

SOPHIA WITHIN, WITHOUT SOPHIA, WHITHER SOPHIA: THE LONGING OF PHILIP K. DICK

Aron Dunlap & Joshua Ramey¹

“Tired of lazy tastebuds?” Runciter said in his familiar gravelly voice. “Has boiled cabbage taken over your world no matter how many dimes you put into your stove? Ubik changes all that; Ubik wakes up food flavor, puts hearty taste back where it belongs, and restores fine food smell . . . One invisible puff-puff whisk of economically priced Ubik banishes compulsive obsessive fears that the entire world is turning into clotted milk, worn-out tape recorders and obsolete iron-cage elevators, plus other, further, as-yet-unglimpsed manifestations of decay. You see, world deterioration of this regressive type is a normal experience of many half-lifers, especially in the early stages when ties to the real reality are still very strong. A sort of lingering universe is retained as a residual charge, experienced as a pseudo environment but highly unstable and unsupported by any ergic substructure. This is particularly true when several memory systems are fused, as in the case of you people. But with today’s new, more-powerful-than-ever Ubik, all this is changed!”²ⁱ

¹ In the following text, Arabic numerals refer to our commentarial footnotes and Roman numerals refer to the bibliographic endnotes.

² Where are we? Whither Sophia? Characters do not find themselves, in the novels of Philip K. Dick, at the level of a reality that can be accepted as real, but are constantly attempting to attain to that real, to follow an Ariadne’s thread back to something that could be counted on not to lie. Dick’s great characters are under the influence—of a drug, a demiurge, or a web of illusions—and salvation is an effort to unravel this web or wait out the drug trip—even if it means becoming a stone for three million years (as in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*) or killing the demiurge. All to get back to the (really) real. But as debased as this second power reality may be, the key to getting back to the real is only found

from within the artificial world, the realm of lies—the realm, as *Valis* has it, of the “black prison.” We might say that the story of salvation for Philip K. Dick is never a story but always a conundrum, in that one is forced to find the key to the real in the realm of the lie.

But how could anything found in the black prison lead to the truth? Every time the key is found, it is not the real key, but simply another step towards an ever-receding real key and the real, good world. Dick’s novels always show us prisons that can be escaped from, but only into other prisons, like the escape, through *Ubik*, from tasteless real food into artificially satisfying false nutrition.

But when the real is reached within the illusion, death is near. When Sophia, the fifth and final savior to appear in *Valis*, is finally found she must immediately die, and send her seekers on yet another endless quest. What Dick’s conundrums reveal is that all worlds—real worlds, fantasy worlds, illusory worlds, ephemeral worlds—are equally cracked, equally marked by a kind of wobble in their being, a smudge in their smooth reflective surface. Should you wish to depart from a given world, or should you find yourself forced out of it, your conduit must be that crack; follow it and you find yourself in a different world, but one that, inasmuch as it is defined by the element that sets it askew, is depressingly identical to the one you just left.

This second power of reality, the power of the black prison, is archetypically understood as a man, separated or divorced from a beautiful woman and perhaps some beautiful children, living out his days in some kind of exile, surrounded by a barren landscape where plants do not thrive and, where, in the words of the Sumerian *Descent of Inanna*, “ass does not lie with ass, nor man with maiden.” This man is driven to find the key to return to a world in which a woman awaits and desires him and the earth flourishes.

While the protagonist must often follow the trace that is the wobble in his world, Dick’s literary offerings, taken in and of themselves, have their own kind of wobble, which is the trace that Dick left for himself. It is often apparent as a kind of sophomoric philosophizing that Dick eventually made a monument to in his recently re-published *Exegesis*. The following passage is taken from *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*. We’ve de-italicized the wobble.

*“Its very simple Mayerson; I’ll give you a translation world in which you’re a rotting corpse of a run-over dog in some ditch—think of it: whatta goddam relief it’ll be. You’re going to be me; you are me, and Leo Bulero is going to kill you. That’s that dead dog, Mayerson; that’s the corpse in the ditch.” And I’ll live on, he said to himself. That’s my gift to you, and remember: in German Gift means poison. I’ll let you die in my place a few months from now and that monument on Sigma 14-B will be erected but I’ll go on, in your living body.”*³ⁱⁱ

*Within time, hyperuniverse II remains alive: “The Empire never ended.” But in eternity, where the hyperuniverses exist, she has been killed—of necessity—by the healthy twin of hyperuniverse I, who is our champion. The One grieves for this death, since the One loved both twins; therefore the information of the Mind consists of a tragic tale of the death of a woman, the undertones of which generate anguish into all the creatures of the hologramatic universe without their knowing why. This grief will depart when the healthy twin undergoes mitosis and the “Kingdom of God” arrives. The machinery for this transformation—the procession within time from the Age of Iron to the Age of Gold—is at work now; in eternity it is already accomplished.*⁴ⁱⁱⁱ

³ This bit of amateur etymology doesn’t seem to add anything to the wonderfully disorienting plot that centers the novel, but the eruption of this jarring voice always leads us back to Dick himself and to his insuperable conundrum. This voice is for our disturbed author a trail of breadcrumbs so he can find himself again. The monstrous *Exegesis* is precisely Dick’s concentrated effort to find himself apart from the literary artifacts he left us. This attempt to philosophize himself out of this world, hot on the trail of meaning, mirrors the attempts of his characters to set their world aright, or return (or find) their real reality. While this hurts the purely literary character of Dick’s works—even his best books are cracked in this way—Dick is always true to his voracious lust for truth.

The defining truth of his work is that there is no world that is not cracked, and the voice which utters this truth is itself breaking.

⁴ Even though it appears from this quotation as if “all things are well” for the One that dwells in eternity, the crack is apparent in even this world, the very sphere of God, inasmuch as it was of necessity that the woman died. Even if she should be reborn again via mitosis what would stop her from of necessity dying again?

Which is of course exactly the plot-line followed by *Valis*: the savior is born again, but must die again, and there is no end for this cycle. Dick's *Exegesis* is perhaps the purest rendering of obsessive machinations we have: new, uncracked worlds are generated at a phenomenal speed and are just as quickly shown to be faulty—"puzzled" as Dick would say—and to thus necessitate the creation of a new world, this time the right one . . .

That Sophia and her avatars must die is a theme that takes different forms in *Valis*, in which quite a few women die for not very good reasons. Horselover Fat's friend Gloria, with whose suicide the book begins, and Fat's ex-wife Beth (who doesn't die, but who, if we can sympathize with Fat, perhaps should have) are versions of the Sophianic "woman" who must die for the Kingdom of God to achieve touch-down. In *Valis* the character of Fat is helplessly attracted to helping such women, noting that the only things standing in the way of him and psychological health are dope and trying to help people. Since he actually gives up dope after his (second) suicide attempt we can assume that it is precisely women like Gloria, Beth and Sherri (Fat's friend who dies of cancer) who are his only and perpetual obstacle. We are shown little evidence that they will be overcome as easily as the dope was.

These women are variations on Sophia, who herself was, for Dick, psychologically rooted in his twin sister, Jane, who died days after birth and for whose death Dick blamed himself for much of his life. From an analytic perspective, the girl Sophia (in *Valis*) who gets killed by "Mini"—as Dick was when his sister was alive—has its predictable obverse in the devouring females (*Gloria et al*) who are blamed with all such violent appropriations: if someone gets eaten up, it's the girl that's to blame. We might call this a psychological symptom that poisons the universe of the text. Dick was no doubt aware of this, and the importance of *Valis* lies in his depiction of the losing battle he wages to delimit it in both his character and his writing. *Valis* is Dick saying: "I know I am crazy. I am trying not to be. I am losing."

Admittedly, psycho-biography is a dangerous method. In Dick's case, though, his own psychic history is woven into his texts in a way that one simply can't ignore. In *Valis*, his most personal novel, Dick himself is a character, the narrator and Fat's shadow, and Horselover Fat is of course just a multi-lingual pun on his own name. Thus, we are forced to analyze him as we interpret his text,

because of the unhealthy lack of separation between the person Dick and his own literary offsprings. This is perhaps a way for Dick to score some free therapy, he being often quite as poor as *Ubik*'s Joe Chip, who cannot even pay his front door to open (does there exist a better, more sad and more hilarious, image of the paranoid genius?). Dick, both author and narrator, is an exemplar of the over-analyzed obsessive, of whom we cannot say, as Lacan said of (the psychotic) Joyce, that he healed himself through writing. In fact, Dick may have done just the opposite.

The characters in *Valis* are, more than in any other of Dick's major works, walking archetypes. We have the polarization between belief and doubt (cynicism rather) embodied in David and Kevin, respectively. Then there is the aforementioned devouring female that takes form in the three women: Sherri, Gloria, and Beth, (and projected in an inverted fashion onto the child Sophia). It is Dick's anxiety concerning his habit of projecting his own guilt about the death of his sister onto his Sophianic characters that causes him to repeat this infantile devouring by having Mini destroy Sophia before she can lose her innocence, before she can become the devouring one. We must, of course, set aside the fact that this episode makes very little sense in the context of the story—how could this all-powerful creature, this fifth savior come to earth, be killed by a stupid accident?

What is truest in the world of Dick—and he always claimed to be only writing about Truth—is that the quest for personal salvation, as we see it undertaken by Fat, is precisely psychotic. The fact that Dick/Fat is helplessly motivated by this quest and that he *loses*, is his testament to our age, and to our need to finally understand that Christianity as a religion of love *cannot* also be a religion of personal salvation. And yet to turn to some kind of theory of corporate salvation (mankind is a person, *à la* Dick's beloved Meister Eckhart) is also a false path—in fact it is the path of the school of Idealism that perhaps had its birth in Eckhart's thought, and no doubt its apotheosis in the victory of Hegel's World Spirit). Christianity as personal salvation is psychosis. Christianity as corporate salvation is fascism. The “black prison” that defines Dick's *oeuvre* is a topographical object, like a Klein bottle or a cross cap, where the interior is a schizophrenic mind (absolute duality), but whose exterior is an alternate universe in which Hitler was victorious and all the world has only gained its

“One of these days,” Joe said wrathfully, “people like me will rise up and overthrow you, and the end of tyranny by the homeostatic machine will have arrived. The day of human values and compassion and simple warmth will return, and when that happens someone like myself who has gone through an ordeal and who genuinely needs hot coffee to pick him up and keep him functioning when he has to function will get the hot coffee whether he happens to have a poscred readily available or not.” He lifted the miniature pitcher of cream, then set it down. “And furthermore, your cream or milk or whatever it is, is sour.”^{iv}

The big economic forces had managed to remain free, although virtually everything else had been absorbed by the Government. Laws that had been eased away from the private person still protected property and industry. The SP could pick up any given person, but they could not enter and seize a company, a business. That had been clearly established in the middle of the twentieth century . . . If he could get back to the Company, get inside its doors, he would be safe. Jennings smiled grimly. The modern church, sanctuary. It was the Government against the corporation, rather than the State against the Church. The new Notre Dame of the world. Where the law could not follow.^v

“Don’t look so unhappy,” Jennings said. He folded his arms. “The paper’s safe—and the Company’s safe. When the time comes it’ll be there, strong and very glad to help out the revolution. We’ll see to that. All of us, you, me, and your daughter.”

He glanced at Kelly, his eyes twinkling. “All three of us. And maybe by that time there’ll be even more members to the family!”^{vi}

health (unity) at the expense of nazification. The inhabitants of this prison wander from one realm into the other, fleeing one evil only to run into the other.

⁵ Thin as it may be there is always a trace that the Dickian hero must follow, a trace both impossible to ignore (one gives up everything to heed its call) and flatly treacherous, inasmuch we never see the trace pay off. The short story *Paycheck* is almost an anomaly in this regard, though, in that the promise of a life free and good is emphasized so strongly at the end of the story—in fact, a little too strongly; we suspect that Dick is being ironic and wicked. This is a story of a man who gives up his paycheck for seven trinkets, like a hell-bent Israelite deciding not only to escape

Tim said, “The anokhi is the pure consciousness of God. It is, therefore, Hagia Sophia, God’s Wisdom. Only that wisdom, which is absolute, can read the Book of the Spinners. It can’t change what is written, but it can discern a way to outwit the Book. The writing is fixed; it will never

but to despoil the Egyptians while he’s at it. He has hired himself out to do top-secret work for the Rethrick construction, at the cost of them removing his memories of that time. The action, then, happens quite literally in the unconscious, in a two year span that has been removed from his brain, though a little scar remains. He has left the clues for himself in the seven trinkets: charms, instead of money. Here we see perhaps the only Dickian moral: no matter how hopeless the search for the real may be, how paltry the traces that link us to it, no matter how certain it is that our effort will end in failure, such a failure is to be desired absolutely against the falseness of the prison, the worse lure of the paycheck, the false sovereignty of money (i.e. a naïve belief in the surface effects of this world). This is both the only way our hero, Jennings, can survive and the only way the revolution can come off. When Jennings first took the contract he was merely motivated by the paycheck, but at the bottom of that selfishness he sees a way for the whole system to be derailed. The Egyptians must have trusted their neighbors to lend them their valuables. Jennings has absolute faith because he knows that he has already laid the successful plan for himself. This is the Sophianic aspect, God’s wisdom of the end of things, of the end of the rule of money, and the rebirth of love and family and freedom. That’s a very hard thing to say with a straight face. Dick is able to give his protagonist a ridiculous level of confidence because of what he has accomplished in his unconscious before he was even aware of the traces, and of his impending adventure. But in order to enact the courage of his unconscious decision, he must penetrate into the heart of the corporation that imprisons him, going all the way in, as Lacan says. This is the arch-feminine act, something a man could only undertake under the influence, of drugs, the unconscious, what have you. It is he himself, in the caring arms of his own unconscious, that is the new Notre Dame of the world.

One should be astounded at the end of *Paycheck*, not that Dick finishes with a wicked flourish, but that, like the worship of money, the true religion is also one in which the truth lies at the surface.

change.” He seemed defeated, now; he had begun to give up. “I need that wisdom, Angel. Nothing less will do.”^{6vii}

⁶ In *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*, just as in *Valis*, the wisdom of God, Sophia, must take on a tangible form for the obsessing subject, in this case the one-time Episcopal bishop of the diocese of California, Timothy Archer, who gives up his bishopric to chase down the truth behind Jesus Christ. He is led to cryptic fragments left by the Zadokites, fragments which contain sayings of Christ—but hundreds of years before Jesus walked the earth. These documents supposedly point to a psychedelic mushroom, *anokhi*, behind the experience of being born again. *Anokhi*, Hebrew for “I Am,” the name of God, but for Timothy Archer this utterance of spirit has been transformed into a fungus that can be found should one only look hard enough. His pursuit leads to an untimely death in the desert surrounding the Dead Sea where he was sure that the truth of the *anokhi* could be found.

In books like this (Dick’s last) we see that Dick takes his profession quite literally, for he reveals therein *science as fiction*. Unlike the tenets of orthodox Christianity which demand that a spirit (God) became a human being (Jesus of Nazareth), with no leftover, no mystery “behind” the incarnation, Timothy Archer is neither a theologian—one who knows that the truth lies at the surface—nor a scientist—who knows that the phenomena are always concealing a truth that is makeshift and transient. Timothy Archer attempts to play the theologian *as* a scientist. Thus he loses his faith but cannot stop himself from his addiction to the meaning generated by that now dead faith. He goes in search of a Christ that he has already disproved to himself. Thus, in the end he gets neither meaning nor knowledge, neither religion nor science, both of which for him are fictions. There is nothing redemptive here. For all of Dick’s spiritualizing there is no “hope of the other side”; there is, in fact, no truly other side. There is only the organic cravings of a biological organism and its interface with an endless stream of meaningless information that stands in for God. Dick’s work is proof that we can doubt our doubt and cast an ineradicable suspicion not only on our gods, but also on the foundation of our knowledge. The fantasy worlds of PKD are exquisitely broken in a way that is determined by the mode of entrance to that world. The way in will make you rue your decision to come. As noted before, we believe these defects can be found on a continuum between the

“The instinct for survival loses in the end. With every living creature, mole, bat, human, frog. Even frogs who smoke cigars and play chess. You can never accomplish what your survival instinct sets out to do, so

psychosis of a debased Christianity-as-religion-of-personal-salvation, and a mystical Eckhartian notion of the progressive enlightenment of a corporate humankind (which immediately turns into a kind of fascism; hence, the recurrent theme of Hitler in so many of the novels, *The Man in the High Castle* being only the most developed version of this theme). The thread that connects the dual worlds in all of Dick’s work, and what gives the best of those works their inimitable vertiginousness, is desire. Ironically enough, the most religious of the sci-fi giants had no conception of spirit. Dick never had a feel for the first tenet of Judeo-Christianity, namely, the difference between creator and creation (which perhaps explains the consistent motif of the pot and the potter in his late works, a motif which never seems to fit or make sense with a given narrative, but which has a powerful pull to it—Dick using this ancient Hebrew metaphor for the creator to fill in a gap that he felt, if only unconsciously). Aside from naked desire (for drugs, for release, for health, for just fading out . . .) the only faculty of the mind which is something other than stunted is the imagination—and it is bloated and rotten from the inside out. In a Cartesian universe where doubt is the pillar of all knowledge, once this doubt can be shown as doubtful (essentially Dick’s *modus operandi*) the imagination can have no relief from the other mental faculties, from judgment or will, which depend for their functioning on the real presence of other people and cannot be verified in mental thought experiments. This is why Dick’s worlds are always built on the model of a double prison that folds in on itself, perhaps best represented in *Ubik*, where the two worlds seem to be equally in danger of being attacked by a devouring presence, Jory, as well as the decomposition which the “half life” is meant to fend off. The substance *Ubik*, a god-like restorer of youth and vitality, is clearly on the defensive here, and what is truly ubiquitous is neither the evil of decay nor the good of rejuvenation but the eternal war between them. On the other hand, the Sophianic character in *Ubik* is uniquely positioned to challenge that eternal war. We will return to her later.

ultimately your striving ends in failure and you succumb to death, and that ends it. But if you can fade out and watch—

“I’m not ready to fade out,” Jason said.

“—you can fade out and watch with happiness, and with cool, mellow, alpha contentment, the highest form of contentment, the living on of one of those you love.”^{viii}

Final scene of the film version of Total Recall (1990): Quaid: “I just has a terrible thought. . . What if this is all a dream?” Melina: “Then kiss me quick . . . before you wake up.”

And who doubts that, if we dreamt in company, and the dreams chanced to agree, which is common enough, and if we were always alone when awake, we should believe that matters were reversed? In short, as we often dream that we dream, heaping dream upon dream, may it not be that this half of our life, wherein we think ourselves awake, is itself only a dream on which the others are grafted, from which we wake at death, during which we have as few principles of truth and good as during natural sleep, these different thoughts which disturb us being perhaps only illusions like the flight of time and the vain fancies of our dreams?^{7ix}

What a chimera then is man! What a novelty! What a monster, what a chaos, what a contradiction, what a prodigy! Judge of all things, imbecile worm of the earth; depositary of truth, a sink of uncertainty and error; the pride and refuse of the universe.^{8x}

⁷ Earth is Mars dreaming. It is our green planet which has been forgotten, and even though Mars is dusty and red, it harbors a life giving gift. Sophia is hidden in the dream within the dream for Dick. We are still smack dab in the middle of the Cartesian hallucination, redoubled now. Thus, Sophia can never be real for us. She must always hover at the edge, tempting incarnation. *We* are the feared demiurge and trickster god. *We* are the creators of this earth and the dream we’re now suffering. Descartes wondered whether the world that God had created was real; we took the doubt for a surety and built a “rational” world instead, one that we now desperately need to be wakened from.

⁸ Philosophically, one might say that Dick is reviving a crucial critique of Descartes that was articulated first by Pascal: It is possible to doubt our doubting, and this leaves us no stable foot to

I studied philosophy during my brief career at the University of California at Berkeley. I'm what they call an "acosmic pan-enthiest," which means that I don't believe that the universe exists. I believe that the only thing that exists is God and he is more than the universe. The universe is an extension of God into space and time. That's the premise I start from in my work, that so-called "reality" is a mass delusion that we've all been required to believe for reasons totally obscure.^{9xi}

We are served by organic ghosts, he thought, who, speaking and writing, pass through this our new environment. Watching, wise, physical ghosts from the full-life world, elements of which have become for us invading but agreeable splinters of a substance that pulsates like a former heart.^{xii}

She laughed a rich warm laugh. "You're the other one," Joe said. "Jory destroying us, you trying to help us. Behind you there's no one, just as there's no one behind Jory. I've reached the last entities involved." Ella said

stand on–Dick's universe, in which there is no escape from Descartes' demonic trickster god.

⁹ This quotation, taken from an interview, also concerns the black prison, which Dick was able to construct extemporaneously. On the one hand God is all that exists, and, according to Dick's acosmic pan-entheism the universe should be completely transparent to us, reflecting God's goodness with no need for theophanies. On the other hand this universe is a delusion, all the more imprisoning for its non-existence. The fact that it is a lie makes it impossible to brush aside, and out of this prison universe only the most insanely dedicated, the most drug addled or sick, are able to glimpse the truth before the truth eats away their mind. But which is it? Is the universe a (benign) extension of a loving God, or is it a prison that violently obscures from us the truth? Is there a God behind god? Without Sophia we perceive the universe to flicker between the two in a schizophrenia-inducing display. This is the same conundrum delineated earlier, that if this world is unreal there can exist no key within it that would illuminate the real one—and yet we are driven to believe that there must be. The thread that Dick follows, and that he gets us to follow in his books, is thinner than a spider's line, evaporating in the morning sun, crumbs eaten by unministering birds . . .

caustically, "I don't think of myself as an 'entity'; I usually think of myself as Ella Runciter.^{10xiii}

"Oh hell, yes. Christ, I just now bought it downstairs at the tobacco counter. We're a long way into this. Well past the stage of clotted milk and stale cigarettes." He grinned starkly, his eyes determined and bleak, reflecting no light. "In it," he said, "not out of it."^{xiv}

& I accept my own aging now. & I have my two fine cats. I guess now I don't need my psychotic fantasy-system so much—but I treasure parts of it, esp[.] the love & the beauty—& her. My psychosis put me in touch with "das ewige weibliche" [the eternal feminine] in me, & for that I will always be grateful; it means I will never really be alone again: whenever I really need her, I will sense her presence & hear her voice (i.e. St. Sophia.)

¹⁰ Dick's purest Sophianic vision is embodied in *Ubik*'s Ella Runciter. Mysteriously dead at the age of 20 and the wife of the powerful Glenn Runciter, she guides her husband's company whilst in the limbo of half-life. There, we find out at the end of the book, she has devoted herself to battling the eater of life, Jory, a perverted adolescent half-lifer who attacks other souls and incorporates them for no clear purpose beyond shits and giggles—a formidable and grotesque trickster. The most compelling part of Dick's Sophianic vision in this novel is Ella's creation of *Ubik*, a rejuvenating substance in a spray can which is the only possible protection against Jory's malevolence. Dick does not spell out the manner in which Ella was able to create this balm, but from a Sophianic standpoint we have to assume that it is because she herself was "there in the beginning" (Proverbs 8:22) with the creator of life and half-life as well. She is not an entity but Woman in all her forms. She is the opposite of the devourer and as she fades into (real) death she makes way for her successor, Joe Chip, to carry on the battle against, not death, but the forces of an accelerated and perverted dying. When Joe Chip's face shows up on the coins in Glenn Runciter's pocket in the "real" world we understand this as a suggestion that Ella's loyal fight in the nether regions of half-life are perhaps more real than the daily ups and downs in the realm of what we call reality. Dick found in Ella, perhaps, an end to his perpetual cycling, and his ever-reaching-further schizophrenia.

At the center of psychosis I encountered her: beautiful & kind & most of all, wise, & through that wisdom, accompanying & leading me through the underworld, through the bardo thödol journey to rebirth—she, the embodiment of intelligence: Pallas Athena herself. So at the core of a shattered mind and life lies this epicenter—omphalos—of harmony and calm. I love her, she is my guide: the second comforter & advocate promised by Jesus . . . as Luther said, “For the very desperate,” here in this world secretly, for their—our—sake.^{xv}

Halting his work he turned his attention on her, faced her levelly. Her expression was cool and intelligent, with a faintly mocking quality which was particularly rewarding and annoying. “Hello,” Jack said.

“I saw your ‘copter on the roof,” the girl said.

“Let him work,” Arnie said peevishly. “Gimme your coat.” He stood behind her, helping her out of her coat. The girl wore a dark wool suit, obviously an import from Earth and therefore expensive to an appalling degree. I’ll bet that set the Union pension fund back plenty, Jack decided.

Observing the girl, he saw in her a vindication of a piece of old wisdom. Nice eyes, hair, and skin produced a pretty woman. This girl had such a nose: strong, straight, dominating her features, forming a basis for her other features. Mediterranean women reach the level of beauty much more easily than, say, Irish or English women, he realized, because genetically speaking the Mediterranean nose, whether Spanish or Hebrew or Turkish or Italian, played a naturally greater part in physiognomic organization. His own wife Silvia had a gay, turned up Irish nose; she was pretty enough by any standard. But—there was a difference.

He guessed that Doreen was in her early thirties. And yet she possessed a freshness that gave her a stable quality. He had seen such clear coloration in high-school girls approaching nobility, and once in a long while one saw it in fifty-year-old women who had perfect gray hair and wide, lovely eyes. This girl would still be attractive twenty years from now, and probably had always been so; he could not imagine her any other way. Arnie, by investing in her, had perhaps done well with the funds entrusted to him; she would not wear out. Even now he saw maturity in her face, and that among women was rare.^{11xvi}

¹¹ In *Martian Time-Slip* (1964), Sophia is still in the symbolic. She has not yet slipped into the real. She wears the wool suit, she submits herself to the disgusting flesh of the capitalist, she drinks the cocktail, drapes herself over the proper arm. She is in and of the world. This is Lacan’s feminine act, “all the way in” the

“The existential psychiatrists often say to let them go ahead and take their lives; it’s the only way for some of them . . . the vision becomes too awful to bear.”

Jack said nothing.

“Is it awful?” Doreen asked.

“No. Just-disconcerting.” He struggled to explain. “There’s no way you can work it in with what you’re supposed to see and know; it makes it impossible to go on, in the accustomed way.”

“Don’t you very often try to pretend, and sort of—go along with it, by acting? Like an actor?” When he did not answer, she said, “You tried to do it in there, just now.”

“I’d love to fool everybody,” he conceded. “I’d give anything if I could go on acting it out, playing a role. But that’s a real split—there’s no split up until then; they’re wrong they say it’s a split in the mind. If I wanted to keep going entire, without a split, I’d have to lean over and say to Dr. Glaub—“He broke off.

“Tell me,” the girl said.

“Well,” he said, taking a deep breath, “I’d say, Doc, I can see you under the aspect of eternity and you’re dead. That’s the substance of the sick, morbid vision. I don’t want it. I didn’t ask for it.”

The girl put her arm within his.^{xvii}

“But,” he said, “that’s the whole point; it’s designed to make you flee—the vision’s for that purpose, to nullify your relations with other people, to isolate you. If it’s successful, your life with human beings is over. That’s what they mean when they say the term schizophrenia isn’t a diagnosis; it’s a prognosis—it doesn’t say anything about what you have, only about how you’ll wind up.” And I’m not going to wind up like that, he said to himself. Like Manfred Steiner, mute and in an institution; I intend to keep my job, my wife and son, my friendships—he glanced at the girl holding on to his arm. Yes, and even love affairs, if such there be.

I intend to keep trying.^{xviii}

symbolic, an action so far from within, it is subversive precisely because it is without break in the seam of the symbolic.

But of course, Jack doesn’t end up with Doreen. Doreen enables the passage to the action, enables Jack to kill Arnie. And Jack must return to his unhappy, or at least imperfect marriage.

Well, thinking about this, about how Zoroastrianism teaches that we are met by the spirit of our religion when we die, & if we are a son of light, she is "Jung und Schön" [Young and beautiful]. But if we are a servant of the lie she is a wrinkled old hag... I dream I heard the magic bell, and & see her in bird feathers-like Papagena . . . I am even more 1) uneasy as to whether I am in the "live" world (lower realm) or the "next world" (upper realms); but 2) pleased at how ma'at has judged me. There has been, admittedly, a lot of pain (over [past women in his life]) but the reward element predominates; I feel better & better, &, what is equally important, seem to understand more & more, exponentially. I am no longer chronically depressed & apprehensive (terror stricken). I've written (I feel) my best book so far** My mind is alive & active. I feel I am growing & developing. I finally got Laura & Isa*** down here. I'm economically secure. I'm no longer abusing drugs, legal or illegal—i.e., drug dependent. I am very happy. I even went to France. I had a lot of fun with Joan.**** My career is gosh wow (due in good measure to my own—and Thomas'—efforts). So I may be dead, as of 3-74. My cosmological concepts are so terrific, so advanced as to be off the scale. I create whole religions and philosophical systems. The very fact that I honestly ponder if I may be dead & in heaven is *prima facie* evidence of how happy & fulfilled I am. How many people seriously wonder this? (Maybe everyone, when they die.) If I am not dead, how do I explain 2-3-74? No one has ever reported such obviously post mortem experiences.*

Well, I explain it in terms of a two part oscillation comprising my total existence: (1) the part where I am alive and in this world & my sister is dead & an idea in my brain; & the other part where I am dead & she is alive & an idea in my brain; & 2) the other part where I am dead & she is alive & I am a thought in her living brain—& I construe this matter as a riddle posed to me by the designer of the computer: Holy Wisdom, who is playful. But how do I explain why all of this was revealed to me & to no one else? I have no explanation; I know what I know but not why. Unless, of course, when you die it's all revealed to you routinely—

Or—having a deceased twin sister makes me unusual: in symbiosis to a dead (sic) person, & in telepathic contact with her. Or maybe I'm just a genius. No, I'm not. But I am curious. I love epistemological riddles. & so now I've got one, a superb one. It's ultimate. Just theoretically, its formulation couldn't be beaten. I love it. I'll solve it.

I regard the two-proposition formulation about "am I alive or . . ." etc. as a brilliant application of the "UBIK" puzzle to my own self. But I can't take credit for formulating it; it was presented to me. Whoever the funning player is, she is a delight. Sophia, I think it is you.

One thing I must posit as absolutely veridical: the power of Karma over me was broken completely in 3-74. So at the very least, I am 1) dead to the way-of-being in the world I had known; & 2) alive to a new free way of being, & progressively more so. (1978)

**Character in Mozart opera THE MAGIC FLUTE*

***The reference here is to VALIS, written in 1978.*

****PKD's two daughters, by his third and fourth marriages, respectively. PDK had arranged for each of them to visit him at his Santa Ana condominium during this period.*

*****Joan Simpson [with whom PKD had a romantic relationship in 1977]*^{12xix}

¹² More and more, the writing becomes autistic, self-enclosed. Hermetic. The characters start to lose their draw, their pull, as they are all pulled into the man. We lose PKD, or we start to lose PKD the moment he needs to live in his own dream. The moment he needs full resolution, full inclusion of himself within the godhead. Full communion with his dead sister, by identifying himself fully with her. But the cost of full and ideal identification with the sister is the full and complete split of PKD into two parts, into two halves. The becoming-gnostic of PKD. Not that he is suddenly converted to Zoroastrianism or Neoplatonism or Gnosticism. But rather that he becomes these things, he becomes the “binary computer” that sees itself as macrocosmic. And of course he wonders if it is real, if it really happened. Well of course it is real, of course it really happens. And yes, effectively, he dies. He loses his desire. His life gets cleaned up, he cleans up his act. His desire gets internalized, like Carl Jung retiring to build his tower. The self trying to include everything within itself. The self demanding satisfaction, and finally finding it.

“*Post mortem* experiences,” indeed. “Two part oscillation”: the one internalizing the other. What happened here? Was death internalized? Does the mystic take in the whole world, and lose his soul, or lose at least the ability to communicate—to shop for groceries, pay the bills, show up on time? Passing over into a self-with-self oscillation? To whom is Dick, at the end, speaking? To whom is he appealing? To whom are any of us speaking? “Admired in France.” France, land of endless talk, land of *parler*. Where they dream of having the capability for such madness, such passion, such life.

But if we put PKD in the clinic, Lacan's or anyone else's, that is because it is where we have ended up—we, whoever we are, in the line of Burroughs, Kerouac, Henry Miller, D.H. Lawrence, maybe back as far as Donne, Petrarch, Augustine himself. A line of broken Western men, broken knights, wounded savants. The search for the lost Sophia, the search for the Self, the Soul. For She who is everywhere, everything. Elusive, untraceable. Driving crazy a line from knights errant to dead young rock stars, all longing and desperation and pale skin.

A legend: three men are sitting in a café, talking. They are discussing, with great seriousness, passion, and sincerity, some of the fundamental problems of the world. They converse with transparency, intimacy, and forthrightness. They hold back no secrets, they harbor no hidden agendas. Their desire is for truth alone, for truth to be shared, understood, and hopefully, against all hope, for truth to become action, to become life and time. They bring years of experience and dedication and sacrifice to the table. Years of solitude and grief and wandering in deserts, but also years of earnest expectation, joy, and moments of beauty that have promised infinite fulfillment beyond the charade of the world. You can see this in their eyes as they converse. This is no secret cabal, no private club. This is a conversation that should be, that wants to be, and that even is in principle open to any interlocutor, any listener, anyone in earnest.

Just beyond the three men, at the next table, is a beautiful dark-skinned woman. She is dressed in the most contemporary fashions, more glamorous, and yet more attentive to her surroundings than anyone else, man or woman, in the café. She seems to know nearly everyone by name. She even knows one of the men engaged in the serious conversation about the deepest, darkest problems of the world. She keeps staring at the man she knows. The man acknowledges her smile, looks her in the eyes several times. But she will not stop staring, stop smiling. Her gaze becomes rigid, fixed. There is something wrong. The man gets up, leaves the important conversation, and engages the beautiful dark-skinned woman in conversation. She remembers everything he ever told her, though it was years ago that they last spoke. She asks after his career, his son, his troubled marriage. The man does not

remember anything about the woman, but asks anyway, trying to offer something resembling her intensity and enthusiasm.

Sensing he is trying to return to his conversation, his work, she desperately searches for more news to relate, something that would be relevant to the man steeped in such a serious conversation with his colleagues, his friends. She knows the man is a philosopher. She tells him she took a class once on the Italian philosopher, Vattimo. It was in 1990. The man suddenly realizes the woman must be much older than she seems, than her beauty and glowing skin betray. Finally the man tears himself away, makes it back to the table, the earnest, important exchange of ideas and communion of souls. The man can see that the woman has begun to talk to herself, to laugh to herself, or at her own thoughts. Or is she overhearing the important conversation, the big ideas, the ambitious theorems, the audacious hypotheses. Is she laughing at us? he wonders. Her laughter seems filled with pain. She was not like this, two years ago, when we met, he thinks to himself. I wonder what happened. I wonder if she is alone. I wonder if she was on meds and stopped taking them. I wonder if the others here in the café like her, tolerate her, know her, protect her, care for her, or if some other more sinister modality of human relation obtains between them. She seems to know everyone. But then she tries to stop another man who is just leaving, and he says he is just leaving.

Finally, mercifully, she goes outside to smoke a cigarette, leaving the three earnest men, our modest trinity, to their holy conversation, their intimate communion, their eternal peace of earnest talk. The men finally leave, one his way and two on theirs. Of the two, the man who knew her is guilt-stricken. Should he have brought her to the table? At one point she had nearly shouted to the man, “your son is French and American, isn’t he?” “Yes, he is,” the man smiles. What would have happened if she were brought to the table? Instead she waited outside smoking. When the man left, with his friend, he passed her on the opposite corner, pretending not to see her.

Filled with shame and horror and wonder, the trinity moves on to its next occasion of grace. Meanwhile the neglected woman, sick with grief, sick with drugs or loneliness or longing, sick with the problems of the world, waits to be taken home. What would have happened if the men had talked to her instead of talking to

God manifested himself to me as the infinite void; but it was not the abyss; it was the vault of heaven, with blue sky and wisps of white clouds. He was not some foreign God but the God of my fathers. He was loving and kind and he had personality. He said, “You suffer now in life; it is little compared with the great joys, the bliss that awaits you. Do you think I in my theodicy would allow you to suffer greatly in proportion to your reward?” He made me aware, then, of the bliss that would come; it was infinite and sweet. He said, “I am the infinite, I will show you. Where I am, infinity is, there I am. Construct lines of reasoning by which to understand your experience in 1974. I will enter the field against their shifting nature. You think they are logical but they are not; they are infinitely creative.”

I thought a thought and then an infinite regression of theses and countertheses came into being. God said, “Here I am, here is infinity.” I thought another explanation; again an infinite series of thoughts split off in dialectical antithetical interaction. God said, “Here is infinity; here I am.” I thought, then an infinite number of explanations, in succession, that

themselves, about themselves? Would she have been too crazy to contribute? Would she have known the magic word? Would her inclusion have been the action the conversation was apparently about? Or is this only the form Sophia takes if she lets herself apparently be seen? Is Sophia only radiant, whole, wise, as long as she remains invisible, subtle, the substance of the conversation itself, the evidence of things unseen? Can Sophia only show up in the flesh as perverse, or as schizoid, as a drunk or a whore or just as unmanageable? Or can she never appear? Or is She somehow both the unhealable wound and the healing words, the force driving both men and women on, ever on, to whatever well of healing there may be—the next pill or nightclub or Philip K. Dick novel? Or is She the longing with which they long to but cannot hope to heal each other, at least not in time, never in time?

Amphilotropic. We coin this concept. This is the name of that which can be shared. Am, as in amphibian. Phil, as in love, or PKD. O, as in the null set, the emptiness. Or as in O Brother, Where Art Thou? Tropic, as in tending to create places or dimensions. This is a seal that cannot be broken, unless it is in the name of love, but then if it is broken in the name of love, it continues. Continues to respond, break, respond, break, respond, break, respond, break . . . have we lost count yet?

explained 2-3-74; each single one of them yielded up an infinite progression of flipflops, of theses and antithesis, forever. Each time, God said, "Here is infinity. Here, then, I am." I tried for an infinite number of times; each time an infinite regress was set off and each time God said, "Infinity. Hence I am here." Then he said, "Every thought leads to infinity, does it not? Find one that doesn't." I tried forever. All led to an infinitude of regress, of the dialectic, of thesis, antithesis, and new synthesis. Each time, God said, "Here is infinity; here am I. Try again."

...

"You cannot be YHWH Who You say You are," I said. Because YHWH says, 'I am that which I am,' or, 'I shall be that which I shall be.' And you—"

"Do I change?" God said. "Or do your theories change?"

"You do not change," I said. My theories change. You, and 2-3-74, remain constant."

"Then you are Krishna playing with me," God said.

"Or I could be Dionysus," I said, "pretending to be Krishna. And I wouldn't know it; part of the game is that I, myself, do not know. So I am God, without realizing it. There's a new theory!" And at once an infinite regress was set off; perhaps I was God and the "God" who spoke to me was not.

"Infinity," God said. "Play again. Another move."

"We are both Gods," I said, and another infinite regress was set off.

"Infinity," God said.

"I am you and you are you," I said. "You have divided ourself into two to play against yourself. I, who am one half, do not remember, but you do. As it says in the GITA, as Krishna say to Arjuna, 'we have both lived many lives, Arjuna; I remember them but you do not.'" And an infinite regress was set off; I could well be Krishna's charioteer, his friend Arjuna, who does not remember his past lives.

"Infinity," God said.

"I cannot play to infinity," I said. "I will die before that point comes."

"Then you are not God," God said. "But I can play throughout infinity; I am God. Play."

"Perhaps I will be reincarnated," I said. "Perhaps we have done this before, in another life." And an infinite regress was set off.

"Infinity," God said. "Play again."

"I am too tired," I said.

"Then the game is over."

"After I have rested—"

“You rest!” God said. “George Herbert” wrote of me:

Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness.
Let him be rich and wearie, that at least,
If goodness leade him not, yet weariness
May tosse him to my breast.

“Herbert wrote that in 1633,” God said. “Rest and the game ends.”

“I will play on,” I said, “after I rest. I will play until I die of it.”

“And then you will come to me,” God said. “Play.”

“This is my punishment,” I said, “that I play, that I try to discern if it was you in March of 1974.” And the thought came instantly, My punishment or my reward; which? And an infinite series of thesis and antithesis was set off.

“Infinity,” God said. “Play again.”

“What was my crime?” I said, “that I am compelled to do this?”

“Or your deed of merit,” God said.

“I don’t know,” I said.

God said, “Because you are not God.”

“But you know,” I said. “Or maybe you don’t know and you’re trying to find out.” And an infinite regress was set off.

“Infinity,” God said. “Play again. I am waiting.”^{xx}

Aron Dunlap is an assistant professor of liberal arts at Shimer College in Chicago. He works in the fields of Christian theology, psychoanalysis and literature and is currently finishing a book entitled *Lacan and Religion*. He also writes songs and performs with Good Dust.

Joshua Ramey is the author of *The Hermetic Deleuze: Philosophy and Spiritual Ordeal* (Duke University Press, 2012). His work on figures from Laruelle, Badiou, and Zizek to Warhol, Hitchcock, and Cronenberg has appeared in journals such as *Angelaki*, *SubStance*, *Political Theology*, *Discourse*, and *Journal for Religious and Cultural Theory*. He is currently co-translating François Laruelle’s *Mystique Non-philosophique à l’usage des contemporains* for Palgrave-Macmillan Press, and is writing a monograph, *On Divination: Contingency, Metaphysics, and the Future of Speculation*. He teaches philosophy and writing at Haverford College.

ⁱ Philip K. Dick, *Ubik* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 127.

ⁱⁱ Philip K. Dick, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 205.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ubik*, 81-82.

^{iv} Philip K. Dick, “Paycheck” (*Selected Stories of Philip K. Dick*, New York: Pantheon Books), 18-54.

^v “Paycheck,” 26.

^{vi} “Paycheck,” 54.

^{vii} Philip K. Dick, *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 208.

^{viii} Philip K. Dick, *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 110.

^{ix} Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts (Thoughts and Minor Works*, New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1910), 145-146.

^x Pascal, *Thoughts*, 147.

^{xi} Philip K. Dick, “An Interview With America’s Most Brilliant Science Fiction Writer,”
(http://www.philipkddick.com/media_aquarian.html, last accessed 2/21/13).

^{xii} Philip K. Dick, *Ubik*, 213-214.

^{xiii} Philip K. Dick, *Ubik*, 206.

^{xiv} Philip K. Dick, *Ubik*, 182.

^{xv} Philip K. Dick, *In Pursuit of Valis: Selections From the Exegesis of Philip K. Dick*, ed. Lawrence Sutin, (Lancaster, PA: Underwood-Miller, 1991), 37.

^{xvi} Philip K. Dick, *Martian Time-Slip (Five Novels of the 1960's and 1970's*, ed. Johnathan Lethem (New York: Library of America, 2008), 90.

^{xvii} Philip K. Dick, *Martian Time-Slip*, 98.

^{xviii} Philip K. Dick, *Martian Time-Slip*, p. 100.

^{xix} Philip K. Dick, *In Pursuit of Valis*, 39-41.

^{xx} *In Pursuit of Valis*, 51.