

How Am I Not Myself?

Philip K. Dick, The Autism Connection

By Jasun Horsley, 2013

To Philip, & Kindred

“My books are forgeries. Nobody wrote them.”

—Philip. K. Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick*

Autist Time-Slip

“Dick perceived reality as a paradoxical, distorted, and even dysfunctional thing, and he sought, through his writings, a variety of possible explanations; political, religious, philosophical, psychological, even pharmacological. One of the very few he didn’t pursue was a neurological explanation.”

—Jonathan Lethem, “My Crazy Friend”

Today Philip K. Dick is seen as a sci-fi prophet, probably the most prominent science-fiction writer of the second half of the 20th century. Naturally, he wasn’t seen that way in his lifetime: he died in 1982, just before *Blade Runner* was released. The main thing Dick is credited with anticipating is the whole “matrix” surrogate reality idea. Dick was probably the first writer to deal with this mystical concept in technological terms as opposed to strictly philosophical ones. Dick’s primary preoccupation was twofold: what is reality, and what does it mean to be human? The second preoccupation naturally overlapped with technology, most famously in his 1968 novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (which later became *Blade Runner*). If machines develop self-awareness, does that make them equivalent to human? And if human beings lose their capacity for self-awareness, do they cease to be human?

Dick’s prescience was in recognizing that, not only would technology provide the opportunity to expand our ideas about reality and ourselves, it would *force us to do so*. He foresaw that the opportunity of technology was the *crisis* of technology, and that this crisis was not merely social but *existential*, or spiritual.

The less remarked on, but even more remarkable, way in which Dick’s fiction has proved prescient is his descriptions of an alternative form of human consciousness, human reality, and human individual that has nothing at all to do with technology (directly at least), but which presents instead a *biological* crisis-opportunity. Several of his novels involve a form of innate psychism possessed by a small minority of the species, a mutant strain which is viewed either as a threat (crisis) or as a *resource* (opportunity) by the controlling powers.

While Dick’s worldview has long been described as “schizoid” (Dick even sporadically described himself that way), the word “autistic” has rarely, if ever, been attached to him or his work. This strikes me as a peculiar oversight. By my reckoning, Dick was the first writer to consider the psychic implications of

autism in a work of fiction (or anywhere else), in *Martian Time-Slip*, published in 1964. In passing, it's worth noting that the year before, in September 1963, Marvel Comics released the first *X-Men* comic, about super-powered mutants and their psychic leader (Professor X). As in Dick's stories, the X-Men were viewed as both threat and resource, though mostly the former. I grew up reading the comics, and they fed into a rich fantasy life for a troubled adolescent.

Not counting *Blade Runner*, I first became interested in Dick (! Pun unavoidable!) at around nineteen or twenty. Oddly, the context wasn't literature, or even movies, but alternate music. Specifically, Dick got my attention via a collection of writings and interviews with underground musicians such as Nick Cave, Genesis P. Orridge, Henry Rollins, The Swans, Clint Ruin, and Lydia Lunch.* In the Sonic Youth section, lead singer Thurston Moore talked about Dick's novels and (if memory serves) how reading them seemed to have influenced his reality.† The novel which Moore cited was *A Scanner Darkly*, about a police informer who winds up spying on himself. I read the book, but that was as far as I got with Dick until a few years later, in my mid-twenties. While I was cleaning up and moving into an apartment in Northern Spain, I found an old copy of *The Man Whose Teeth Were All Exactly Alike*; then later I came upon *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*. After reading them, I tracked down several old copies of his work (this was before Amazon), including *Martian Time-Slip*. In retrospect, that was probably the first time I began to wonder about autism! I also read *Time Out of Joint* during the same period.

Time Out of Joint, published in 1959, is about Ragle Gumm, who lives inside a surrogate reality created by the government to keep him sane while his psychic powers are harnessed to keep the world safe from nuclear attack. Since recognized as a direct inspiration for *The Truman Show*, the novel combines what may be Dick's two main intersecting themes—reality creation and alternate forms of perception—and therefore indirectly explores what I think was Dick's primary *personal* preoccupation, the question of what constitutes sanity and insanity. *Martian Time-Slip* covers the same subjects from a different angle, making the books like two sides of a single “diagnosis.” In *Joint*, the psychic, Gumm, is placed inside a false reality in order to keep him sane to harness his power to foresee the future. In *Time-Slip*, the autistic boy, Manfred, is likewise able to see the future (or rather, unable *not* to), and an attempt is also made to harness this power; but here the protagonist, Jack (a recovering schizophrenic), winds up temporarily lost in Manfred's world. Manfred's world is not so much a false reality as a radically different perception of reality, one that is arguably closer to the true state of things. From Jack's perspective, however, entering Manfred's world—going through the time-slip—is akin to going insane.

* The book was called *Tape Delay: Confessions from the Eighties Underground*. Oddly, I first heard about the author Paul Bowles—who also became a major influence—from an interview (published elsewhere) with The Swans. One medium (music) was leading me deeper into another (literature), like the right brain sending messages to the left?

† From Wikipedia: “*Sister* [Sonic Youth's 1987 album, the first of theirs I ever heard, and which indirectly led me to the book] was in part inspired by the life and works of science fiction writer Philip K. Dick. The original titles for the album were Kitty Magic, Humpy Pumpy, and Sol-Fuc but it was named ‘sister’ as a reference to Dick's fraternal twin, who died shortly after her birth, and whose memory haunted Dick his entire life. ‘Sister’ was also the original title for ‘Schizophrenia,’ and Moore often introduced it as ‘Sister.’”

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sister_\(Sonic_Youth_album\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sister_(Sonic_Youth_album))

In his short essay “The Merger of Fact and Fiction: Philip K. Dick’s Portrayal of Autism in *Martian Time-Slip*,” John R. Blakeman writes:

Manfred clearly has “exaggerated insight”¹ in the form of the ability to see the future. . . . While Dick may be stretching the meaning of “exaggerated insight” a bit, the basis for seeing the future can be seen in this symptom described by [neuro-psychiatrist Laretta] Bender. Moreover, the theory proposed by Dr. Glaub in *MTS* reveals the possibility of a severe “disturbed thought process” in Manfred. According to Dr. Glaub, the new Swiss theory on autism is that “It [autism] assumes a derangement in the sense of time in the autistic individual, so that the environment around him is so accelerated that he cannot cope with it, in fact, he is unable to perceive it properly.” Thus Manfred’s thought process is disturbed because he is not able to properly perceive time. Again, using Kantian thinking, it can be said that Manfred possibly had a brain that did not filter out the true reality of the world around him and thus could see into the “real” world.

Martian Time-Slip proved remarkably prescient (or precognitive!) on Dick’s part in two ways. Firstly, he ended up passing through his own “time-slip” in February and March of 1974 (“2-3-74”), when he began to experience himself living in two different timestreams simultaneously.* And secondly, substantial evidence has since been found that autistics—as well as schizophrenics—often have an unusual experience of time. It may even be that *how autists perceive time* is central to their alternate experience of reality, and to their difficulty communicating, and even functioning, within the social realm:

According to Brain Research Institute of UCL, neurological circuits in the cerebellum, basal ganglia and prefrontal cortex are responsible for time perception, with a healthy human brain checking incoming information and measuring the passage of time. In certain neurological conditions, such as autism, the concept of time is somehow distorted. Why people with autism perceive time differently is unknown, though evidence suggests a neurological impairment in the areas of the brain that measure time. . . . For example, a person with autism who has echolalia may hear a phrase in the morning and repeat the phrase hours later out of context.²

Simply put, “People with autism perceive time differently than nonautistic people.”

* In February and March of 1974, Dick had a life-changing experience in which he believed he had been suffused in the pink light of conscious energy emitted by a cosmic super-intelligence which he termed VALIS (Vast Active Living Intelligence System). The experience continued for several months, and Dick spent the rest of his life attempting to make sense of it through writing (hence the “Exegesis”). A central part of his experience entailed the belief that he was being contacted—and at times supplanted—by a second personality that existed in the past, circa A.D. 70 (or 45). Dick came to believe (at least some of the time) that this past timestream represented his true life, that it was happening currently, and that his future/present self was a false overlay or manufactured delusion.

Autists in the Closet

“There are ‘androids’ or ‘the mantis’ among us which appear human but only simulate humans. . . . Here is where I went wrong: the simulation is (1) not evil (as I thought) and it is not *less* than what it simulates (as I thought) but more; not clever simulacra-reflex machines, but angelic. . . . Behind Palmer Eldritch’s cold cruel mask lies the visage of a totally harmless and *virtually* defenseless organism . . .”

—Philip K. Dick, *Exegesis* (p. 257-8)

Dick’s influence on me was gradual, like a slow-acting drug. At least until I read *Valis* and realized that his stories were *metaphoric narratives* for his own lived experiences. This was something Dick himself didn’t realize until his last decade or so. While I was interested in schizophrenia even in my twenties, autism didn’t show up on my mental radar for another decade, shortly before I self-diagnosed as autistic. Even then, I didn’t link the subject to Dick right away. But in 2012, while working on “Autism and the Other,” I was “coincidentally” reading *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* (the 900 page version) and I came upon a passage which caused a flurry of activity in my awareness. In the midst of his endless theorizing around what happened to him in 2-3-74, Dick wonders if his sudden personality change might have to do with being possessed by the spirit of his friend Bishop James Pike, who died in 1969. He refers to a specific turning point ten years earlier, in 1964, following a serious car accident, when—he speculates—he may have entered into a kind of “fugue state,” or false identity.

Well then we have here a sort of time travel, rather than someone who is dead “coming across” from the Other Side. It is still me, with my old, prior tastes and skills and habits. Mercifully, the sad recent years are gone. Another form of my odd and chronic psychological ailment: amnesia, which my head learned after my dreadful auto accident in 1964. . . . Perhaps what happened that day was that from the physical and mental shock an alternate personality was struck off; I did have extraordinary amnesia during the months afterward. So that might make an excellent hypothesis: the trauma of that auto accident started a secondary personality into being, and it remained until mid-March of this year; at which time for reasons unknown it faded out and my original “real” personality returned. That makes sense. More so than any other theory. Also it was in 1964 that I first encountered Jim Pike (p. 25).

According to a footnote in *The Exegesis*, “The year 1964 was a bad one for Dick. Burned out after writing seven novels in twelve months, Dick suffered a serious bout of depression. Writer’s block and two bad acid trips took their toll.” (So far as I know it was only one bad acid trip, and Dick never took LSD again. He also separated from his second wife, Anne. *)

Reading the passage in *The Exegesis* seemed to trigger a rapid series of associations for me, and over the next few hours I had what might be called a minor epiphany regarding Dick’s unrecognized autism. *Martian Time-Slip* and the first reference to autism in a sci-fi work occurred in 1964 (the book was

* Anne was married to Dick from 1958 to 1964. After finishing this piece, I read Anne R. Dick’s *The Search for Philip K. Dick*, and was left with the strong impression that Anne was Dick’s “real” wife or soul-match (he married three more times after they split). If so, then it would be natural that living with her triggered an unusual, even overwhelming, amount of unconscious material for Dick.

written in 1962, the year Dick published his most successful novel, *The Man in the High Castle*). Between its writing and its publication, Dick experienced an unprecedented outburst of inspiration (compulsive writing) that produced seven novels,^{*} and which was followed soon after by depression. This roughly coincided with his separation from Anne, his traumatic car accident, and meeting Bishop Pike, whose spirit he became possessed by ten years later (or so he speculated). Throw in communication with the dead, psychism, alternate perceptions of time and reality, and the matter of Dick's alleged dual personality, one real, the other illusionary, and all of this had more than passing significance for me.

The more I had explored the possibility that I was on the autistic spectrum over the previous few years, the more I had begun to suspect that my customary identity was a kind of "neurotypical" false self, a socialized persona which I had in my early years (pre-memory) superimposed over my deeper, more vulnerable, authentic self. This outer persona, while ostensibly designed to protect my authentic self, had wound up obscuring it and imprisoning it, leaving me like a character in a Dick novel: lost in a matrix-like fantasy world of my own (unconscious) creation. The primary tool of this surrogate self, as far as I could observe it—the way it maintained its control, both in the world and in my psyche—was *language*. Like Dick, I was a compulsive writer. I had a lifelong love-hate relationship with fantasy (in my case movies); I nurtured religious-philosophic aspirations, or pretensions; and I had a lifetime's experience of being a misfit and outsider.

So what if, like me, Dick was on the autistic spectrum? That would change the picture dramatically. Suppose what happened in 1974—spirit possession and cosmic superintelligences aside—was the re-emergence of his authentic, autistic self and the collapse of his neurotypical identity-façade? And suppose that façade, like my own, was contingent on his being a writer (something he aspired to from a very early age)? I knew I might be projecting past my limits by imagining such affinities; but on the other hand, maybe those affinities were what had drawn me to Dick to begin with?

Following his mad (amphetamine-fueled?) bout of inspiration in 1963-4, Dick burned out and fell into depression, broke up with Anne, and soon after suffered the serious car accident, which he later claimed has been a suicide attempt.[†] It was then that he (possibly) entered all the way into a dissociative state (amnesia) which he later described as his "secondary personality," a state which he only emerged from ten years later. Psychologically speaking, I knew such dissociation from trauma was common enough, being fundamental to how a false or fragmentary self is created. Of course, this would have happened at an early, even a pre-verbal, age for Dick—just as it had for myself. But was it possible that, in 1964, he

^{*} I haven't been able to ascertain exactly which novels, but according to David Hyde (author of *Pink Beam*), Dick wrote seven novels—*The Game-Players of Titan*, *The Simulacra*, *Now Wait for Last Year*, *The Zap Gun*, *Clans of the Alphane Moon*, *The Crack in Space*, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*—between May 1963 and early 1964, i.e., in eight months! It's significant that this run ended with *Palmer Eldritch*, in which Dick describes reality being replaced by the willed delusions of a god-like psychopath—or psychopathic God (Eldritch).

[†] There was another element to the narrative: after Dick's car accident, he dislocated his shoulder, making him unable to type. For a period, he was forced to dictate his writing; in other words, he had to find *a new voice* as a writer. This may well have exacerbated the crisis for him.

was unconsciously reenacting an *original* trauma and dissociation—repeating it, reinforcing it, and taking it one step further—in an attempt (again unconscious) to bring about a healing crisis?

After finishing this piece, Anne's *The Search for Philip K. Dick* gave me still more to chew on. In 1963, during the period leading up to Dick's break-up with Anne, car accident and psychotic break, Dick suggested to Anne that he should give up writing because he wasn't able to support them, and instead open a record business. She went along with his idea and suggested they mortgage the house to fund the business. According to Anne's recollection, both Dick's mother and therapist then accused her of trying to make Dick quit writing! Shortly after, Dick had Anne committed to a psychiatric institute. She was released after a two-week evaluation but was heavily medicated for several months. Dick then began leaving her at regular intervals, and moving in with his mother.*

Excited by these possibilities, I began to look into Dick's childhood for early indicators of autism. I ordered a copy of Emmanuel Carrere's *I Am Alive and You Are Dead* online, where I found the following clues. On page 2, Carrere describes Dick's father, Edgar, putting on a gas mask in front of his young son (who was probably four at the time). Phil "screamed in terror, convinced that a hideous monster, a giant insect, had eaten his father and taken his place. For weeks after, Phil kept scanning his father's face for other signs of the substitution." Admittedly this was a reversal of the usual autistic child scenario in which the parents feel as though their child has been substituted by an alien. But the same basic elements were present, and the experience was apparently formative for Phil, as many of his stories involve humans being replaced by alien or android imposters.

There was something else too. In a little-known 1979 two-hour interview with Charles Platt in Santa Ana,³ Dick describes a life-changing vision of an evil "demiurge" in the sky and how it drove him to seek refuge in religion (he later described the vision in *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said*). The vision also occurred in 1963. In the interview, Dick accounts it to the experience of the gas mask, and recounts how his father would show him his war memorabilia and describe in terrifying detail his wartime experiences. Dick believed this had an indelible impact on his four-year-old psyche, imbuing him with a lifelong fear that the world was a terrifying and irrational place, hence his vision, thirty years later, of the evil deity. This would seem to confirm the idea that, in the period between 1963 and 1964 (i.e., after writing *Martian Time-Slip*), Dick was unconsciously re-enacting certain traumatic experiences from his past, seeking to understand them.

On page 3, Carrere describes how "Phil loved spending hours on end hiding in old boxes, silent and safe from the world." A desire to be covered up, contained, hidden away, is characteristic of autistic children, and it was a characteristic that continued in Phil's later childhood. He went to Quaker school (much of which was passed in silence), and spent long hours alone at home while his mother worked. According

* Anne also recounts how Dick was depressed in the winter of 1963 due to the Kennedy assassination. He got two Siamese kittens which became sick at once and spent weeks staying up nights, trying to force-feed them and keep them alive. Eventually they died. Anne writes, "I should have realized something was terribly wrong when Phil didn't want to get another cat" (p. 96). Since Dick was himself a twin, whose sister died soon after birth, this again suggests he was unconsciously re-enacting an original trauma with the Siamese kittens, which according to Anne were a boy and girl cat.

to Carrere (p. 4), Phil “spent his afternoons for an entire winter playing at being one of the first Christians hiding in the catacombs.” Carrere then describes Phil as “an artistic soul, an albatross whose enormous wingspan prevented him from walking on the earth” (p. 4). A few pages later (p. 7), he calls him “one of those compulsive personalities who, like Sherlock Holmes, can date a file by the thickness of the dust covering it and relish being the only one who can make sense of the reigning chaos.” These are unmistakably Aspergerian tendencies.*

Phil’s capacity to cheat on the psychological tests routinely given to children in the 1930s, is also suggestive. According to Carrere, Phil was able to recognize trick questions and give the required answers:

Like a student who has managed to get his hands’ on the teachers’ manual, he knew exactly which bubbles in the Wordsworth Personal Data Sheet of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory he should blacken if he wanted to please the doctor, which figures he should see in the Rorschach splotches if he wanted to confound him. At will he could appear normal, normally abnormal, or (his forte) abnormally normal . . . (8-9)

This last point also suggests that, at an early age, Phil developed *an instinctive capacity for creating false personae*. Finally, on page 11, Carrere sums up Phil’s childhood personality with a quintessentially autistic image:

In one of Phil’s favorite daydreams, he is an astronaut circling high above an earth devastated by atomic catastrophe. From the spaceship he is condemned to call home for the rest of his life, he sometimes receives messages from survivors on the planet’s surface.

Later I found further clues to Dick’s autism in *The Search for Philip K. Dick*. In his youth, Dick was agoraphobic—an intense fear of crowds—and had trouble being in public places. He also had a phobia about eating in the company of other people, a form of social anxiety sometimes shared by autistics. (I have a touch of it myself.) He also suffered from vertigo and Anne reports a particularly serious attack in her recounting of Phil’s early years:

something irreversible happened to his psyche when he was ushering at the symphony with [his friend Dick Daniels]. He said that his being had sunk down into itself—from then on, it was as if he could only see out into the world with a periscope, as if he were in a submarine. He felt that he never recovered his ability to perceive the world directly [p. 236-7].

All of these details may seem more or less what we’d expect to find in the formation of a fantasy writer, and indeed they are. They are also strong—if inconclusive—signs of autism. Considering that a) autism was not being diagnosed in the US until the 1940s; b) it was initially considered a form of child schizophrenia, and Dick showed a persisting interest in schizophrenia; and c) Dick had a unique

* Sherlock Holmes is now seen as an Aspergerian prototype, and is even described as such in the recent BBC series, *Sherlock*.

preoccupation with autism as early as 1962; it seems reasonable to extend a tentative diagnosis of autism to him.* If so, what his early (and later) biography shows is that he learned to deal with such unusual perceptions and hyper-sensitivity by the autistic strategy of *withdrawing into fantasy* (even literally, using cardboard boxes), and later, by *becoming a writer*—i.e., by making his fantasies “real” via language.

Like so many other autistic-artists, Dick would have been drawn to creative expression as a necessary way to deal with his unusual experience of reality and of himself, and to make a niche for himself in the world. Since this process amounts to developing *an acceptable social identity*, it was probably inevitable that it also became a way to contain, control, and *sublimate* (if not out-and-out suppress) Dick’s unusual, or “neurodiverse” perceptions of reality.

This process then became *the single most persistent theme and subtext (and even text) of his writing*, most of which, in one way or another, is about how false realities are created, unusual perceptions harnessed or suppressed, and humanness (sanity) is lost and found.

What Sci-Fi Writers and Autists Have in Common (& What They Don’t)

“The teaching machines demonstrated a fact that Jack Bohlen was well aware of: there was an astonishing depth to the so-called ‘artificial.’ And yet he felt repelled by the teaching machines. For the entire Public School was geared to a task which went contrary to his grain: the school was there not to inform or educate, but to mold, and along severely limited lines. It was the link to their inherited culture, and it peddled that culture, in its entirety, to the young. It bent its pupils to it; perpetuation of the culture was the goal, and any special quirks in the children which might lead them in another direction had to be ironed out. It was a battle, Jack realized, between the composite psyche of the school and the individual psyches of the children, and the former held all the key cards. A child who did not properly respond was assumed to be autistic—that is, oriented according to a subjective factor that took precedence over his sense of objective reality. And that child wound up by being expelled from the school; he went, after that, to another sort of school entirely, one designed to rehabilitate him: he went to Camp Ben-Gurion. He could not be taught; he could only be dealt with as *ill*. . . . Autism . . . had become a self-serving concept for the authorities who governed Mars.”

—Philip K. Dick, *Martian Time-Slip* (published 1964)

In the 1979 interview with Platt, Dick mentions (at around the 27-minute mark) that he was reading *Martian Time-Slip* the night before. The context is Dick’s choice to write science fiction as “a route by which I could publish the kind of thing that I wanted to write.” *Martian Time-Slip*, he says,

is *exactly* what I wanted to write: the invasion of one person’s world by another person’s world. . . .
. this is definitely what I wanted to do from the very beginning, the way the autistic boy’s world

* In the 1979 Charles Platt interview, Dick describes taking a psychological test with a friend who was training to be a psychological profiler for the army. The results showed him to be paranoid, cyclothymic (mildly bipolar), neurotic, schizophrenic, and a pathological liar!

takes over, say, Arnie Kotts', takes over Jack Bohlen's, and so on. [This was] the premise, which was to me so important . . . not just that we live each of us in a unique world of our own psychological contents, but that the subjective world of one rather powerful person can infringe upon the world of another person. . . . The greatest power the human being can exert over others is to get control of their perceptions of reality.

Dick goes on to say that, after *Time Out of Joint* (which he wrote in 1958), he felt dissatisfied with the overly literal device he had used (of a government-constructed fake reality to house an insane person) to communicate his all-important idea. He points out that this was before he or the general public knew about LSD, so he didn't have that model either. The implication for me is that, in 1962, Dick came up with a way to communicate his message more faithfully, and that the key he had been looking for was *autism*. If Dick's main theme as a writer—the message he was most determined to deliver—was that of one person (or group of people) making another subject to their interpretation of reality, evidently this had been Dick's own experience *throughout his life*.^{*} The irony of his use of autism in *Martian Time-Slip* is that it exactly *reverses* the usual state of affairs in which neurotypical professionals, parents, and caregivers impose their version of reality on the autistic child, in order to 'get control of their perceptions of reality.' Dick was fully aware of this, because he describes it in detail in the book. With *Martian Time-Slip*, he was turning the tables, and at one level it reads as a kind of autistic revenge fantasy; on another, deeper level, it is a tale of redemption. It shows how Manfred, and by implication Jack, are able to reclaim their own "heritage" (individuality) by casting off the perceptual shackles of an outer-imposed interpretation of reality.

In his final years, based on compelling evidence, Dick came to believe that his life was coming more and more to resemble his fiction. Dick's subjective experience of reality, in other words, was being shaped (so he believed) by the "literalization" (putting into words) of imagination which novel-writing allows for, or depends on. An alternate view, which may be just another way of saying the same thing, is that Dick possessed a similar kind of psychism, or pre-cognition, as many of his characters, allowing him to see his own future without knowing it, which he then turned into novels.

To many people—though perhaps not to Dick fans—both possibilities may seem far-fetched. A preferred reading of the data would be one that simply diagnosed Dick with a mild form of schizophrenia and/or as subject to paranoid delusion. I'm going to offer a reading that allows for all these interpretations without excluding any of them, one which I hope both embraces Dick's more "fantastic" perspective with a more skeptical or psychological view. As a writer, like all good writers, Dick was able to tune into his own unconscious. Nothing too remarkable about that. By doing so, he was able to determine, in a non-rational way, what was transpiring just beneath the threshold of his conscious mind, and to then turn those "images" into fiction. This is what fantasy writers do. The difference is that Dick began to *believe* in his fictions. The ordinary assumption would be that this made him less sane than your average fantasy writer. An alternate, less dismissive deduction is that he was tuning into an *unusually deep* layer of his unconscious.

* In the same interview, Dick describes himself to Platt as a "weak ego." He accounts his overwhelming fear of totalitarianism (local or global) to "probably an indication of my own vulnerability, to, the fragility of my own ego, my own self-system." He adds later, "I am immediately persuaded by every argument I hear."

Since what is only latent or potential today will become fully manifest tomorrow, this is equivalent to saying that Dick was tuning into his own “psychic” potential, i.e., his *future*. By tapping into that vast unconscious well of images and affects, and giving it form as fiction, he was bringing his unconscious to the light of consciousness. Inevitably, this would have influenced how his future unfolded.

What happened in 3-74 was that the real, the thrusting-through world which I intuited, proved actually to be there, and not only that, to be accessible . . . I never anticipated such a tremendous payoff (breakthrough), despite the fact that the corpus of my writing is a map, and analysis, and a guide. The 26 years of writing, without 3-74, is a map of nothing, and 3-74, without the body of writing, is conceptually inexplicable (*Exegesis*, p. 268).

This may seem “paranormal” or supernatural, but that’s only because Dick’s case was more extreme than what most of us are used to. For example, if we have an intuition about someone—as in a case of “love at first sight”—and we act on that *irrational* feeling, there’s a good chance that, by tuning into our unconscious, we will end up co-creating our future. Did we fall for that person because we “knew” they were our future partner? Or did we create a future out of the whole cloth of a (mostly unconscious) desire? Only time can tell; and even then we may never know for sure.

By writing successful science-fiction novels, Dick introduced hundreds of thousands of people to his ideas, in other words: to the contents of his unconscious. He extended his unique perceptions of reality *into* the world, and, by drawing others into his surrogate “reality,” gave substance *to* it. On the other hand, more profanely, by becoming an established sci-fi author, he gradually but significantly altered his position in life, thereby changing his experience both of himself and of reality. In other words, *co-creating his future through writing*.

This may seem obvious. You could say it’s just what happens when writers write, successfully at least. But once again Dick is not just any writer, and the underlying reason for this is what I relate to autism. Dick created at least one major autistic character, and though he didn’t write *directly* about autism much outside of *Martian Time-Slip*, he wrote about it a whole lot without knowing it (or admitting it). For example in “Drugs, Hallucinations, and the Quest for Reality,” written in 1964, he gives a more general description of perceptual anomalies which in retrospect has turned out to be almost an *exact match* for the “Intense World Syndrome” hypothesis of autism:

too much is emanating from the neurological apparatus of the organism, over and beyond the structural, organizing necessity. The percept system in a sense is overperceiving, is presenting the self portion of the brain too much. The cognitive processes, then, in particular the judging, reflecting frontal lobe, cannot encompass what it has been given, and for it—for the person—the world begins to become mysterious. No name entities or aspects begin to appear, and, since the person does not know what they are—that is, what they’re called or what they mean—he cannot communicate with other persons about them. This breakdown of verbal communication is the fatal index that somewhere along the line the person is experiencing reality in a way [that is] too radical to allow empathic linkage with other persons. [T]he organism *cannot continue an*

empathic relationship with the members of his society. And this breakdown of empathy is double; they can't empathize his "world," and he can't theirs. [Emphasis added.]⁴

Compare this to the autistic Lucy Blackman's description of her experience, in *Lucy's Story: Autism and Other Adventures*: "I . . . was beginning to understand that I was using my language to make a link with people who lived on another planet in terms of what their senses told them."⁵

Dick's rare ability to tune into the hidden or unconscious strata of reality—to "overperceive"—by immersing in his inner world is an *autistic* quality. Dick used writing—again like all good writers, or so I imagine—to *manage* otherwise unmanageable perceptions and avoid the breaking of his "empathic link" to the world. Being uncomfortably aware of the things moving around—like H.G. Wells' Morlocks in the tunnels—beneath the surface of his conscious mind, things that he couldn't even *think* about but which were nonetheless affecting him, writing was a way to relieve that discomfort. It was a necessary recourse, a way to create a "buffer" between his conscious mind and his unconscious. Rendering unfamiliar, non-rational or "psychic" affects (let's call them images for simplicity's sake) as imaginary narratives—giving names to "no-name entities"—would have been a way for Dick to make them comprehensible, both to himself and to others. This would have allowed him to process those inner experiences, into and *as* fiction.

One natural consequence of this was that, eventually, his "fiction" came true. Because once a no-name aspect of experience (an unconscious affect) has been named, it can more easily be communicated, and then experienced.

So how does this relate to his "seven-novels-in-twelve-months" amphetamine orgy of 1963/4? If the borders between Dick's conscious and unconscious selves were, for whatever reason, unusually open and unpatrolled, allowing for a free passage of Morlocks carrying hidden treasures of the underworld, it's perhaps no wonder he didn't want to stop working! Who knew how long such an opportunity would last? The pressure would have been especially intense since, in 1963, Dick won the Hugo award for *The Man in the High Castle* (written 1961, published 1962) bestowing on him a whole new degree of fame and fortune. If his identity—his livelihood—as a science-fiction writer was thereby consolidated, it's also no wonder if, after so many years in the wilderness, rather than resting on his laurels, Dick went into overdrive.

Dick's tendency to immerse himself in writing activity at the cost of everything else might also be seen as autism-related: "perseverance" is the word used to describe the obsessive and highly selective interests of individuals on the autism spectrum (especially Aspergerians). The word is also used in relation to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and sometimes called "hyperfocus."^{*}

* According to Wikipedia, "Several researchers have tried to connect perseveration with a lack of memory inhibition (the person repeats the answer because they have not been able to forget a past question and move on to the current subject); however, this connection could not be found, or was small." This links perseverance to the anomalous perception of time already connected to autism. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perseveration>

Staying up nights and reducing sleep time drastically, as Dick did at various periods in his life, is a literal way of turning unconsciousness into consciousness, and even of blurring the lines between the two. Lack of sleep leads to a kind of fevered, dreaming-awake state that is ideal for allowing the imaginative process to take over. Dick would have been deliberately letting his unconscious (those Morlocks) possess him in exchange for the treasures it brought. He would have been greedily collecting ideas which he could flatten out, fictionalize, and turn into hard cash. Ironically, Dick's "exploitation" of his unconscious closely matches his descriptions of the government's use of the pre-cogs in "The Minority Report" (published 1956)* and, even more closely in *Martian Time-Slip*, Arnie Kott's attempt to use Manfred's precognitive ability to make a killing on the real estate market. Evidently Dick was aware of what he was doing, even if not fully *cognizant* of it.†

The internal pressure this would have created—the conflict between his need for money/status and his fear of being overwhelmed by unconscious material, not to mention the lack of sleep—could very easily have led to, for lack of a more precise term, a psychotic break. His depression (writers' block?) was perhaps a way to slow him down, and then the "break" was literally (externally) enacted via his accident, which forced him to stop writing (and start dictating). According to Dick's later analysis, this caused his defensive false-ego self (his neurotypical persona?) to fully take over the reins again. After this, the border was more tightly controlled and no Morlock could pass without a Visa. Between 1965 and 1973, Dick's output was reduced to a little over a novel a year (admittedly including four of his breakthrough works, *Ubik*, *Androids*, *Flow My Tears*, and *Scanner Darkly*).

Once again, this sort of scenario is just part and parcel of what writers do. But Dick was an extreme case: not just a science-fiction writer but a science-fiction writer's *idea* of a writer (a "Sibyl," in touch with extra-dimensional entities). And although he drew a line in his fiction, or at least in his later interpretation of it, between "autistic" psychosis-based realities and genuine alternate or higher realities hiding behind this one, it was a line he was constantly hopping back and forth over and unable to ever find or fix in his own mind. My growing sense is that Dick was an autistic-author in denial of his own autism. So while he would defend the subjective experience of the schizophrenic as "an attempt on the part of the brain to achieve bilateral hemispheric parity—an evolutionary leap forward" (*Exegesis*, p. 243), he equated autism, in what so far was the only mention I could find of it in *Exegesis*, with something malign. It's probably telling that the context he used it in was his own writing and specifically his on-going fear that, if he was deluded about his 2-3-74 experience, "it would serve a malign, sick

* "Precogs are produced by identifying the talent within a 'subject' and developing it in a government-operated training school—for example, one precog was initially diagnosed as 'a hydrocephalic idiot' but the precog talent was found under layers of damaged brain tissue. The precogs are kept in rigid position by metal bands, clamps and wiring, which keep them attached to special high-backed chairs. Their physical needs are taken care of automatically and it is said that they have no spiritual needs. Their physical appearance is somewhat different from that of ordinary humans, with enlarged heads and wasted bodies. Precogs are deformed and retarded, 'the talent absorbs everything'; 'the esp-lobe shrivels the balance of the frontal area.' They do not understand their predictions." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Minority_Report

† Kott uses ex-schizophrenic Jack Bohlen as his intermediary, his "in" to Manfred's psyche. Kott winds up getting sucked into Manfred's hallucinatory world, and when he is shot by a smuggler whose business he has destroyed, he dies believing it all to be a hallucination.

purpose: leading the reader away from reality toward autism” (p. 273). If writing was Dick’s way of staving off—or keeping from overwhelming him—his own autism, it made perfect sense that he would fear infecting the reader with it. And of course, what we most fear is invariably what we end up bringing about.

R.D. Laing wrote that the schizophrenic is drowning in the same ocean in which the mystic swims. In a similar way, autists (generally) can’t do what Dick did or what visionary writers and artists in general do. (Or at least if they did, they wouldn’t need to be diagnosed as autistic.) They can’t process or communicate their perceptual experiences of reality. They are caught in a liminal realm between self-awareness (rationality) and unconsciousness (imagination), trying to find a safe “place” to exist within that perceptual chaos, the “intense world” of psychic data flooding their senses.

If both (good) writers and autists are “tapped into” their own unconscious, then they would also be closer to the collective unconscious, perhaps to the extent of being hostages, and even prey, to it. Being more susceptible to the influence of the unconscious means having less defenses against it, which comes down to having a less clearly defined ego or conscious identity-self. As a result of having such a “porous” self, Dick’s fiction was “prophetic,” not only in his own life but also at a collective level. As he himself put it, “for months I lived inside the collective unconscious and its contents” (*Exegesis*, p. 241). To be tuned into the collective unconscious means to exist within a different perceptual (subjective) reality, but it also implies, so far as I can deduce at least, having *an alternate experience of time*. The reason I deduce this is that ordinary linear time depends on having an individual point of view limited to a single sequence of events, as for example in a (non-Dickian) novel. But to be tuned into the collective experience suggests several, even many, different perceptual realities or narratives, occurring simultaneously. In such a hypothetical case, it would hardly be possible to experience linear time.

So Dick’s own account of his life, post 2-3-74, was distinctly akin to Manfred’s in *Martian Time-Slip* (though curiously, as far as I know he never made the comparison): “What is my real relationship to time? I experience the near past, the near future, and the very far past; a lot of my soul or psyche seems to be transtemporal . . . maybe this is why any given present space time seems somehow unreal or delusional to me. I span across and hence beyond it . . .” (*Exegesis*, p. 261)

The Other Side

“I seem to be living in my own novels more and more. I can’t figure out why. Am I losing touch with reality? Or is reality actually sliding toward a Phil Dickian type of atmosphere? And if the latter, then for God’s sake why?”
—Philip. K. Dick, *Exegesis*

Bishop Pike, whom Dick met shortly after his accident in 1964, was an influential religious figure and political activist with a particular interest in contacting the dead. (He published a book about it in 1968, called *The Other Side: An Account of My Experiences with Psychic Phenomena*.) After Pike’s son

committed suicide in 1966, Pike believed Jim Jr. was communicating to him from the other side by psychic means. Pike Sr. died in 1969 under mysterious circumstances: he was looking for proof of the historical Jesus in the Judean Desert with his wife; when their car broke down and she went for help, Pike wandered off for unknown reasons. Eventually his body was found.

In 1971, Dick's apartment in San Rafael was broken into by unknown parties and trashed; his safe was cracked open and all of his papers were taken. Before that he had been paranoid; now he *knew* he was being spied on. One of the most convincing (for me anyway) reasons he came up with for the break-in was that it was due to his relationship with Pike (i.e., part of an on-going investigation into Pike's activities, continuing after his death). The break-in was at least one of the contributing factors that led to Dick's own breakdown/breakthrough of 2-3-74, when Dick started to believe (like Thurston Moore) that his novels had begun to influence reality, and that his life was slowly but steadily transmogrifying into a Phil. K. Dick novel. One of the explanations he found for what was happening to him was that Jim Pike Sr. was communicating with him—or rather had partially possessed his body—from the other side, by psychic means.

This echoed what for Dick, in his exegetic explorations, was probably his key work, *Ubik*—written in 1966. *Ubik* is about characters living in a dream world or Bardo realm being contacted by what they think is a dead man, when in fact(?) it is they who are dead (the dead man being God, or Christ, or VALIS as Dick later named it). And lo, In 1974, Dick found himself wondering the same thing (hence the title of Carrere's bio, *I Am Alive and You are Dead*).

I wrote *Ubik* before Jim Pike died out there in the desert, but Jim Jr. had already died, so I guess my novel could be said to be based on Jim Jr. coming through to his father. So my novel *Ubik* was based on life and now life is based on it but only because it, the novel, goes back to life. I really did not make it up. I just observed it and put it into a fictional framework. After I wrote it I forgot where I got the idea (*Exegesis*, p. 23).

In 1974, by his own account (all 900 pages of it, not counting the novels and the unpublished "Exegesis" notes), Dick was zapped by a pink laser beam which he believed came from a "Vast Active Living Intelligence System," VALIS. The beam caused "anamnesis," a removal of amnesia, after which he started to remember another life, from another time and place (Rome, around the time of Christ). He also began to receive information through dream and vision, some of which he was able to verify as accurate (for example, he was "informed" that his son needed an urgent operation, and his spontaneous diagnosis was confirmed at the hospital). In 1974, Dick became the *receiver-transmitter* which he had long suspected he was, a writer of non-fiction fiction. At least for a while, Dick believed the information was coming from Bishop Pike, who he felt had partially replaced his, Dick's, personality. Somewhat paradoxically, he also saw this "possession" as a return of his authentic self after ten years of amnesia, following the accident in 1964. . .

Without attempting to parse out the many disparate threads of Dick's religious-paranoid psychodrama—which would require at least one novel to do, maybe a trilogy—what was clear to me

was how, in Dick's psyche, several crucial elements were conflated: a mysterious intelligence—whether divine, technological, or divinely technological—emanating from outside the phenomenal world; a disembodied consciousness existing on “the other side”; his own authentic, long-buried self; a powerful and influential political/religious activist who, it's probably fair to say, was a kind of father figure for Dick; Sophia, *wisdom*, the divine feminine; a wise and benevolent philosopher-teacher, located somewhere in ancient Rome, or ancient Greece, or both; and finally, his experience of existing outside the linear timestream of what he'd hitherto taken to be “reality.”

Since the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, the overriding narrative that incorporates all of these subjective experiences, without being restricted to any one of them, is that, in 1974, after ten years unconsciously preparing for his massive integration-healing experience, and precipitated by the combination of psychological burn-out as a writer, separation from his wife, a serious car accident, and meeting Bishop Pike, Phil Dick made contact with his own psyche, soul, and/or higher-deeper Self. Nothing too radical there, I trust.

All of a novelist's characters are himself. This statement could hardly be truer than in the case of “Hoselover Fat.”

The most essential fact about Philip Kindred Dick is that, with the addition of *The Exegesis* to his oeuvre, it's no longer possible to separate the author from his works.

This is true of all authors, but Dick's case writes it in huge, trashy neon letters on the wall of world literature, so to speak.

What really makes all these strands interesting to me—and how they ended up in a book(?) about autism, if they did—is that they are bound together with, in, or *through* (since the main thing about Dick is that his life *is* his novels, and vice versa), the writing and publication of *Martian Time-Slip*.

Time-Slip is about an autistic boy, Manfred, his relationship with an ex-schizophrenic (and possibly Aspergerian*) technician, Jack, and Jack's relationship with Arnie Kott, the real estate Mafioso who hires Jack to help him harness Manfred's precognitive powers. Manfred exists in an entirely different reality. Jack is stuck in a sort of intermediary state between full-blown autism (what he thinks of as schizophrenia) and his precariously maintained neurotypical “sanity”; he is sympathetic to Manfred but also afraid of him. Arnie is unsympathetic either to Jack or Manfred; he is a crass capitalist exploiter with no capacity to grasp the mysteries of autism—or of ego-transcending realities—save as a freakish opportunity for financial gain.

* Jack Bohlen is the technician hired to create a device for the autistic boy, Manfred, to communicate with. Bohlen is probably Aspergerian, and is clearly chosen for his affinity with the boy, as well as for machines. While he's working on the device, his father accuses him of being cold and disaffected, and of regressing to his former strangeness.

Jack is entrusted with the task of communicating with Manfred and in the process has a relapse into schizophrenia. Arnie, reluctantly drawn into proximity to Manfred and Jack, ends up taken over by the very forces he is attempting to exploit. He is repeatedly sucked into Manfred's autistic *other-world*, nearly loses his mind, and ends up dead without knowing it. Jack intervenes to save Manfred from a terrible future (which is the cause of Manfred's negative autism, i.e., his withdrawal from the world), by helping him join the aboriginal people on Mars, the Bleekmen. The Bleekmen recognize Manfred's spiritual (shamanic) nature and welcome him into their community as one of them—a kindred soul. In the last but one scene, Jack receives a visit from the future Manfred, surrounded by Bleekmen, thanking Jack for his help.

In Anne R. Dick's *The Search for Philip K. Dick* (which I read after finishing this piece), Anne writes of Manfred:

When I read *Martian Time-Slip* I was disturbed by the little boy looking out of the window like Phil when he was a latchkey child in Washington, D.C., waiting for his mother to come home. Phil became quite cross with me when I continued to worry, probably a little obsessively, about the child, but I couldn't get him out of my mind. Phil said, "You don't have to worry about him. He was all right. He ran off with the Martian 'Indians.'"⁶

At the risk of overstating what (I hope) by now should be obvious, Manfred, Jack, and Arnie represent three aspects of Dick's psyche and the struggle between them. The psychological process Dick was describing in *Martian Time-Slip*—in 1962, as his star soared to new heights as a sci-fi author—can be seen as an example, admittedly in very rough or symbolic form, of the fiction-becoming-reality process which Dick recognized, twelve years later (with the publication of *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*) as occurring in his life, and in the end, taking it over completely.

Yet curiously, the parallel between Dick's life and *Martian Time-Slip* is a parallel he never really zeroed in on. The book does not make it to his short list of most personally meaningful Dick novels (though it does make it—just—onto the longer list). To my mind, that makes it significant by omission.*

After all, Dick's whole Exegesis is directed towards the attempt to prove—to himself—that his full and final immersion in the Manfred-esque "autistic" world of Valis/Pike/Sophia/Logos/the past/his own unconscious was a real, authentic, glimpse into ultimate reality, and most definitely *not* a schizophrenic episode (although he allows this too, once in a while); nor, most unthinkably of all (since he never mentions it), was it evidence of his own latent/disowned autistic nature.

* Dick's short-list, in his recommended correct sequence for reading: *A Scanner Darkly*, *Flow My Tears*, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, *Maze of Death*, *Ubik*. An amended list includes *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and "Imposter." Finally he tentatively adds "Faith of the Fathers," *Time Out of Joint*, *The Eye in the Sky*, *The Man in the High Castle*, *Martian Time-Slip*, *Galactic Pot-Healer*, and *Penultimate Truth*, before returning to his amended list of seven titles. See *Exegesis*, p. 405-7, from the September-October 1978 folder.

Dick's unacknowledged (re-)introduction to his own latent-disowned autism—if such it was—which began in 1962 and peaked in 1974, culminated in 1982 with two events: the writer's death, at fifty-three; and the release of *Blade Runner*, based on *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* published in 1968 (mid-way between '62 and '74).

Blade Runner was the film that made Dick (posthumously) famous, and which (re-)introduced the humanized robot (and robotic human) to the world. As such, it can be viewed as the autistic-android movie text *par excellence*.

Ironically—and tellingly—it is the film version and not Dick's original book that turns a sympathetic eye towards the autistic-androids, showing, in very clear terms, that empathy, as a lost human trait, has now moved into the realm of the machine.

This precisely echoes Dick's oft-repeated assertion in *Exegesis*: that the Deity always surfaces in the place we least expect it.

Deus ex machina. Even the writer doesn't know where to look.

P.S. Dead Author Seeks Novel to Live In

"[If] superhumans (mutants, etc.) live among us undetected they would use such things—carriers—as popular novels (and I suppose music and films) to 'communicate'—keep in touch—with one another. . . . So it would be ideal, then, if the author knew nothing, was subliminally cued. Of course, if/when the heavy shit came down on him, if the 'mutants' were ethical and not exploitive, they'd rescue him. And they'd know when he was in trouble by means of the same paranormal powers by which they got the material into his books in the first place. They would have to be more or less continuously linked to him telepathically."

—Philip K. Dick, *Exegesis* (p. 336)

So why would it even matter if Dick was autistic? There's only one reason I can think of. To find and identify his kindred (Dick's middle name—i.e., "hidden" nature, though he took care to include the "K" in all his works).

The Exegesis is the great unpublishable P. K. Dick novel. His reputation had to increase tenfold from the time he died for it ever to come into the public realm in the form it eventually did, twenty years later. Its publication demonstrates just how far he has come since *Blade Runner*—and since he "passed over."

P. K. Dick novels—so their author believed—contain secret "living" information meant for a select few (whom Dick sometimes referred to as "the real Christians"). Today, I would guess that his novels have been read by millions of people. But the *Exegesis*? However many people are buying the damn thing, it's hard to imagine that more than a few thousand will ever wade through the 900 pages of repetition,

hyperbole, contradiction, self-aggrandizing, self-doubting, circular arguments and loony logic. Reading the entire published *Exegesis* might even be seen as a rite of passage, the necessary literary initiation to become a true “Dick-head.”*

The annotations from the editors (Jonathan Lethem and Pamela Jackson) and seven or so other authors are like a recurring reassurance, both a comfort and a consoling to the reader, a reminder that he or she is not alone in the thankless, strangely compelling task of navigating the labyrinth of mirrors and maze of literary solipsism (or autism) that Dick’s final years of writing turned into. In *The Exegesis*, the medium is *absolutely* the message. What Dick communicates above all is his insatiable mania for words, his incurable literary addiction. The work in totem (at least the first half of it, which is all I have got through so far) is like a writer’s quest for the validation of his words, a desperate search to prove to himself—empirically, ontologically—that his work, and his life, has meaning and value. Ironically, and as Dick says of *Ubik* (in *Exegesis*), *The Exegesis* is its own proof: the fact that it exists proves it is “right,” or at least that Dick’s uniquely autistic (a tautology, I know) version of reality would prove meaningful to generations of future readers. And most of all, to future *writers*.†

The Exegesis is the capstone to Dick’s oeuvre—or better yet the massively oversized footnote. It is like a ball and chain of fact to his fiction. Yet it is also, I suspect, a strange attractor for, if not autists or mutants, social outliers—people who, by definition, belong to a worldview so far from the societal norm that any kind of halfway coherent vision that resonates with them *at all* is like a sign-post in the desert. You may not want to follow it, but you *sure as hell* need to read it.

As a representative of the transitional world between inner-subjective and outer-objective reality—a world that is by definition autistic and unique—in other words as a spokesman for the unsayable, Philip K. Dick is the Happy King (Felix‡) in service to whom he placed his final years, and last million words.

And King has the same root as *kindred*.§

*

* At time of completing the first draft of this piece, I had made it through Parts One and Two to the midway point. However, just as when I read the Holy Bible, it would be more accurate to say that my eyes passed over every word. I certainly didn’t take all of it in consciously.

† This is not a critical analysis, either of Dick or his work; if it were, my primary criticism of *The Exegesis* would be Dick’s prevailing belief in *words*—language/Logos/information—as the salvific agency, and his assigning of primacy to “Mind” over Body. This is a fundamental error in all of his “models,” not a moral one but an intellectual one (ironically). My guess is this also relates to his being an autist-in-denial (since autism can loosely be correlated with a pre- or non-verbal state of consciousness). But what’s a writer to *do* once he starts to doubt the Word? (Also, if this were a critical analysis, I might feel obliged to point out how, for a visionary-genius-novelist, Dick wasn’t much of a *writer*. Most of his novels are like out-worn technology – clunky, inconsistent, and a bit wearing.)

‡ After he had a vision in which he was shown the name “Felix” in his novel *Flow My Tears*, “King Felix” became for Dick a code signifying the returned Christ. He incorporated it into *VALIS* and *The Divine Invasion* as a cypher.

§ Possibly at least. “*kindred* (n.) c.1200, *kinraden*, compound of kin (q.v.) + -rede, from Old English *ræden* ‘condition, rule,’ related to *rædan* ‘to advise, rule.’” <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=kindred>

“books within books: the real world turned into a book, and a book turned into a world. We *are* totally scripted, after all—rigidly, deterministically programmed (‘written’ our rules engrammed in and onto us all). Which is the book and which is the world?”

—Philip K. Dick, *Exegesis* (p. 331)

Something occurred to me while I was working on this current piece. It was an inevitable occurrence; to some extent you could even say I contrived it for the sake of the piece. But nonetheless, it shall be acknowledged.

What occurred to me was that a new, unknown element had entered into my writing. Not that the piece was writing itself, exactly (every writer’s fancy), but that *certain unseen elements* were beginning to surface, elements that, while apparently secondary to the arguments herein, started to look more and more like the actual, concealed substance of the work. These elements had to do with the subject and the author being in a sense not two things but a single thing, intelligence, or entity.

After all, the author was writing about words (the medium being the message, and all that). And then he was writing about a writer who believed, while he lived, that his novels were the unconsciously-constructed carriers of “living information” (the plasmate), transmitted to him from an unknown source (which he called Zebra, and VALIS, and several other more theological names), in order to extent itself into this world.

Philip K. Dick also believed, at least *some* of the time, that the consciousness of a dead Bishop (Pike) was coming through him. At other times he believed the hidden source behind his novels (and his life, which were one and the same) was a kind of artificial intelligence or AI, a super-computer able not merely to conceal itself in our reality but *as* reality, meaning that we were in effect living *inside* it, without ever suspecting the true nature of our world.

Now the present author was writing about these ideas, and conveying essentially the same information; whether or not it was living information (or even accurate), he could not say. He was doing so as part of a larger piece about autism. Independently of his analysis of Dick, he had already suggested (just a few days before beginning the Dick section of the work) the possibility of *an unseen intelligence*, concealed just beneath the surface of the world (and of his own consciousness). He began to suspect this intelligence was attempting to communicate with him, through him, and *as* him, and in fact he had vocally invited it to do so. He believed, or hoped, that his insuppressible desire to write was even sparked and directed by that same unseen intelligence.

The symmetry was inescapable. But did it actually mean anything besides, “*Dude*, like attracts like!”?

And all the while, the author was secretly (! Yeah, right) hoping that, with *this* piece, he would finally create something that would have an impact on the world of literature. After half a lifetime struggling to be noticed, to amount to something, maybe with this he could break out the bubble of anonymity that

he'd been trapped in and reach a larger audience? More to the point, maybe he could start earning enough income to *live off being a writer*?

Dick was validated by VALIS. Maybe the present author could receive his bene-DICK-tion from the Dean? The irony struck him at once; Dick had always written about frustrated, powerless, and ineffective characters, because that was how he experienced himself, even *after* winning the Hugo award. And he struggled to make a living to the end of his daze. Hollywood only discovered Philip in time for Dick to die.

Now what if the wandering spirit of P. K. Dick was trying to move into his psyche, to find a home and an expression there?

He was pretty sure he wasn't the first to have entertained such thoughts. Maybe his psyche wasn't the only "home" Dick had found?

He had to face it: was there anyone who ever lived *more* likely to be sending messages from the other side than Philip K. Dick?

On the other hand, maybe he, the author, was trying to find a "home" for himself by writing about Dick, by possessing Dick's "body of work," using it as a vehicle to enter the social realm?

He realized that if his life were superimposed on top of his subject's life, at age forty-six as he was now, he would have only just had his own 2-3-74 anamnesis experience. His best work would be mostly behind him. His death would be a mere seven years away. Yet curiously enough, despite all of that, he would be facing the exact same questions he was already facing, because these were the questions Dick was facing at that age. Was what he was doing meaningful or worthwhile? Did his writing have any lasting value? Was it all just the self-referencing, "autistic" meanderings of a disturbed mind? Was it even possible it might be *both at once*?

Then of course there was the possibility, whispered serpentiously in his ear, that he had been *chosen* for this, by the same Super-Intelligence that had chosen Dick, that he was continuing—even completing!—the work started by his secret mentor and autistic kindred, Dick. After all, he had been born the year after *Ubik* was written. That year, 1967, was also the only year between 1952 and 1970 that Dick didn't write a single novel! *Why not?* Three years later, Dick wrote *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*, which he later believed triggered his 2-3-74 awakening, which occurred immediately after *Tears* was published. The novel had a protagonist named *Jason Taverner*. This was a fact of great significance to Dick. *Why?*

Soon after he wrote *Tears* in 1970, Dick met several characters who appeared to be out of the novel, even down to their names (one of them was named Jack). In 1974, after the novel was published and he had his awakening experience, Dick was talking to his priest (Episcopalian) about a scene near the end of the novel in which the Police General Felix Buckman meets a black stranger at an all-night gas station. (It's a key scene in the novel because it's the scene in which the policeman's tears finally stop flowing.)

The priest told Dick that he had described a scene from the Book of Acts, from the Bible, adding that, in Acts, the person who meets the black man on the road is named Philip! Dick went home and read the scene in Acts, a book he claims he had never read until that moment. He noticed that in Acts, the high Roman official who arrests and interrogates Saint Paul is named Felix, and Felix Buckman is a high-ranking police general. (He later found out that Felix meant “happy,” and used “King Felix” as a cypher for Christ in his last novels, thereby transforming the tyrant into the savior.)

Since the main character in *Tears* is named Jason, Dick got an index to the Bible to see if he could find anyone named Jason. He found only one incident, in the Book of Acts:

And, as if to plague me further with coincidences, in my novel Jason is fleeing from the authorities and takes refuge in a person’s house, and in Acts the man named Jason shelters a fugitive from the law in his house—an exact inversion of the situation in my novel, as if the mysterious Spirit responsible for all this was having a sort of laugh about the whole thing. . . A careful study of the novel shows that for reasons I cannot even begin to explain, I had managed to retell several of the basic incidents from a particular book of the Bible, and even had the right names. What could explain this?⁷

Of course I looked into the matter for the current piece. I discovered that the Jason who appears in Acts is known as “Jason of Tarsus”; he was appointed Bishop of Tarsus by Paul and is numbered among the 70 disciples of Christ. He gave shelter to Paul and two other disciples, and was arrested when they couldn’t be found.* Other sources write that Jason traveled to Corfu as an early Christian missionary and was imprisoned. While in jail he converted seven prisoners, who were all killed by the King. The King’s daughter also converted to Christianity but he had her killed as well. Jason escaped and fled the King’s persecution, thereby becoming a fugitive like Jason Taverner. When the King gave chase his boat sank, and apparently the King finally saw the light at this point and converted to Christianity. He changed his name to Sebastian. Sebastian was the name of my older brother, who died in 2010. He was *crucified* as part of an art project in the Philippines in 2000, the year I turned 33. For many years I felt “persecuted” by him.

Of course this was all just coincidence. Unless we lived in a language-based reality in which words were living things. Or in AD 45.

I began to wonder: by writing the present piece, was I creating a “space” for Dick’s hidden autistic side to emerge through? Was I, in other words, providing a refuge for a fugitive? (The name Taverner also suggests a shelter or refuge.) Or was I the fugitive, seeing shelter in the shadow of a dead man? Then there was my last name, unmistakably echoing the name of Dick’s fictional stand-in in *VALIS*—Horselover Fat (Horselover is the root meaning of Philip). If Dick’s restless spirit was seeking a temporary refuge or *Tavern* (psyche) to rest in, and/or a “horse” to travel on between shelters (to ride into this dimension), what more suitable place (name) than this?

* Dick is slightly mistaken in saying it is the only mention of him, as he is also mentioned, in passing, in Romans (16:21). See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Jason

And so on, ad Dickinitum.

So where was I?

Dick believed *The Book of Acts* was the unconscious template for *Tears*. He also began to believe that, since he was really living in the time *Acts* was written, that it was the actual world hidden behind this false one, what *seemed* like a book (*Acts*) was in fact (exactly like *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* in *The Man in a High Castle*^{*}) the means by which the real world (Rome circa A.D. 45) was *inserted* into this false world—*as a book!*

So did that make this world *just a book*, a fantasy narrative or fugue state hiding the real existence behind it? Were we reading about ourselves in some parallel reality?

Wait a minute. *Where are we again?*

Which was better, he wondered: to be an unknown writer writing about a world famous real-life character as a means to become better known thereby in a false world construct? Or to be a character (possibly real) inside a well-known book that only *seemed* like fiction, but was in fact, *uh*, the real world riding into the false world leaving a message for the true, *um*, autistic-Christians who read it?

And where was P. K. Dick by this point?

And which was he and where and which was I?

And now, how about you?

How are *you* not yourself?

Most importantly of all: Are you kindred?

* *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* is a book within a book about our present world that exists in a parallel world (that of *The Man in the High Castle*) in which the Axis (Japan-German alliance) won World War Two and the world is a fascist super state. So within Dick's fiction, reality exists *as a book*. The book is banned by the ruling powers.

End Notes

¹ Blakeman is citing neuropsychiatrist Laretta Bender's description of schizophrenic children's "exaggerated insights."

² "Time Perception in Autism Spectrum Disorder," by Adrienne Warber.

http://autism.lovetoknow.com/Time_Perception_in_Autism_Spectrum_Disorder See also "Slipping Through Time In Autism," <http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/neuroskeptic/2011/04/25/slipping-through-time-in-autism/#.Uh01aDDuAaA>

³ <http://www.sffaudio.com/?p=34258>

⁴ *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick*, New York, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 172-3.

⁵ Quoted in *Autism and the Edges of the Known World*, Olga Bogdashina, pg. 109.

⁶ Anne R. Dick, *The Search for Philip K. Dick*, Tachyon, 2010, pg. 80.

⁷ "How to Build a Universe That Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later," *ibid*, p. 267-8.