudes into the sublime. The two men talk a bit, the black man asking who Buckman is. “I’m an individual. Like you” (199; ch. 27).

Often, by the end of a Dick novel, the initial adversary has turned into an ally, as happens in Now Wait for Last Year. Or repressive authority figures become something more than cut-out villains, as does Buckman. And former allies turn out to be as bad, if not worse, than the original villains.

Divisions between white hats and black hats disappear. Only the individual remains, and he or she proves unable to be judged by abstractions. The individual, by the very nature of being so, makes tremendous mistakes, for singular vision is always blurred. Characters act on assumptions that soon prove to have been incorrect. They trust people who soon prove untrustworthy and justify actions conclusively even in the face of conclusive evidence that their judgments are faulty. But something, even the veracity of that basic thesis of Dick’s, can still be learned.

At the end of Ubik (1969), one of Dick’s more problematic novels, Glen Runciter believes he has been assisting his dead employees, led by Joe Chip, in their attempt to take control...
of the “half-life” which remains to them for a time after death. His messages have appeared to the “half-lifers” on matchbooks, on product wrappers, even on coins—some of which appeared to show Runciter’s face.

In the last short chapter of the book, Runciter offers some coins as a tip to a man who has done a small favor:

“Thank you, Mr. Runciter,” the attendant said. He glanced at the coins, then frowned. “What kind of money is this?” he said.

Runciter took a good long look at the fifty-cent pieces. He saw at once what the attendant meant; very definitely, the coins were not as they should be. Whose profile is this? Not the right person at all. And yet he’s familiar. I know him.

And then he recognized the profile. I wonder what this means, he asked himself. Strangest thing I’ve ever seen. Most things in life eventually can be explained. But—Joe Chip on a fifty-cent piece?

It was the first Joe Chip money he had ever seen. He had an intuition, chillingly, that if he searched his pockets, and his billfold, he would find more.

This was just the beginning. (190-191; ch. 16)

This most surprising ending turns the whole book on its head. Only two things have appeared “solid” to the characters caught in “half-life.” One is the idea that Runciter, once they have established that it is they, not he, who are dead (they initially believe they remain in the “real” world and that the messages from Runciter come from his own “half-life”), remains in the “real” world and is trying to help them. The other, also discovered only after some time, is that the product Ubik can help them stave off the control of their perceived reality by a manic half-lifer named Jory. And this Ubik is tied up with Runciter.

If Runciter’s world proves no more stable than that of the half-lifers’, where is he? In half-life himself—like them? How, then, could he actually have helped the others? Given that
Runciter was trying to communicate with Joe Chip when his own picture appeared on Chip’s coins, could not the converse be true as well? If so, what might Chip, who has survived Jory’s attacks, be trying to tell Runciter?

At the end of the penultimate chapter, Joe Chip has received a message through the label of a can of Ubik:

“Thanks,” Joe said to the spray can. 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-time 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. (200; ch.16)

Thanks? Is that what Chip is trying to tell Runciter (if it is he who is responsible for the coins at all)? What a thanks—telling one his world lacks the solidity one always believed in. Passing new, valuable notes back to the “real” world.

In Dick’s view, that might be the best thanks that could be given.

The importance of an understanding of the weaknesses and relativity of individual perception is evident in the structure of a number of Dick’s novels, where interconnectedness also plays a role. Speaking of The Man in the High Castle, though she might have been considering any of a number of other Dick novels, N.K. Hayles says:

The narrative switches between various characters, revealing each consciousness it probes as partial, biased, confused, and often simply wrong. With no single focusing consciousness at the novel’s center, the stress falls on the interconnections that tie all the fragments to each other. (58)

In many ways, narration of this sort contributes to the discussions of Dick’s themes, allowing him to avoid the writing
traps analogous to the human trap of belief in any sort of fixed structure. When each character is presented as though the world he or she perceives is the real one, the clashes between their perceptions keep the question of “What is real?” always before both writer and reader.

An early story (and the basis for the Stephen Spielberg movie), “The Minority Report,” shows the importance of interconnections at the expense of what many of Dick’s characters at first believe is “solid truth.” No one commits murder in the world of the story, for the police have developed a way of telling who is going to commit murders, and a means of stopping them. They use three idiots-savants, each of whom has the ability to see the future, or, rather, a most likely one. When two of these agree, a computer system hooked to them produces a card containing the name of the potential murderer, who is quickly hustled off to a detainment center.

When a card pops out with the name on it of the head of the service running the system, that man pockets it and disappears. Knowing he would commit no murder, suspecting a set-up by his new second-in-command and thinking it is the second-in-command he is expected to want to kill, Anderton, by disappearing, sets out to expose the plot.

It is not, however, his second-in-command whose name appears on the card as potential victim. When he finally examines the card, Anderton finds the other name to be one he has never heard—that of a military general of no significance to him.

After a confusing series of events, Anderton gets back into his offices where he discovers the truth of the matter: a military plot afoot may lead to the destruction of the power of the police by destroying the credibility of the police system for detecting murder.

Anderton examines the reports of all three of the “seers,” for he still cannot believe the “majority report.” Though all are different, two come to the conclusion that Anderton will in fact kill the general.
Why the difference? The third “seer,” he already knows, is “phased” a few seconds after the other two, so takes into account their reports. In this future, Anderton is aware that he will commit a murder, so does not—so the majority report appears to be superceded.

The first two reports, however, when examined separately, present radically different pictures. One, it turns out, really is superceded by the third. The other supercedes them both, though it does present the same conclusion as the first. Unknown to the police, that one, it seems, “sees” even a bit further into the future than do the other two.

In the first of the three scenarios, Anderton will kill the general to suppress an attempted coup. In the second, as has been said, he has been discovered, so decides against it. In the third, he realizes that he must kill the general, if the system (which has been quite effective) is to remain in place. And so he does. Had he not, the coup would have been successful.

What Dick attempts here, even so early on in his career, is demonstration that no system can be completely and consistently effective. Loop-holes remain. Total control of systems proves impossible. By arguing for this point of view, Dick, though he may not have known it, was following lines of thought sparked by Kurt Gödel, whose “proof” shows that any axiomatic system has either one axiom whose negation is also an axiom or does not cover all possibilities raised by the system.

Anderton, though he relies on his system and believes in its efficacy even at the end, never sees the weakness of his belief. Like most humans, he manages to find other scapegoats when his beliefs are threatened. Much of the story deals with his mistaken distrust of his wife and his second-in-command. He blames them for his situation—and not the system. They, he thinks, are the ones plotting against him. Yet they, like him, are only acting on the mistaken belief that the system is foolproof. None of them, the story shows, ever should have put the system above human relationships.
Dick was beginning to see that we can put faith in nothing beyond ourselves. But he is also suggesting that we should take our relationships with others seriously, something not found, but implied, in “Small Town.”

Though he does not do so in “The Minority Report,” Dick often considers betrayal, and bemoans it. But, ultimately, he discovers, even betrayal does not matter. It is not belief in others that makes one deal with them, but belief that the interconnections with others are all, in fact, that we can actually act upon.

The fact of this belief solidifies in _The Man in the High Castle_ when Tagomi, after his “mystical” experience, refuses to sign papers authorizing the deportation of Frank Frink—the man who had, unbeknownst to Tagomi, made the charm that has helped save him.

### Controlling the Fictions

Since perfection and control do not exist outside of the novel—any novel—Dick might ask, why look for it inside? Lou Stathis says of _Time Out of Joint_ (1959), the “two sections of the novel just don’t fit together” ( _Time Out of Joint_ 259). Often, to recognize what is wrong with this and others of Dick’s “flawed” novels to shrug one’s shoulders. So what? Or to ask if the book does something else instead. If the “flaw” might be not a mistake, but an attempt at something else entirely.

At the opening of the _Time Out of Joint_, Dick focuses on a character named Vic, and the reader settles into the idea of following him through the novel. Soon, however, focus shifts to Vic’s wife Margo. Through Margo we get our first glimpse of her brother Ragle Gumm. Afterwards, the narrative moves more and more toward a closer focus on Ragle, until, by the second half of the book, it almost seems as though Dick has admitted deceiving his audience, and, in repentance, is only presenting his main character’s point of view—with a few exceptions, of course (as is always true in Dick).
According to Dick, *Time Out of Joint*, the first of his novels in which the problems of belief versus reality (the *eidos kosmos* versus the *koinos kosmos*, as he puts it) are really tackled in terms of the individual’s perception, was not sold as science fiction, but was “bought by Lippincott as a ‘novel of menace’” (*In His Own Words* 138). Through the novel, Dick says, he was:

> dealing with fake reality. I was just fascinated with the idea. So that’s a pivotal book in terms of my career. It was my first hardcover sale, and it was the first novel I wrote in which the entire world is fake. You find yourself in it when you pick up the book and turn to page one. The world you are reading about does not exist. And this was essentially the premise of my entire corpus of writing, really. This was my underlying premise. And this is that the world we experience is not the real world. It is as simple as that. The phenomenal world is no the real world, it’s something other than the real world. It’s either semi-real, or some kind of forgery. (*In His Own Words* 138)

By the time Dick said this his idea of what the “real” world might have changed considerably from that of the time of *Time Out of Joint*. Still, the idea that, though each of us (as individual perceivers—as the individual perceiver) may be real (if even the concept of that “reality” has any validity), there is no reason to suppose from there that the world we live in must be real as well. According to Dick, it probably is not.

In *Time Out of Joint*, however, Dick has not progressed to the point of saying that, whatever the world is, we must live in it as best we can. Nor has he come to his concept of belief as something divorced from reality, something that cannot be judged by the standards of a “consensus” reality.

*Time Out of Joint* ends with a resolution just too pat for the situation presented. Perhaps, at this early date, Dick was much too cautious. He may have felt he had to find some resolution his readers would find understandable. Perhaps he
realized that, had he extended his initial discussion, no one at that time would have published his book. No one would have read it.

For all its weaknesses, given Dick’s continuing conversation in his fiction *Time Out of Joint* deserves a great deal of attention, for it presents only his second vision of an artificial “reality.”

Ragle initially appears as something of a bum—in the eyes of his neighbors, at least. He drinks warm beer all day long, tries to seduce his next-door neighbor’s wife (but only haphazardly), and makes his living simply by constantly winning a contest run daily in the local newspaper. The time is 1959, supposedly, a 1959 just a year or so in the future at the time of the book’s composition.

The book’s 1959 seems quite real, at first. But incongruities soon begin to appear. In the first chapter, two characters discuss *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as though it were a contemporary novel and a Book-of-the-Month-Club selection. And the car of one’s dreams is a Tucker, not a Cadillac or a Jaguar. But most of the rest of the world, down to the last, carefully-detailed incidental, seems to be that of 1959.

In fact, the world of the first pages of the novel contains all the detail expected of a standard “realistic” novel:

> From the cold-storage locker at the rear of the store, Victor Nielson wheeled a cart of winter potatoes to the vegetable section of the produce department. In the almost empty bin he began dropping the new spuds, inspecting every tenth one for split skin and rot. One big spud dropped to the floor and he bent to pick it up; as he did so he saw past the check-out stands, the registers and the displays of cigars and candy bars, through the wide glass doors and on to the street. (1; ch. 1)

Everything is concrete: the American reader can easily identify the scene from his or her own experience.

Not until Vic pulls out his books-club notice does any hint appear that something is wrong, in terms of what we view
as “normal” reality. And even this hint hardly warrants notice. The book club, after all, is a standard feature of modern America. Only the selection seems peculiar, and that could be explained. It could easily be that Vic and his companion of the moment are unaware of literary history and Harriet Beecher Stowe. They are, after all, uneducated. A reissue of Stowe’s most famous novel could conceivably strike them as only another new book.

That strange car, the Tucker, appears briefly at the end of the chapter, though only as a car seen passing by. In no way does it present a clear signal that the world of the book is not the one we know of as 1959 either. Models and styles, after all, change quickly. And this, though a Tucker did exist for a time, could be no more than a fictional model presented for reasons similar to those of the writers of realism who introduce fictional corporations and the like, so that no “real” corporation will be offended, so that the writer will have the liberty to construct a situation fitting his or her outline. This conventional device has appeared in fiction so frequently that it now gets little notice.

So, neither of these two early signals takes the reader away from the idea that he or she is reading about a “real” 1959 and not a constructed semblance.

Through attention to detail, Dick tries to insure that his readers will not begin to suspect the “reality” of the world he is presenting too early. He wants his readers to accept it as much as his characters do. He wants them to doubt it only as his characters begin to do so, and to share their surprise at what they find. He succeeds at this, and through that, manages to set the tone of suspense that dominates the middle portion of the novel, and that carries the reader on even to the anti-climactic end.

Not until the end of chapter three does Dick allow the reader to see that something is seriously wrong with the world the author has created for his characters. Ragle has taken Junie Black, the neighbor he is trying to seduce, to the park, for swimming, conversation, and, perhaps, love-making.
Thirsty and frustrated by her refusals, Ragle walks over to a soft-drink stand, hoping to find some beer. Once there:

The soft-drink stand fell into bits. Molecules.... He saw the soft-drink stand go out of existence....

In its place was a slip of paper. He reached out his hand and took hold of the slip of paper. On it was printing, block letters.

**SOFT-DRINK STAND (55; ch. 3)**

We find that something like this has happened to Ragle six times. Something certainly is wrong with his world. But, now caught up in it as much as Ragle, like him, we have no idea what this something might be.

Later, Ragle contemplates what has happened, what he has seen:

Words, he thought.

Central problem in philosophy. Relation of word to object... what is a word? Arbitrary sign. But we live in word. Or reality, among words, not things. No such thing as a thing anyhow; a gestalt in the mind. Thingness... sense of substance. An illusion. Word is more real than the object it represents.

Word doesn’t represent reality. Word is reality. (59-60; ch. 4)

Even though this discussion of word is a red herring (as we finally learn) Dick will return to this idea later in his career. Something of a joke in *Time Out of Joint*, the question of the veracity and place of words in negotiating the world was very, well, *real* to Dick.

Dick could not see the humor in this conception of words in the way that Barth does in *The Floating Opera* where the setting sun provides too perfect a metaphor, embarrassing the narrator. Barth’s character never “knows” he is only a character, a victim of another’s words, as Dick sometimes suspects we all are. Barth’s joke is for the reader, comfortably assured that she or he lives in a “real” world. Dick, on the other hand,
forces his reader to consider that he or she may be a victim of a joke just such as the very one that Barth perpetrates.

A rather disturbing proposition.

In *Time Out of Joint*, Gumm eventually discovers that he is not alone in his possible discovery of delusion, that Vic has some of the same doubts he has, and has had some similar disturbing experiences. The two decide to escape, to test the limits of their reality. They succeed, discovering along the way that their world has been constructed because of, of all things, Gumm’s considerable importance to Earth’s defense establishment.

Crucial to understanding this novel is recognition of the manner in which the fictional world about Gumm has been constructed. Before deciding (on moral grounds) that he could no longer perform his military task in the “real” world, Gumm had occasional “fits” during which he withdrew into the world of his childhood. He romanticized the world of the fifties, for he had no serious and ambiguous moral questions facing him there. From his current life in the 1990’s, he remembered it as a perfect time.

Important to his memory was *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which he had read as a child, as was the Tucker, a car he had once seen, but that had never made it in the marketplace.

During the years intervening, Gumm ballooned his memories of the Tucker and Stowe’s novel until they seemed, to him, to have been important parts of that bygone age. At the same time other things lost significance. Marilyn Monroe, for example, a major star but something less than an interest to a pre-pubescent child, was left out.

So, the world of the fifties constructed for Ragle did not include Monroe, but it did contain the Tucker as a major nameplate and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as a major new literary work. For the attempt was to create something close to Gumm’s memory, not simply a bygone world.

Through this ballooning and deflating, Dick provides a commentary on the memories of all of us in much the same way as Gabriel Garcia Marquez does in *One Hundred Years*
of Solitude. We think we know what happened in our pasts, but we dream of older days, and change them as we dream. Our dreams are no more real than are Gumm’s, than are the memories presented by the narrator of One Hundred Years of Solitude.

Late in Time Out of Joint, when Gumm is trying to convince Vic to join him in his escape, Ragle continues his thoughts on words:

“The word. Maybe it’s the word of God. The logos. ’In the beginning was the word.’ I can’t figure it out. All I know is what I see and what is happening to me. I think we’re living in some other world than what we see....” (188; ch. 11)

That Gumm’s conclusion is correct though the reasoning is not probably strikes the reader of only this one Dick novel as rather peculiar. Still, Gumm’s line of reasoning, though not appropriate for this novel, is appropriate for many other Dick novels and important to the works as a whole.

At this point in his career, obviously, Dick was not yet ready to posit seriously that words can be worlds—though he may have already toyed with the idea in his own life.

When he does finally seriously consider the idea of the word as the “real,” Dick finds he must reject it as merely another smokescreen, another aspect of chaos. Even the “fact” of fictionality becomes unimportant when, in The Man in the High Castle, the characters realize that relationships, and not reality, are the core of their world—of any world. Julianna Frink, having been told by the I-Ching that her world is not real, is asked what she will do now:

“I don’t know.” The problem did not bother her.... “maybe I’ll go back to my husband Frank. I tried to phone him tonight; I might try again. I’ll see how I feel later on.” (248; ch. 15)

The easy way out, finding a “reality” behind what seems real, as in Time Out of Joint, gives way, by the time of The Man in
the High Castle, to considerations of how one must act in a world where the question of “real” knowledge remains moot. Can there be moral action, Dick then asks, in a world where, as Dick so often quoted from Gilbert and Sullivan, “nothing is what it seems/Skim milk masquerades as cream.”

At the end of Time Out of Joint Dick sidesteps the questions he has raised during Gumm’s procession toward regained knowledge. For perhaps the last time in his considerations in fiction of “reality,” he incorporates a facile explanation into the novel and posits a “real” world behind the illusion. Later, evidently, he found this device too pat, too much the easy way out. For the same questions that can be asked about the illusory world can be asked of any worlds that appear to be real.

Still, even in Time Out of Joint, even in his youth, Dick demonstrates that he had already developed a complete awareness of the vagaries of perception and memory. What was is tainted by what we want it to have been. What exists is tainted by those already-tainted memories, and by the limitations of our perceptions as human beings.

The cover of the 1983 Berkley Books edition of The Cosmic Puppets says “the ultimate struggle for the universe begins at home.” In an odd way, this fits the novel, strange though that may seem to readers of science fiction book covers. Dick’s protagonist, Peter Trilling, has returned to his home town—only to discover it far different than his memory says it should be.

He returns only to find he had died, according to newspaper records, when he was nine years old.

In this novel, first titled A Glass of Darkness, Trilling:

    discovers that the whole valley is a battle ground on which two demiurges (named Ormazd and Ahirman, after the opposed deities of Zorastrian mythology) fight to impose their formative will. (Stableford)
Demiurges? They are more than that, as anyone who looks either at Zorastrianism or the novel will see. They are the forces behind perception, the things, one representing creation the other destruction, that make our worlds real. And they have the power to change that reality, almost at will.

As in *Time Out of Joint*, which follows *The Cosmic Puppets* by five years, those who create the “unreal” worlds are untrustworthy, at best. The best interests of those who must inhabit the created worlds are not considered by the creators. Gumm finds himself in a fantasy world where he will, unknowingly, continue to use his odd talent to predict where missiles from rebels on the moon will enter Earth’s atmosphere, working for a cause he had come to conclude is wrong. *He* thinks, in the world created for him, that he merely successfully plays a newspaper’s daily game. Trilling, in the earlier novel, finds his entire early life “obliterated” because of a contest between two beings to whom Earth is of little immediate importance.

Dick understood, even at the time he wrote these novels, that the deceiver need not necessarily act through evil or unsympathetic intent. His 1953 short story “The Defenders,” later to be used in *The Penultimate Truth* (1964), concerns the aftermath of a nuclear war during which the population of the world was moved underground, the war continuing through use of “leadies,” robots that can survive on the surface. The people underground continue to watch films of the destruction and to produce war goods that, supposedly, are shipped up for the war effort.

When a group of humans manage to get up to the surface, they discover that the war has long been over, that the leadies have instead reconstructed the surface world in preparation for a time when humans could live in peace. In this case, the deception takes place for mankind’s good.

“The Mold of Yancy,” also used in *The Penultimate Truth*, again ends with a positive deception, an antidote to an earlier, dangerous deception. The population of Ganymede has been led toward war-hysteria by a television commentator named Yancy, a simple, homespun type of man who turns out not to
be a man at all, but a robot carefully programmed to lead the population toward certain ideas. When control of the robot is taken over by opponents to the war movement, they, in turn, decide to use the persuasive robot, but only to bring the population back to its senses.

Later, of course, Dick would realize that even such seemingly benign deceivers can be dangerous. Little positive comes out of the situations of the stories when they are transferred to *The Penultimate Truth*.

Stanislav Lem, himself one of the most respected writers of science fiction of Dick’s time, sees Dick as a “visionary among charlatans.” But Lem’s term falls short as a description of Dick. Dick was no visionary. He did not see a world beyond our own; he had no vision, not in that sense. Instead, he had questions. And it was his questions he wanted his readers to consider, not any visions he might have.

Don’t get me wrong: Dick certainly did have visions, but these were not as central to his fiction as were the questions he posed before them, through them, and after them. Dick, like the wubs of two of his stories, wanted to talk, wanted discussion. Unlike a true visionary or prophet, Dick had nothing to tell people, merely a number of desperate questions to ask them. He offered no “truth,” just doubts.

In *Dr. Bloodmoney or How We Got Along After the Bomb* (1965), Dick depicts a post-holocaust time in the western part of Marin County in California tied closely to his memories of it from the late fifties. Though doubts are not central to the novel, *Dr. Bloodmoney* does show Dick’s growing concern with belief, and with its impact on the real world. In this case, he presents a number of characters who attempt to gain control of the world as a way of verifying their own beliefs about it.

In the main, *Dr. Bloodmoney* focuses on power and its abuses, starting from the level of employer/employee relationships and moving up to world-shattering conflicts and abilities.

The plot centers on two places in two times: Berkeley and the western part of Marin County in “future” 1981 and 1988.
The great event is a nuclear war in 1981. It dominates all of the lives and smaller events shown—even an aborted encore in 1988.

Dick’s questions of control and perception of the world revolve around four characters, two of whom are world famous, each having an impact on all humanity. The other two are claimants for such roles. The first famous person is Dr. Bruno Bluthgeld, the man who has been held responsible for a nuclear accident some years before the war that nearly destroyed the world. The second, Walt Dangerfield, has been stranded in Earth orbit, along with an incredible tape library, by the war. Bluthgeld believes he caused the war, by willing it. Dangerfield believes in nothing more than his responsibility to provide what entertainment and communications he can for the people trying to survive below, helping them build, perhaps, something more than isolated, paranoid communities like the one at Point Reyes Station. One is hated, of course (though he is not suspected of starting the war), the other loved.

The two pretenders are Hoppy Harrington, a legless, armless, a ‘phocomelus’ with extraordinary mental powers, and Bill Keller, the “unborn” brother of Edie Keller, who appears, to a doctor’s touch, merely as a benign growth in her belly.

As might be expected, the fates of all four characters finally become intertwined. Harrington destroys Bluthgeld and nearly manages to kill and usurp Dangerfield. Bill, recently removed from his sister’s body, engages Harrington in a psychic battle. He wins, taking Harrington’s body as his prize (his own small body cannot survive in the world on its own).

Bruno Bluthgeld believes so strongly that he caused the earlier war merely by willing it that he actually becomes able, for a time, to create another war. Like Verne Haskel, he manages to involve others in his fantasy, to make them live in the world he believes in.

Walt Dangerfield, thrust into his role as the glue for human civilization, lives completely alone, stranded in a spaceship turned satellite. Had he ambitions for power, he could
not fulfill them, for a return to Earth is impossible and he lacks the kinds of powers exhibited by Bluthgeld, Harrington, and Keller. Though he presents an idealistic concern for his fellow man, Dangerfield really represents only the past. He does transfer information from group to group, information that can help people on the Earth below him, but information primarily meant for a rebuilding, not for a movement into something new, not for serious consideration of the new reality he has never experienced, where animals have mutated, some becoming extremely intelligent, where human beings, too, are becoming something other than what they were. That one of the books he reads to the populations below is W. Somerset Maughan’s *Of Human Bondage* shows his nostalgia for a reality long gone and his lack of understanding of the world evolving below him.

Harrington, born 1964, was a thalidomide baby. Though a product of the excesses of the modern world, he, too, represents something of the past. His psyche has been warped by the attitudes shown toward him before the war. Afterwards, now able and willing to show and use his mental abilities, becoming, through them, a first-class repairman, he becomes a prized member of the community. No longer can things be easily replaced, making those who, like Harrington, can fix them, extremely valuable.

But Harrington still sees himself as an outcast—and his attitude toward others helps maintain that vision (though attitudes towards “phoces” has changed, vestiges of the old attitudes remain—and Hoppy acts so as to keep them in place). To prove himself to himself Hoppy wishes to accrue power, to *make* others respect him.

Keller’s world consists of communications with his sister and with the dead, who he can imitate and talk to. His sole desire is to be able to experience the unknown world beyond that limited experience first-hand. Conceived, along with his sister, the day the bombs fell, Bill Keller represents the new world, the post-war world, in a way that none of the others can.
Though the perceptions or abilities of all four relate specifically to two of the other three, each presents a world-view totally at odds with the others. Dangerfield, for example, the only human (aside from those like Bill, who were born after it) never to have directly experienced the war, believes in the possibility of a return to a modified and idealist vision of the past.

Bluthgeld, a player in nuclear politics by the nature of his scientific activities, becomes emotionally involved with the event itself and lives with the idea that humanity hates him as instigator. The world he lives in centers on destruction and an egocentric view of his own role in it.

Like Bluthgeld, Harrington sees the world from a narrow, egocentric point of view. To him, the war was a watershed, separating him from what he sees as an ignoble past, vaunting him into a brave new future. In a way, he is the antithesis of Dangerfield, who he can imitate amazingly well, for Dangerfield was the selected best of pre-war humanity who, with his wife (who died in orbit), was to establish a new human existence on Mars. Because of the war, Dangerfield’s life has become limited to the radio, a mechanical device. Harrington, on the other hand, now has expanded horizons. Once perceived as dependent on mechanical limbs, he now has the freedom to use his mental abilities openly.

Harrington’s view of the world can no more survive with Bluthgeld’s than it can with Dangerfield’s. Bluthgeld desires constant destruction as much as Dangerfield looks to the past for solace. Harrington wants the new world to remain, for he believes he can control it.

Bill Keller, born because of the war (his and Edie’s mother had a sexual encounter during the daze of the day of the war), never experienced the time before the war, and never experiences the world after it until the end of the novel. His world, like that of the reader of a novel in relation to the world of that novel, comes through the perceptions and narrations of others—of Edie and (again like a reader) of the dead.
At the climax of the novel, Harrington must destroy Bluthgeld, for the new destruction Bluthgeld brings could make impossible the scenario Harrington desires to create for himself. Harrington, through his powers, has also been in the process of attempting to destroy Dangerfield, who he sees as a rival, whose influence over the human race Harrington, through his ability to imitate Dangerfield, would replace. Keller, however, intervenes. Now having a chance at a life not filtered through the experiences of others, he cannot live within the world-view of a Harrington.

Keller has no idea what he has done. His purpose is to make himself free of the opinions—for him, all he had—of others. By changing places with Harrington, he accomplishes his task.

Immediately after doing so, however, he begins to try to learn how to use the electronic equipment Harrington has built. Now an independent actor, he wants to insure his independence remains—and he perhaps sees Dangerfield as one defender of that independence. So, he wants to save him. He wants to cooperate with those who accept the integrity of others.

Dr. Stockstill, the first to reach Keller in his new position, also wants to save Dangerfield and speaks to him through Harrington’s equipment:

“Walter, the one who usurped your authority in the satellite—he’s dead, now, so you don’t have to worry regarding him....

The phoce, rolling about the room on his ‘mobile, like a great trapped beetle, said, “Can I go to school now that I’m out?”

Yes,” Stockstill murmured. (287; ch. 16)

Keller wants to enter the world as it exists after the bomb, to learn, to come into it as it is. Naive, he sees school as a way of learning about the, to him, new world. Naive, he has also saved Dangerfield, the representative of sanity to Edie, who
had listened to his broadcasts with the rest of the community.

Dangerfield and Keller, however, have many reasons for supporting each other, though they are the most removed of the four power characters of the novel. The past and the future have a great deal in common, more, perhaps, than does the present with either.

At worst, the past and the future war with each other, ignoring the present. In *Dr. Bloodmoney*, however, the vision of the past and the possibility for the future combine to circumvent a decrepit version of the present. Having defeated Harrington, who has destroyed Bluthgeld, Keller, the future, tries to help Dangerfield and asks if he can go to school—school, of course, being the means for bringing the past into the present.

*Dr. Bloodmoney* presents four “realities” but allows only one to eventually control the future of humanity. The people of the novel, however, other than the four who control the situations, have to work within the framework given them. They try to get on, accepting, as Stuart McConchie does, such things as the devouring of a horse, a precious item in days post destruction, with equanimity. They will continue on, no matter who controls their world.

McConchie continues to try to make money, though his position as a salesman at a television shop has disappeared because of the bombs. His view of the world changes not at all through dramatic world changes. Just so, the attitudes of the inhabitants of Point Reyes Station remain what they were.

The average human cannot be shaken out of the world view they have accepted as “truth.” Though Bluthgeld, Dangerfield, Harrington and Keller have the power to change everything the small person perceives as the “real” world, not much of what these “world changers” or putative “world changers” might do changes their world.
Reflecting Control

Five of Dick’s now-published novels that lacked publishers in the fifties follow a single pattern, one of movement toward what might be called fantasy, and away, at the very least, from a commonly understood “reality.” The majority of each book is concerned with depiction of actions and characters in a world made as “real” as possible—in large part through the “inessential” details Dick uses to bring about “verisimilitude.”

At or near the end of each book (and others), for one reason or another, the “reality” built is abandoned for some sort of fantasy on the part of one or another of the characters.

In Confessions of a Crap Artist, Jack Isidore tries to recreate his sister and dead brother-in-law’s destroyed home. In The Transmigration of Timothy Archer (1982—and written about that time, long after the others in this group), Angel Archer begins to fantasize that the schizophrenic Bill really is, as he claims, in contact with the dead Timothy Archer. Walt Dombrosio, in The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike, imagines the time five years in the future, when his yet-unborn child is a five-year-old boy with a Neanderthal-like jaw, and is about to be enrolled in a special school. Bruce Stevens, in In Milton Lumky Territory has a fantasy that goes at once back to his childhood and into his future. Mary and the Giant shows the young Mary finally in a situation she wants to have around her—though Dick’s prior characterization of her shows this would be impossible. And Puttering About in a Small Land’s Roger Lindahl leaves his wife and her realized fantasy, hoping to create one of his own.

Only Mary’s and Lindahl’s situations can be easily accepted by the reader lulled into acceptance of the realism earlier presented in these novels, though perhaps Isidore’s could be, as well, by a bit of stretching. In the others, Dick steps outside of the accepted norms of the form and destroys the illusion that what is depicted as real could be real.
This is what Dick would have his reader’s do: accept. He does not hold to traditional causal ideas of proof, or even to the concept that experiencing something is proof. He also knows that people experience things in different ways, and that all of us, in one way or another, are living in fantasies. So why not incorporate knowledge of that into a book? The fantasies are real to those who hold them, so why make them shams by presenting them as unreal? This may have been Dick’s thinking.

In all of his longer works, and in many of his short stories, Dick had one over-riding purpose. As Kim Stanley Robinson says, “what Dick most wanted to accomplish was the depiction of contemporary society, to create in fiction a critique so all-encompassing as to be an indictment” (The Novels of Philip K. Dick 6). As fantasy is an important part of that world, Dick could hardly ignore it.

Like much of Confessions of a Crap Artist, The Transmigration of Timothy Archer is a first-person narration. Its narrator, though, is the antithesis of Jack Isidore. Angel Archer, daughter-in-law to the title character, an intelligent, compassionate woman at the height of her perceptive powers, quickly proves herself to be a narrator the reader can trust, can respect (something rare in Dick’s fiction). What she says must be taken seriously; she demonstrates her acumen, her unwillingness to accept what she sees and hears at face value. At the same time, however, she never appears as a particularly likable person. She can be callous and sarcastic. In all, she strikes the reader as a “real” character, though she will never be a favorite one.

The story told in The Transmigration of Timothy Archer is, in part, a fictionalized version of the last years of Bishop James K. Pike, the Anglican bishop who, during the later part of his life, began to believe he could communicate with his dead son. Pike later died wandering in an Israeli desert, looking for additional Dead Sea Scrolls—having provided himself with no supplies before setting out.
Dick certainly sets up the book so that it looks like the tale of Timothy Archer, told by his daughter-in-law Angel. What the book turns out to have been from the beginning, however, is the story of Angel, a pragmatic woman with a strong enough sense of her own “reality” to deal intelligently with people on the fringes of “normal” belief. These include her father-in-law, her suicide husband, her father-in-law’s mistress, and the mistress’s son, Bill Lundborg. She is the center around which they rotate.

Tim Archer has always been interested in odd-ball beliefs and pursues them as far as he can. At one point in the book he and his mistress become convinced they can communicate with Archer’s dead son through a medium. The medium has given messages that could only come from the dead man, or from someone who knows a great deal about the lives of the members of his family. Angel witnesses all this, but is not convinced. To her, there are too many possible causes, too many unanswered questions. Still, she:

cannot condemn the idea without losing their friendship, and valuing the relationship more than her intellectual beliefs, she withholds her scathing opinions and does what she can to help. (Robinson, The Novels of Philip K. Dick 122)

Like all of Dick’s best characters Angel Archer sees that human relationships are at the center of life, that they are more important than belief of any type. Acceptance of people takes priority over belief. Timothy Archer and his mistress do not know this—the bishop turns to books, not people, to help him out of problems, even personal problems—but Angel cannot deny her in-law or his mistress because of their faults. She controls only herself, so must accept others, even though the others would not accept her, were she to express her belief. Finally, Angel becomes what Dick would have liked all his protagonists to be, a caring, understanding person who can separate western rationalism from emotions, yet who never denigrates the importance of emotions, who can abandon
rationalism, when emotions make it necessary. The center of Angel’s world is her relationships with the people around her—not a system of belief or an acceptance of perception.

Though she is an egotistical, headstrong woman who, knowing she is bright, jumps too easily to conclusions, Angel is of the class of characters Dick approved of most. He had specific and political considerations in mind when he created her, reacting in part of criticism of the women in his other works. But she also follows in the footsteps of earlier characters, most of whom can be seen as Dick’s “little protagonists.”
Chapter Five:
Fighting the Power of Deception


Manipulation on the Sly

In The Man Who Japed (1956), one of Dick’s early novels, Allen Purcell japes a statue of Major Streiter, the founder of the Earth regime Morec (for “Moral Reclamation”). The next morning, he does not remember doing so—having been drunk at the time. Hearing about the incident, he goes to see the now boxed-over statue. An elated woman tells him what has been done to it:

“The criminal, or japer, or whatever he is, painted the statue red.... And,” she smiled brightly. “Well, frankly, he severed the head, somehow.... Removed the head and placed it in the out-stretched hand.”

“I see,” Allen said, listening intently.

“Then,” the girl continued, in a quiet monotone, “the individual applied a high-temperature pack to the forward leg—the right leg. The statue is a poured thermoplastic. When the leg became flexible, the culprit reshaped its position. Major Steiter now appears to be holding his head in his hand, ready to kick it far into the park....” (The Man Who Japed 37; ch. 5)

Later, Purcell, having taken control of the media of the Morec world, presents another satire: he shows Major Streiter as having engaged in “active assimilation,” a euphemism for cannibalism, during the hard times after a catastrophic war. Streiter, his family and followers, Purcell claims, ate their enemies, thereby allowing the borning Morec system to sur-
vive and expand. No outrage accompanies the making of the claim; Purcell’s media discussions present the act as a serious and natural part of the evolution of Morec, a religio-political system bent on controlling the morals of the world. The joke, in other words, is told with a straight face.

Purcell, rather than trying to remove the mask of Morec (which he secretly hates), has created another mask for it, one that will appear so ludicrous that people will see through it on their own—and laugh. Purcell hopes that, after laughing at one mask, the populace will take the other less seriously, thereby reducing its power.

Like Purcell, who decides not to make full use (or, as Dick would say, abuse) of the propaganda machine he has come to control, Dick saw mass media as potentially dangerous forces, ones that could be unscrupulously used to form people and their opinions. That, in itself, is not so unusual, but Dick saw all mass media, even the fiction he wrote, as dangerous—even if and when he would be in control of them himself. Mass media do not offer an obvious method of dealing with others that is not manipulative. That, Dick believed, was the basis of the threat they represent.

Of course, Dick knew that his fiction would not lead to emulation directly, to actions based on what he has written. No one becomes a rebel because Dick presents rebels as “good guys” any more than anyone would eat people, in the world of The Man Who Japed, because the television says Major Streiter did. The existence of these particular masks is too evident—and so they are removed from the realm of actual deception. But possibilities for manipulation remain, and these scared Dick.

The immediate problem, for both Dick and Purcell, lies in the nearly impossible task of finding a way to use media for their purposes—but in non-manipulative manners. Rejecting manipulation through media, both find methods based on manipulation of media. By turning the media against themselves, they cause contradictions to appear within them and, thereby, arouse suspicion about them. As the message of both is,
in part, that media should not be trusted to act in the interest of any but the media, their method becomes their message.

Purcell uses satire to accomplish his end. Get people laughing at Morec, he decides, and maybe they will stop believing in what it has been telling them, in the mask it wears. Though he did sometimes turn to satire, Dick, as he matured as a writer, most often chose other techniques.

By disrupting the continuity of his novels, by breaking the “rules” of verisimilitude and consistency in fiction and by making questions of the role and responsibility of the author part of the work, Dick tries to force consciousness of “fictionality” to the forefront of the reading experience. Through this, he would be keeping his readers from being lulled by his soothing authorial voice, from accepting the “truth” of the mask, of what the author “says” on the surface.

Dick worried about the internal “truth” of the fiction itself and about the reader’s act of “suspension of disbelief” and its concomitant, acceptance of the author as temporary leader or wise person. That, to Dick, could be the start of a willingness to accept, or submit to (even if only temporarily), the beliefs of another—itself too much a temptation for the start of totalitarianism.

Only by denying the possibility of belief within the presentation itself, Dick finally decided, could the danger of creeping totalitarianism be avoided. Only by turning a system, be it Morec or preconceptions about the novel, against itself could his somewhat libertarian political point be made—without the making becoming, itself, another move toward totalitarianism.

In his early works, Dick evidently had not yet come to his conclusion that any attempt at manipulating public opinion—even in fiction, even if only in and for the course of a fiction—is fraught with danger, with the looming despotism of the power of manipulation. Nor was he yet willing to show that the act of rebellion is more important than the level of success—that integrity lies in the doing only, never in the result. He still believed in those results, and showed positive
ones in his fiction, as in *The Man Who Japed* and “The Mold of Yancy,” as demonstration of the positive value of questioning. Purcell’s act of satire may be the first step toward the destruction of Morec and its stifling, hypocritical morality, a morality completely at odds with any idea that differing perceptions may each have their own “truths.” The new utilization of the Yancy, in “The Mold of Yancy,” it is hoped, will move the citizens of Ganymede to think for themselves.

Dick made sure, as he began to grow as a writer, that his sensitivity to totalitarianism was translated into his novels and into his presentation of them. Ultimately, Dick wanted his novels to be a part of change in the world, change that would make totalitarianism impossible. As Kim Stanley Robinson, in speaking of *The Man Who Japed*, explains it:

> We can understand this novel as a meta-narrative, a work that describes—once again wishfully—the process of Dick’s own fiction. For what Purcell is doing with his satires is no more or less than what Dick is doing with his: and Purcell’s actions have toppled his government and changed his world. Expressed here is a wish to change the world by the creation of engaged, critical fictions. (14-15)

Later, Dick began to recognize a totalitarian aspect in even this kindhearted belief: it set him and his ideas above others. Consequently, he changed his focus, making his later novels presentations only of the possibilities inherent in the human individual—even when faced with a totalitarian situation. Only this would fit into his growing belief that even he could fall prey to totalitarian temptations.

At the same time, Dick was making his novels less argumentative, turning them instead, or so he hoped, into presentations of possibilities, choices awaiting reader decision. No longer wanting to directly convince people that his way was “right,” he added normal fictional “verities” to his work only to the extent made necessary by constraints placed on him by his publishers and readers.
As he became convinced that any complete vision of a world smacks of totalitarianism, Dick also discarded presentations of consistent (and, therefore, knowable) worlds. The worlds presented in his novels become increasingly fragmented and subjective. They become more ludicrous—and more obvious—masks. Or, more accurately, they become collages of pieces from a number of different masks. Through this, Dick further weakened his control, as author, over reader perception of his work.

It often seems, especially in the works of the sixties, that Dick lost his own control of his work. Perhaps because of drugs or by writing too fast, Dick could not see his novels as wholes or, needing money, was merely stringing together old short stories in order to cash in on the success of The Man in the High Castle. But something else was going on: Dick, whatever his personal situation might have been, was now purposely rejecting the traditional idea of the novel as a complete and consistent whole. Though coming to this point from an essentially political line of reasoning, Dick was beginning, perhaps even with Confessions of a Crap Artist, to become something of an experimentalist.

Even as he started to experiment, though he often spoke of Joyce and Proust, using the two as bench-marks of what he saw as “intellectual” writing, Dick seems to have been little concerned with either the theory or the fact of twentieth-century experimental fiction. Nowhere in his interviews does he mention Samuel Beckett or Iris Murdoch, let alone John Barth, Gertrude Stein, Thomas Pynchon, Robert Coover, Flann O’Brien, Lawrence Durrell, John Hawkes, or Doris Lessing, all writers whose attempts to overcome what they see as the limitations of the novel have a great deal in common with what Dick was doing by 1960. Had his concern solely been fiction itself or the words within creations, he would have known of them—or, at least, he would have mentioned them when speaking of his own work.

Though Dick did, occasionally, play with the idea of “the word”—Ragle Gumm’s contemplations in Time Out of Joint are
but one example—Dick was little interested in Linguistics or Semiotics. The fact that people tend to respond in predicable ways to word usage was apparently enough for him. Much more interested in worlds than words, he tried to deconstruct the former rather than the latter.

Any intersection between Dick and experimentalists comes within the fictions themselves. His sometimes neurotic mistrust of power, as I have said, led Dick to alter his approach to fiction. Consideration of the position of meaning in the language experience has led many experimentalists to similar alterations. Both, though coming from different directions, become concerned with control and worlds within a fictional frame, and with the acts of creation that bring them about.

The World Jones Made (1956), another early Dick novel, actually presents six “worlds.” Jones, the title character, experiences everything twice, once a year ahead of the other. From this comes the power that makes many see him as a savior and a prophet.

Earth, as so often in a Dick novel, has come through a great war, one fought over ideologies not mentioned. A new and totalitarian power has arisen since, based on “Relativism,” explained through a conversation between narrative focus Doug Cussick and his wife, Nina. She has asked him why he stays with the Security forces that control Earth:

“Because Security is the lesser of two evils. I say evils. Of course, you and I know there’s no such thing as evil. A glass of beer is evil at six in the morning. A dish of mush looks like hell around eight o’clock at night. To me, the spectacle of demagogues sending millions of people to their deaths, wreaking the world with holy wars and bloodshed, tearing down whole nations to put over some religious or political ‘truth’ is—” He shrugged. “Obscene. Filthy. Communism, Fascism, Zionism—they’re the opinions of absolutist individuals forced on whole continents. And it has nothing to do with the sincerity of the leader. Or the followers. The fact that they believe it makes it even more obscene.
The fact that they could kill each other and die voluntarily over meaningless verbalisms.... “He broke off. “You see the reconstruction crews; you know we’ll be lucky if we ever rebuild.”

“But secret police... it seems so sort of ruthless and—well, and cynical.”

He nodded. “I suppose Relativism is cynical. It surely isn’t idealistic. It’s the result of being killed and injured and made poor and working hard for empty words. It’s the outgrowth of generations of shouting slogans, marching with spades and guns, singing patriotic hymns, chanting, and saluting flags.” (33; ch. 4)

The secret police of the Relativism system keep people from forcing their beliefs on others, though, ironically, they insist on enforcing this with brutality. The problem is that the system offers no hope for improvement, no idealism. This is the first of the “worlds.”

What Relativism does is close to what Dick may have believed, later, he might be doing himself through his own fiction. That is, he might be reducing everything to the advantage of nothing. The belief may be right, but the execution, in life as in fiction, may be as dangerous as a rigorous system of belief. In response to this possibility, Dick later removed viable systematic thought to the level of immediate interpersonal relations only.

Though Cussick rejects what he sees as “naive” idealism in favor of that other idealism, Relativism, most of humanity, including his wife, does not. The individualism of Relativism is as sterile to them as the concepts of Deconstruction can be to many readers. Neither gives anything but a text—and there are many who want meaning provided for them. Lacking other options, the people in The World Jones Made turn to Jones, who leads a successful popular rebellion against the Relativism system.

Jones, though, fails to provide what he has promised. Recognizing his failure, he arranges for Cussick to kill him, making him a martyr, the dead savior of a new world, “the
world Jones made.” Giving meaning to his life through his death, he makes it impossible for Relativism to continue.

In this book, Dick spells out a political dogma that would remain with him throughout his career. Worlds may be what they may be, but human beings live in them and interact through them, and it is that—only that—giving worlds importance. Simply put, everything else being unstable, it is necessary to focus on human interactions. Though individually different, as a class they remain constant. As the only thing that we can depend on, they should be the center of our lives. They provide the meaning; they make the worlds and the words we use to understand them.

Dick, though he probably did not recognize this, presents a Skinnerian view of the world and of communication. Meaning, for example, does not rest in any word itself, but in the interaction between utilizers of the word. Just as B. F. Skinner, in *Verbal Behavior*, reduces the word to expectation and response, Dick sees nothing as more important than interpersonal interaction. When the meanings of “chair” for you and me only intersect through relative response to utilization, the word “chair” itself remains irrelevant, nothing more than an agreed-upon marker.

By the same token, political systems are only useful, to Dick, as long as they can be completely understood by those involved in the transactions they represent. And “understanding,” in this situation, means also a concurrence, an acceptance not imposed by the system, but by the individual.

Like Willard Van Ormand Quine, Dick apparently believed that discussion of “meaning” devolves into synonymy. He ignores, then, the beginnings of language, exploring it, instead, as a political tool, as a means by which some people place their own visions of the world on others. The mask itself, in Dick’s case, is the topic, not the maker.

Dick’s simplest presentation of the importance of recognizing some shared “reality” appears in the 1969 story “The Electric Ant,” an otherwise complicated story that Patricia Warrick and Martin Greenburg see as an example of Dick’s
“exhaustion and weariness” (*Robots, Androids, and Mechanical Oddities* 214) at the time of composition. Certainly, Dick’s life at the time of composition was hard, but he, as all his fiction from the time shows, had not lost his sense of humor or his willingness to examine “the real” in extreme situations.

The story presents an android who has been led to believe that he is human. He discovers the truth only as the result of an accident, finding that all of the sensory data he receives comes from a tape in his abdomen.

The premise behind the story is nonsense. If the tape is discovered, the android was meant to be able to learn about it—for it, too, would have to be on the “reality tape.” But that does not matter: Dick’s point in this story has nothing to do with logic—and, to make that point, he presents a mask so obvious in its ridiculousness that it will never be taken seriously.

The android starts to experiment with the tape. By the end of the story, he has decided to disconnect it, so that he can experience what he thinks will be “all” (true “reality”). The tape is a punch tape. By disconnecting it, he decides, he will no longer have the blanked-out portions “protecting” him.

As he reaches the point when he questions the reality of anything at all, he tries to explain his attitude to his secretary, who has come to his house. She responds:

“I am real.”

“I want to know you completely,” Poole said. “To do that I must cut the tape.”...

“You make me wish I had gone to the office after all.”

(*The Stories of Philip K. Dick* 5, 237)

She thinks that, as a human, she need not be involved in the problems of this machine. Dick, to destroy her arrogance and to jolt his readers from their own, plays a rather grim joke on her at the end of the story.

After the android has cut the tape, the secretary calls their office, and refers to the android as “it”—not as the thinking being she had pretended it was before. After all, “it” was only a
machine. Now, in the words of the man she calls, they are “finally free of it” (*The Stories of Philip K. Dick* 5, 239).

But she, too, is part of the “reality tape” of the android. Soon, she notices her hands becoming translucent. Finally, she disappears.

In this story, Dick attacks the arrogance of the Cartesian *cogito, ergo sum*. He establishes the android as a thinking being, as the most “human” of any of the characters of the story, and then demolishes the complacency of the humans around him, who know of him as just a machine.

Thinking only, perceiving everything, as the android, perhaps, finally does, proves a dead end. But so does being, in the sense we normally see as “human.” The android fights to come to terms with a world suddenly strange to him, a world in which he is an artifact, not, apparently, an actor, but a tool for others. And the human secretary, still smug within her solipsistic “humanity,” ends of as shocked as the android must have been—more so, for she had further to go, never having questioned her own ontological status at all.

“The Electric Ant” also reflects Dick’s desire to escape the “logic” he saw being foolishly demanded, by readers and editors, of science fiction. Here, he parodies the “what if?” type of story that so often appears in the genre. Normally, something, even an absurd thing, is posited in this type of story, and the implications of the proposition are explored. By positing something self-contradictory and following it with a result completely illogical, even given the initial proposition, Dick makes the form look foolish.

By doing so, Dick challenges his readers to open themselves up to non-traditional ways of looking at things—without, however, providing his own new view. The contradictions in the story indicate quite clearly that this is no scenario Dick would ever want to see taken seriously. What it does, even so, is raise questions that Dick *would* want taken seriously. Here, then, more obviously than elsewhere, Dick breaks the rules of fiction in order to keep his readers from accept-
ing what he says, yet to nudge them toward asking the ques-
tions he asks.

In *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* Dick presents a
“reality” that can interface directly with drug-induced “reali-
ties” that should be at least spatially separate from it. In this
book, then, no “reality” can supercede any other. No Jones
can say for sure what will happen tomorrow. The only thing
one can do, again, is forget “realities” and look to relation-
ships.

At one point, Leo Bulero, trapped in a drug-induced state
and not even on Earth, “goes” to New York via a hallucina-
tion. There, he asks one of his employees, Barney Mayerson,
to help him. Mayerson does not. Later, Bulero chastises
Mayerson for his inaction, and Mayerson accepts responsi-
bility for it. The “fact” of the impossibility—or “irreality”—has
nothing to do with the underlying situation: Mayerson *did* do
nothing to help his boss.

The *Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* begins on a comedic
note. It also ends with comedy, sandwiching its more serious
statements between the absurd. Dick, like Purcell in *The Man
Who Japed*, uses this technique to keep readers from accept-
ing the worlds of his books at face value—even for the time of
reading.

Essentially, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* cen-
ters on a struggle for the future of humanity. On one side are
Bulero, an “evolved” Earthman, and Mayerson, a “pre-cog”
(able to see possible futures) employee of Bulero’s company.
On the other is Palmer Eldritch, who has returns to the Sol
system after years away, bringing with him the apparent ca-
pability to disrupt each individual human’s ability to join in a
common reality.

At the beginning of the book, Mayerson awakens with a
hangover, next to a woman whose name he annot remember.
He asks his “suitcase, that of his psychiatrist Dr. Smile” (1;
ch. 1) where he is and who he is with. The suitcase tells him,
but gets Mayerson’s name wrong, calling him Mr. Bayerson.
Not only, it develops, is Mayerson’s psychiatrist a suit-case making jokes about hangovers and aspirin brands, but it acts not for his mental health, but his mental undoing—and purposely so. Mayerson has been served with a draft notice, meaning he will have to go to Mars as a colonist—unless he can prove himself mentally unfit. The “psychiatrist” suitcase will, supposedly, help him become so.

Though humorous in intent, this passage does hint toward some of the issues that will become important as the novel progresses, bringing into the novel the ideas of sanity, perception and interaction that will become crucial upon the return of the “insane” Palmer Eldritch with his perception-altering drug. It also presents a situation, in which one being is willingly manipulated by another, though in this case that other is a suitcase psychiatrist. Later, in one of the two triumphs Dick presents in the book, Mayerson will accept his personal situation, thereby rejecting Dr. Smile and those others who, at that point, attempt to control him.

At the end of *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, Bulero, who has won a rather strange battle with the returned Eldritch (becoming Eldritch, and vice versa, for a time), talks to one of his subordinates. One of the “stigmata” of Eldritch, which appear on those he “becomes” for a time, is artificial eyes:

“Stick around for a while. There’ll be action. I may be looking at you through a couple of Jensen luxvid artificial-type eyes but it’s still me inside here. Okay?”

“Oh, okay,” Felix Blau said, “Anything you say, Leo.”

“Leo? How come you keep calling me ‘Leo’?”

Sitting rigidly upright in his chair, supporting himself with both hands, Felix Blau regarded him imploringly. “Think, Leo. For chrissakes think.”

“Oh yeah.” Sobered, he nodded; he felt chastened. “Sorry. It was just a temporary slip. I know what you’re referring to; I know what you’re afraid of. But it doesn’t mean anything.” He added, “I’ll keep thinking, like you say. I won’t forget again.” He nodded, solemnly promising. (277–278; ch. 13)
Bulero has nearly been killed through his personality “transfer” with Eldritch and something of Eldritch, who has himself died, remains with him. Still, Leo cannot take it all completely seriously. He could lose himself, lose completely, but it is merely, now, a matter of remembering not to.

And that, of course, is ridiculous. Given what has happened in the book, especially so. Though caught up in cosmic battles, Leo finds himself unable to face them as more than a normal small-time businessman. It is all part of what one goes through in life: One does what one can.

A memo Bulero wrote after his return, after his defeat of Eldritch, a cosmic character far beyond the intellectual reach of Bulero, who, himself, is beyond “normal” mankind, prefaces the book. In it, Bulero tries for an explanation of his own cosmic vision but makes something of a fool of himself, thus setting up the book as a depiction of the victory of the well-meaning, but limited, Bulero over the cosmic, yet totalitarian, vision of Eldritch. In this memo, Bulero also makes Dick’s point about human interaction. He is talking about people interacting, and ends with a question, a demand for a response. Instead of telling, he begins a dialogue:

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. You get me?

(Preface)

Though the novel presents problems of vast scope, the man who overcomes them can only see things in a muddled, cliche-ridden manner. He cannot even write well. In this memo, he is more of a Jack Isidore than he is a world-saver. That is probably Dick’s point: The brilliant do not always triumph, but the little men generally managed to muddle through—as long as they remain unwilling to submit to
the powers attempting to corrupt them, as long as they retain their concern for others.

Mayerson, at the novel’s end, elects to stay on a barren Mars where he will attempt to grow vegetables. That, he believes, is better than continuing involvement with the greater problems facing humanity. And he is right. For he now must deal only with individuals.

The importance of this is brought home earlier, though Bulero, of course, does not realize it, through an incident in which Bulero “appears” in the future, and confronts two men even more “evolved” than he. They may be smarter, it turns out, but they are no less prone to human foibles than “normal” humans.

A monument, in this particular vision of the book’s “future,” has been set up in memory of Bulero’s killing of Eldritch. Eldritch had been an agent, if not something more, of those of the Prox system who wanted to take over the Solar System. One of the two further-”evolved” guards explains to Bulero why they are there:

“The Proxers,” Alec said over his shoulder, “always seek to—you know. Desiccate this.”

“Desecrate,” his companion corrected. (124; ch. 6)

Soon after, a dog comes up (Eldritch in the shape of a dog):

As the three of them watched, the dog halted at the monument, seemed to gaze up at the plaque for a brief interval, and then it-

“Defecation!” Alec shouted, his face turning bright red with rage. He ran toward the dog, waving his arms and trying to kick it, then reaching for the laser pistol at his belt but missing its handle in his excitement.

“Desecration,” his companion corrected. (125; ch. 6)
The memorial to a “world saver” becomes appropriately ridiculous. Heroes, after all, have little real, immediate importance within individual lives.

This incident comes at the end of an extremely difficult scene in which relationships between “reality” and “hallucination” become scrambled. The scene includes a good number of passages that must be read slowly and carefully if any sense is to be made of them at all—if sense, in our traditional terms, can be made of them. Included, at one point, is the reappearance of the “real” Dr. Smile, that suitcase psychiatrist, in a “hallucinatory” world. Through this scene and the following one concerning the memorial, Dick tries to show both the reader and Bulero that no real heroism exists in grand things like saving mankind—or, at the other extreme, even in getting through a number of difficult pages.

The humor present in Leo’s encounter with the guards at the monument further emphasizes the point of the preceding the book. Though a conqueror, Leo never manages to become a totalitarian leader. Not even a memorial to him can be taken quite seriously, indicating his lack of control over the world he has saved.

Evidently, judging by the evidence provided by the endings of his stories and novels of the period, by the time of The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch Dick had completely rejected the idea of total victory over the controllers (evil through the totalitarian act of controlling, if for no other reason) of the world. Total victory, after all, would put the victors in total control—a dangerous situation, no matter who they are.

Even in the earlier novels and stories Dick did temper the successes of his heroes, however, sometimes forcing them into exile, as in The World Jones Made, or in some other way making one wonder if the characters would in fact live happily ever after. Even Purcell, in The Man Who Japed, faces a long, hard struggle against the still-powerful Morec forces.

In Vulcan’s Hammer (1960) a computer, and those who tend it, control the world, doing so ‘for its own good,’ forgetting the needs of those it was meant to assist. Here, as of-
ten happens in Dick novels and stories, education, a cultural tool too easily turned to totalitarian ends, has once again been perverted. At one point, a teacher contemplates the role of a school and then chastises her students:

> After all, it was the task of the schools, and especially the grammar schools, to infuse the youth of the world with the proper attitudes. What else were schools for? ...
>
> “... I suppose if you had your way you’d be reading those commercial comic books that teach adding and subtracting and other business crafts.” (16; ch. 2)

Later, the leader of the rebels puts this in perspective: “There are slow murders and fast murders.... And body murders and mind murders. Some you do with evil schools” (76; ch. 8). And murder, as Dick would point out, is the final totalitarian act.

The schools in *Vulcan’s Hammer* operate only to perpetuate the Unity system that helps the computer, Vulcan III, control the world. Learning has given way to the furthering of a specific world view. Dr. Smile, by trying to upset Mayerson’s sanity in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, is attempting to do something of the same thing. Education, psychiatrists, polemical novels, state-controlled propagandistic media: all of these attempt to change people. Though he would like to see people change, Dick rejects the methodology of those who would act on others—for he also rejects the idea that any individual or group can define “good” for others. Change has to come from within.

A cab, like the one that gives Eric Sweetscent such profound advice about how to deal with his wife at the end of *Now Wait for Last Year*, appears in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*. This one tells Mayerson he was right, finally, to volunteer for the draft he was faced with anyway:

> “It’s patriotic to go into the service,” the cab said.
> “Mind your own business,” Barney said.
“I think you are doing the right thing,” the cab said, anyhow. (140; ch. 7)

The cab’s reasoning is wrong, Dick had no respect for patriotism. But the taxi’s conclusion is right on the money. Still, Mayerson knows better about what he is doing, though even he has no idea what the consequences will be.

But the idea of a machine giving moral advice to a human? Mayerson takes it seriously, though he does not want to hear its trite talk. Sweetscent takes it very seriously indeed, and heeds the advice, though he clearly would have chosen the course he does take anyway.

Like everyone, as Dick sees things, Sweetscent must make his own decision and live in his own world. And both Sweetscent and Mayerson must interact with whatever their worlds present—even if that might be a cognizant machine.

**Manipulation of the Rules**

Two, or one, of the most significant examples of Dick’s breaking the rules of fiction are, or is, *The Unteleported Man* and/or *Lies, Inc.*—depending on whether one wants to call them (or it) one or two novels. Or three, for *The Unteleported Man* has been published in two versions—not to mention its initial magazine appearance—the second being something of an expansion of the first. The magazine version appeared in 1964. The first novel, *The Unteleported Man*, followed in 1966. The expanded version came out in 1983, after Dick’s death. *Lies, Inc.* was published in 1984.

Possibly, the discrepancies in the manuscripts would have delighted Dick. Unfortunately, they only became apparent toward the end of his life; he was dead before the situation had been adequately explored and the novel adjusted. Still, taken as a whole the various manuscripts present an enlightening glimpse into Dick’s method of creation, especially since he had, by the times of composition, become leery of the power of the story-teller.
The various versions of this novel also illustrate, as no other Dick work does, the way all of his looks at totalitarianism can come together. In these—or this—books—or book—Dick attacks “viewpoint” and “preconception” from most every angle imaginable.

Here, I will examine the “complete” *The Unteleported Man*, even though the “cuts” editor Russel Galen refers to when talking of the 1964 edition in a note preceding the revised 1983 edition may have met with Dick’s approval—or may have been later additions, and not material cut at all. *Lies, Inc.*, published a year later, contains additions, restructurings and amendments so distinctive that it may be considered as a different, though related, novel.

Never content with the standard vision of the novel, especially as manifested in science fiction, Dick would probably like the confusion this novel—or novels—has caused its readers.

*The Unteleported Man* begins with a presentation of Rachmael ben Applebaum as he is pursued by a “creditor jet-balloon” (1; ch. 1) that constantly reminds him of his debts. He escapes into the offices of Lies Incorporated, a “security” organization whose agents might be able to help him regain something of the financial empire his bankrupt father had left. A Freya Holm speaks with him there.

Ben Applebaum is initially told, as he already knows, that his late father’s transportation empire is bankrupt, thanks to a teleportation device owned by Trails of Hoffman Limited (THL) that makes the old interstellar ships obsolete. Ben Applebaum admits, to the Lies Incorporated agent, that all he has left is one interstellar ship, the Omphalos. He needs certain parts in order to make an eighteen-year trip with the ship, and wants Lies Incorporated to get them for him.

Though ben Applebaum has no money, Lies Incorporated has instructions from its owner, Matson Glazer-Holliday, to help him, even though everyone knows that the one-way teleportation to ben Applebaum’s destination, the new colony, Newcolonizedland on Whale’s Mouth in the Fomalhaut sys-
tem, takes years less time—no time, in fact, through the new THL technology.

For, like ben Applebaum, Lies Incorporated has noticed certain inconsistencies in the THL claims about its technology and the colony.

_Lies, Inc._, purportedly the same novel, or the “real” version of the same, begins with a consideration of the output of a Lies Incorporated computer “which was not a lie” (5; ch. 1). The data, concerning a rat, a Lies Incorporated technician discovers, has been subliminally transmitted to Rachmael ben Applebaum.

The scene shifts to ben Applebaum’s apartment, where its occupant, while shaving, contemplates seeing a psychiatrist because of a dream he has of being a rat. He has found himself wondering if he were a man dreaming of being a rat or a rat dreaming of being a man. At the end of the chapter, it occurs to him that the dream might be trying to tell him something.

For a long time he stood without moving, the razor held away from his face. Tell me what? That I’m living in a garbage dump where there’s dried scraps of food, rotting food, other rats? (9; ch. 1)

The rat sequences, which appear off and on through the early chapters, may have been cut by Dick—or an editor—because of space considerations—the Ace science fiction novel at the time of initial publication (as half of an Ace “double”) of _The Unteleported Man_ was notorious for its 60,000-word limit. But, it is also possible that Dick decided to scrap this strand of his narrative as an unnecessary foreshadowing of the multiple worlds that later become so important in the novel. After all, the questions ben Applebaum asks are asked again later.

_The Unteleported Man_, in its second chapter, presents Glazer-Holliday in his satellite villa, where he and his mistress, the same Freya Holm who had spoken with ben Applebaum, discuss ben Applebaum and THL, whose colony
at Whale’s Mouth can communicate with Earth only through electronic media.

The two have decided that there is something peculiar and sinister about the set-up THL and its putative United Nations collaborator have established. Among other things, both are controlled by Germans—a bad sign, to those who remember the Nazi mentality of World War II. A two-pronged investigation is decided upon: Lies Incorporated will send one of its own agents to Whale’s Mouth through THL, and it will back Ben Applebaum in an attempt to reach it in his remaining ship. Ben Applebaum, if he gets the parts he needs, will spend the years in suspended animation.

Chapter Two of *Lies, Inc.* is an expanded version of the first chapter of *The Unteleported Man*, though it lacks the opening scene of credit balloons hounding Ben Applebaum and includes a sequence in which Freya and the rat appear to Ben Applebaum as one. And Chapter Three is the same as chapter two of *The Unteleported Man*.

Except for a return to the “rat” story strand, through a dream sequence in which Ben Applebaum is told by another rat that the other is really a computer repairman trying to correct the situation, Chapter Four of *Lies, Inc.* is substantially the same as Chapter Three of *The Unteleported Man*. In it, a Lies Incorporated pilot comes to him, to put the Omphalos into hiding. They take a smaller ship to the Omphalos, but are intercepted and immobilized by a ship carrying what appears to be Theodoric Ferry, head of THL. Ferry, on boarding their ship, offers Ben Applebaum a deal: he will let him keep the Omphalos as long as Ben Applebaum guarantees that it will never leave the Sol system, thus confirming to Ben Applebaum, whose suspicions of THL were as great as those of Glazer-Holliday, that immigration to Whale’s Mouth is not as advertised.

When Ferry and his henchmen attempt to leave Ben Applebaum’s ship, the henchmen are destroyed by Lies Incorporation agents who have been alerted by lack of communication with the ship. They flood it with a gas for which
the Lies, Incorporated pilot has an antidote. Only Ferry, of the invaders, remains unaffected. He proves to be a “sim,” a duplicate through which the real Ferry communicates. Now free, ben Applebaum and the pilot continue on to the Omphalos.

Chapters Four and Five are, again, quite similar. In them, Freya tries to give Rachmael the parts that will make it possible for him to go into deep freeze for the trip. The transfer is foiled by THL agents. Later, from a hint given by Matson-Holliday, ben Applebaum learns that a satellite put in orbit seventeen years ago still circles Whale’s Mouth, though it has not sent signals for fifteen years. The chapter ends with a passage presenting the difficult decision of a family regarding emigration to Whale’s Mouth.

In Chapters Five and Six, the action is identical. Al Dosker, the pilot who remained with the ship while ben Applebaum tried to get the parts he needed, tells ben Applebaum about the Lies Incorporated plan. Matson, at the same time, has decided to send his agent “over” with a device that can activate the satellite, information from which could lead to the recall of ben Applebaum, who has decided to make the trip without the parts allowing him to make the trip in suspended animation.

Chapters Six and Seven are, again, identical. A warhead destroys the satellite transmissions from Whale’s Mouth. Holm is soon told, by the pilot who has hidden the Omphalos, that her lover and boss is now going to attempt a massive infiltration of Whale’s Mouth. It will be an attempt at a military take-over.

The next chapter in each book opens with similar passages, with only minor differences. Then, though much remains similar, it is Matson, in The Unteleported Man, who is crossing over to Whale’s Mouth in disguise. In Lies, Inc., Rachmael does so. Complicating matters, both characters use the fictitious identity “Mr. Trent” to get through the THL bureaucracy.

As all of the preceding information has placed ben Applebaum in a space ship instead of a teleportation device, the events of the chapter—beyond even the LSD-like “altera-
tions”—test reader willingness to continue to follow the writer’s lead. Offering no explanations, no excuses, Dick barrels from here into a description of a drug experience, into a sequence as confusing as that other drug sequence—Leo Bulero’s in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*.

In *The Unteleported Man*, Matson, with Freya, attempts to coordinate the invasion of Whale’s Mouth by Lies Incorporated Agents. She identifies the civilization set up on Whale’s Mouth as a Spartan type, with the addition of Soviet-style work camps. The invasion does not go well—how could it, against an armed camp—and Matson is killed. At chapter’s end, Freya encounters a potentially deadly nerve gas, and falls to the ground, unconscious.

Soon after the chapters diverge, Rachmael, in *Lies, Inc.*, thinks to himself that he will get Freya back. Nowhere, earlier in *Lies, Inc.*, has Rachmael had Freya to lose, let alone to get her back. At first, this may seem, to some, to be part of the disastrous authorial “mistake” of the role switch. For the words themselves, for a part of the chapter, make it appear as though Dick has merely replaced Matson with Rachmael—especially when compared to the early version of the novel.

Dick does, however, make changes other than in the names. At one point, immediately after arriving at Whale’s Mouth, Rachmael responds to a solicitous question from an official:

> “I’m-all right,” Rachmael said. Abba! he thought in panic. Did they destroy you within me? Are you gone? Do I have to face this alone, now? Silence within him.

> He made his way unsteadily to his clothing. Hands shaking, he dressed, then stood uncertainly.

> “Here are your two items of luggage,” the bureaucrat said, without looking up. (*Lies, Inc.* 84; ch. 8)

Rachmael discovers that Abba, the rat presence which had been with him so long, has disappeared. The comparable passage, in the other book, runs as follows:
“I’m-all right,” Matson Glazer-Holliday said, and made his way unsteadily to his clothing; he dressed, then stood uncertainly.

“Here are your two items of luggage,” the bureaucrat said, without looking up. (The Unteleported Man 68; ch. 7)

Since the only real difference, besides stylistic changes, is the addition of the rat, it appears that Dick was aware of what he was doing by not changing the rest of the scene—including the reference to Holm. As the evidence, from the stylistic changes, is that Lies, Inc. is the later of the versions of the novel, we can also conclude that the differences resulted not from cuts, but additions.

Instead of paring the work down to Ace standards, Dick had expanded an older work, altering it to better reflect his purpose. The early rat sequences, then, were not cut so that space requirements could be met, but were added to insure that later scenes of various realities would not be taken as gratuitous or accidental. This point becomes particularly significant in this chapter, where disjunction within Lies, Inc.—let alone the differences between the two novels—becomes so significant. Ben Applebaum’s thoughts about Holm are only the tip of this iceberg of frozen red herring.

The last scene of the chapter, in Lies, Inc. is much longer than that of The Unteleported Man, incorporating material appearing later in the latter novel. In the former, Rachmael is quickly shot by an “LSD-tipped dart.” The rest of the chapter details his attempt to negotiate the drug and the “changing” world it has placed him in. Faced, finally, with an awesome, “oceanic” creature, he asks, in Latin, for God’s help.

Here, we are introduced to the question of just what world, in this novel, is the “real” one—the question hinted to in the Abba rat sequences. The various perceived “worlds” interact in an even more confusing manner than they do in The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch. Dick continually offers explanations for these “worlds” but undercuts them afterwards.
Chapter Eight of *The Unteleported Man* is identical with Chapter Sixteen of *Lies, Inc.*, a jump from center to end. Al Dosker, The Lies Incorporated pilot, receives a message from Freya Holm on Whale’s Mouth. He interprets it and takes the chance of contacting ben Applebaum who, with the Omphalos, has begun his long trip. On hearing of the situation on Whale’s Mouth, with its implication that the teleportation is actually two-way (why have an armed camp, but to attack someone—and who to attack, but Earth?), ben Applebaum decides to turn back.

Dosker though he and his own ship had been far from Earth, near Pluto, is intercepted by UN ships. The broadcast had been monitored. He is taken to New York, where UN Secretary General Horst Bertold interviews him, addressing him as the senior Lies Incorporated official left on Earth. Bertold informs Dosker that there is no UN presence on Whale’s Mouth, and that the UN has been as surprised as Dosker and ben Applebaum as to the true state of affairs there.

Chapters Nine and Seventeen remain identical up to the last three paragraphs of *Lies, Inc.*, which are new. A remaining section in the chapter in *The Unteleported Man* is the LSD experience that appears in Chapter Eight of *Lies, Inc.*

In the identical passages, ben Applebaum, like Dosker, is escorted to New York and the UN Secretary General’s office. There, Bertold points out to him one of the flaws in the logic that had led both ben Applebaum and Lies Incorporated to assume that the UN was in league with THL. Because both groups were dominated by Germans, they had assumed that the two were in league, and that both reflected the old German totalitarian mentality.

“’Sein Herz voll Hasz geladen,’” Horst Bertold said to Rachmael. “You speak Yiddish? You understand?”

“I speak a little Yiddish,” Rachmael said, “but that’s German. ‘His heart heavy with hate.’ What’s that from?”
“From the Civil War in Spain,” Bertold said. “From a song of the International Brigade. Germans, mostly, who had left the Third Reich to fight in Spain against Franco, in the 1930s. They were, I suppose, Communists. But—they were fighting Fascism, and very early; and they were Germans.... We fought the Nazis, too, we ‘good’ Germans; verges’ uns nie.” Forget us never, Bertold had said, quietly, calmly. \( \text{(The Unteleported Man 88; ch. 9/} \text{Lies, Inc. 217; ch. 17)} \)

The point Dick makes here, of course, is that one ought not trust any preconceptions—for they are all masks. And that is what Dick has been saying from his earliest stories: remember the fates of the dog in “Roog” and the wub in “Beyond Lies the Wub.” By moving this scene to the end of the novel, Dick accents what he may have seen as the middle of an earlier muddle, bringing the novel clearly into line with the rest of his work.

Having heard Bertold, ben Applebaum, the one who was to be the “unteleported man,” prepares to teleport to Whale’s Mouth. He now feels the obligation of error—and he wishes to attempt to save Holm, whose fate is unknown on Earth.

After showing a family about to cross over but stopped by a UN raid on the THL facility, Dick, in \text{The Unteleported Man} now presents ben Applebaum’s crossing and the drug experience. \text{Lies, Inc.} includes this scene, with several additional paragraphs describing the family which had wanted to teleport now leaving the THL facility.

Chapter Ten of \text{The Unteleported Man}, then, follows directly after the LSD experience. As does Chapter Nine of \text{Lies, Inc.} Not surprisingly, the two chapters, for the most part, are identical. Ben Applebaum finds himself in a building with others who have seen visions, some of the aquatic face he saw. They are in a controlled environment, and attempt to discern the reality, or lack thereof, of their world. The following chapter, in each novel, again the same in each, continues the discussion. The people try to make sense of what they have seen, to come to terms with the new and strange world they in-
habit, a world each sees somewhat differently—or, perhaps, each inhabits a “paraworld” that only interconnects to a certain degree with the others. Ben Applebaum’s original vision remains with him, though it is changing. By the end of the chapter it is eating its own eyes.

Here, Dick presents a horrific version of his own vision of the world of individual interaction—the only “real” world he ever accepts. Here, however, one individual has the power of destroying—with the other’s “consent” (a signature that cannot, really, be refused). This one takes on, thereby, the role of the author of a fiction.

The next chapter in each book presents Sepp von Einem, the scientist who has developed the THL teleportation device. After dealing with a man “out of phase in time” (The Unteleported Man 135; ch 12/Lies, Inc. 131; ch. 11), von Einem talks to the operator of a “spy” housefly, then considers the situation, now under control, on Whale’s Mouth, “except for the unhappy weevils and their destroyed, ridiculous crypto-perceptions” (The Unteleported Man 138; ch. 12/Lies, Inc. 133-134; ch. 11). These, of course, are ben Applebaum and his fellows—even the woman who has been given “control” of the others in their situation.

Both chapters then turn to Gregory Gloch, the man out of phase with time. Like von Einem, Gloch is something of an eccentric genius caught up in plans to control both Earth and Whale’s Mouth—though not exactly the same plans as von Einem’s. Gloch, among other things, is involved in tinkering with time—as, he discovers, is the UN, which attempts to use what it has learned to change von Einem’s youth. Like an author faced with an editor who would change the work, Gloch discovers that what he has developed is not his alone.

Again, the next chapters are the same, with an initial return to ben Applebaum, who is shown—by the creature which chews its eyes—a book called The True and Complete Economic and Political History of Newcolonizedland, by a Dr. Bloode. Seeing the book, ben Applebaum wonders once more about his situation.
Could this actually be the authentic underlying reality? he wondered. This macro-abomination that resembled nothing ever witnessed by him before? A grotesque monstrosity which seemed, as he watched it devour and consume—to its evident satisfaction—the remainder of its eyes, almost a parody of the Aquatic Horror-shape?

“This book,” the creature intoned, “demonstrates beyond any doubt whatsoever that the plan to colonize the ninth planet of the Fomalhaut system is foolish. No such colony as the projected Newcolonizedland can possibly be established. We owe a great debt to Dr. Bloode for his complete elucidation of this complex topic.” It giggled, then. A wet, slurred, wobbly giggle of delighted mirth.

“But the title,” he said. “It says—”

“Irony,” the creature tittered. “Of course. After all, no such colony exists.” It paused, then, contemplatively. “Or does it?” (The Unteleported Man 148; ch. 13 / Lies, Inc. 144; ch. 12)

Rachmael cannot answer.

Suddenly, he and the creature are confronted with a creditor balloon of the type that had hounded ben Applebaum on Earth. This one, however, starts to rail at the monster, calling it, of all things, Mr. Trent—the name Matson-Holliday and ben Applebaum had used when teleporting to Whale’s Mouth. It also tells the monster that it owns Lies Incorporated.

“I don’t own Lies Incorporated any more,” the eye-eater broke in gloomily. “It belongs to Mrs. Trent, now. Mrs. Silvia Trent. I suggest you go and bother her.”

“There is no such person as ‘Mrs. Silvia Trent,’” the creditor balloon said, with wrathful condemnation. “And you know it. Her real name is Freya Holm, and she’s your mistress.”...

Rachmael said to [the monster], “You’re Matson Glazer-Holliday.” “Yes,” the eye-eater admitted. (The
Later, the Matson monster explains Rachmael’s situation to him:

“... Rachmael, you’ve got the illness. Telpor Syndrome. Right?”
“Right,” he admitted.
“So it’s S.A.T. for you. Good old therapy by Lupov’s psychiatrists... Lately you’ve been, um, a weevil; part of that class and seeing Paraworld Blue...” (The Unteleported Man 151; ch. 13/ Lies, Inc. 147; ch. 12)

Rachmael, still unconvinced, wonders if even this is “real.” “Did nothing actual lie at hand?” (The Unteleported Man 151; ch. 13/ Lies, Inc. 147; ch. 12). The Matson monster goes on trying to convince Rachmael, finally returns to the subject of the book, suggesting Rachmael read it. He finds a section telling him that zygotes “formed between the indigenous inhabitants of Fomalhaut IX and Homo sapiens” (The Unteleported Man 154; ch. 13/ Lies, Inc. 150; ch. 150). From this, he realizes that the monster is actually both Glazer-Holliday and his offspring.

A moment later, ben Applebaum looks up Freya Holm the book he had found, and reads the passage, word for word from earlier in The Unteleported Man and Lies, Inc., in which she encounters the nerve gas. After that, the book tells ben Applebaum what happened to Freya afterwards: she has been caught in a similar situation to that of ben Applebaum, but has been told by Dr. Lupov that it has all been done by gadgets.

The scene then shifts to Dr. Lupov and an assistant watching the previous scene on a “vid” screen. As they watch, ben Applebaum reads how he will die. Lupov and his assistant comment that they have done a good job, and Lupov thinks further about Freya Holm, thinking that he had so far failed with her.
We then discover that Lupov is preparing a version of the text for Theodoric Ferry, the head of THL, to take when he once again crosses to Newcolonizedland. This version will drive Ferry crazy.

By making the lines of the book within the book identical with some of those of the novel itself, Dick also asks reader to draw a parallel between Lupov, the evil manipulator, and Dick, as author, himself. Both watch what happens—and can change it. Dick warns his readers not to trust him.

The chapters continue on their parallel lines, now moving to Freya, who, recovered from the gas, is making her way through Newcolonizedland. She finds a hidden teleportation terminal and ends up in a gunfight with the technicians there. Unable to kill both, she activates a bomb implanted in her skin—and discovers herself in the same place, except that the world is now that of the fake THL transmissions from Whale’s Mouth—the ones meant to convince people on Earth that Whale’s Mouth is a paradise. The hoax has come to life.

After being taken into custody by THL officials, she, too, is shown the book about Newcolonizedland. She now, in Lies, Inc. (the corresponding place in The Unteleported Man is, appropriately enough, a blank representing a manuscript omission), reads a passage identical to one in the two “real” novels, one in which Rachmael is reading the book and talking to the monster. She continues reading.

Insanity bubbled up within her. It isn’t a book, she kept thinking. It’s real.

“It’s only a book,” she said aloud. “A version of the text. not necessarily the right version. It says so, right here, where Lupov and Jaime Weiss are watching Rachmael on a vid screen—” (Lies, Inc. 163; ch. 13)

Realizing she is completely caught in something she cannot conquer, Freya tries to kill herself, to use a suicide implant. The THL agents stop her. Here, The Unteleported Man picks up once more.
Later, Freya turns to the book again, and reads of her meeting with Theodoric Ferry, a meeting, she has been told by the THL agents, toward which they are now heading. It tells her that she tells Ferry that she knows what he is, one of the creatures like Matson, that he had infiltrated Earth decades before, soon after the first teleportation to Whale’s Mouth.

The words she has read in the book are the ones we read—again—when she does confront Ferry—after she believes she has established, independent of what she has read, Ferry’s “true” nature. Soon, Freya manages to attack Ferry, with another of her hidden weapons. Gears and wiring and other mechanical pieces erupt from his head. “He’s not a deformed, non-Terran water-creature; he’s a mechanical assembly—I don’t understand. She shut her eyes, moaned in despair” (*The Unteleported Man* 173; ch. 14/*Lies, Inc.* 170-171; ch. 13).

To make matters worse, she now remembers that one of the “paraworlds” is called “The Clock”—the manifestations akin to those ben Applebaum has seen are, there, mechanical. She believes she is now in that paraworld—and remembers:

the original encounter between the black space-pilot, Rachmael ben Applebaum and the sim of Theodoric Ferry—that, back in the Sol system, had been a manifestation—not a Ferry-simulacrum at all—but, like this, of the paraworld called The Clock.

The delusional worlds somehow active here at Whale’s Mouth had already spread to and penetrated Terra. It had already been experienced-experienced, yes; but not recognized.

She shuddered. (*The Unteleported Man* 174; ch. 14/*Lies, Inc.* 172; ch. 13)

The next chapter, in each book, returns us to Sepp von Einem and the man out of phase, Gregory Gloch. Von Einem has been listening in on a communication with Gloch. He does not recognize the voice, but thinks he should. He, therefore, orders a tracer on the transmission and the death of the speaker.
The action turns to Theodore Ferry, who is attempting to teleport to Whale’s Mouth, using the pseudonym Mike Hennen to fool the UN, which has taken partial control of the THL apparatus on Earth. Once in Newcolonizedland, he buys a book from a mechanical vendor—The True and Complete Economic and Political history of Newcolonizedland. In it, he reads that he has crossed as Mike Hennen.

On impulse he looks up a citation regarding Dr. Lupov; a moment later he finds himself engrossed in that particular section of the text, even though admittedly it did not deal with himself at all.

Peering tautly into the small vid screen, Dr. Lupov said to the sharp-featured young man beside him, “Now is the time, Jaime. Either Theo Ferry examines the Bloode text or else he never does. If he turns to page one-forty-nine, then we have a real chance of—” (The Un teleported Man 185-186; ch. 15/Lies, Inc. 184; ch. 14)

Of course, Ferry turns to that page, and Lupov and Weiss exult. They are interrupted by word that a destructive device is headed their way. It is, not surprisingly, the one von Einem had loosed through his order, for they had been the ones in touch with Gloch. It will take time, they realize, for the book to complete its impact on Ferry—too long, for their destruction will alter the pattern, and that will happen before the time is up. Weiss thinks about the situation:

What a waste, he thought; what a dreadful, impossible waste, if not. Everything we set up: the pseudo-worlds, the fake class of ‘weevils,’ everything—with no result. (The Un Teleported Man 187; ch 15/Lies, Inc. 185; ch. 14)

The device then hits them.

Ferry, studying the text, gets a message from von Einem, telling him to get rid of the book. He throws it down. When he jumps on the book, it squeals—alive.
Realizing he has now triumphed over almost all of his foes, Ferry thinks about other enemies, particularly ben Applebaum, and gloats over anticipated annihilation of even him.

The next chapter is the last of *The Unteleported Man*. In *Lies, Inc.*, it is followed by the two chapters similar to two earlier ones in *The Unteleported Man*, those in which Dosker and ben Applebaum are brought to Earth from their space ships, in which ben Applebaum decides to go to Whale’s Mouth. In this chapter, the vehicle Freya Holm and the THL agents are riding on after the destruction of the clock-work Ferry breaks down, leaving them off on the huge ship that had brought the Ferry.

They get inside, only to face—Theodoric Ferry. He demands to know ben Applebaum’s location. When she cannot tell him, Freya is fired upon.

Again, she does not die. Time has stopped for everything but Freya—and some tiny creatures in water, watching a tiny “vid” screen. She comes into telepathic contact with one of the character’s there, one of those in ben Applebaum’s group, with the suggestion that the tiny creatures are, in fact, that group. The creature tells Freya that she is caught in Paraworld Silver, that Freya, herself, knows how to get out.

She throws an autodestruct switch for the ship, knowing it will not be activated until time starts again. So, she resumes her place in the line of fire and gives permission for time’s resumption. She is destroyed, and the ship blows up.

The scene now switches back to ben Applebaum and the Matson monster. Ben Applebaum asks for the book again, to see what happens to Ferry. The monster tells him to get it from within his middle. Rachmael tries, but the monster turns into another from his discussion group, a woman—but still a monster. The rest of the group is there—also as monsters.

Rachmael, searching his pocket for a pen with which to sign orders, held out to him by the member of the group who had instructed Freya, for his own destruction, comes out with
a tin he had forgotten, one containing a “time-warp” device developed by the UN. All he has to do is open it.

Which he does.

In *Lies, Inc.*, time returns to the initial entry into Whale’s Mouth. But this time it is Matson and Freya, not ben Applebaum and Freya, who appear. In *The Unteleported Man*, it is ben Applebaum and Freya, not Matson and Freya. In *The Unteleported Man*, ben Applebaum uses his device again, and returns to the restaurant where Freya had tried to give him the devices for his ship. He attempts to explain to Freya what has happened, to show her the device. But she does not understand—and the device is gone, somehow lost.

But, knowing how those other devices, the ones for his ship, were kept from him before, he manages to get them—even though he now knows his trip is, really, useless.

*Lies, Inc.*, instead, now presents the last section of Chapter Seven of *The Unteleported Man*, in which Glazer-Holliday is killed and Freya Holm attempts to direct the Lies Incorporated attack. The book ends with the chapters described above, ones that appear earlier in *The Unteleported Man*. After returning to Earth—having learned from Dosker what the situation on Whale’s Mouth “really” is, ben Applebaum talks with Bertold then prepares to teleport to Newcolonizedland.

Each ending promises something of a circularity in continuing events—as though the future, in each novel, would be something of a replay of the past. Thus, Dick presents no conclusion in either, no success and no failure. Only a continuing saga of people negotiating worlds that just won’t stay put.

Though often over-looked, *The Unteleported Man* and *Lies, Inc.* contain fractured narrative, multiple “worlds,” and anti-totalitarianism that work in tandem—and more obviously than elsewhere. All, in fact, of what has come to be identified as “Phil-Dickian” appears in these—or this—novel.
When success leads consistently to failure or, at best, stasis; when plans, for man’s progress or for evil, become irrelevant; when the motion of time means nothing; when these are found to mask situations antagonistic to the individual, just how does that individual find motivation for survival? To Dick, who presents just such situations, this question was as important as the political considerations that led him to deal with it in his fiction.

Surprisingly, Dick decided that such motivation can still be found—even when nothing, not even the situation of that successful character, can possibly change for the better. For success lies in attitude, not in worldly gain. The worlds Dick imagined are too often too illusory for any good fortune in them to have substance.

So, success in the life of a Phil Dick character stems partially from refusal to let others dominate, partly through paying attention to craft, to the thing one does, and partly through consideration for the needs of others—by acting and reacting in an humane manner.

Mary Anne Dominic, only a minor character in *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said*, but one of Dick’s few absolutely exemplary characters, succeeds in her life by turning down an offer of immediate financial gain that would also have placed her in debt to another—by caring more about the pots she makes than about financial reward for making them. When she does succeed it is because she has assisted another person, without asking for gain for herself.

When Jason Taverner, a famous and powerful TV performer, offers to spotlight her pots on his network show, she turns him down with a couple of rhetorical questions that en-
capsulate much of whatever message Dick may have been trying to get across in all of his fiction:

“Leave me alone, please. I’m very happy. I know I’m a good potter; I know that the stores, the good ones, like what I do. Does everything have to be on a great scale with a cast of thousands? Can’t I lead my little life the way I want to?” (166; ch. 23)

Dick may admire characters such as Felix Buckman, the police general in Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said, who try as hard as they can to stem the tides of horror that Dick sees on the revolving modern world, but Buckman, like many of the others, can ultimately do little more than hold the waters back for a short while. What Mary Anne Dominic does has greater lasting power; she has brought beauty into the world. Buckman believes he is better able to make decisions than are most others, but he eventually abuses the power of his position in grief over his sister/wife’s death. Dominic would never allow herself to get into a situation where such a betrayal would be possible.

Dick, who put something of an idealized version of himself into Dominic, had both his own dreams for his work and an admiration for those artists who could let the work simply be what it may. He understood from hard personal experience what the two phrases “art for art” and “art for money” really mean. Though, in his own life, money became (often) more important than art, it is art, he shows here that he believed, where salvation lies.

Art, after all, rarely leads the artist toward activities forcing others into certain pathways. Generally an individual activity, it forces artisans and artists to look to themselves for solutions, and not to others, thereby, Dick may have believed, removing some of the temptations to control others that are found elsewhere.

In the Epilogue to Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said, Dick, perhaps in a maudlin mood, “rewards” Dominic for being the character he has made her, writing that Dominic later “won a
major international prize for her ceramic kitchenware” (206; Epilogue) and led a “long and successful life” (208; Epilogue)—not successes Dick allows many of his characters.

The last paragraph of the novel, in fact, concerns one of Dominic’s creations. It gives her an importance not readily apparent in the main body of the text and confirms Dick’s affection for the character:

The blue vase made by Mary Anne Dominic and purchased by Jason Taverner as a gift for Heather Hart wound up in a private collection of modern pottery. It remains there to this day, and is much treasured. And, in fact, by a number of people who know ceramics, openly and genuinely cherished. And loved. (208; Epilogue)

Dominic becomes a part of the novel through the assistance she provides Taverner while he attempts to elude the police—who want him for various reasons, including suspicion of the murder of Buckman’s sister/wife. He is innocent—Buckman even knows he is after Taverner only because he needs a scapegoat, something to lash out against in his grief—and in need of aid. Though hesitant, Dominic does help him and, by refusing his offer to showcase her pots, confirms that she acted because he was simply another human being and in need—and not to get something for it.

A relationship positive for those on both sides always involves explicit understanding of the nature of the return, the transaction, the trade involved in the relationship. When a return does not enter into the picture until after the initial transaction, it changes the nature of the event. Something has been hidden, in a sense, and the balance becomes unequal. By accepting Taverner’s offer, Dominic would, to some degree, come into his control, a possibility she shows she recognizes by refusing the offer. She wants her life to continue on its small plane while Taverner, even if he were not conscious of it, would move her into a paternalistic relationship, with him in the controlling position.
Still, Taverner honestly—or so he believes—wants to re-
ward Dominic. He does not recognize that she has already
been rewarded. Her transaction, of what Dick would see as
the highest type, is with herself, and is fulfilled by her action.
Taverner, the lucky recipient, has no role in that. Any attempt
to involve himself, if successful, would only cheapen a previ-
ously completed transaction.

Emily Hnatt, another ceramicist and the ex-wife of Barney
Mayerson, in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, has no
success comparable to Dominic’s. Ambitious for her work,
unlike Dominic, Hnatt propels her also-ambitious second
husband into a deal that leads him to sign the two of them up
for E-Therapy, a process that allows a person to “evolve” to the
next step in human development. For Hnatt, who (ironically)
had not really wanted the therapy in the first place (just every-
thing else), it backfires, and she “devolves” slightly. She does
become rich and famous, but she ends up only making pots
like those she made before. No longer can she go forward. No
longer can she produce anything genuinely new. She’s “just
a little more shallow, a shade sillier” (244; ch. 12). Her ambi-
tion—coming back to her through her husband—has ruined
her creativity. And she does not even know it. All creative
artists fear her fate; Dick himself was accused of falling vic-
tim to it.

“Selling out” for money does not alone cause Hnatt’s
downfall. Lack of forcefulness and lack of proportion are also
part of her problem. She should have stood her ground when
her husband suggested E-Therapy. And she never should
have expected so much from her pots. They were selling well
enough; she was no starving artist. She should have seen
that her art was doing all that could be asked of it. She ought
to have accepted that, as Dominic did, as Dick, perhaps,
hoped he had.

Hnatt was also rather egocentric. Her concern was always
for her own well-being, never for that of others.

Like both Dominic and Hnatt, Joe Fernwright, of *Galactic
Pot-Healer* (1969), is also, by the end of the book, a potter. At
the beginning, and throughout most of the book, however, he thinks of himself as merely a pot-healer, one who repairs old and damaged pots.

If Dominic is the artisan at idealistic best, Fernwright is the artisan at frustrated worst. Faced with a world as regimented and ridiculous as any totalitarian nightmare (he can’t even walk without being threatened with death by police for doing so, or give away money without being arrested), Fernwright throws his lot with a strange character from someplace he has never heard of, someplace called “Plowman’s Planet.” This Glimmung, a god-like being, wants to raise a sunken cathedral for purposes not readily apparent.

Fernwright, when the task is finally complete, rejects the Glimmung and soon decides to try to make a pot on his own—a revolutionary idea, for him. After all, no one on Earth had bothered to make a pot since an earlier great war that had nearly destroyed the planet.

When Fernwright and the one other being, a gastropod, who has also refused to remain in community with the Glimmung, walk away after the successful attempt to raise the cathedral, Fernwright finds himself chastised and given advice that he will soon follow:

“You know what your problem is?” the gastropod said. “I think you ought to create a new pot, rather than merely patching up old ones.”

“But,” Joe said, “my father was a pot-healer before me.”

“Observe the success of Glimmung’s aspirations. Emulate him, who in his Undertaking fought and destroyed... the tyrannic rule of fate itself. Be creative. Work against fate. Try.” (189; ch. 16)

Fernwright had been caught up in someone else’s battle. In his case, that battle had served a purpose for him, had saved him from an increasingly useless existence. But to what end? The battle of the Glimmung is the Glimmung’s own. It helps no one else, yet involves and endangers many others. The
lesson seems to be, by analogy, that only the smaller battle against fate should also be fought—but it only seems to be that, as the last chapters of the novel show.

Fernwright, as indicated, takes the gastropod’s advice and tries to deny fate, decides to do something on his own, to make his own pot:

His first pot. Taking it to a table, under direct light, he set it down and took a good look at it. He professionally appraised its artistic worth. He appraised what he had done, and, within it, what he would do, what his later pots would be like, the future of them lying before him. And his justification, in a sense, for leaving Glimmung and all the others. Mali, the most of all. Mali whom he loved.

The pot was awful. (190-191; ch. 16)

The Glimmung has risked his own life, Fernwright’s, Mali’s, and those of all of the others he had recruited to assist him. For his own purposes—though he does eventually reward his helpers by incorporating them into a positive community of beings. But the reward he finally offers has made no sense to Fernwright, for neither it nor the task were consistent with what he felt had been contracted for. Fernwright is shown as a short-sighted man, concerned only with the immediate.

Though he had felt cheated, once he learned the task he was to perform and the purpose of the Glimmung, Fernwright went through with it. He could not, however, accept the reward. He chose the integrity of the individual, though that had already been violated, though that might mean unhappiness, where staying with the Glimmung would mean happiness, fairly surely.

Unlike most of Dick’s world-shakers, the Glimmung succeeds concretely and immediately, and does have some concern for those who have helped it. And, unlike most of Dick’s little protagonists, Fernwright fails absolutely.
Why does Dick allow the Glimmung to succeed and Fernwright to fail here, something the reverse of the situations in his other novels? Again, we must remind ourselves that, to Dick, result alone has no importance. Only the attempt does. The Glimmung, unlike so many of Dick’s characters who attempt to control the actions or lives of others, has never expected to succeed. Fernwright (perhaps) expects to, and so he fails. Not that it matters in either case: what is important is that both try. Success does not validate attempt. Only attempt itself can do that.

Plus, Fernwright has evaded all of Dick’s prefaces to success. He sells himself to the Glimmung; he is too ambitious: a good pot repairman, he wants to abandon that for the greater glory of a pot maker; and, he turns away from participation in a close community of beings—one that even includes the woman he loves.

The most striking aspect of Fernwright’s failure is that it is the one incident in all of Dick’s novels where the protagonist finally does fail so clearly and completely. Perhaps the lack of this failure elsewhere results from Dick’s obvious “like” for his characters. While writing, he became extremely involved with their worlds, to the extent that, in the case of *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*, he says “I felt a loss as real as I have ever felt” (*In His own Words* 218) upon finishing the writing of the novel. The loss was of Angel Archer, the narrator:

I began to realize that I would never be in the mind of Angel Archer, or put another way, Angel Archer’s mind would never be in mine. Our minds would never be one mind again. (*In His Own Words* 218)

Dick felt strong sympathy with all of his characters, so it is not really surprising that few of them end in disastrous situations—even though Dick’s political point, if successfully made, could allow them little success.

In addition, Dick did not want to overly reward his characters for that might make them move overtly into roles as ex-
emplars rather than individual “beings.” The important thing, for all of them, is that they follow through on their choices and beliefs. Thus real external reward, like real destruction, rarely is encountered by the central characters.

Only in *Dr. Futurity* and *Vulcan’s Hammer*, both early novels, do the central characters really seem to have much of a chance at happy futures.

*Dr. Futurity* (1960), a time-travel book, presents physician Jim Parsons as he, at first, explores the future world he has been thrown into—a world where physicians are looked upon as obscene, death a positive thing leading, literally, to new birth and the improvement of the race. He has been brought into the future by a group claiming descent from American Indians who want to change the past by murdering the early explorers who paved the way for eventual destruction of the American Indians. This group needs a physician in order to save the life of their own leader—who has been fatally injured during his own trip to try to change the past.

Parsons joins in with the group on discovery that agents for the dominant portion of the future society are also meddling with the past—to make sure that the smaller group fails. Upon returning to the time of the death of the man he was meant to save, however, Parsons finds himself the unwitting murderer.

Exiled, thereafter, to the Pacific coast long before any European arrived by those he had sought to help, Parsons is soon rescued by a woman from the future who had fallen in love with him. She sends him back to his own wife, but with the hint that he will return to her at a later time. Though he does not know the future, she does.

In a way, Parson’s luck results from his position as, for the most part, unwitting player in a game whose rules he does not comprehend. Like Thomas Cole in “The Variable Man,” he operates within a milieu beyond his understanding by standing dog-fast to the rules he knows from his own time. To punish him or make what he accomplishes ambiguous would do nothing to serve Dick’s purposes in this particular novel.
William Barris, though, in *Vulcan’s Hammer*, has as good a view of events on Earth as any but one—Jason Dill, the only man with direct access to the Vulcan computers that control Earth. Barris is an unusual figure amongst Dick’s creations for he is a man of power who proves more competent even than his superiors and rivals—including the self-perpetuating and protecting Vulcan III. He not only discovers that Dill has been using the out-dated Vulcan II against the growing powers of Vulcan III, but he manages to form an alliance with a rebel group against Vulcan III—once it has been clearly proven that the group of which he had been a leader has become only a puppet of the super-computer. And that alliance, thanks to Barris, wins. As a final result, Barris even gains the love of one of the female characters.

In most cases, however, only peripheral characters, like Dominic, can find such rewards. But other somewhat minor characters, like Gino Molinari in *Now Wait for Last Year* (1966) perhaps, find something closer to a living (or dying) hell, thereby balancing the books.

Like Fernwright, Molinari has made a fatal alliance—this time in an interstellar conflict. He has chosen to side Earth with aliens who look like Earthmen against those who do not, considering only a surface affinity, not real purposes or core similarities. Molinari quite literally dies, constantly, because of his mistake, dies in order to keep Earth from being overrun by his “allies,” who postpone a series of vital negotiations whenever he becomes sick. Each time he dies, the one defense he has discovered, the one atonement he has found for his error, a replacement Molinari from another time-stream, appears. And this one is a healthy one, surprising the “allies” with his appearance (they believe he has somehow miraculously recovered). Each new Molinari, however, suffers as a result of the presumption of that one long gone. Christ-like, quite clearly, in his dying for mankind, he ultimately only becomes another sufferer for mistakes. In his egoism, he had over-stepped his bounds. And he pays the price—even for each other version of himself.
Eric Sweetscent, on the other hand, though he finds himself drawn into the heroic struggles of Molinari through his skill as an artiforg (artificial organ) surgeon, finally realizes that he cannot remain involved with Molinari’s fight. He, too, risks finding himself out of his bounds.

To keep the alien “allies” at bay, Molinari must appear near death each time they attempt to meet with him. Sweetscent’s job is to step in and try to save that particular Molinari—each of whom can contact the diseases of others through empathy—in order to keep alien physicians away from the ruler. Should he die in the hands of the “allies,” of course, any appearing replacement would constitute a verifiable fraud.

Sweetscent has to appear to be working as hard as he can to save his leader—so he, too, is kept in the dark as to the actual situation. Like Thomas Cole in “The Variable Man,” at this point, he is merely a tool used for a certain expertise.

Eventually, however, Sweetscent finds himself drawn into the complete horror and possible hopelessness of the situation, discovering, of course, the Molinaris’ ruse. For a time, he even attempts to rectify it, for use of the same drug that allows Molinari to bring in replacements from different “time-streams” soon allows Sweetscent to travel back and forth into the future.

At the end of the book, as the result of a discussion with a taxi—of all things—Sweetscent realizes he cannot escape his own smaller fate, any more than he can change the greater situation:

“If you were me, and your wife were sick, desperately so, with no hope of recovery, would you leave her? Or would you stay with her, even if you had traveled ten years into the future and knew for an absolute certainty that the damage to her brain could never be reversed? And staying with her would mean—”

“I can see what you mean, sir,” the cab broke in. “It would mean no other life for you beyond caring for her.”

“That’s right,” Eric said.
“I’d stay with her,” the cab decided.
“Why?”
“Because,” the cab said, “life is composed of reality configurations so constituted. To abandon her would be to say, I can’t endure reality as such. I have to have uniquely special conditions.”
“I think I agree,” Eric said after a time. “I think I will stay with her.” (224; ch. 14)

The comparison between this passage from the end of *Now Wait for Last Year*, and the ending of *Galactic Pot-Healer* is particularly interesting. Fernwright has taken the advice to fight fate. And has failed. Sweetscent has decided to accept fate. Yet he, too, loses the heights his craft and political involvement could have taken him to. He opts out of his own life to support someone for whom he had little remaining affection in the first place (he and his wife had been considering divorce before her illness). However, like Molinari, Sweetscent must pay for his past actions. He accepts this necessity, this responsibility to other beings. Fernwright, who abandons the community with the Glimmung and the Mali, does not.

Furthermore, Sweetscent, though he knows that the future can be changed, that reality has no more permanence than vague memory, recognizes that he must accept the reality of his own being, including the situations such a being places him in. That there may be other realities (and there certainly are, in *Now Wait For Last Year*) makes no difference.

Though it becomes increasingly difficult to simplify the plots and themes of a Dick novel as his career goes on—or to provide a diagram that will show how relationships work in them, it is worth looking at least at one diagram, for Dick surely used something akin to this model to set up expectations in his readers in *Now Wait for Last Year*. As he became a more sophisticated writer, he also used it to destroy expectations. The relationship between Sweetscent and Molinari exemplifies the heart of this model.

Kim Stanley Robinson, in *The Novels of Philip K. Dick*, provides this basic diagram, one detailing the relationships be-
between what he calls, after Dick, “little protagonists” and “big protagonists” (17). Though Robinson presents his diagram primarily in relation to the novels of the sixties, the seeds of this system appear in the earlier novels, and there are remnants of it in the later novels. Simply put, the novels fitting this diagram center on the relationship between the “little protagonist” (a Sweetscent) and a “big protagonist” (a Molinari) involved directly with world-shaking events, and between these two and the big protagonist’s opposition. There are also intervening individuals, particularly the women Dick’s little protagonists are involved with (who often also have some sort of relationship with the big protagonist). The novels revolve around the changing and relative strengths and weaknesses of these characters.

The successes, or lacks thereof, of Dick’s characters are often caught up in the changing natures of these relationships.

The “little protagonists,” those not quite so powerful or ambitious, concern Dick most, for, among other things, they often are the monkey-wrenches thrown into the machinery, the very plans of the “big protagonists.” They are Dick’s tools as well, his means for making his political points.

In his early novels, Dick presents his concern and affection for his little protagonists by, strangely enough, flinging them directly into the middle of world-shaking conflicts where their comfortable lives face destruction. For example, Ted Benteley, a mid-level bureaucrat and focus of the narrative in Solar Lottery, quickly finds himself embroiled, because of his own much smaller ambitions, in machinations toward control of Earth. Allen Purcell, head of a small media production house, is flung into a similar struggle in The Man Who Japed. And Doug Cussick, the secret policeman at the center of The World Jones Made, becomes the instrument for changing his world. By their actions, all of them send Dick’s own message to all who would control worlds: count lightly on those you would use, for what they will do might surprise you.
The three novels mentioned above are the first science fiction novels Dick wrote after finding he could tap into the Ace Doubles system of original science fiction paperback publications (each book bound with another) and make more money than he was discovering he could through his stories. They all show that Dick was already formulating the types of characters and situations that would become standard in his work, though he had not yet come to grips with the implications of those very scenarios. All three concentrate on conflict between individuality and community—a type of conflict that would remain present in Dick’s novels up through his last.

Yet none of them exhibits anything of the sophisticated considerations of totalitarianism that would later become the benchmark of a Dick novel. Instead, they present a consistent and rather simplistic view of power, one that Dick did utilize in the later novels, though there it becomes a relatively minor part of a greater discussion, just as Robinson’s model, too, would be consumed by the greater and more sophisticated discussions of the later novels.

In these, the model remains in place, yet success is achieved only by those who can ignore it, who can turn from it to consideration of craft or immediate task and interpersonal relationships. Even Barney Mayerson’s decision, in The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch, to attend to his garden fits this formula. He has given up his ambitions for a task within his capabilities, recognizing that his concern should be for that task only, and for the people who surround him, even though they, like him, inhabit “hovels” on a destitute Mars.

The problem with the “big protagonists,” including even the best of dictators, for Dick, is their belief in the future, with parallel rejection of the present—along with rejection of the possibility of surprise, of the possibility of being wrong. They forget that people exist now, and not twenty years from now. Planning, or expectation, has become what they see as their great strength. And, though they do not see this, it becomes the cause of their downfall. They forget that the unexpected is always just around the corner, that the people they count on
are as likely as anyone to “betray” them, to act on a basis not in line with the leader. They forget what, to Dick, is the central aspect of human life: The situations now of those immediately around any individual. They forget this in favor of a vision of a future beneficial for all of those they consider their people—even at the expense of the individual today. Though their aims are laudable, their means are totalitarian. And so, in Dick’s view, by definition they never can succeed in what they try to do.

From this come the limit to Dick’s admiration for dictators. He loathed Hitler, whose plans, really, had little good for the people at their heart. But Mussolini, to Dick, was merely an idealist who had lost sight of his surroundings. Hitler and Stalin, at the other extreme, were a megalomaniacs to whom belief was only a tool.

Dick certainly had no fondness for the Russian Soviet system, or for its leaders, for through accent on planning their system has become caught up in a rigid ideology where even idealism had been forgotten and where the present often had no place. As he says:

> My real stance was opposing authority. And I opposed the Communist authorities as much as I opposed the American authorities. I had a girlfriend in Berkeley who was a member of the Communist Party. And I caused her such trouble that they forbade her to see me anymore. She took me to one meeting and I got up and informed them their analysis of fascism was completely wrong, they had no understanding of fascism. I explained what fascism was. They told me. . . to sit down and shut up, and they told her never to see me again. (In His Own Words 131)

Finally, they told him he “sounded like a fascist” (In His Own Words 131). But Dick, certainly, was no fascist, though he, just as certainly, could, as mentioned, think well of a fascist leader:
In some ways I was quite an admirer of Mussolini.... I think Mussolini was a very, very great man. But the tragedy for Mussolini was he fell under Hitler’s spell. But then so did many others. In a way you can’t blame Mussolini for that. (In His Own Words 153)

Dick saw Mussolini as an idealist gone wrong, forced into questionable—and worse—action by a course of events even beyond his supposed dictatorial control. He expected one thing and got another—through too much confidence in his own virtue. And that, to Dick, is the tragedy always befalling the “good” dictator, one common both to the “real” world and to his fiction.

Anti-elitism always appears in the totalitarian leaders Dick admired, even when one of those leaders, in turn, establishes a new elite, blindered by his new position. Dick surely appreciated the irony of that, but it did not hinder his admiration. He understood intentions, even when the results of their implementation were disastrous—as Dick certainly could have predicted they would be. The well-meaning leaders may be wrong in looking to the future at the expense of the present, but they cannot be completely condemned for it. In Dick’s novels they always fail, but some sympathy is given to them in that failure.

Perhaps the premier example of the well-meaning totalitarian in Dick’s fiction is Molinari, who is drawn, in fact, in part, from Mussolini. But there are others, many others, not the least being Felix Buckman, the police general of Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said. The pre-cog Jones, in The World Jones Made is another. Both Nobusuke Tagomi and Rudolf Wegener in The Man in the High Castle exhibit some of the characteristics of this character type. As do Arnie Kott, in Martian Time-Slip (1964), Leo Bulero and Palmer Eldritch, in The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch, and even the Glimmung, in Galactic Pot-Healer. Of these, only Tagomi and Bulero are drawn with complete sympathy, though a great deal of compassion is shown for Buckman—and even the Glimmung—as well. Not a one of these leaders is condemned out of hand,
However. They are fools consumed by unfortunate and destructive political visions, but still well-meaning, at least to a degree.

The problem for these leaders is that they think what they have drawn in their imaginations is the “real” human situation. In other words, they have become believers in the masks they have created for themselves and in those they have placed on others. They have become something like L. Ron Hubbard, who believed so strongly in his science fiction that he tried to turn it into “reality” through the Scientology movement he founded. So sure their views are right, they try to force the world into compliance. This is something rather too dangerous, certainly, for a mere human. And so, they fail.

Dick’s “big protagonists,” for all their power, are not the supermen we expect from an Edgar Rice Burroughs, a Robert Heinlein or even an Ayn Rand. They struggle in the webs, so to speak, of industrial, military, and governmental structures, and are losing their battles. At least partially responsible for spinning the webs that trap them, they have almost no chance at all for escape. Less, even, than those they have trapped.

Though their ultimate actions of acceptance of their situations provide what moral points Dick makes, none of his little men acts with complete forethought or independence. What each does do stems from care for individuals, from gut reaction, not from reasoning. Yet what each does do turns on and influences great world events—even when their first concerns are the little events of their own lives. The “little protagonists” deal with the people directly around them, wives or girl-friends, children, associates. They never pretend to such knowledge as could make them world movers—even when they become so by their actions.

The little people, of course, have small chance for escape either, but their chance is at least a little better than that of their leaders’. Dick’s artisans can find some salvation through their craft, something denied the leaders. And other little ones find comfort, if not success, in the attention they pay to those whose lives intersect with their own.
Though the greater structure lies beyond even the leader, that leader still personifies it. Neither he or she nor it can be avoided without struggle, and this is the reason for his or her failure. He or she is too interested in control. Another structure—call it fate, though in the later books it becomes more directly some idea of a god—works from behind these, also involving itself in the situation at hand. It proves to be the force behind the destruction of the leaders.

Even if successful in freeing themselves from the big protagonists and the structures they represent, the little people still find they cannot free themselves from their responsibilities, their fates, their gods. They are just as trapped as the big protagonists who, though with fewer (though larger) obstacles, find the snare rather tight.

In Martian Time-Slip, Jack Bohlen, a repairman, takes the responsibilities of job, family and other quite seriously, even if that other is the autistic child of a neighbor who has killed himself. His sense of responsibility extends even to the things he fixes. Though he finds the ‘Public School’ on Mars troubling—the teachers are all complex automatons representing certain character types: the Angry Janitor, Abe Lincoln, Kindly Dad—Bohlen fixes one of the automatons, and does it well.

To do so is particularly repulsive to him, however, because of a schizophrenic episode in his own past in which he saw people as machines.

Still, Bohlen manages to keep in sight, somehow, the fact that people are more important than machines or craftsmanship. He is a competent mechanic, but that brings him little pleasure—not that his interactions with people brings him much more. Yet he deals with them as competently and compassionately as he can, just as he deals with the machines he repairs. He befriends Manfred, the autistic boy, though the friendship seems one-way. He brings water to the Martian Bleekmen (native sentient beings) dying of dehydration—not so much because he has to (it is the law), but because he would think of taking no other action. At the end of the book,
he searches for Manfred’s mother, who, now lost and wandering, is yet another who has never given him regard.

Bohlen’s skill does not over-power his commitment to others or make him overly ambitious. That he is a craftsman—an artisan, though a repairman—in no way raises his expectations of society. And his personal problems do not interrupt his skill or concern about others not directly involved. No specific rewards come to him, but he is a winner—simply because of his attitude.

Unlike Joe Fernwright, Jack Bohlen recognizes that he must respond to the lives around him to have any integrity in his own life. Not doing so would send him back into the schizophrenia of believing all around him is nothing but machines.

Bohlen’s opposite number in Martian Time-Slip, Arnie Kott, heads the Plumbers Union, the most powerful force on Mars. Kott wants most of all to control his own life, to best fate, much as the Glimmung has done. But Kott cannot, and he dies as a result.

Much as Fernwright finds himself under control of the Glimmung, Sweetscent of Molinari, Bohlen must often do what Kott wants. Like the others, he tries to get out from under that control, yet he always respects it. All three characters understand enough about to recognize that they cannot ignore it. One cannot live, they know, as though there were no greater force. Whatever it may be, its needs must be met, and many of the compromises it demands must be accepted—to a point. In this, they all fit Robinson’s diagram.

But the similarity is limited. Sweetscent and Bohlen have legitimate reasons for leaving their big protagonists. Fernwright’s only excuse for his action is his egoism. Thus, he fails, while the other two have some small, though limited, success. The others, at least, have made their own choices and can live with them.

Even more complicated, the situation in The Man in the High Castle presents Frank Frink, who uses deceit to establish himself as an independent jewelry maker and then finds
himself saved from deportation as a Jew to the Nazi-held east coast through a minor refusal (sparked by one of Frink’s creations) by one of the officials of the Japanese occupation of the west coast, a deportation that was itself caused, ironically, by that initial deceit.

Like Fernwright, Frink has spends most of his career dealing with things of the past. Fernwright repairs them; Frink makes copies that are sold as originals. Both, also, eventually strike out for themselves. Fernwright, as we have seen, fails. And so does Frink. Initially, at least. His jewelry cannot sell within a milieu of fascination with the past of America and degradation of its present. Yet his creations do save his life—but only after his desire to make them puts him in jeopardy.

Frink, like most of Dick’s artisans, makes things to make money. But he makes them as well as he can, and is aware of their value (to him, at least) in themselves. Thus, his survival.

Unlike Fernwright, who sees that his work is bad, Frink knows he makes excellent jewelry; he recognizes the value of what he has made—as does Robert Childan, who finally decides to sell the pieces.

Childan, a shopkeeper, agrees to attempt to retail the jewelry on consignment. Though a confirmed imitator of Japanese style and fad, he eventually rises above his normal, pandering self and rejects an idea for mass-producing Frink’s products for export to less developed countries. He cannot see the jewelry as exquisite art, but he does find some pride, finally, in the fact of this attempt at art by his countryman and contemporary.

Nobusuke Tagomi, a Japanese official and the recipient of one of Frink’s pieces doesn’t see the true value of the piece any more than Childan does. But, unlike Childan, he does, ultimately, experience its value. And that leads him to reject Frink’s deportation order—though he knows of no connection between the potential deportee and the “bauble.”
Initially, the only person who understands the pieces does not appreciate their artistic value. He is a young Japanese man, Paul Kasoura:

“It does not have wabi,” Paul said, “nor could it ever. But—” He touched the pin with his nail. “Robert, this object has wu.”

“I believe you are right,” Childan said, trying to recall what wu was; it was not a Japanese word—it was Chinese. Wisdom, he decided. Or comprehension. Anyhow, it was highly good.

“The hands of the artificer,” Paul said, “had wu, and allowed that wu to flow into this piece. Possibly he himself knows only that this piece satisfies. It is complete, Robert. By contemplating it, we gain more wu ourselves. We experience the tranquility associated not with art but with holy things....” (168; ch. 11)

When Frink and his partner create the jewelry, they are also, like Mary Anne Dominic, trying to make money, enough, at least, to live comfortably. But their primary concern lies with what they do. Like Dominic, and like Joe Fernwright, they are very much concerned with their craft. Unlike Fernwright, however, the other three all care about other people as well as the craft they have accepted as their own, and they act on that concern, never sacrificing people for art.

Fernwright’s failure to make a good pot, again, is emblematic of his attempt to reject his place within a community of beings. Unlike the Glimmung, who comes to realize the importance of community, Fernwright does not learn the lesson, and so starts out on his own Glimmung-like quest, having taken the bad advice of the gastropod.

In Vulcan’s Hammer, Barris, though he is one of the dozen or so most powerful men on Earth, expresses one of what would eventually become Dick’s theses on the position of the small person:

A job, Barris decided, isn’t that important. You have to be able to trust the organization you’re a part
of; you have to believe in your superiors. If you think they’re up to something, you have to get up from your chair and do something, even if it’s nothing more than to confront them face-to-face and demand an explanation. (56; ch. 6)

Barris does so, insuring his final place as one of the only Dick protagonists who achieve an unequivocal happy end.

In *In His Own Words*, Dick says:

I’ve always had a great regard for men who worked with their hands. Craftsmen as it were.... I identified with the TV repairmen that I knew. Guys with no degrees, humane, intelligent and warm.... A very powerful trait in me is an anti-elitism.... (146-147)

As we have seen, these people seek no power or fame. Instead, they show care and consideration for those around them. Never interested in “using” people, they attempt only to get along with them. Though, of the characters in his novels, only Jack Isidore in *Confessions of a Crap Artist* and, perhaps, Jack Bohlen in *Martian Time-Slip* manage to reach the ideal Dick sets for these people, many of Dick’s other little protagonists do eventually manage to throw off the yokes keeping them from recognizing the necessity of looking to others. These become his heroes, even though they rarely achieve the success of a Mary Anne Dominic—a success not often possible in the worlds Dick builds.

Yet, again as we have seen, Dick admired certain totalitarian leaders as well, even though the actions of those leaders, as portrayed in his books, often destroy the very type of “little man” Dick found so important. These leaders, often little men gone wrong, rise above their small places by trying to do something great. Unfortunately, they turn out to be too limited for success, unable to see, among other things, what the results of their actions might be and, therefore, are unable to adequately plan for the future. After acting, they become trapped by the results of what they have earlier done, suffering the consequences more clearly than anyone else involved.
And they end up trapping many they claim to have led, or have used, along with them.

One of the marks of Dick’s care for the “common” man is the frequency of situations where he “allows” characters of this type to subvert the plans of the “great” leaders—even though they often do so unwittingly.

Perhaps the clearest early example of the trapped “common” man in Dick occurs in “The Variable Man,” a long and very early short story. A handyman from the early twentieth century is “scooped” into the future—by accident or by fate. He quickly becomes the single unknown variable in a forthcoming war between Earth and Centaurus, messing up computations on the outcome of the war, computations the Earthmen are using to decide when, and how, to start the war.

Thomas Cole, the artisan/repairman, has an affinity for objects, for machines. His hands can “feel” how things in a machine should be for correct operation. And they have the ability to make them so.

His talent discovered, Cole is whisked off to help complete a missile that will destroy the Centarus home world, a missile whose creator has died while working on it. Cole, like so many, becomes a tool used for completion of other people’s tasks.

A true artisan, in Dick’s sense, Cole considers his task, not its consequences. Those who have put him to his task think of the future, of war victory. Cole thinks only of the immediate problem of finishing the guidance control for the missile, though he has no understanding of what it is or what it will be used for.

In a way, Cole resembles those scientists who worked on atomic and hydrogen bomb projects, and then justified their actions by claiming some importance for the task, not the consequences. That, they have lain at the feet of others.

Unlike those scientists, however, Cole has been given no chance to learn of the possible consequences of his actions. Or to react against them, a possibility given many of Dick’s
later artisans and little protagonists. So, Cole must end up with positive results to what he does.

But, given the events of the story, the distinction between Cole and the atomic scientists becomes trivial: Each deals with what immediately concerns him, not with what may follow down the road, and this is what interests Dick.

Dick can forgive all such people, anyway. Though they should have considered what they were doing, they were not the ones with the malicious intent. They are not the planners, the ones who want to use what others can do for destruction, for some elusive “victory.” So he forgives Cole, too: His design does not work as expected, does not provide a bomb that will destroy the Centauran system. Instead, his hands have seen the initial intention of the missile, which was for it to be a faster-than-light drive. And his hands have fulfilled that intention, finally making the war irrelevant by superseding its necessity.

Through his innocence, Cole becomes something other than the tool he was expected to be. He never turns completely to the will of the men who wish to use him; his actions are not meant for the completion of their tasks but for completion of the objects he deals with directly. In this sense, he is unlike many of Dick’s later artisans, who can see the intent of their tasks, even though Cole thwarts the intent of his as effectively as any of the others do.

At the center of “The Variable Man” is a duality best presented through a little man/big man dichotomy where differing purposes and expectations lead to unexpected results when combined. At first, Cole seems to be a victim, a tool only. What he is expected to do and what he does instead surprises his manipulators, to say the least. Imagine someone pounding on the side of an automobile engine with a wrench. Imagine, then, the wrench escaping the hand and making a few adjustments. Imagine that, afterwards, the automobile flies above the road, rather than riding on it. The surprise at that would be akin to that felt at Cole’s achievement.
The little man often becomes something of a victim on the plain of the “world-class” player, but the smaller actions, in the worlds Dick presents, do, as we have seen, have an impact similar to that of the big players. The size of the action, we are shown, matters little, while awareness of just who is involved and of consequence, both immediate and long-term, matter much. Perhaps the big difference between the two is the arrogance shown by those involved in world-shaking events.

The dangers of this arrogance appear both in what happens to the powerful as a result and in what happens to the little man. The best of those little protagonists, Dominic, Sweetscent, and the like have, or develop, humility. The worst, like Fernwright and, perhaps, Hoppy Harrington in *Dr. Bloodmoney*, do not. So, Fernwright fails to make a good pot and Harrington, whose actions have much graver implications for the larger community, dies.

Perhaps the most horrifying and graphic vision of acceptance of responsibility for one’s actions appears in *A Scanner Darkly*, through the fate of Bob Arctor. He does not even know what he is doing as he acts to accept his responsibility to his drug-addict friends and to the greater, anti-drug legal structure. Yet he acts on it, anyway, unknowingly and horrifically triumphing through his own destruction.

Obviously, Dick found the creations of his artisans an important part of their existence, and these creations are somehow tied up in their actions in regard to the larger world. Bohlen, Sweetscent, and Harrington, of course, do not create *per se*, but they do have crafts that add something the future would lack without their efforts. Still, it is easier to understand the role Dick presents for craft through the potters and jewelry-makers.

What Frink has accomplished, as has Dominic, what Hnatt and Fernwright fail to do, is to transfer the care they have for those around them into their creations. Hnatt and Fernwright lack the empathy, perhaps, that would allow them to become good artists. Skill, of course, is a part of any art, but it is not the whole.
Dick has said he loved his characters, all of them. That comes through in his own craft. Obviously, to him craft is a vehicle toward positive action within a community, for it brings individuals into closer contact with themselves as well as with each other. Books, pots, jewelry, and anything else we make or even repair are more than merely devices for pleasure or for comfort. They have an impact on the others who come into contact with them. These are the corollaries to the political actions taken by the big protagonists. Either action, making a pot or deciding the destinies of millions, must be taken with care, with love, success or failure notwithstanding.

Making things, unfortunately, does not always bring people together, in Dick’s work or elsewhere, or make the masks more visible, less threatening. Sometimes the things made turn out to be masks themselves—as fiction itself has shown to have been. But the situation gets more complicated, for sometimes the creations even seem to begin to change places with the things they imitate.
Chapter Seven:
Religion And The Demise Of The
“Gray Truth”

Our Friends From Frolix 8 (1970) and
and VALIS (1981)

God is reborn on Earth. What happens? A goat dies. God, information, and information transfer, sire a girl-child, a returning savior. A disciple seeking more of the blissful information soon kills her. A young woman’s death over-shadows the landing of a returning savior. Time begins to fold back to its beginning, and a prophet who has died returns but can save nothing.

These are but a few of the strange things that happen when Philip K. Dick presents a god in his fiction. When he begins to delve beneath what he saw as that illusory surface, “perception” or “the mask,” to see how things “really” stand—in his own world as in his fiction. The examples above come from, respectively, The Divine Invasion, VALIS, Our Friends From Frolix 8, and Counter-Clock World. These, with The Cosmic Puppets, Deus Irae, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, Eye in the Sky, Galactic Pot-Healer, A Maze of Death, The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch, The Transmigration of Timothy Archer, and Radio Free Albemuth make up Dick’s opus, in the novel, on questions concerning the roles of gods and the god-like.

In all of these works, the gods somehow fail. Saviors appear to return to worlds feeling the full brunt of entropy. They return to worlds falling apart or, at least, worlds retreating from the limits of entropy into another chaos, stasis. In each case, the savior appears only to fail to save—if, in fact, he or she even makes the attempt. The older movement remains intact, static.

Nothing changes. Things will always fall apart. History, when it comes to an end, obliterates itself and its end,
and returns to process—or is found never to have existed. Apocalypse comes and goes, and nobody notices.

Time and process, in Dick’s view of things, do not exist, not as we normally perceive them, at least. They are, perhaps, the greatest of illusions—or the most diabolic of masks. Compared to them, the meager attempts at manipulation by mere humans, be they dictators or wives, amount to little more than nothing.

We cannot be surprised, then, when we discover that Dick’s career can easily be seen as a movement toward more direct grappling with the issues surrounding the idea of a god as manipulator, as the ultimate totalitarian. Dick believed in a concrete god, one constantly involved in human affairs, yet one masking that involvement, allowing only hints about its role to appear. Therefore, apocalypse—the Christian god’s promise to believers—becomes an extremely important concept to Dick. Understood in one way, it makes Dick’s god the worst type of leader: “I punish you now but, if you do what I ask, I will reward you in the future.”

To integrate his own Christian god into his political framework, Dick had to come to terms with the idea of apocalypse, to somehow see it as something less than a totalitarian event. Unable to ignore it, Dick re-interpreted it, making it meaningless in the larger, worldly sense, bringing its significance into the arena of the individual only, and leaving it there. Here again, Dick refuses recognition of the greater world, making only individual relationships—though, this time, with god—significant.

Tandem questions of individuality and the idea of god, of individuals and their gods, come down to consideration of how one should relate to a god of total power, yet one who allows, if not freedom of choice, at least the illusion of it. Intent on holding onto one’s identity, should one fight for freedom from the god, even knowing the battle lost? If not, why does individuality exist? Are we merely victims in a cruel game? Have we been created merely to be deceived and bested?
As his life went on, Dick began to find answers to these common religious questions—for himself and not necessarily for others. To believe that he knew and could tell the rest of us would have struck him as too coercive. As egalitarian relationships were crucial to his political vision, they became the base of his religious rhetoric as well. “These are things I want to talk about,” he might have said, “possibilities I have discovered. I present them to you, and ask you to give me others, in return.”

A novelist, of course, can have no direct dialogue with the reader. So, Dick presented as many possibly alternatives to his own belief as he possibly could, expanding possibility and offering the reader the option considering even ones he has missed. “You should never believe what I say,” his later books tell us, “but please consider the options I present.”

Though he does present gods and their impact on mankind in some of his early books, Dick’s interest in them is obviously speculative. The books are examples of that “what if?” formula of science fiction and not the grappling with a given that appear later. But, to Dick, the end of man involves more than destruction, as it might in the more common sort of science fiction end-of-the-world vision; it contains questions and possibilities of salvation that have become immediate and as real as only a god can make them.

Dick saw two possible and mutually exclusive fates for humanity: a general, totalitarian apocalypse and personal salvation. As, in his scheme of things, the individual experience is of paramount importance, that other possible end, a general apocalypse, must be proven fraudulent or, at least, unimportant. Dick liked to express this distinction in terms of the eidos kosmos and the koinos kosmos, the world of the individual and the world of the group, connecting the two through the fact of a kosmos but never accepting the dominance of the koinos kosmos, something an apocalypse would necessitate.

Before discussing Dick’s mature works expressing his religious vision and its relationship with the mask and individuality, it may be prudent to look at some of the stories and early
novels that point the way toward them, the ones that provide
the underpinnings for his final great debate.

In 1968, Dick’s short story “Not By Its Cover,” in which
he returns to the wub, the creature of his first published sto-
ry, appeared in *Famous Science Fiction*. In it, Dick presents
his vision of most “organized” religious thought, and it is not
a very complimentary one. In it also, however, Dick provides
his first, tentative vision in his fiction of his new own Christian
(or neo-Christian) beliefs.

In the story, a Martian publishing firm has put out a se-
ries of reprints of Earth classics, and has bound a limited edi-
tion in wub-fur. Strange things start happening to the words
in the books. Changes are made, for example, to the vers-
es of Dryden’s translation of Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*, so
that the book now talks of a blissful life after death. After ex-
amination of one passage, one of the characters says, “What
is most annoying... is that this quatrain preaches a message
diametric to that of the entire book” (*The Stories of Philip K.
Dick* 5; 176).

Soon, the publishers discover that the wub-fur itself is
changing the texts, is alive, still containing the essence of the
wubs. Interested, the characters set about discovering what
else the wubs have to say, hoping, perhaps, to discover some-
thing of value—maybe about life after death. And they find
out a great deal.

In the wub-covered version of Paul’s letters to the
Corinthians, they discover that, as one character explains:

“The passage that begins, ‘Behold, I tell you a mys-
tery—’ it is set all in caps. And it repeated the lines,
‘Death, where is thy sting? Grave, where is thy victory?’
ten time straight; ten whole times, all in caps.” (*Stories
5; 179*)

If the wubs do not fear death, have conquered it, what
about other life-forms? Another, experimental text had been
bound in wub-fur:
“As a matter of fact I’ve already tried an experiment. I had a one-sentence text printed up, a single line reading: ‘The wub, unlike every other living creature, is immortal.’

“I then had it bound in wub-fur; then I read it again. It had been changed. Here.” He passes a slim book, handsomely appointed, to Masters. “Read it as it is now.”

Masters read aloud: “The wub, like every other living creature, is immortal.”

Returning the copy to Snead he said, “Well, all it did was drop out the un; that’s not much of a change, two letters.”

But from the standpoint of meaning,” Snead said, “it constitutes a bombshell.” (179-180)

If the wubs are to be believed, every creature lives eternally. Snead is asked what other books he bound in wub-fur:

“The Britannica. It didn’t precisely change anything, but it added whole articles. On the soul, on transmigration, on hell, damnation, sin, or immortality; the whole twenty-four volume set became religiously oriented.” He glanced up. “Should I go on?”

“Sure,” Masters said, listening and meditating simultaneously.

“The Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas. It left the text intact, but it periodically inserted the biblical line, ‘The letter killeth but the spirit giveth life.’ Over and over again.” (181)

Here, once again, Dick has used his wub to make a point, though not a particularly unusual one, about knowledge and discussion—and literature. Though the wubs have literally changed the texts, their act is analogous to that of the reader—though not to the traditional literary critic. The reader approaches a text from a certain stance or belief and reacts to the text, in part, through that belief, often changing what is read (what the author meant to have read, that is) to suit
that particular reader’s framework. The critic, as opposed to the wub, tries, or once tried, to see authorial intention, nothing more.

“What can the work do for me?” Dick has one of the characters demand that his casket be covered with wub fur. This man has not heard completely the messages he has read, but he has begun to listen to readers, not writers. Unfortunately, he has now given special credence to those other readers, the wubs, and not to his own readings even of them. He listens too much to other readers, ones he now thinks of as competent critics. He believes in their protection, and not in what they have told him. He forgets that the dropped “un,” if the wubs are to be believed, indicates eternal life for him, no matter what.

As in the case of the wub in “Beyond Lies the Wub,” Dick himself can be identified with this wub—the Dick, that is, of later years, who used his own books, who even changed his own text to try to inform about the “realities” of his beliefs. Though they were in constant flux, books are the focus of an intense exploration by all involved in them, writers, readers, and critics. Dick believed this as surely as do his wubs. If all writers merely re-write one book, Dick was re-writing his to bring it into line with newer and more deeply-felt beliefs. As his career went on, he became, more and more clearly, the wub.

By the time of “Not By Its Cover,” Dick had almost completely given up the short story for the more lucrative novel market. One later exception is “Rautavaara’s Case,” in which an alien group dispatches a robot to revive an earth person who has died in a space accident. They use her body to restore her brain, the flesh literally feeding the mind. In a vision, as brain only (the rest of her has perished), she sees time return to a prior state, restoring her and her companions to their pre-accident state.

Christ appears to her, to them. The aliens see this as her experience of the afterworld; the Earthpersons, belatedly brought in to help out, see it as an hallucination. As an
experiment, the aliens replace the human vision of the savior with one of their own. Mercifully, the Earthpersons manage to pull the plug on Rautavaara before things get too out of hand.

The question of the “truth” of the vision is never answered. Perhaps the aliens’ savior would have proved another manifestation of Christ. Certainly, Dick’s own beliefs were moving in that direction, that God appears differently to each. This story, written after Dick’s own visionary experience, makes it clear that his literary thoughts were already following his new personal experiences. His Christian vision was getting stronger, the idea of a savior, of some sort, becoming less threatening.

Often, to the early Dick, the savior had been a rather frightening figure, even when its intentions are good. Sometimes in the earlier stories and novels it, and the god or god-like figure behind it, are evil, as in “Faith of Our Fathers,” where an Orwellian “big brother” speaks once more through TV screens. But Chien, the main character sees, through drugs, what Big Brother is—or thinks he does. Sees, that is, one of what Big Brother is. He begins to suspect he has been one of a drugged population. When, supposedly, not drugged (by the drug he had taken, one that counter-acts the original), he “really” sees Big Brother, he “knows” him as a malevolent God—one that calls him slime. It tells him “there are things worse than I” (Stories 5; 219). The alien finally leaves marks on him that continue to bleed. His stigmata.

“Faith of Our Fathers” presents the dark side of Dick’s vision of the savior, of the leader, even the god. Here, he is the most evil and powerful maker of masks. In this sense, the story has more in common with Dick’s presentation of the evil or wayward leader than it does with his growing preoccupation with salvation. Still, it does help make it clear that Dick’s movement toward belief and, finally, preoccupation with God was conducted often with tentative steps, with reservation. He knew the dangers of what he was getting into, the dangers of fraud, of the mask.
Where, in “Faith of Our Fathers,” Dick presents what he saw as the problems of conflation of religion with the political structure, “The Little Black Box,” a slightly earlier but much more optimistic story, shows the dangers a new religion can pose to a political structure. Where the god of “Faith of Our Fathers” has found it necessary to co-opt the political structure from the top, that (if it is, in fact, a god) of “The Little Black Box” works from the bottom, as an antagonist to those in power. The former forces people to believe, through the drugs (and more) that contain “perception.” The latter provides a new perception, one that must be experienced to be believed—though belief, here, exists only in the experience itself.

The particular new religion is based on empathy, on the experience of common pain. Through a device called an empathy box, people can experience union with the struggles of Wilbur Mercer, who is attempting to climb a hill, while being stoned. Because they do not know the source of the boxes, or the purposes of this new religion, the authorities try to confiscate and destroy the empathy boxes. They succeed, but instructions for building them from household objects begin appearing.

Though Dick does not deal with the negative possibilities that might be inherent in this new religion, he was certainly aware of them. As he says: “Here, a religion is regarded as a menace to all political systems; therefore it, too, is a kind of political system, perhaps even an ultimate one” (Stories 5; 389). But, because the system is based on empathy and operates in opposition to the prevailing system, it is not possible that it be too bad (unless, of course, the sense of empathy has a fraudulent base, its anti-establishment character hiding its own purpose). Dick continues his discussion of “The Little Black Box”:

The concept of caritas (or agape) shows up in my writing as the key to the authentic human. The android, which is the inauthentic human, the mere reflex machine, is unable to experience empathy. In
this story it is never clear whether Mercer is an invader from some other world. But he must be; in a sense all religious leaders are... but not from another planet as such. (Stories 5; 389)

The people who have accepted the box, who use it, prove their humanity. Those who refuse to try it, who refuse to experiment, have become as androids.

The question of the source of Mercer becomes moot: all religious leaders, to Dick, are alien, are different from the normal human. They must be. Their source is irrelevant as long as their message helps make human interactions positive—in the sense that what one does in turn improves the lives of others. No matter how hideous its appearance, the aliens’ savior in “Rautavaara’s Case” might be the same as Jesus—would be, were the message, and the result, the same.

Dick incorporated many of the ideas of “The Little Black Box” into Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?. Mercer, the savior in both works, is an ambiguous figure. By taking hold of the handles of the box, believers may be coming into contact with god. But Mercer may be an android, an out-and-out fraud, or even a well-meaning existentialist who wants others to see the difficulties of trial—here, the difficulty of climbing a hill while being stoned. Not that it matters, not to Dick, at least.

At one point, while using the box, Rick Deckard comes face to face with Mercer:

“Mercer,” Rick said.
“I am your friend,” the old man said. “But you must go on as if I did not exist. Can you understand that?” He spread his empty hands.
“No,” Rick said. “I can’t understand that. I need help.”
“How can I save you,” the old man said, “if I can’t save myself?” He smiled. “Don’t you see? There is no salvation.”
“Then what’s this for?” Rick demanded. “What are you for?”

“To show you,” Wilbur Mercer said, “that you aren’t alone. I am here with you and always will be. Go and do your task, even though you know it’s wrong.”


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.” (156; ch. 15)

Mercer, the symbol of empathy, proves that empathy can exist no matter what one does—even if the “one” is a product and not a human being. Though clearly important to Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, this idea grows more so, as Dick’s ideas on religion expand in the novels of the seventies and eighties.

Even in his early days, Dick could see the ironic humor that could be generated by a search for religious truth, a humor that finally manifests itself most explicitly in the attitude of Angel Archer, the narrator of The Transmigration of Timothy Archer. This humor is based on realization that any knowledge, no matter how clearly come by, is based on faulty perceptual systems, and so may prove false, no matter how clear the proof seems. It also comes from realization of the obvious point that monumental consequences can arise from trivial actions—even in the religious arena.

In “The Turning Wheel” Dick tries to demonstrate this last point by presenting a society, post atomic war, with technocrats at bottom (large, ugly, white skinned things) and “bards” at top. The world is oriented to the east, not the west of old. Racial differences are involved in the castes, with Caucasians at the bottom, among the technocrats. The wheel is the cosmic plan, the mandala, that man should not deal against,
should not interrupt with technology. It is the movement of souls from one life to the next. Up, of course, if the life has been good. Down, otherwise.

The bards do use remnants of the technology developed before the war, but they will not repair anything, calling in the technos to do so only when they must. So, their machines are falling apart. One that still works shows future lives, shows the bard Sung-wu that, in his next incarnation, he will be a fly, an eater of dead flesh, on some horrid world. It shows he will die soon of a plague.

Sung-wu thinks of his fate as the result of an illicit liaison of his past. He tries to atone, but the machine vision never changes, leaving no time, he decides, for proper atonement before his death. He soon finds himself sent to investigate Cauc (techno) unrest in Detroit (a backwater, a mysterious area). He finds it, but is deterred from reporting his findings by a present of techno-made penicillin, a drug that can forestall the death and the after-life he has foreseen for himself.

The irony of the story is that Sung-wu may have actually condemned himself by acceptance of the drug, not by his earlier love affair—he has believed in a mask that purports to show god and afterlife, but has betrayed it. Like the others of his caste, he is a fool, for he worries too much about future lives, and not enough about the present one. Would he live his belief by ignoring its promises, by concentrating on doing the right thing, by his belief system, in the present life, the future would take care of itself.

The technos are beginning to pull themselves up from the degrading state the war left them in, are developing fertilizers, are finding here-and-now ways of relieving their misery. The bards, however, while utilizing techno ability, especially that left over from before the war, try to ignore anything that might make current life better.

The bards are those who make a system of belief so powerful that even those who operate their system believe it—as does Sung-wu. Like many contemporary fundamentalists—Christian, Moslem, Hindu or, though it has not happened so
dramatically yet, Buddhist—they believe in a mask, but not to the extent of denying contradictions that might, used appropriately, make the masks more believable to others.

Both viewing technology as “good” and denying it have their dangers. The concentration on technology made the war before the action within the world before the time of the story incredibly destructive. Concentration on the next world makes the one of the story equally so, though on an individual, not universal, basis.

Many of the early stories show an almost whimsical attitude toward problems later to become quite serious for Dick, demonstrating that his later works were not results of some sudden change in belief. “The Builder,” for example, shows a man constructing a large wooden boat with a small cabin atop. He know not why he works on it, only that he must. Finally, of course, the rain starts falling.

In another, “Upon the Dull Earth,” a girl tries too hard to commune with the spirit world, and becomes lost to it. She wants to return, and her lover tries to help. Finally those of the spirit world try to send her back, with the result that every person, one at a time, turns into her, crying for help. Egotistical desire becomes the end not merely of two lives, but of every human life.

In these and many other stories, Dick plays with theological and metaphysical questions that later become quite serious to him. In “A Present for Pat,” he even has a man bring a god back to Earth from Ganymede, a present for his wife. The god disrupts things on Earth.

He has come there for a purpose, has not been brought, as the man who carried him believes. It turns out that the god is looking for another being from his plane of existence. When he finds that being, the two leave, never caring about the disruption they have caused. These are gods at their worst, with an attitude much like that of one of the demiurges in The Cosmic Puppets. Humans do not matter; they are to gods as ants are to humans. Expendable, replaceable: there are many more where that one came from.
Another story of this whimsical, but sometimes rather macabre, sort, is “Prominent Author.” It contains a rather peculiar explanation for the “great silence” some Christians see as having come between man and God since biblical times. This story is referred to in the later *The Crack in Space* as “real” history, and the “Jiffi-scuttler,” something of a teleportation device also central to the novel, first appears here.

There, however, the similarities end. The novel is concerned with solely secular problems; the story, on the other hand, “explains” how the Old Testament was written—and removes God from any sort of continuing interactive role with mankind.

Henry Ellis is utilizing a new device, the Jiffi-scuttler, to get to and from work. His company has developed it, passing people to and fro through another continuum, and he is one of the first to test it out. It allows him to traverse great distances via a few quick steps through a “tunnel.”

One day, Ellis finds a tear in the tunnel, and looks through. Beyond, he sees tiny people, and watches them. What he does not realize, at first, is that they can see him—as a great face in the sky. He also does not realize that their time is faster than his, in correspondence with their tiny size.

He watches them on several occasions, and thinks they must be some non-Terran beings. They eventually hand him a piece of paper “so incredibly small he could scarcely see it. A square of white at the end of a microscopic pole” (*Stories* 2; 384). There is something that might be writing on it, but much too small for him to make out.

At work, he magnifies it, then gives it to a linguistics machine for translation:

> Questions. They were asking him questions. God, it was getting complicated. He read the questions intently, his lips moving. What was he getting himself into. They were expecting answers. He had taken the paper, gone off with it. Probably they would be waiting for him, on his way home. (*Stories*; 385)
Another machine gives answers. They are translated, put onto a small piece of paper, and Ellis gives this to the waiting people—a different bunch, of course, than those who had given him the questions.

This process goes on for some time, until Ellis’ superiors get wind of it, and investigate. Miller, his boss, then calls Ellis into his office:

“Your missive,” Miller stated, “which you foisted on our Linguistics Machine, was not a non-Terran script. It was not from Centaurus VI. It was not from any non-Terran system. It was ancient Hebrew. And there’s only one place you could have got it, Ellis. So don’t try to kid me.”

“Hebrew!” Ellis exclaimed, startled. He turned white as a sheet. “Good Lord. The other continuum—the fourth dimension. Time, of course.” He trembled. “And the expanding universe. That would explain their size. And it explains why a new group, a new generation—” ....

“I don’t think I did any harm, did I?” Ellis was suddenly terribly nervous. “They seemed pleased, even grateful. Gosh, I’m sure I didn’t cause any trouble.”

Miller shrieked in insane rage. For a time he danced around the room. Finally he threw something down on his desk, directly in front of Ellis. “No trouble. No, none. Look at this. I got it from the Ancient Artifacts Archives.”

“What is it?”

“Look at it! I compared one of your question sheets to this. The same. Exactly the same. All your sheets, questions and answers, every one of them’s in here.” (Stories; 391)

Is there any truth in what the machine, through Ellis, told the ancient Jews? Was it merely repeating, as a closed loop, the Judeo-Christian tradition that, according to the story, Ellis had begun? Or was the machine providing some real
answers? Ellis, of course, is no god. But could he, through a machine, be the instrument of one?

Though these questions were probably not important to Dick at the time he wrote “Prominent Author,” they later, these become exactly the questions Dick considers. He discards simplistic causal relationships as masks themselves, and tries to see behind them, to discover what truth they may conceal. After all, causation, if it exists, can also be a tool.

In many of Dick’s novels, a cataclysmic war has passed. Though not often—until the later novels—explicitly apocalyptic, parallels with the apocalypse are drawn, though the event is almost always portrayed as a failure. As apocalypse represented, for Dick, the major problem in resolving man/god relationships, the early presentations can be seen as his rejection of the Christian vision. Not yet a Christian, in fact rather than in name, he could reject apocalypse and show how it, if “true,” demeans human individuality. Later, however, he had to do something more.

Toward the end of *Our Friends From Frolix 8* (1970), after the “dead”—millions of zombie-like humans freed from internment camps—have risen, while the “savior” is greeting the world, Nick Appleton, who has been computer-selected as the archetypal “Old Man”—meaning “common man”—tries to recite a poem to his young lover. She doesn’t want to hear it: it’s “before Bob Dylan” (245; ch. 24). Only three lines of the never-named poem are quoted. Yet that poem, William Butler Yeats’s “The Song of the Happy Shepherd,” provides a crucial clue to Dick’s new vision of apocalypse, one developed as a Christian, not merely as a participant in a predominantly Christian culture.

Dick has changed the focus of the poem, moving it from the nostalgia of Yeats’ shepherd into the realm of apocalyptic vision. The two kinds of truth expressed in the poem, however, remain. As Frank Hughes Murphy says, one is:

> spurious and one valid... ; one is the “Gray Truth” which is now the world’s toy and which seems to be what the “starry men” seek in their optic glass. Theirs
is an undesirable pursuit because it is a fruitless one: “...there is no truth/Saving in thine own heart.” The men of science have gone astray because “dead is all their human truth.” This “human truth” is the second and really the only kind, for Gray truth is illusory; and the human truth can be found only within the self. (12)

This human truth/gray truth distinction is particularly important to Dick, even to his attitude toward science fiction. To Dick, the distinction is between history, and truth of the world, and the history, or truth of the individual. The first, he tries to show, is false, the second, true. Thus, even John’s vision in Apocalypse can be true only insofar as it relates to the individual.

Counter-Clock World (1967), which pre-dates Our Friends From Frolix 8 only slightly, begins with a quote from St. Augustine: “Place there is none; we go backward and forward, and there is no place” (5). And so it is, literally, in the novel. In the late 1980’s time reaches its limit and retreats back to its source, something like a yo-yo. People, though their thoughts still move “forward,” find themselves desiring, for example, to ingest excrement, an act eventually forcing themselves to relieve themselves, through their mouths, of disgusting “food.”

New businesses have arisen—one of which is dedicated to the rescuing of the dead, who are, by degrees, finding themselves alive in their graves.

One of these businesses brings back a man who had led a large religious movement, who may have predicted the change in time, who possibly died prepared to come back. A struggle over possession of him, as he tries to regain his bearings, ensues, and he is killed, perhaps not saved because his one possible rescuer decides to retrieve his own wife instead—acting as Dick would have all act, for the good of those immediately surrounding one and not for some ideal or god. The novel ends as it begins, with people digging up the newly un-dead.

Even discounting the calamitous wars whose aftermaths are the focus of so much of his work, Counter-Clock World is
not Dick’s earliest presentation of the non-apocalypse, though it is more explicit than any that went before. There are hints of it in some of the short stories, in *Solar Lottery* (where a savior is expected, by a small group of fanatics, to come back to life), and, more importantly, in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (where the returning Palmer Eldritch is more Satan than savior).

In *Counter-Clock World* the emphasis on personal mystical experience as an opposition to apocalypse is negligible—Dick had not yet had his own mystical vision when he wrote it—though the individual is clearly portrayed as ultimately more important than the apocalypse. There is not yet, however, the fanatic emphasis on personal salvation presented in the later works. Instead, nostalgia for the external savior prevails.

Dick would like to believe, to accept the possible assistance from outside. But he cannot. The last chapter of the novel is preceded by another passage from St. Augustine: “Thou calledst, and shoutedst and burstest my deafness. Thou did touch me, and I burned for Thy peace” (148; ch. 21). But nothing of the sort happens. There is fire, yes, but it destroys any possibility of a general salvation. Yet, even here, a personal apocalyptic decisions appears: in the choice of saving the wife and not the savior.

*Our Friends From Frolix 8* provides a clearer picture of what was becoming Dick’s central thesis: God cannot save; only the individual, acting on the assumption that he or she is less worthy than those around that individual, can achieve salvation. In the novel three classes of humans appear, the Old Men, the New Men, and the Unusuals. The Old Men are the unevolved; the New Men have an organ on their brains allowing them types of thought not possible to Old Men or Unusuals; the Unusuals are those with effective ESP. Though they compete, the New Men and the Unusuals run earth. The Old Men are doomed to subservience.

They have but one hope: Thors Provoni. Years before, Provoni had stolen an advanced space-ship and set out for
help. His followers have organized an Old Man underground, to prepare for the revolution his return will spark.

Parallels with the Christian apocalyptic vision, as we have seen, are explicit within Our Friends From Frolix 8. When Eric Cordon, the Old Man leader on Earth, is to be captured and killed, the plan for doing so is named “Operation Barabbas” (81; ch. 8). Later, a youth, hearing that Provoni is actually returning, quotes: “The veil of the tent is rent, and the heavens shall roll up like a scroll” (128; ch. 15). The first half of his quote could come either from Matthew 27.51 or Luke 23.45, with a tense change from past to present. In both cases, it is associated with the death of Christ on the cross. The second half is from Isaiah 34.4, from a vision of the return of an indignant God.

Significantly, this is not the first instance of the use of the line from Isiah in a Dick novel. It appears in the early The Man Who Japed in connection with the “japing” (or satiric alteration) of a statue of the founder of the current (to the novel) world moral system. Here, the use of the phrase is clearly ironic, for it heralds the destruction of that Calvinistic system—through satire, though, not through the return of a god.

Though Dick was aware of the importance of apocalyptic visions early on, his changing attitude toward them brings them a new significance in the later novels. In The Man Who Japed he still held the idea that man himself can change things for the better, can bring about an earthly millennium. Later, he has changed his belief in the competence of man. He still believes man can change things, but now the “things” are only himself.

Many of Dick’s characters, however, still believe in the idea of external salvation, of a god or other savior that can help. The creator or savior can set things right, even if man cannot. Thors Provoni, putative savior of Our Friends From Frolix 8, thinks, as he is returning, about his own god-like alien saviors: “The fathers.... Yes, that’s what they are, our friends from Frolix 8. As if I managed to contact the Urvater,
the primordial Father who built the eidos kosmos” (151; ch. 17). He is naive, Dick shows, as naive as those who believe man, himself, can save mankind. But the image of external salvation goes on.

After the incarcerated millions have been released, an action sparked by news of Provoni’s impending return, the man who ordered that release, who had also ordered Cordon’s death, thinks, “Nobody’s risen from the dead in 2100 years; they’re not to start now” (188; ch. 19). He is right, but in a way he does not understand.

It turns out that Thors Provoni is no Old Man, but a combination New Man and Unusual. All have been fooled. Certainly, he is no savior. When he returns, his “friend” destroys both New Men and Unusuals by turning them into idiots, by destroying their talents. Humanity is reduced to what it was, to Old Man status—all, that is, but Thors Provoni.

The Old Men are liberated, at least. If Thors Provoni, now superior to all other men, allows it.

The book ends with a secretary giving a statue, a faddish representation of God, to one of the damaged. He thanks her. She, confused, asks:

“For what?”
“For giving me God.”
“Okay,” she said. And stoically resumed her typing. While Horace Denfeld played endlessly with the plastic statuette. With the vastness of God. (261; ch. 26)

And this after the so-called apocalypse.

Denfeld, of course, is one of the damned, the destroyed. This is also after that computer-chosen archetypal Old Man Nick Appleton has reacted to the new situation. One of the ex-New Men has asked him if Thors Provoni is a nice man:

Nick said, “He is a man who did what had to be done. No, he isn’t a nice man—he’s a mean man. But he wanted to help.”
“Is that good, to help?”
“Most people think so,” Nick said. (274; ch. 27)
Radio Free Albemuth (1985), the first book of the VALIS trilogy (which some like to see as a quartet, including The Transmigration of Timothy Archer within it), though last published, is the most accessible of the three. In many ways, it covers the same ground as does VALIS (1981), but without inclusion of the passages from Dick’s exegesis of his 1974 “religious experience” found in the other work and without the frantic discussions of theological possibilities found in VALIS.

Like VALIS, it contains, as a character, one Phil Dick. Unlike in VALIS, however, the character around which the action revolves is not portrayed as actually a part of this Phil Dick. Nicholas Brady is no immediate “translation” of Phil Dick, as Horselover Fat is, both in name (“Horselover” is the ancient Greek meaning of “Philip”; “Dick” means “fat” in Russian) and in being. Even so, many of Brady’s experiences are taken directly from Dick’s own past. Included among them are time working in a record store and one of Dick’s own mystical experiences.

In addition, Radio Free Albemuth is set in a world of political realities quite different from our own, from those, also, of VALIS. Radio Free Albemuth’s “reality” is an “alternate reality” of the sort found in The Man in the High Castle.

Ferris F. Fremont, who shares some characteristics and background with Richard Nixon, is president of the United States. He has demolished all political opposition through infiltration and spying, making the American system into the one-party kind. Fervent youth groups, modeled on those of Nazi Germany, begin keeping tabs on people—and those not conforming to the new norm are placed in work camps.

Though overtly anti-Soviet, Fremont, we discover, has long been a Communist agent:

One asks, Why should such disparate groups as the Soviet Union and the U.S. intelligence community back the same man? I am no political theoretician, but Nicholas one time said, “They both like figureheads who are corrupt. So they can govern from behind. The
Soviets and the fuzz, they’re all for shadow governments. They always will be, because basically each of them is the man with the gun. The pistol to the head.”

No one had put a pistol to Ferris Fremont’s head. He was the pistol itself, pointed at our head. Pointed at the people who had elected him. Behind him stood all the cops in the world, the left-wing cops in Russia, the right-wing cops in the United States. Cops are cops. There are only divisions of rank, into greater and lesser. The top cop is probably never seen. (18-19; ch. 4)

The political background against which the novel’s action takes place, then, is as clearly totalitarian as in any other Dick work. Just as clearly, however, this is the story of one man’s wrestling with a religious vision that leads him down paths he would never, otherwise, have taken.

The connection between the religious struggle of the foreground and the political struggle that eventually merges with it is hinted at early in the book:

I do not... propose to write about how Ferris Fremont got to power. I propose to write about his downfall. The former story is known, but I doubt if anyone understands the way he was defeated. I intend to write about Nicholas Brady, and about Nicholas Brady’s friends. (19; ch. 4)

Significantly, Dick merely juxtaposes two statements of intention in this passage. He does not say that anything Brady does leads to Fremont’s downfall. Were he to do otherwise, were he to make a direct connection, he would be placing a political purpose on Brady’s actions, making appear that Brady acts from political, and not personal, motives. As Dick had long rejected political motivation as a viable spark for human action, he can only make political results contiguous with the personal.

Even so, it turns out that the source of Brady’s religious visions has a political purpose of its own: the restoration of individual prerogative. Thus, it must fight Fremont. As a force
outside individual human interactions and needs, it is not constrained by them. Also, it acts within the human world not to establish its own control but to be of service to others in need. It acts, perhaps, as a greater version of Eric Sweetscent’s willingness of care for his wife in *Now Wait for Last Year*.

Through its human agents, those who, like Brady, have experienced “visions” provided by the external actor, this force manages to use the media of the United States in a way that might lead to the beginnings of doubt about Fremont. Instead of a human being offering salvation to mankind, as Allen Purcell does in *The Man Who Japed*, Dick now allows that role to external gods—or god-like forces. For humans to do so themselves is too presumptive, even when they act as subtly as Purcell does.

Those who are, in fact, equal, Dick believed, should never attempt to rise above that equality. Such attempts, given the weaknesses of equality, must lead to coercion if they are to succeed. But the outside actor, the god, has no such restraints. Still, the god, too, must remember to respect the individuality of the humans—or the integrity and individuality of each human might be compromised and their ability to accept the god on a purposive and positive basis lost.

Thus Dick’s belief that his own god desired no general apocalypse or salvation. The individual must make his or her own decision based within their own personality and not on external forces. The external savior is impotent if the individual rejects him or her. The apocalypse passes without changing anything—unless it occurs within the individual.

By *VALIS* Dick’s vision of the savior had devolved slightly. That is, the savior no longer comes to man, offering himself or herself to man. Man, if desiring a savior, must seek that savior. But that savior is elusive, purposely so, for easy salvation would be none at all. At the end of *VALIS*, he or she is the object of a search that may well cover a thousand islands. Yet the searcher, faced with knowledge of probable futility, keeps searching. Even though he knows that his quest might well
become meaningless as soon (if ever) as it becomes successful.

The seeker is Horselover Fat. He knows the futility of what he is doing for he has found god once, has been healed once. But the healing does not do him any good in the long run, for the savior is killed. There is no reason to expect it will, in the future, for Fat has not learned that the kingdom of heaven lies within each individual. The savior, like the apocalypse, is, to Dick, a part of each of us, though often unrealized.

It is hard to define \textit{VALIS}, to encapsulate it. Perhaps it is not even science fiction. Most of its action takes place in a “real” past, a past that is, at least, as “real” as that of any “mainstream” fiction. But \textit{VALIS} is certainly framed as science fiction: the quote preceding the novel is dated 1992, well over a decade beyond the novel’s composition. Still, nothing in it is far beyond the realm of our everyday existence—unless a god can be considered beyond that realm, unless a god is only an aspect of science fiction.

God, as presented, may be a satellite controlled by first-century Christians (if time, the time of the intervening 1900 years, is an illusion, as the narrator, Phil Dick, claims it could be). The thing is, this god may as well not be that—the issue is never settled. God, in fact, may not even be important. Not to salvation, at least. And the idea of what is \textit{VALIS}—itself an acronym for “Vast Active Living Intelligence System”—also remains unsettled.

\textit{VALIS}, its religio-philosophical discussions aside, is the tale of a disaffected person. He, Horselover Fat, has lost his reason for being. His story is told by character Philip Dick, who admits he is also Horselover Fat, but who differentiates the two, bringing them together as one being only once—immediately after their meeting with the doomed savior.

Fat, after a couple of suicide attempts, replaces his lost reason-for-being with a communication with god, a communication his friends take as imagined. When character-Dick, who has not believed Fat, is reunited with Fat, it is only for that one brief moment when they both do believe in what Fat
has experienced. When their savior is killed, character-Dick lapses back into skepticism, and the two are again split.

The girl who would be their savior seems to be their last chance, in her life, and in her death. She is both Christ and the Anti-Christ, “666” (143; ch. 9). She is the return foretold in Revelation. Character-Dick and Fat had sought her, had found her through a coincidence that neither believes has a chance of having been chance. That is, they think they must have been meant to find her. Yet she tells them to go away. Yet she is killed.

Fat, consoled by the idea that a savior never dies but, like a phonograph record, is playable many times, takes off on his search soon after, to find god in his or her next incarnation, the next playing. His belief never falters, as character-Dick’s does. And so Fat leaves his other self behind. At the end of the book, he is off to Micronesia, for his search still leads him. Leaving neither character with the possibility of discovering the savior within them.

Because he so passionately desires a savior beyond his own being, Fat loses all possibility for personal salvation. He has no confidence in belief; he has fallen victim to the need for external reinforcement. He cannot trust himself. And lacking that, no salvation can come to him.

Character-Dick is caught in a similar dilemma. Unity of being is as impossible to him as it is to Fat. Though he knows that salvation is only possible in a recalling to the personal, a denying of the external, he cannot bring Fat back to him. God, he thinks he knows, is manifested only by internal events, but he cannot quite accept that fact, the only thing that would bring Fat back to him.

The Divine Invasion (1981) contains another quote from Yeats’s “Song of the Happy Shepherd.” God, one of the characters in this novel, knows the poem, though he is damaged and not cognizant of his full being—a state that allows him to interact with humans on a less than ideal level, where assistance itself is the reward. The damaged god can be helped by others—and accepts their assistance.
Also in this novel is a “Beside-Helper” (118; ch. 10) who offers assistance to the dead before they are to pass over the bridge of judgement. The Beside-Helper offers to exchange his own bill or particulars, the items upon which the individual will be judged, for that of each passing dead. The Beside-Helper is the last mercy offered a human, for the bill of particulars offered is blank. Most people, however, reject the exchange:

on the basis that they are sure they are innocent. To receive the help the person must go with the pessimistic assumption that he is guilty, even though his own assessment of himself is one of innocence. The truly innocent need no Beside-Helper, just as they physically healthy need no physician. In a situation of this kind the optimistic assumption is perilous. (120; ch. 10)

The essence of salvation, the personal apocalypse, to Dick, is willingness to accept just such outside assistance. It is recognition that something better, something beyond human beings, does exist, something offering salvation only for the pleasure acceptance entails and not for any other return.

At the end of the novel this Beside-Helper manifests itself to Herb Asher as a popular singer named Linda Fox. Faith in her causes the death of Asher’s personal demon, that which might lead him astray, that which, at the time, has the rather ironic form of a lamb.

Asher does not change as a result of his redemption. He has not even repented his sins. His acceptance of Linda Fox is enough. He is saved.

Before his salvation Asher has been the husband of the mother of God, has been the beloved of God, and a confidant of the prophet Elijah. None of that, however, and nothing else external, can bring about his own salvation. Salvation comes only from within, from acceptance.

This, too, is the lesson God himself, reborn yet damaged, freshly returned to Earth, learns. Even when he defeats Belial, he defeats him only for his own being, not for the beings he has created. To defeat Belial totally, God would have
to destroy all life—or allow life to defeat Belial severally. In terms of mankind God is impotent—unless accepted by the individual as the Beside-Helper. Only such acceptance destroys each Belial.

Dick saw the idea of common apocalypse not only as a contradiction with his political vision but as an affront to human dignity, struggle, and possibility. In apocalypse, salvation and damnation are general, not personal, and the compact of the individual with God is denigrated to non-existence.

If we, each of us, on the other hand, can reach God via a personal understanding, then general apocalypse is useless and redundant. If it happens, Dick believed, the peace we have made with God is shown to be fraudulent and meaningless.

To Dick, this cannot be. The general apocalypse is a horrible parody of the personal decision each individual must make vis-a-vis God. The universal standards upon which an apocalypse must stand turn religion into tyranny.

By rejecting apocalypse, Dick rejects that tyranny. After that rejection, he is free to accept God, and does so, ridding himself of the terrible loneliness of the isolated individual. Though he was never completely confident in his religious beliefs—the constant questioning in the last four novels shows that—Dick had, when he wrote them, come as close as he ever would to an end to his quest, to answers to the questions that plagued him, that had shown up in his writing, since youth.
Chapter Eight:  
What's Going Down:  
The Lessons of Philip K. Dick’s Short Fiction for the Post-9/11 World

One American cliché since the 9/11 destruction of the World Trade Center is that ‘everything has changed.’ The Earth is more dangerous; we can never sleep in the safety we had previously imagined. However, if we take a look back at the short stories of Philip K. Dick from the 1950s and 1960s, we may learn that the world has not, in fact, changed at all—not in any basic way, at least. If anything, the world we live in now is even more like the worlds Dick imagined—and presented as reflections and comments on his time—than were the 1950s. Perhaps the new cliché would be better replaced by an old one: ‘the more things change, the more they remain the same.’ The people of our world, the common men and women, are certainly as abused and confused as they ever were.

To many political philosophies behind contemporary governments, this is of little matter—even when the rules they govern under espouse the virtues of democracy. One of these is the neoconservative viewpoint (heavily influenced by the writings and lectures of Leo Strauss) now so influential in the United States. One of its core tenets is that Niccolo Machiavelli’s *The Prince* still provides the fount of both political wisdom and political philosophy for the modern world. Like Machiavelli, the neocons concentrate on the needs and duties of the rulers, seeing the political world almost exclusively from that perspective and not, as Dick does, from the points of view of the masses. Important neocons currently or recently in American government include Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense; Richard Perle, Consultant to the Secretary of Defense; Kenneth Adelman, former US Ambassador to the United Nations; and Douglas Feith, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. Clearly, their influence is substantial.
The neocons always look up. Peter Berkowitz quotes Strauss himself as saying to a class on the occasion of Winston Churchill’s death, “We have no higher duty, and no more pressing duty, than to remind ourselves and our students, of political greatness, human greatness, of the peaks of human excellence” (14). Dick, on the other hand, constantly looked around. For most of his career he was no more than a journeyman writer of science fiction struggling (sometimes not very successfully) just to support himself and various wives and children; given his own position, it is not surprising that he saw the world from the point of view of the everyman. To him, the elites were both alien and dangerous. To him, the focus of vision and of political debate should never be on the rulers, but on the little person, the shopkeeper, the mechanic. This, he would say, is our real ‘higher duty.’ For, as he has one of his characters say in “The Hood Maker” (1955), “Nobody should lead mankind. It should lead itself” (Second Variety, 245). True greatness and excellence, in his view, lies in the actions of the unheralded, not of the famous. And this remains as true today as it did in the 1950s, Dick’s peak years of short-story writing.

Nobody should set out to do things for the masses; the masses, after all, are more than capable of doing for themselves. In “Autofac” (1955), machines have been established to take care of all the needs of humans. The people want to take care of their wants on their own; yet, when they try to stop the autofacs from supplying everything for them, they are stymied. “We’re licked,” Perine gasped in wretched agreement, “like always. We humans lose every time” (The Days of Perky Pat, 3). Humanity loses not only to the machines it has created to take care of it, but to any people it has set up to rule—or who set themselves up to rule it.

In “Null-O” (1958), a group of brilliant but deviant paranoids is assuming control of Earth:

“Incredible. I can scarcely believe it, myself. You’re utterly logical. You’ve completely cast off all thalamic emotion. Your mind is totally free of moral and cultural
bias. You’re a perfect paranoid, without any empathic ability whatever. You’re utterly incapable of feeling sorrow or pity or compassion, or any of the normal human emotions.”

Lemuel nodded. “True.”

Dr. North leaned back, dazed. “It’s hard even for me to grasp this. It’s overwhelming. You possess superlogic, completely free of value-orientation bias. And you conceive of the entire world as organized against you.”

“Yes.”

“Of course. You’ve analyzed the structure of human activity and seen that as soon as they find out, they’ll pounce on you and try to destroy you.” (The Father Thing, 137)

This, to Dick, is the view of the masses by any elite. No elite can ever completely trust the people it governs. This natural paranoia is why the people are always in danger when guided by any group distinct from them.

Humanity also loses when it is forced to fight to ‘protect’ what it has. In “Some Kind of Life” (1953), more and more of the population is called to military service to fight wars over resources:

“Men first. Then children. Now women. It seems to take in everybody, just about.”

“Kind of does, I guess. Well, there must be a reason. We have to hold these fronts. The stuff must be kept coming. We’ve got to have it.” [...]

“But who will be left?” Joan asked again. “Can’t you tell me? Will anyone be left?” (Second Variety, 115)

Of course, no one is, finally. Aliens visit Earth some time later and find all the things needed for a perfect life—but no one left to live it. The people have been sacrificed to ‘the greater good’ of their society.

This theme is returned to from another angle in “Souvenir” (1954):
“You’ll destroy us to avoid war?”

“We’d destroy anything to avoid war. We can’t permit our society to degenerate into bickering provinces, forever quarreling and fighting—like your clans. We’re stable because we lack the very concept of variation. Uniformity must be preserved and separation must be discouraged. The idea itself must remain unknown.” (Second Variety, 362).

The needs of the whole—its very survival, according to the ruling elite—precludes variation within it. To Dick, there are few attitudes more dangerous than this.

Yet, for all his concern for the people, Dick understood the motivations of the neocons of his day (long before the movement had a name, it existed among the elites of the United States and elsewhere) and of Machiavelli’s prince—and even empathized with the problems rulers face (witness Gino Molinari in Now Wait for Last Year and Felix Buckman in Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said)—but he felt that neo-Machiavellian attitudes and foci, no matter how well-meant, are ultimately nothing more than recipes for failure. For, though it may be easy to identify tyrannies elsewhere, Dick might have argued, it is almost impossible to recognize the (just as deadly) tyrannies one creates oneself.

So it is not surprising that, even twenty years after his death, Dick remains an important influence within science fiction—and on the world beyond (especially the film world). Like all good science fiction, his work throws light on the contemporary society, exposing the frailties and misconceptions of our rulers through both irony and analogy to fictional “future” situations. In the political climate of our time, however, where (in the common Western perception) irrational, hate-filled enemies destroy our planes and buildings and blow up our trains, Dick can play an even more important role: he can show us where the real enemy hides.

Though Dick’s novels often deal with these same themes and problems, his short fiction can also be used—sometimes with even greater clarity—to illuminate the political crises
now buffeting all of us. Sometimes his stories seem eerily pre-scient. Take, for example, this description of a primary opinion-molder from “The Mold of Yancy” (1955), one that could be of George W. Bush: “A middle-aged man in his late fifties, his face sunburned, neck slightly red, a good-natured smile on his face, squinting because he was looking into the sun” (The Days of Perky Pat, 53). In fact, “The Mold of Yancy” can now be seen as a chilling preview of what is becoming modern political reality and of the dangers of the misuse of what Strauss calls “noble lying” (35). On the moon of Callisto, society is lulled into passive acceptance by a man who tells the populace what it wants to hear, providing a constant patter of small truths along side of much more insidious grand lies and smokescreens:

“But,” Yancy continued staunchly, “I feel a planet must be strong. We must not surrender ourselves meekly... weakness invites attack and fosters aggression. By being weak we promote war. We must gird ourselves and protect those we love. With all my heart and soul I’m against useless wars; but I say again, as I’ve said many times before, a man must come forward and fight a just war. He must not shrink from his responsibility. War is a terrible thing. But sometimes we must...”

As he restored the tape, Taverner wondered just what the hell Yancy had said. What were his views on war? (61-62)

Of course, politicians have always engaged in such obfuscation and logical-sounding nonsense, but with Yancy something more is happening: Yancy has been created specifically to promote simplistic attitudes that can allow the ‘trading syndicates’ to get their profitable way without popular opposition, even to the point of accepting war:

“They’d actually start a war. It would be worth a war, to them.”
“You’re damn right it would. And to start a war, they have to get the public lined up. Actually, the people here have nothing to gain. A war would wipe out all the small operators—it would concentrate power in few hands—and they’re few enough already. To get the eighty million people here behind the war, they need an indifferent, sheep-like public....” (64)

Unlike a standard politician, however, Yancy has no purpose at all beyond propaganda. In fact, Yancy does not even exist as a real human being; he is completely and only a media construct. Even so, Yancy is but the logical extension of what many politicians have become, merely appeasers of the populations, and front men for monied interests. Some would argue that George W. Bush, in fact, is not so far removed from Yancy (and Bush is not the only one: Yancy’s given names are ‘John Edward,” evocative of John Edwards, another contemporary feel-good American politician).

Another story showing the ‘noble lie’ is “The Defenders” (1953), though here Dick—surprisingly—seems to agree with Strauss about its efficacy. The story takes place on an Earth where the entire human population has been moved underground as a result of surface destruction through a cataclysmic war. The population is kept on a war footing, making arms and robots (‘leadies’) intended to continue the fight on the surface. But it is all a hoax:

“Eight years. We were tricked. There was no war. As soon as we left the surface— ”

“Yes,” an A-class leady admitted. “As soon as you left, the war ceased. You’re right, it was a hoax. You worked hard undersurface, sending up guns and weapons, and we destroyed them as fast as they came up.”

“You created us,” the leady said, “to pursue the war for you, while you human beings went below the ground in order to survive. But before we could continue the war, it was necessary to analyze it to determine what is purpose was. We did this, and we found that it had
no purpose, except, perhaps, in terms of human needs. Even this was questionable.” (*Beyond Lies the Wub*, 80)

Here, the leadies have saved mankind—again, an unusual outcome in one of Dick’s stories. The ‘noble lie’ has served its purpose. But this is an extremely early story and Dick had not yet clarified his own world view—and the story does end on an anti-Straussian note: “I see what the leadies mean about diplomacy becoming outmoded,’ Franks said at last. ‘People who work together don’t need diplomats. They solve their problems on the operational level instead of at a conference table” (*Beyond Lies the Wub*, 85). It is not the elites who are important, but the people.

One of the scariest passages in “The Mold of Yancy,” from a contemporary perspective, concerns an aspect of political reality, expressed by a ‘Police Director’ on Earth, that seems to have been lost on modern political discourse, where a fear of terrorism (in the United States, at least) is leading people to willingly sacrifice control for a “safety” with a totalitarian touch:

“Don’t confuse a totalitarian society with a dictatorship,” Kellman said dryly. “A totalitarian state reaches into every sphere of its citizens’ lives, forms their opinions on every subject. The government can be a dictatorship or a parliament, or an elected president, or a council of priests. That doesn’t matter.” (*The Days of Perky Pat*, 55)

The American ‘U.S.A. Patriot Act,’ passed in the feverish days directly after 9/11, allows unprecedented governmental intrusion in the lives of United States citizens—and has been accepted without murmur by the majority of Americans. The beauty of what Yancy is employed for, and what George Bush and what other great propagandists aim towards, is just this, that their successful enterprise eliminates some of the more troubling aspects of the totalitarian state:
Torture chambers and extermination camps were needed only when persuasion failed. And persuasion was working perfectly. A police state, rule by terror, came about when the totalitarian apparatus began to break down. The earlier totalitarian societies had been incomplete; the authorities hadn’t really gotten into every sphere of life. But techniques of communication had improved. (*The Days of Perky Pat*, 62)

Exactly as is happening in many contemporary societies, including the United States.

As in “The Defenders,” Dick presents a society that had been run by robots (who represent the elites of twentieth-century society) in “The Last of the Masters” (1954). Here, though, he writes more in keeping with his later beliefs. As he wrote in 1978 (a comment which explains the gulf between this story and “The Defenders”), an “ambiguity hangs over the morality of this story. Should we have a leader or should we think for ourselves? Obviously the latter, in principle. But—sometimes there lies a gulf between what is theoretically right and that which is practical” (*The Father Thing*, 374-375). Though he recognizes the dangers of relying on an elite or a government, Dick was more than aware of the problems at the other extreme.

In “The Last of the Masters,” a popular anarchist revolt demolished a government run by robots:

“They were without a government a whole month. The people saw they could live without a government!”

“The marches started it,” the black-haired girl corrected. “That was the first time they started pulling down the government buildings. In East Germany and Poland. Big mobs of unorganized workers.”

“Russia and America were the last,” Tolby said. “When the march on Washington came there was close to twenty million of us. We were big in those days! They couldn’t stop us when we finally moved.” (*The Father Thing*, 82)
Afterwards, to insure that no government could be re-established, members of an Anarchist League (aware of the contradictory nature of their organization) roamed the world.

One of the ruling robots, however, managed to survive, and started a new, organized movement hidden away in a mountain valley. At one point, the robot converses with one of his maintainers about why no one in the valley would want to disable the robot, though they could:

“But what would you gain? You know I’m the only one who can keep all this together. I’m the only one who knows how to maintain a planned society, not a disorderly chaos! If it weren’t for me, all this would collapse, and you’d have dust and ruins and weeds. The whole outside would come rushing in to take over!” (The Father Thing, 85)

The world outside is depicted as poor and dirty, quite different from the opulent organization of the valley. The problem with this becomes apparent just a few pages later:

“We have weapons!” Green shouted excitedly. “In an hour there’ll be ten thousand men ready to fight. We have jet-driven ships. Heavy artillery. Bombs. Bacteria pellets. What’s the League? A lot of people with packs on their backs![…]

“How can they do anything? How can a bunch of anarchists organize? They have no structure, no control, no central power.”

“They have the whole world. A billion people.”

“Individuals! A club, not subject to law. Voluntary membership. We have disciplined organization. Every aspect of our economic life operates at maximum efficiency. We—you—have your thumb on everything. All you have to do is give the order. Set the machine in motion.” (The Father Thing, 89)

And so it is. But: “There was only one hitch. No army opposed them. A mistake had been made. It took two sides to
make a war, and only one had been resurrected” (*The Father Thing*, 95).

Though the anarchists triumph, Dick does not vindicate them, keeping it clear that the robot had certainly accomplished something in that valley, though it had eventually gone too far.

In a recent neo-Straussian text, *The Modern Prince: What Leaders Need to Know Now*, Carnes Lord writes that, even in the face of the external threats from rogue states and terrorist groups, “the real problem facing the modern prince is not the barbarians at the gate; it is the barbarians within” (227). Dick would certainly have disagreed, but not in any way one would necessarily expect. For, to him, it is rarely *either* the barbarians without *or* within who are the problem—but is more likely the very people who want to protect us from them: the modern princes. The American neoconservative paranoia evinced by Lord is diametrically opposite to Dick’s more Orwellian fears—and though the neocons have come to political importance long after the science-fiction writer’s death—Dick’s fiction still sheds light on them, and can help us understand why so much of what they are now attempting is both frightening and doomed to failure. Very quickly, concern for barbarians without and within turns to concern for maintenance of power (if it were not, in the first place). In every case, concern for preservation of the regime leads to the seeds of its own destruction, for such concern ignores the strength of the people through its focus on the importance of the elite.

Where Lord makes a distinction between the external and internal threat, Dick recognized this as merely an artificial distinction, one most often created for the purposes of the rulers. Often, neither one is really a threat, but is merely made to be perceived as one. In “Martians Come in Clouds” (1954), Dick illustrates the basic misunderstanding in almost any culture of the alien outsiders. Here, it is Martians who are brutally attacked and destroyed each time they appear on Earth. All they want, it turns out, is permission to live on the seas, where there are no humans. One of them finally man-
ages to communicate with a young boy: “It wanted him to say, to answer, to give his permission. It was waiting to hear, waiting and hoping—imploring[…]” (*Second Variety*, 124). But the boy, inundated with anti-Martian attitudes, cannot comprehend the veracity of the request, and so this Martian, too, is killed. The internal threat, to Dick, is no more real than this.

In “The Little Black Box” (1964), a woman named Joan Hiashi is placed under arrest:

> “By the United States Government,” Mr. Lee said. “I have read your mind and I learn that you know that Ray Meritan is a prominent Mercerite and you yourself are attracted to Mercerism.”
> “But I’m not!”
> “Unconsciously you are attracted. You are about to switch over. I can pick up your thoughts, even if you deny them yourself.[…]” (*The Little Black Box*, 11)

Meritan is Hiashi’s boyfriend and has just publicly announced his adherence to Mercerism, a movement that has yet to show any overt hostility to the government. Yet Hiashi is to be charged with “Political agitation iminical to the safety of the United States” (*The Little Black Box*, 13). The movement, not understood by the government, is seen as a threat—as a barbarian within.

In one of his saddest stories, “The Hanging Stranger” (1953), Dick uses a image of the threat from within gone wildly wrong to depict a threat from without. A man sees another hanging dead from a lamppost—a lynching—yet no one else seems bothered.

> “See it?” Ed pointed into the gathering gloom. The lamppost jutted up against the sky—the post and the bundle swinging from it. “There it is. How the hell long has it been there?” His voice rose excitedly. “What’s wrong with everybody? They just walk on past!”
Don Fergusson lit a cigarette slowly. “Take it easy, old man. There must be a good reason, or it wouldn’t be there.”

“A reason! What kind of a reason?”  (The Father Thing, 14)

Why? Because all of the other people, including Fergusson, have been taken over by aliens and the hanging bodies will only be commented upon by the few humans who have been missed. Their reactions to the lynchings make them easily identifiable—then easily strung up themselves. Dick’s message here is that it can be something other than the barbarians without or within, but the barbarians in the majority who threaten.

No, the threat is not really from the barbarians, not in Dick’s view of thing. It comes from the people who arrest Hiashi, from those who take on the task of protecting people from the barbarians, who always have a hidden agenda for maintenance of their own power. In “The Hood Maker” Dick tries to explain how this happens through creation of a world where ‘teeps’ (telepaths) keep order by reading the minds of the population:

Before the teeps, loyalty probes had been haphazard. Oaths, examinations, wire-tappings, were not enough. The theory that each person had to prove his loyalty was fine—as a theory. In practice few people could do it. It looked as if the concept of guilty until proved innocent might have to be abandoned and the Roman law restored. (Second Variety, 238-239)

The ostensible purpose of the teep probes seemed laudable; more draconian methods did not have to be employed, after all, and those with nothing to hide had nothing to worry about. The teeps, however, want to be more than tools; they want to rule:

“The teeps are no different from the Jacobins, the Roundheads, the Nazis, the Bolsheviks. There’s always
some group that wants to lead mankind—for its own good, of course.”

“Do the teeps believe that?”

“Most teeps believe they’re the natural leaders of mankind. Non-telepathic humans are an inferior species. Teeps are the next step up, *homo superior*. And because they’re superior, it’s natural they should lead. Make all the decisions for us.”... (24?)

When people find a way of thwarting the teeps through hoods that keep their thoughts private, they have to be destroyed, the teeps decide, for the good of *everyone*. Once more, it is the barbarian within that is seen as the threat—while it is really the elite who are dangerous.

After recognizing the truth of part of Dick’s attitude, that elites “may oppress,” Lord goes on to say that they “may also demonstrate farsighted leadership, engage in heroic self-sacrifice, and provide competent and honest administration of the public business” (55). Dick saw them differently, presenting his most horrific vision of them in “Faith of Our Fathers” (1967), concentrating his fears and his wrath on their leader, who is not even human:

> It was terrible; it blasted him with its awareness. As it moved it drained the life from each person in turn; it ate the people who had assembled, passed on, ate again, ate more with an endless appetite. It hated; he felt its hate. It loathed; he felt its loathing for everyone present—in fact he shared its loathing.[...] He saw the trail of stepped-on, mashed men and women remnants behind it; he saw them trying to reassemble, to operate their crippled bodies; he heard them attempting speech. (*The Little Black Box*, 217)

This most horrifying vision is also of a population drugged (literally) into believing in the benevolence of its leaders—who not only have disdain for humanity, but who actually hate it.

In “The Hood Maker,” the point is that there is something more behind even the most hideous attitudes of the elite: that
need for the elite to perpetuate itself. Without that ability, it cannot even exist in the present, let alone in another generation. Its public-spiritedness, then, always comes from a more nefarious agenda. This can be seen in the attitude towards those wearing the hoods (who have received them, apparently at random, through the mails):

“ [...] There’s a reason why hoods are sent to these people. They’re not picked out at random.”
“Why are they picked?”
“They have something to hide. Why else would hoods be sent to them?”
“What about those who do notify us?”
“They’re afraid to wear them. They pass the hoods on to us—to avoid suspicion.”
Ross reflected moodily. “I suppose so.”
“An innocent man has no reason to conceal his thoughts. Ninety-nine per cent of the population is glad to have its mind scanned. Most people wand to prove their loyalty. But this one per cent is guilty of something.” (Second Variety, 238).

‘If he was arrested, he must be guilty of something.’ This infantile view of the workings of government and the world has been exploited for millennia—and continues to be so.

Though he was concerned with the machinations of the elite and the repression of the populous that invariably results (unless the populous rejects the elite), Dick’s greatest fears were for what could result from the manipulations deemed necessary for staying in power. Generally, these lead to war—war that had been encouraged by the elites. In “Breakfast at Twilight” (1954), he expresses his fear that war, once started, cannot be contained:

“How did the war begin?” Mary asked faintly.
“Begin? It didn’t begin. You remember. There was war seven years ago.”
“The real war. This.”
“There wasn’t any point when it became—this. We fought in Korea. We fought in China. In Germany and Yugoslavia and Iran. It spread, farther and farther. Finally the bombs were falling here. It came like the plague. The war grew. It didn’t begin.” (Second Variety, 212)

If he were alive now, he might well wonder if Iraq weren’t a real step in the fictional progression he outlined so many years ago.

If he were alive now, Dick would likely be watching the neocons with grave concern. Though he was a deeply religious man at the end of his life, his religion was one based on a personal mysticism, not one with a political program. It all boils down to the personal vision, and to respect for the intelligence and ability of even the most insignificant person, to Dick. Anything else smacks of an incipient authoritarianism that will eventually squash the individual spirit—both in the oppressor and the oppressed. In response to the Straussian belief that “opinion is partisan, fragmented and partial; philosophy by contrast, is total, integrative and comprehensive” (Susser, 503), Dick might argue that even the apocalypse, ultimately, is personal and subjective. Furthermore, reflecting one of Dick’s favorite lines, from Gilbert and Sullivan’s HMS Pinafore, “Things are seldom what they seem,/ Skim milk masquerades as cream,” he would argue that it is impossible to attain the certainty Strauss imagines for philosophy—and that presumption of such of certainly leads only to totalitarianism.

Rejecting the idea that there are “only two choices: nihilism or the belief in an accessible, transhistorical, universal absolute” (Susser, 499), Dick sought another way, one that, at the end of his life, he based on the mystical concept of a personal relationship with God—for even God, to him, was not an absolute. Dick’s God is a guide (and an imperfect one, at that), not an answer, but still an effective guide that can keep the individual from falling into either trap, that of nihilism or that of absolutes.
Instead of providing the simple escapism of a certain type of science fiction and, indeed of some (but not nearly all) fantasy and horror, Dick, like Horace and Sir Philip Sydney, wanted his stories to both delight and instruct. He had a vision of the world and the way it either should or could be that developed and clarified through the 1950s and 1960s, but that was fairly unified, even from the beginning. The fact of his continued popularity and influence testifies to the power and relevance of that vision. Clearly, Philip K. Dick is no simple curiosity of the past, but a writer who shows where contemporary science fiction, if it is to retain relevance, must continue to go.
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