

## PKD OTAKU #20

This is a rather unusual edition of PKD OTAKU. It is a slightly re-written compilation of private correspondence with a group of friends. It goes back as late as 2006 so you'll see references to old movies such as *Scanner Darkly* and the Library of America's edition of Phil's early novels. Most of it is pretty short and all of it is informal. I thought there might be some material that would interest the typical OTAKU reader (whoever you are) so I pasted it all together, added the usual book reviews and called the whole mess "number 20."

\*

My friend Jerry wrote this to me in a recent letter:

"I've said it before but yes, we are living in Dick's future: oppressive governments, endless distant war, dissembling media, and surreal public spectacle as a distraction. Worse things is, as in Dick's novels, most people are not standing up and saying this is too weird to be believable."

\*

You know I, for one, am not entirely happy that Phil has become a household name in 21<sup>st</sup> Century culture. I appreciate that this is kind of selfish of me. After all, how can it be a bad thing if more and more people learn about Phil and read his books? I guess my main beef is that it seems as if people know about Phil, if they know about him at all, because of the movies, not for his books. Even though I liked *Blade Runner* a great deal I never thought it was really very, uh, philidickian. The films that followed – *Total Recall*, *Imposter*, *Minority Report*, the godawful *Paycheck* stripped most of Phil away and replaced it with a generic paranoia. To my mind the only film actually true to Phil's original vision was *Screamers* – and everyone hates that movie for some reason. I liked it, myself, certainly much more than all the other cheap simulacrum that followed. I hold absolutely no hope at all for *Scanner Darkly*.

So, although they have little or nothing to do with the real Philip K. Dick I am convinced that when you see a reference to Phil in the media it surely based on some flick or another. And those references are primarily suggestive of paranoia or surveillance or a police state of some kind. When they say Philip K. Dick they really mean George Orwell. Why they can't just say "Orwell" or "Orwellian," which are perfectly legitimate terms, in fact perfectly appropriate terms I don't know. Hell, Orwell wrote the textbook for all of that. But no; Orwell is out and Philip K. Dick is in. I don't know why. Is Orwell too old fashion? Or – and I think this is the case -- is Phil now cool?

He must be. It is rather an odd fate for our guy. I think Phil would find this somewhat pleasing but also pretty silly. And I hope he'd be just a little annoyed that his reputation was based on some bastardized flicks rather than his own novels and short stories. He used to groan about academics one day colonizing his works but surely he would be even unhappier that Hollywood had taken him over. After all, Hollywood is really just an adjunct of Madison Avenue and for Phil Madison Avenue was one of the dark powers controlling our lives.

Occasionally a media citation will make reference to what you might call "acid Phil." That would be the Philip K. Dick who distrusted reality. So in Salon Gary Kamiya remarked, "Those who have watched *Fox News* recently must feel as if they had fallen into a bizarre time and logic warp out of Philip K. Dick, where 9/11 never happened..." Okay, this is much closer to the PKD we all know and love. This is the Sixties Phil, the guy who wrote *The PENULTIMATE TRUTH* and *NOW WAIT FOR LAST YEAR* and *UBIK*. Still, I don't think that "bizarre time and logic warps" are what Phil is about. God knows (*VALIS* knows?) it was the trippy Phil I liked originally but after all it was the Sixties. I got older, Phil got older, the world got even more fucked up and finally the true message, to my mind what Philip K. Dick is all about, emerged. There are two messages in fact: one is there are people who pretend to be human but who are not. The second is the only thing that will save us from those deceivers is *caritas*. I wish the next media reference to Philip K. Dick reflected that but I imagine it will never happen.

\*

Recently Laura wrote:

A friend said, "Well, it's not like it's always a PKD world and something always needs to be commented about." I glared at him, muttered, "Look around you, man, are you living in the same kind of reality that i see?' So i kicked him out and grasped VALIS to my heart and cried. (Well, actually, we both went to Harlows to drown this reality in a flood of rock n roll and good buddies). But VALIS is still in my hands and I'm ready to go on a different PKD trip than the one i live in everyday.

\*

John related the following story:

I had a used book store owner once tell me that it had been suggested to Phil that he change his name – he'd sell more books.

\*

[found this on the Internet a while ago.]

From: Greg Sandow

Date: Mon, 11 Oct 1999

Subject: Re: Abductions: A Funny Thing Happened...

[Stephen Lewis wrote] >>I think even UFO UpDates venerable Greg Sandow met PKD.]

I'm not going to touch "venerable" (makes me feel old!), but I did know Philip K. Dick. I met him in California a year or so before his death, after getting his phone number from another science fiction writer, Thomas M. Disch, who'd been the librettist for two operas I'd composed. Tom knew I loved Dick's writing, and thought I'd enjoy meeting him.

"Enjoy," though, wasn't quite the word. My wife (now ex-wife) went to visit Phil, and found him morose (I'm sure we weren't the first people to find him that way). He announced that he'd been to the doctor, and was going to die. I still don't know whether this was an accurate report of something the doctor had told him, a fear based on a serious diagnosis, or simple panic.

Phil then went on to tell us about the paranormal experiences -- constant contact with what he believed to be a non-human intelligence, which put thoughts in his head, and struck him with a purple being (I hope I'm remembering this right), at which point he knew beyond any doubt that his young son was desperately ill with something never diagnosed by any doctor. And when Phil rushed the kid to the hospital, he really was found to have the condition Phil said he had.

All this had been related in Phil's novel "Valis," but not about him -- it all happened, in the book, to one of his characters.

It wasn't widely known, as it is now, that Phil was relating his own reported experiences.

What struck me, first, was that he'd tell two perfect strangers about all this. Maybe he told lots of people. And, second, I was almost dumbfounded by something missing in the way he interpreted what happened to him. He spent endless hours trying to make sense of both his experience and the knowledge he felt it conveyed to him. He read widely about western mysticism, to find precedents and, more generally, to find a framework for all his thoughts. But he didn't read anything in Eastern thought. I think I asked him why not (my memory of all this is now a little dim), and his answer was noncommittal.

Never once did he suggest that aliens of any sort were contacting him. His theories were more along the lines of some vast disembodied cosmic intelligence.

Greg Sandow

\*

I was paging through Phil Stephensen-Payne and Gordon Benson's PKD bibliography, "Metaphysical Conjurer" (1995), when I came across two citations I hadn't noticed before. "The Electric Dreams of Philip K. Dick" by Richard Bernstein appeared on page one of the NY Time Book Review for November 3, 1991 and Peter C. Du Bois' article, "The Provocative Adventures of a Major Sci-Fi Writer," a review of TIMOTHY

ARCHER, appeared, in of all places, The Wall Street Journal on July 8, 1982. On the editorial page no less. The Wall Street Journal! Who would have thought? And in 1982!

The bibliography hasn't been updated in over ten years now and there has been a boat load of new secondary material on Phil. Alas, not very much primary material at all. I used to send the bibliographic Phil updates but that sort of fizzled out eventually and so far no new edition of "Metaphysical Conjurer" has appeared. Perhaps just as well since the '95 edition is voluminous enough. Looking through it is always fun. There are hundreds of citations from desiccated academic articles to newspaper stories to, naturally, the utterly weird. Of these last, three strike me as being especially fascinating:

- "Philip K. Dick and the Psychogenic Origins of Death by Meteor-Strike" by Angus Taylor: Energumen, 1972
- "Dick Soup" by Steve Sneyd [on slapstick elements in Dick]: Transylvanian Brain Surgery #5, 1977
- "Letter from Rev K.G. Trego [about Dick as a saint of the A-1 Church of Eric Clapton]: Surrealist Exchange, date?

I have never been able to track any of these down, I am sorry to say. They all appeared in fanzines, I suppose – well, I'm not sure what "Surrealist Exchange" is; maybe it's a "real" magazine. Except for Energumen, no library lists the titles in their catalogs. I'd love to read these, though. "Slapstick elements in Dick?" Phil can be hilarious at times. THE MAN WHO JAPED is an obvious example but most of his novels have their humorous moments as do many of the early short stories. Consider "The War with the Fnools" as a prime example. I've read one or two other essays by Steve Sneyd and he is quite good. As for Angus Taylor, one of Phil's correspondents, by the way, I'm not at all sure what "the psychogenic origins of death by meteor-strike" even means! And what has Phil to do with it? I'm dying to know. Truly, however, it is the Rev. K.G. Trego's letter that I most want to read. So Eric Clapton has a church. I'm assuming that means a denomination, not just a building, though that would be strange enough. I can't imagine what its creed would be. Or its rituals, either. Phil's presence as one of its saints is highly suggestive. I wonder if it is the Gnostic Phil or the acid Phil. Or maybe it's just Phil the sci-fi writer. I don't really see any connection between Phil and Eric Clapton. Now if it had been the A-1 Church of Linda Ronstadt – that would make sense.

\*

Andre's comment:

you are dead right about the movie Dick. That 'philip k. dick' is totally self-contained. He is Orwell with a corporate twist, amnesia, androids, and fireworks. The stupidest blurb mining the movie Dick I read recently on Richard K. Morgan's BROKEN ANGELS, sequel of ALTERED CARBON:

"Morgan has created a world as cinema-rich as those of Philip K. Dick - USA Today"

Hell, I never imagined NOW WAIT FOR LAST YEAR or even FLOW MY TEARS as being 'cinema-rich.'  
(Of course, David Lynch could do a hell of a MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE serialization, you have this combined diner/record shop in the Free Rockies starting to sell 'Rock' and 'electric Barbershop' records that might be ingenious fakes or come from an alternate earth where the US won the war and the fifties were a period of prosperity...)

The PKD-inspired movies, again. Who hasn't imagined a real Philip K. Dick movie? It is easy to make a movie in your head. No production costs involved at all. I'd do "Faith of Our Fathers" I think. In deference to Phil, Barbara Hershey would have to play Tanya Lee. David Lynch doing HIGH CASTLE? I don't know. That would be...somewhat surreal I think. David Cronenberg almost did Total Recall. I would have loved for that to have actually happened.

Speaking of which, I saw the trailer for "Scanner Darkly" in the theater the other day. It gave me a headache. The animation style is going to drive me crazy even without taking issue with any changes Richard Linklater may have made with the plot. At first I decided not to see it at all. But, hell, it's a PKD movie. What

else can we do? Having sat through "Imposter" it would be silly to draw the line now. I've already seen the worst possible adaptation. And Linklater is an interesting director at least, albeit no David Lynch. So, yeah, I'll go see "Scanner Darkly" but I think I owe it to myself to read the novel again first.

Andre again:

I take issue with 'Phildickian' being characterized as that situation and state of being where "those close to them (or even they themselves) are secretly robots, aliens, supernatural beings, brainwashed spies, hallucinations, dead, from another time or a combination of these". Of course that's Impostor and Transmigration etc. But what about the decay, the form destroyer, the kipple, the wheels within wheels within wheels? The Ubik. How come I feel so often quite Phildickian but have gotten over the belief those others might be robots, aliens, monsters etc. with thirteen? Of course they still might be brainwashed spies. We all are. (AND supernatural beings, the Gnostics say)

You know, I don't have any idea what "phildickain" as a word encompasses. Andre's list is a good beginning, though hardly exhaustive. What about caritas? What about the dignity of ordinary people and of manual labor? Clearly these are a part of Phil's writings. There is just so much there; "paranoia" is only one aspect and not even the most salient. Phil liked to exaggerate, as most writers will, so he talked up the paranoid in his interviews. I rather like his idea that paranoia is a kind of sixth sense we developed in our primitive mammalian state when we were the prey of anything bigger than we were. It was something we evolved to tell us when a predator was out there looking us over. After we became the most rapacious predator on the planet that early warning sense atrophied into what we now commonly call paranoia. This is such a Phil idea. You can almost see him sitting on the sofa in his living room, talking with friends, listen to music, maybe smoking a joint and suddenly, spontaneously, coming up with the theory. He'd probably offer it up to the others in the room in a dead earnest voice. Probably everyone would be convinced; Phil, too. Later, of course, he'd find some basic flaw and move on to the next theory. Jeez! Is this in SCANNER? It's been so long since I read that book.

Anyway, paranoia is still useful on occasion. Paranoia was for sure a good attitude to cultivate in the 60s. Nixon was out there, the FBI, the Panthers, the Minutemen... Now it's the NSA. And just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't out to get you. Exaggeration aside, I think when Phil tells us, quoting Gilbert & Sullivan, "things are not as they seem" it is not an invitation to freak out over the situation. He's telling us to pay attention, ask questions, dig deeper, keep an open mind, don't make quick assumptions or hasty decisions. Phil's own view of spurious realities evolved over time, too. In the beginning, to be sure, the false worlds, the conspiracies, were definitely hostile. But by the time of VALIS and TIMOTHY ARCHER that had changed. Behind the dubious illusion we call "reality" now lay not an enemy but instead something wonderful.

\*

David wrote pointing out the following in Chapter 16 of COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD:

"So you maintain," Doug Appleford said briskly, "that if a person is killed by a meteor it's because he hated his grandmother. Some theory." David goes on to say,

Been so long since I've read that book I don't recall the context. Which is happy news as it means I'm ready to read it again when the mood strikes. I just took a little look at the relevant passage and some preceding and following paragraphs. Oddly, this makes me even more curious about 'Philip K. Dick and the Psychogenic Origins of Death by Meteor-Strike'.

I am in the same boat. I read COUNTER-CLOCK WORLD a million years ago and barely remember it myself. I suspect that the secret of "Psychogenic Origins" lies within its pages. I will have to re-read the book as well.

Concerning the PKD-inspired movies David remarks:

I saw Blade Runner when first released, same with the director's cut and have seen both on TV edited in various ways for various reasons. I've seen Total Recall on TV in more than one edited form. Not seen any of the other movies in theater, on VHS or DVD or on TV. It's not that I actively avoid them but I don't make any effort to seek them out and I share TV with someone who is slightly biased against

PKD movies. I'm pretty sure some I've not seen have been on channels I get in the year that I've had satellite TV and I've seen a number of them at the local video/DVD rental but I don't really care. Aside from BladeRunner I don't have the impression any of the movies are "PKD movies" in any real sense or are particularly worth seeing on their merits.

I have always found it odd that, most likely, Phil's survival and triumph (if those are the right words) in popular culture hinged upon that movie. I watched it again recently, the old videotape version with the Dekkard voice-over and the happy ending, and found it not nearly as good as I once thought. Or maybe it was just a bad time. Certainly the "look" of the film is still breath-taking. Of course it is the exact opposite of the setting in ANDROIDS DREAM. Indeed there is very little Phil in the film but that doesn't seem to have mattered. I think in addition to the movie you have to factor in the emergence of cyberpunk at around the same time and somehow this all came together and managed to insert Phil firmly into the public zeitgeist. The movie had already saved Phil's butt in the early 1980s by finally making some decent money for him. Later it helped make him a household name.

\*

Andre tells me that yet another PKD-inspired play is showing in Berlin. What is going on here? This new work is based upon THREE STIGMATA. Here's how Andre describes the situation:

the next gig. a polish avant-garde troupe plays "the three stigmata of palmer eldritch" at a theatre festival in Berlin. almost no info on the web except the attached german program info I shot from the downloadable program pdf. not much in the text. the director is a self-described 'theatre-DJ' and 'mental scratcher' and the text says he 'deciphers' Dick' text as an ironical view on today's Capitalism which strikes me as bullshit because who needs to decipher Phil's full-blown ironical, sarcastical and all-out hilarious view on yesterday's, today's and even tomorrow's Capitalism! And they write that Dick's novel is a 'vision of consumer society escaping the plight of "real problems" by and into organized hallucinations' which is not untrue but a weak point, to say the least.

a berlin paper wrote accordingly that it was a crude and neomarxist rendering and downgrading of Dick's fill-blown cross-merging of "metaphysical battle and bad acid trip" merely showing how churches and drug dealers compete and the play made-up with day-glo neo-capitalist new-rich yuppie props of the nineties. Palmer Eldritch comes with a green laser halo. The critic did not like it.

\*

I have never thought of Phil's books as being frightening. But I have had second thoughts lately after hearing from Andre. I had sent him a quote by SF author Juanita Robson in her Locus interview:

"Philip K. Dick's books aren't scary because big monsters are coming to get you; they're scary because you're falling to bits inside your own head and you don't know how to put yourself back together again. Maybe there is no way. They also have these bleak endings where you can't even find all the pieces, let alone put them back together. That's frightening, but it seems very realistic."

Andre picked up the thread from there:

Patrick, she's so right. the horror experience by Joe on the entropic stairs, the fade-out experienced by Fergesson after his business trip around Oakland, the self-conscious oblivion, the galloping 'Alzheimer' of Fred/Bob; that's the scary stuff in Dick and coming from one of his most important and powerful engines (then there is the ontological decay, the utterly justified paranoia, the wheels within wheels within wheels, etc.): Presenting us with a picture of how we die. Might die. Anyway, this is strong stuff, you might even break into tears if entropy is recently gnawing at you lustily, too. They're scary and they are SAD because of that specific empathic horror trip of watching yourself bleed out and die in this total immersion mirror-neuron-activating illusion theatre that is literature. "Philip K. Dick's books aren't scary because big monsters are coming to get you; they're scary because you're falling to bits inside your own head and you don't know how to put yourself back together again." That's simply and greatly put. He is the great writer of Death which is coming to everybody at least once or even more times. And not even the Walker-on-Earth can spare you the end of the road where your life-car will ultimately 'fall to

bits' (if our wits haven't been scrambled before) like that of anybody. Philip K Dick tells us this with penetrating clarity like a mad Buddhist monk or renegade Church of Judas preacher. Repent, Harlekin, said the Ticktock-Man.

You know, this is substantially true. Terrible things do happen in Phil's novels and short stories. The people in his fiction very often die or slip into irreversible mental illness. And yet we don't normally think of Phil as a horror writer, at least I don't. I believe that the horror that is fairly consistent in his fiction is leavened by two factors: his great sympathy – as a writer Phil held the market on caritas -- and his inevitable sense of humor. Phil's dilemmas are deadly serious, but they are also, well, nuts. That varies from novel to novel, of course; compare EYE IN THE SKY with FLOW MY TEARS.

\*

Andre got through SCANNER and he report:

I actually did reread Scanner in advance of the infamous movie anime flick. patrick, I never understood how smoking and eating worked while wearing a scramble suit. How does it look like from the outside when you penetrate your body? I thought some of the humour was somewhat forced as in that scene when Fred three times fast-forwards the holotape to escape stupid random dopers reasoning only to catch the 'same' thread. Yeah, well stoner talk is elliptical but that was too much, sitcom stuff. the scene when the chick merges into Donna and back is a real black hole in this novel, it does not make 'sense' like the Walker's appearance after they all 'woke up' in MAZE. The way donna, not bob, turns out to be the real rogue undercover super-narc is very delightful, she empties her clip into a coke truck just for some emotional relief, Dirty Harry would be so proud! And how Bob's demise is only some side-plot in them bagging Barris; preparing a burnt-out wreck with dormant snooper potential for a planned infiltration mission.

But there is not much talk on the peculiarities of Death, how it is different from smack or pot. People need it and get mellow when they 'drop tabs'. But you cannot get a grip on its special turn on.

I finally finished re-reading it myself just before the film opened. I don't believe I had looked at it in some years as it is not a favorite PKD work for me mostly because it is such a sad book. Phil was definitely on a downward spiral at this point in his life and I imagine he was trying to write himself back to a normal life. I was struck by how life-like he made those characters and how the scenes come to such vivid life. Of course he had always used attributes and speech mannerisms of people he knew as templates for his characters but in SCANNER I'm pretty sure these are the same people Phil lived amongst with very little shading. Well, it's hard to believe there really was someone as evil as Barris in Phil's circle but perhaps so. The conversations strike me as utterly true. The shabby living rooms and dopy conversations are certainly familiar.

I have to say that Arctor is a drag. Always whining, too fucked up to really function in either of the worlds he sought out as cop and drug dealer. Besides Arctor is too old to have been assimilated into that milieu. I think so anyway. It's hard to gauge anyone's age in the book. Are they high school age? College age? Surely no older than their 20s. Arctor on the other hand must be in his mid-to-late 30s at least since he had a previous life with a wife and kids and a career of some kind. I know he is based in part on Phil's own situation in 1971 – Phil would have been in his early 40s when he lived through his drug-hippie experience. Is Arctor that old, too?

Arctor is a cipher to me despite being the novel's protagonist. The first time I read it I knew little of Phil's actual life but now it is pretty obvious that Arctor is Phil, right down to his habit of reciting German poetry and his fatal infatuation with dark-haired girls. So SCANNER may be as much a memoir as anything else. Certainly more so than it is "science fiction," which it manifestly is not.

Like Andre, I can't figure out Substance D. What in the hell does it do? Is it like speed or acid or heroin? What is the high? Phil never tells us. I suppose it is supposed to represent all drugs, especially the William Burroughs imaginary drug that causes instant, irremediable addiction after one hit. It would be interesting to know more about Phil's views of Burroughs. I get the impression that Phil didn't see any real drug casualties until he got to Canada and hung out in heroin rehab. Clearly the latter part of book is a thinly disguised look at X-Kalay and it's kind of fascinating that he made its fictional counterpart, New-Path, a front for the drug trade. By the way, my wife tells me that she swore off drugs after reading the book.

In the end, SCANNER is one downer of a book. There is no redemption here, only utterly damaged humans trying to cope and failing, manipulated both by the drug dealers and the cops. Phil was in his bleak period. FLOW MY TEARS, which preceded SCANNER, is another depressing read. It's kind of amazing that he made it through the 70s at all.

Then I saw the *Scanner Darkly* movie. I was not impressed. It is certainly the most faithful of all the adaptations of PKD's works – we sure haven't seen much of that in earlier productions. But this alone doesn't mean a great deal to me and maybe it was too deferential to Phil's book. The main question is does it work as a film? In this instance I have to say, not very well. I found the rotoscoping animation a distraction. Why hire big time actors like Reeves, Ryder and Downey if you are going to cover them in paint? It was hard to take any of these purple and blue and brown people seriously. I especially hated the famous "scramble suit." I'm not at all sure how I envisioned the suit in the novel. Probably vaguely like the Brothers Quay book jacket illustration. The movie's suit was exactly as Phil describes it but because it was so weirdly colored it looked literally cartoonish. The real problem, however, is the source material. A SCANNER DARKLY (the book) is not very cinematic being a series of conversations and internal dialog for the most part with virtually no action. It is not a "thriller" in any conventional sense, nor is the movie much as the ads tried to sell it as some kind of noir adventure. Despite wanting to say something about contemporary issues the film is hopeless mired in the Southern California 1970s drug culture from which the novel first came. I had no sense at all of this film taking place in our 21<sup>st</sup> century. Linklater lifted whole chapters of dialog from the novel and that is fine as it is often hilarious, particularly in Downey's character. Still, in the end not very much happens, what does happen is awfully confusing and it drifted into boredom near the end. I'm amazed that anyone who hadn't already read the book would be able to make sense of it at all. It's a downer flick, too, albeit not nearly so depressing as the book itself.

\*

John sent me a newspaper clipping describing "starter-interrupt devices" that fit under the dashboards of leased automobiles and is enabled by a numeric code that you periodically enter directly into the device. As long as you keep up with your car payments the leasing company sends you an updated six-digit code every month that tells the car you are current and it allows you to drive normally. But if you fall behind the company won't give you an updated code. No updated codes means the car refuses to start for you. In fact the device will begin flashing lights at you a few days before the payment is due as a reminder. As John quite correctly notes this is "as Phildickian as a front door that won't let you out unless you pay."

\*

While paging through The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (1<sup>st</sup> edition) I read the entry for "Gothic SF." In passing the author refers to Palmer Eldritch as the "metallic reality changer." Yeah, I like that.

\*

You know, I've been reading about PKD for a long time but until the other day I never considered this disturbing possibility. Phil says he saw ancient Rome superimposed on 1974 Southern California. "The Empire never ended" and all that. Now way back on March 15, 1968 there was a *Star Trek* episode called "Bread and Circuses" where the *Enterprise* stumbles across a planet that had paralleled Earth history somehow, only in this case the Roman Empire did not fall. It survived and attained a more or less 20<sup>th</sup> Century-style technology while retaining many of its ancient militarist traditions, including gladiatorial games, slavery and persecution of Christians. So you got this weird hybrid civilization. The plot is content with surface matters and really couldn't extrapolate much about this planet and it's actually kind of silly anyway. But, you know, Phil almost certainly saw that show either initially or in reruns. You have to wonder if it didn't plant a seed in his head. Of course it might have just nurtured an idea he already possessed, what with suddenly speaking Latin during his 1964 LSD trip. And was that some kind of premonition? Phil always talked about speaking Latin while on acid but to my knowledge never connected that phenomenon with his post-Pink Beam experiences of seeing ancient Rome, the whole "it's really 70 AD but we can't see it" theory. I don't know...just something to consider.

\*

A recent posting on jazzflavor noted a PKD conference going on in Italy. The computer translation of the original Italian was pretty mangled. But I kind of dug it all the same, especially this part (considerably re-written here):

“from psychoanalysis to the world of drugs, until his obsession with conspiracy and totalitarianism reached, in the last phase of his work, the creation of a Gnostic theology. A writer who’s works [?] were made of truth and illusion, the real and simulated, life and dead women, faith and madness...

“Life and dead women, faith and madness” – sounds a lot like Edgar Allan Poe.

\*

Well Dave read VOICES FROM THE STREET. Here is what he had to say:

I've read it and don't feel there's much I can say about it on a list where most of the people are likely to read it but haven't done so yet. POV is a bit clumsy. One portion seemed like it could be improved by some improbable Paul Bowles rewrite/fix but would still be out of synch with the novel as a whole. A fair amount reminded me of Nelson Algren although not imitative of him. Nearly all of it made me aware I'm very ignorant of mainstream fiction of the time and don't know how it fits in with that.

I don't remember most of Phil's "mainstream" novels well but will go out on a limb and state I'm pretty sure this one is significantly different than anything else he wrote. I don't much agree with what I recall reading about Voices FWTW. I didn't feel it contained any truly sympathetic characters. Correction, Ellen Hadley may be a sympathetic character but I don't empathize enough to strongly care about her. Did an online lookup: "sympathetic - (of characters in literature or drama) evoking empathic or sympathetic feelings; 'the sympathetic characters in the play' " One borderline sympathetic character.

To me the book has to be interesting enough in the events and ideas it presents to be good without sympathetic characters. I think there are some excellent books and stories that manage this; it may not surprise list members to hear that Bowles, Algren and Terry Southern are among the authors who I think have done this well or that their prose style when they did this was much better than Phil's in Voices. It's questionable whether PKD pulled this off in Voices. Also questionable how much bias I have because I'm a longtime PKD fan. I wonder what the novel might have been like if Phil had pulled the manuscript out to do a rewrite about 5 years later though I suspect his perspective would have been changed too much to improve the novel as it was and he would have either changed it greatly (perhaps detrimentally) or more likely rejected the idea of attempting a rewrite. Beyond that I'm pretty much back to I don't feel there's much I can say about the novel on a list where most of the people are likely to read it but haven't done so yet.

I do think it's worthwhile reading for the people on this list which I wouldn't say about all PKD works.

I tried to read VOICES, honest I did. I tried three or four times but could never get beyond the first 20 or so pages. I hate to say this but it is pretty bad. I know we're supposed to hang on every word Phil wrote but I couldn't do it. I did, however, read parts of Emmanuel Carrere's *I Am Alive and You Are Dead*. Couldn't actually read all of it as Carrere really annoyed me. He continuously took incidents from Phil's fiction and reported them as having actually happened. The book is not a "real" biography though it certainly is packaged to look like one. I'm not sure what point Carrere was trying to make here. Some of it was fun though. I especially liked Chapter 14, "Freaks," which recounts Phil's crazy days on 707 Hacienda Way after Nancy left him and he lived amongst the young dopers and hippies and narcs. Anne Dick's biography is the best history of this period, which I thought Sutin gave rather short shrift. Anne had lots of good stories (she interviewed Phil's old roommates) and Carrere retells a lot of them – along with a fair number of incidents from FLOW MY TEARS and SCANNER DARKLY that he presents as being true.

It did make me nostalgic for the "acidhead Phil." I'm a bit embarrassed to admit this but it was the dooper PKD who wrote those cool reality meltdowns that I was first attracted to. THREE STIGMATA, GAMEPLAYERS OF TITAN, "The Electric Ant" and "Faith of Our Fathers." While these were all trippy in that Sixties way, I always felt that Phil himself was quite sane. He always sounded sane at least until he got into his "Pink Beam" frame of mind. This brings up the "Horselover Fat vs. Phil Dick" debate which I suspect we all keep arguing in our heads. ("Was Phil crazy? Was he? Was he?" is how Sutin put it.) I think he really was sane. Even at the end when the Exegesis thing was going full tilt. TIMOTHY ARCHER strikes me as being

completely rational. Even more so is Phil's own hysterically funny self-written review of DIVINE INVASIONS for *Venon Magazine* (as by "Chipdip K. Kill"). It begins, "They say old dopers never die, they just write pompous novels (nobody said that? Well, they should have, because here is a case in point)." The review makes pointed fun of all the Philip K. Dick tropes: the drugs, the theology, the many marriages, the writing style. Phil is clearly aware of his reputation as a sci-fi nut job; he acknowledges it and at the same time mocks it. He's clearly having an enjoyable time demolishing his "image." If "know yourself" is the hallmark of wisdom then Phil had it to spare. If only he had followed Kill's advice: "take some much-deserved R&R: stop writing, Phil, watch TV, maybe smoke a joint...and generally take it easy until both the Bad Old Days and the *reaction* to the Bad Old Days subside in your fevered mind."

\*

So I read THE COSMIC PUPPETS. I probably hadn't looked at that in a decade. Not sure what the impulse was for pulling it off the shelf again. I had been reading horror novels recently and PUPPETS is if not exactly horror is as close to it as Phil ever got to that genre. Does MARTIAN TIMESLIP count as horror? Phil called PUPPETS "fantasy." For certain it is not science fiction, which seems to have been a problem for Ace books when they published it in 1957. Written around August 1953 the story was originally published as "A Glass of Darkness" in the December 1956 issue of *Satellite Science Fiction*. A pretty cool title, I think, based upon Saint Paul's famous remark and echoed many years later as A SCANNER DARKLY. Ace changed the title to the more sci-fi sounding COSMIC PUPPETS and offered the totally spurious blurb, "An American Town Run By Galactic Invaders." "Galactic?" The "invaders" are actually the deities Ormazd and Ahriman. If PUPPETS is referenced at all it is as an example of Phil's very early use of Zoroastrian concepts. It's also homage to H.P. Lovecraft. In Chapter 8 the evil Ahriman transforms into a typical Lovecraftian barely described giant monster preparing to destroy the world.

The novel is weirdly prescient of Phil's much later works. Not just the Zoroastrian connection. Consider the young girl, Mary, who turns out to be Armaiti, daughter of Ormazd. You don't have to dig very deep to see Zina from DIVINE INVASION. Actually INVASIONS is in some ways PUPPETS rewritten. PUPPETS is a slight work, to be sure, but kind of fun to read and all the resonances with later, more important works gives it more legitimacy than might otherwise be the case.

\*

I've been emailing Laura about "PKD and women." She writes:

...as far as the women and pkd- that's a big, rich topic, one I think about fairly often. Basically, my theory looks at the sexually repressive times and lifestyles of the period when the books were written, when women were not yet full and expressive partners of their husbands. Much of the spitting and fighting, sniping, anger and resentments could have resulted from unresolved sexual issues of the times. Does that sound totally off the wall? Of course, ya get into pkd and sexuality, and dude, what a can of worms that might open! Anyway, that's the germ of my idea.

It is a rich topic and, really, one that hasn't been much explored beyond the usual "Phil was a misogynist" (or maybe he wasn't). When you consider his upbringing in 1940s America and the issues he had with his mother (I personally don't give much credence to the Twin Sister Question) and then plunge him into the cauldron of the Sixties (both the women's liberation Sixties and the macho revolutionary Sixties) and stir that up with unprecedented sexual freedom and experimentation you can see where Phil might have been a tad messed in the head. Everyone, when they explore the issue, looks to the novels. But I think the letters and "The Dark-Haired Girl" is the place to search. Phil wrote in the pulp tradition and that shaped the kind of women that appeared in his fiction. I don't think you can consider Phil's attitude toward women in his fiction without reference to the same in science fiction genre's attitudes. If Phil's works were unique unto himself, still, the only genre in which they fit is SF. Even so, his personal involvement with women clearly colored his characterizations. A deep topic indeed, as you say. Just as an aside, the only one of his wives that seems to me to be not just normal but actually sane and to harbor no ill-will toward Phil at all is Kleo. It was a 1950s-era marriage but at the same time Kleo seems to have been a very non-traditional woman. Interesting.

\*

One of the stories in the collection *Splatterpunk 2* is called "PIG" by Gorman Bechard and it's described as "a wickedly funny tale about an all-woman vigilante hit squad in 21st-century Los Angeles that simultaneously evokes Philip K. Dick and the frenetic violence of Japanese adult comics." Alas, no. It's really evokes *Blade Runner*, not Phil. It does indeed read like a fairly disgusting manga however. What did I expect from something called "splatterpunk?"

\*

Two quotes:

Philip K. Dick read *Dr Adder* in manuscript and for years advocated it; and it is clear why. Though the novel clearly prefigures the under-soil airlessness of the best of urban cyberpunk, it even more clearly serves as a bridge between the defiant reality-testing paranoia of Dick's characters and the doomed realpolitiking of the surrendered souls who dwell in the post-1984 urban sprawls. --John Clute, *Encyclopedia of SF 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.*

"A lot of the stuff we think of as being unique to Phil Dick is the bread and butter of thrillers and mysteries. The paranoid element, the way the private eye or secret agent has to deconstruct an unreal world to find a real world. He has to break down the lies and alibis and falsities, this sort of stuff, and then find something else underneath. Look at Cornell Woolrich's stories, where you have constant themes of loss of identity, of falling into strange worlds, the great amnesiac stories and these strange shifting realities." -- K.W. Jeter

\*

This sounds interesting. Wish I lived in Seattle...

"800 Words: The Transmigration of Philip K. Dick"  
Live Girls! Theater through Nov 17.

At the end of Philip K. Dick's life, he skittered around his apartment like a cockroach with a mean speed habit, and, having already built his literary career on paranoia, he started fearing everything, including the air he breathed. At the beginning of *800 Words*, Dick (Shawn Belyea) seems genially laid-back, like the Dude from *The Big Lebowski* with an even longer history of LSD abuse. Things are almost too placid.

Once Dick starts talking to his cat (a puppet charmingly controlled and voiced by Megan Ahiers) and she suggests that he might not be "the most reliable of narrators," it becomes obvious the play's structured like a PKD novel—things appear pleasant before falling apart in a glorious mindfuck. Stanislaw Lem (Nik Perleros, selflessly supporting Belyea) may be a KGB spy trying to get Dick to incorporate Marxist propaganda in his novels, Dick's driving instructor (Perleros again) could be an FBI agent after his secrets, and God may or may not have burgled his apartment.

Belyea grows into the role masterfully as Dick bounces through time, repeatedly losing his wife (Holly Arsenault, blessedly not overplaying the shrill ex-wife card) and falling asleep on top of his desk like Snoopy on his doghouse. The story becomes a conspiracy theorist's wonderland, the set pretty much has a mental breakdown and cracks open, and the talking cat gets the respect it rightfully deserves. It should satisfy fans of Philip K. Dick—and I mean "*Ubik* is one of the best sci-fi novels ever," not "I kind of liked *Paycheck* except for that douchey Ben Affleck"—and it serves as a good introduction for the rest of us. It's probably as close to the happy chaos of reading a Dick novel as the stage will ever see.

\*

William Gibson, he of *Neuromancer* fame, had another go at Phil in the November issue of the UK magazine *DeathRay*. This is his sixteenth published put-down by my reckoning. Here it is:

There's a maxim that comparisons are inherently odious, and I think there is some truth to it. And if they're not odious then they're not very useful either. But I'm certainly more comfortable being compared to Pynchon than I am being compared to Dick, because I've been a Pynchon fan in my day, and I never was a big Dick fan. Dick was never much of an influence; Pynchon was my Phil Dick. The vitamins lots of people got from Phil Dick, I got from Pynchon – though, to be honest, they were

probably very different vitamins. The difference is that at some point Dick was clearly mad, mad as a sackful of rats, God bless him. If *Valis* was literally and personally true to Phil Dick, then Phil Dick was the most important human being that ever lived, and I don't think he was.

I don't get this. I mean there is certainly no requirement to like Phil's works or think highly of him but to repeatedly, one might say, hysterically deny he was an influence suggests that something else is going on. Frankly, I see little in common between Phil and Gibson and I have no idea why people would even make the comparison. Gibson, however, seems to be actually offended that anyone could think such a thing possible. No: "It was Pynchon! Pynchon, I tell you!" God forbid a *New York Times* book list author should be associated with some acidhead pulp sci-fi author instead of an academically-approved later-day Salinger. Still, twenty-five years after his death all of Phil's books are in print, even the bad ones, and people read him. Twenty-five years after Gibson dies will anyone be reading him? I doubt it, unless it's (oh, the shame!) that first cyberpunk novel.

\*

I highly enjoyed Jonathan Lethem's memoir, "You Don't Know Dick," in his collection *The Disappointment Artist*. (2005). Lethem talks about his early infatuation with Phil's works and the adventures he had locating out-of-print copies of many of the lesser novels including the thrilling discovery of VULCAN'S HAMMER in "a crate of moldering paperbacks that had been pushed beneath the shelf." He suggests that having all of Phil's, uh, "weaker" books out of print back then (1979-80) was actually a good thing. The only books readily available were the really good ones and so the public was under the impression that Phil only wrote things like TIME OUT OF JOINT, TIMESLIP and HIGH CASTLE instead of WE CAN BUILD YOU or JONES. All this biblio-archeology eventually led Lethem to the PKDS and, finally, the Library of America editions.

The essay is a lot of fun. Lethem is an award winning and much admired author. But at heart he's just a crazy fan like, well, us. His take on Phil is friendly and cogent and he has lots of cool stories such as these questions from Phil's copy of the *I Ching*:

"Will (editor X) accept the new draft of Policeman?"

"Should I lend Y money for Seconal?"

"Will Z sleep with me?"

I wonder what the Oracle had to say about that second question. If Y wanted the money for food would it have made a difference? Anyway, track down *The Disappointment Artist* and check this out.

\*

I finally saw *The Gospel According to Philip K. Dick* on DVD. It was just okay. The animated sequences became old after the third or fourth repeat; after the ninth or tenth replay they drove me crazy. It's all talking heads and not many of them have a great deal new to say. Most interesting to me were the comments of Phil's colleague Ray Nelson. Being the PKD junkies that we all are, I suggest that you take a look but keep your expectations low. This leaves *The Nervous Breakdown of Philip K. Dick* as the only one of these strange, more-or-less professional PKD short films I haven't seen. Anybody know that one? I came across this description:

Judy Bee's **THE NERVOUS BREAKDOWN OF PHILIP K. DICK**, 21 min. is a darkly comic, hallucinogenic account of the horrific psychological fragmentation and complete mental collapse of the highly regarded American novelist/sci-fi genius whose work provided the basis for Ridley Scott's classic film, *BLADE RUNNER*. Set in Berkeley in 1968 against a backdrop of worn-out radical chic, shrill Nixonian totalitarianism and hippie psychedelica, this film is a dizzy detective story about a man in search of his own sanity.

While it is true that I haven't had much use for the flood of PKD films churned out by Hollywood I admit to liking the idea of ordinary people making movies about Phil. I myself have a great idea for a PKD flick modestly called "PKD Otaku." All I lack is a script and, you know, the actors and the entire filmmaking apparatus. But other than that...

There are a dozen “Philip K. Dick” shorts on YouTube the last time I checked. You’ll find a short film of HIGH CASTLE and an hour-length BBC documentary called “A Day in the After Life of Philip K. Dick” plus interviews with Phil (looks like the same one over and over) and, my favorite, a 21 second long “Philip K. Dick Speaks” utilizing a hand puppet. So any one can do this.

\*

Found this on the internet. No idea if these are articles or stories, or both. I do like the word “Maledicktion” quite a bit.

### ***Dimension Philip K. Dick***

Anthologie dirigée par Richard Comballot.

- Bruno LECIGNE / Le Dieu venu du néant [The God came out of nothing]
- Jean-Pierre HUBERT / Substance 82
- Pierre STOLZE / Glissement de temps sur Manhattan [Time slip on Manhattan]
- Daniel WALTHER / Les Oubliettes du Haut-Château
- Xavier MAUMÉJEAN / Mauvaises nouvelles d’avant-demain [bad news avant-demain]
- Richard CANAL / Les Clones rêvent-ils de Dolly? [The Clones rêvent-ils Dolly?]
- Alain DARTEVELLE / Fictif K. Dick
- Laurent QUEYSSI / 707, Hacienda Way
- Jean-Pierre VERNAY / Parce que mon Nom est légion [Because my name is legion]
- Philippe CURVAL / Malédicktion
- Johan HELIOT / La dernière Valse de Philip K. [The Last Waltz Philip K.]
- Alain DARTEVELLE / La Déesse venue du froid
- Ugo BELLAGAMBA / Ils ne construisent que la partie du monde dont ils ont besoin... [They do not build that part of the world they need ... ]
- Jacques BARBÉRI / Les Amants du paradis artificiel [Les Amants du artificial paradise]

\*

So I re-read MARTIAN TIME-SLIP recently. I don’t know when I read it the first time except it was the 1976 Ballantine edition so pretty late. Unlike VALIS or HIGH CASTLE or JOINT, I may have only read it that one time. I have no memory of what I may have thought about it the first time around but this time the book astonished me. It seems quite a change of pace to Phil’s usual hell-on-wheels writing...well, maybe not compared to HIGH CASTLE but certainly compared GAME PLAYERS, SIMULACRUM and WAIT FOR LAST YEAR which followed. For one thing TIME-SLIP is carefully written and the plot well constructed. Phil takes his time bringing the characters together so that when they do meet it in quite a natural manner. The characterizations are really well done; these are fully-realized people though perhaps Arnie Lott is a “type” rather than an individual, but even he demonstrates unexpected depth and pathos. Despite causing enormous damage with his machinations he is by no means an evil man though he is certainly a selfish one. We’ll see his like again in Leo Bulero, Gino Molinari, Gene Runcitor, even, I think Willis Gram in FROLIX-8. But Arnie is the most complex of them all. There is no “dark-haired girl” in TIME-SLIP. The women, Silvia Bohlen and Doreen Anderton, are caring and supporting for a change (though Silvia doesn’t shake off her lethargy and depression until the last minute). Does that ever happen again in Phil’s books? That question gave me pause. Can we see what is going on in Phil’s own life by reference to his books? What was happening on in 1962 when TIME-SLIP was being written? I wonder. The “horror elements” in the novel are quite impressive. It took me a while to figure out what was going on when the evening at Arnie’s replayed three times. Those chapters are really effective. How in the world did Phil think to structure it that way?

TIME-SLIP is a perfect example of the kind of science fiction Phil wanted to write. But what a strange SF book. They are on Mars but doesn’t it look a lot like New Mexico or Arizona? There are very few gizmos in the book. People travel by helicopter, of course but not, be it noted, by “flapples.” Throughout the book there is no effort to emphasize the SF elements. The school is the only real sci-fi device of note. J.G. Ballard remarks that, though taking place on Mars, the characters “move through a landscape that uncannily resembles southern California perceived through the glaze of some deep psychosis.” The book is really about suicide and schizophrenia, not exactly common SF tropes. Was there anything at all like this in 1964? I can’t imagine.

Phil had a good deal of difficulty in finding a publisher and when it was finally published it was met with indifference by critics and fans alike. Having only recently been awarded a Hugo for HIGH CASTLE Phil keenly felt this reception as a kind of defeat, one which prevented him from moving forward as a writer. He told Greg Rickman in 1981:

“There would have been following **Martian Time-Slip** a much higher kind, a much better novel. Which now we’ll never know what it would have consisted of. Because I never went on. It would have been **Man in the High Castle**, **Martian Time-Slip**, and then **X**, and I can’t even project now what that would have been.”

What a shame. What would have happened had TIME-SLIP been a success? We’ll never know.

\*

John has a knack for discovering random PKD references. He sent me a page from the December 2007 issue of *Vanity Fair*. It was from a profile of Richard Prince, whom John explains is “an A-list NYC artist” though I can’t say I’ve ever heard of him. I suspect I do not fall within the preferred *Vanity Fair* demographic. Anyway, Richard Prince is rich and a bibliophile. The article relates,

There was a copy of Philip K. Dick’s 1968 novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, inscribed to Dick’s fellow science fiction writer Tim Powers. “I paid \$150,000 for that,” says Prince. “I was more than happy to pony up – it’s an important book for me.”

This is just so wrong. John remarked, “There is so much I could say about this that I will just say nothing at all.” I feel the same way except to reveal that I myself have a first edition of DADES. Alas not autographed; it is a withdrawn volume from my hometown public library with the card pocket glued in the back and yellowing tape holding plastic wrapper around the dust jacket. Oh, and the price still penciled on the inside page: 20 cents.

\*

Concerning absinthe (recently decriminalized in the U.S.) Oscar Wilde wrote: “After the first glass, you see things as you wish they were. After the second, you see things as they are not. Finally you see things as they really are, which is the most horrible thing in the world.” John sent me this quotation, too, and remarked that it made him immediately think of “Faith of Our Fathers.” And rightly so. This is great. One of us needs to drink a glass of the stuff and turn on the TV.

\*

PKDream

I dreamed about Phil the other night. I haven’t had a dream about Phil in a long, long time. Of course it was strange.

Phil and I and my friend Scott were in an apartment. Phil was ranting about Vangelis. He raved on and on about him and said he was going to sue the composer.

I said to Phil, “Why are you so worked up about this?”

Phil looked offended and replied, “I just want my residuals.”

“You can’t get any residuals,” I told him. “You’re dead.”

There was a long, embarrassing silence. Finally Phil, in an exasperated voice said to me, “You are such a gnomin.”

That’s it. I woke up then. Who knows what it all means. I suppose it had something to do with the Vangelis soundtrack to *Blade Runner*. I have no idea what “gnomin” may mean, if it means anything, and why I am sure it begins with a “g.” To tell you the truth I’m a bit afraid to even look to see if it is a real word.

\*

My friend Bruce spent the late summer wondering around Turkey and East Europe. He sent me a Turkish edition of UBIK. It is pretty cool. This edition has numerous footnotes – none of which I can read so I do

wonder what is going on. But one was straightforward enough: "Homosimulakrik" defined in a footnote as "android." I guess it probably literally means "simulated man" but it is interesting that the word "android" itself apparently needed no further explanation.

\*

Check this out:

As usual, Trevor had a stack of paperbacks on his lap. He was a crustacean as a reader, moving sideways from book to book like a crab.

"Oh, another novel channeled by Philip K. Dick. This one's entitled *Mere Alibis*. It's about an alternative universe in which everything is more ordinary than it looks."

"Well," Nelly chirped, grinning, "if anyone has the energy to write sci-fi novels after he's dead, it's Philip K. Dick. How many does that make it so far?"

"Channeled? Forty-two."

"That's more than he wrote in real life."

"What can I say? He's prolific."

- Alexander Beshar, *Mir: A Novel of Virtual Reality*. (1998) Pg. 97

\*

A message from my friend Christian: "Keep forgetting to tell you that I finally read DIVINE INVASION and A SCANNER DARKLY. I was pretty fucked up for a couple of weeks."

\*

David recently remarked, "Imagine a new version of PUPPETS: the protagonist is told by his car navigator to head to an old town, and there he receives creepy sms messages on his mobile phone telling him that things aren't exactly what they seem..."

Not as far fetched as it might seem. Mark Hurst told the PKDS newsletter that a new edition of COSMIC PUPPETS was planned. It was even supposed to be "illustrated" – by whom, I wonder. Phil was also supposed to "heavily revise" DR. FUTURITY which would be re-named "Time Pawn" after the original story that Phil expanded to novel length. Hard to think what that would have looked like. All of this, along with the re-jiggered UTM was part of a three- book deal Hurst cooked up with Phil in 1979. Only UTM, re-named LIES INC, came to pass.

David went onto say, "I am thinking of what Dick might have written had he lived till today... probably a new version of UBIK where messages telling you that you're dead come via email or are found on webpages."

Andre speculated about this as well:

...but what would Phil write today? Would he have caught up with the wired world? Would he wave his iPhone at a web cam in an Apple ad? Or duck and cover in his h-bomb-proof Montana retreat, issuing further exegesis lectures via satellite radio ALBEMUTH? Or sit in his California condo writing his novels over and over again each year so that they eventually cease being visionary and end up being flavors of that same already historic vision of a dated future - still waiting for last year? Or roaming the streets as that bum he was so fond of envisioning himself, on the bus, mumbling scripture or giving advice as the Walker-On-Earth since the Philip K Dickianization of the world convinced him at last that he must be the (amnesiac) God of at least this one fake universe.

It is highly unlikely that Phil would have lived to see the "wired world." To be sure, he died too young at age 54 – hell, I'm 58 – but his health was not good and there clearly was a stroke waiting in his near future. Maybe not in 1982 necessarily but sooner rather than later. With luck and some decent health care maybe as long as a decade down the road. But Andre asks a wonderful question. I wonder about this all the time.

Had Phil lived longer what would he have produced? TIMOTHY ARCHER was not particularly successful and the *Blade Runner* movie was a disappointment at the time so I suppose he would have once again turned away from the mainstream back to his old mistress science fiction. We know that he was beginning what he tentatively titled THE OWL IN DAYLIGHT, though surely there would have been a different title by the time it would be published. Phil's own titles mostly suck after all.

OWL had at least two possible plots: the futuristic “Disneyland” one detailed in a letter to David Hartwell dated May 21 1981; and the deaf-mute-alien-in-the-biochip trying to understand music recounted in the interviews collected as *What If Our World Is Their Heaven?* The second plot, circa January 1982, makes no sense to me and really I suspect that Phil cooked it up on the spot during the interview. The “Disneyland” plot is serviceable enough even if much of it sounds like something Phil would have written in the Sixties. Probably by the time Phil would finish the book it would have mutated beyond recognition.

He was cranking out short stories, too, a form he hadn’t dealt with since 1974. It’s an interesting collection:

“The Exit Door Leads In” *Rolling Stone* 6/21/79

“Chains of Aether” *Spectrum* #5 7/9/79

“Strange Memories of Death” *Interzone* 3/27/80

“I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon” *Playboy* 4/24/80

“Rautavaara’s Case” *Omni* 5/12/80

“Alien Mind,” too, of course, written in January of 1982 though really that’s a throwaway written for a fan. And the new first chapter for LIES, also written around the same time, is sort of a stand-alone short story in a way – it certainly has nothing to do with the rest of the novel. Concerning the other stories the thing that sticks out in my mind is *where* they were published. Prestigious venues all of them, especially *Playboy* who, I understand, paid their writers very well indeed. Whatever you think of the stories -- “I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon” is by far the best -- the fact that Phil is now appearing in these sorts of publications (*Rolling* fucking *Stone!*) demonstrates, if nothing else, that Phil was now hip. Phil might have continued writing in the short form if he could appear in upscale publications. Or he might have abandoned it for another five years.

SF was changing course in the 70s and early 80s. Authors like Joe Haldeman and John Varley in particular were new voices that, to my mind, were moving the field in a different direction. Phil’s pals K.W. Jeter and Tim Powers were getting published, too. Of course SF is so conservative that change was incremental at best. Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke were still winning Hugo Awards in this period while Frederik Pohl, Larry Niven, Clifford Simak and Robert Silverberg were still being nominated. (William Gibson won in 1984, beating out both Heinlein and Niven in the process...interesting.)

But was Phil even reading this stuff? Did he care? The only SF book that I know of that Phil read, since he wrote a blurb for it, was Dennis R. Caro’s *The Man in the Darksuit* published in 1980. Of all things – why that one? It’s interesting but not especially notable. Yet Phil blurbed, “A sheer delight. Don’t pass this one up!” Was that a favor for someone? Who is Dennis Caro anyway? Phil’s own novel output in his final years certainly has little to do with anything else going on in the SF marketplace. So maybe trying to divine what Phil might have written after 1981 by looking at the rest of the field is pointless. Phil always marched – and wrote – to his own drummer.

Looking at his output -- VALIS 12/7/78; DIVINE INVASION 3/14/80; TIMOTHY ARCHER 5/13/81 – it seems Phil could produce a new novel about every two years. Supposing OWL in whatever form has been completed in 1982-83 and supposing that Phil had survived another ten years. Ideally that would give him time to write another four or five novels. Would they have been like Jeter and Powers? Power’s *The Anubis Gate* was published in 1983; Jeter’s *The Glass Hammer* appeared in 1985. Or would they have picked up on the cyberpunk wave of that period? You know, I doubt it. When I try to imagine what they might have been I draw an absolute blank. I think they would have been uniquely Philip K Dick novels. I can barely perceive THE OWL IN DAYLIGHT, at least had Phil stuck to one of the plots we have. But after that? You can drive yourself crazy even trying to visualize the possibilities.

\*

There was an argument on jazzflavor sometime back as to whether or not Phil wrote horror stories. Myself, I think he did though still recognizably science fiction, too. Others disagreed. Recently, though, I found a statement on the subject written by some who ought to know. In a 1988 collection of short stories called *Fine Frights: Stories that Scared Me* selected and edited by Ramsey Campbell is Phil’s “Upon the Dull Earth.” Campbell had this to say:

How many Philip K. Dick stories are tales of terror? In my experience, quite a few, but perhaps that matters less than the eloquence of his best writing, among which I would include his vision of Togore, the second coming of Christ. Whether or not it is objectively real, I find it heartbreaking. His great

theme was the nature of reality, even here in one of his earliest and strangest stories, a tale of terror if ever he wrote one.

\*

from Uncyclopedia:

"Philip Kissmy Dick: (December 16, 1928 – March 2, 1982)) was high all the fuckin' time, man. He was tragically killed in 1982 when he was torn apart by a pack of giant red dogs that, ironically, escaped from one of his own hallucinations. Shortly after his death, it was discovered that, in an astounding yet fitting twist, Philip K. Dick had been a replicant all along."

\*

I recently bought a copy of *The Dim Reflection of Philip K. Dick* by Tessa B. Dick so I thought I'd write up my impressions and pass them on. *Dim Reflection* seems to be self-published memoir or reminiscence. It's not paginated but there are 45 pages of text with approximately 6,000 words, which makes for a pretty short "book." You can order it from Amazon for \$6.25 with another \$3.99 for postage and handling. This has been a long time in coming. Something quite similar was announced in PKDS Newsletter #6 back in April 1985 called "The Search for Valis: excerpt from a work in progress."

*Dim Reflection* may be a different work. The only novel it discusses at any length is SCANNER and the bulk of this quite brief volume is about her relationship with Phil. There are details of living together – Phil was really hard to live with apparently – their struggle with poverty, no car, raising a child, and she confesses to being a "terrible cook and a lousy housekeeper." In many ways this is a memoir of her struggle to become independent. Of course it is told from her point of view. Phil claimed she left him, taking their son Christopher with her; Tessa says what broke up the marriage was Phil leaving her in order to take care of Doris Sauter.

There are minor variations and expansions on incidents already reported elsewhere such as the radio that kept playing downer songs like Linda Ronstadt's "You're No Good" even after it was unplugged. There are additional details concerning the "Xerox Missive" which arrived in the mail in March of 1974. As reported in *Divine Invasions*, Tessa told Lawrence Sutin the return address was "a hotel in New York" and the book being reviewed was about "the decline and fall of American capitalism." In *Dim Reflections* she says "the letter came from Austria...the title of the book being reviewed had the word 'Carousel' in the title..." That was intriguing. I searched OCLC for books with that word in the title published between 1971 and 1974 and the only title that emerged that looks at all plausible is a collection of short stories by Nelson Algren called *The Last Carousel* published in 1973. Algren was a major writer in those days (he wrote *The Man with the Golden Arm*) and he took a harsh view of America and capitalism. He is also the sort of writer whose books would normally be reviewed in the press. It's just a guess; there is no way to know for sure since Phil sent the "missive" to the FBI.

Tess says that Phil threw "most" of the letters to the FBI in the dumpster behind his apartment. "If the authorities really were spying on him, then they would get those letters, and if they were not, then there was no harm done..." Also "Phil often said that it was better for the authorities to think that you are nuts, than that you have committed a crime."

Much of what she reports confirms what Phil said on various occasions. However there are some significant differences in her account of Phil's "Pink Beam Experience." Phil said it was upon seeing the "fish sign" necklace on the young woman delivering his prescription pain meds that he saw the flash of light. Tess says that while the woman did indeed wear such a necklace Phil merely remarked about the fact (Tess thinks he was trying to look down the woman's blouse) and that the pink light struck him afterwards. She believes it was a flash of sunlight coming through a rectangular sticker on their window – also with the fish sign, as it happens. After this he "kept seeing a rectangle of pink light projected onto our bedroom wall opposite the bed, and he saw writing in the rectangle." He also "heard strange voices and even saw little people lurking in the corners of our little apartment." She sometimes makes Phil sound like a real lunatic, certainly more so than the other memoirs we have. She says, for instance, that Phil often told her he saw aliens.

There are some discrepancies with Sutin's account. For example, Sutin says the "Xerox Missive" arrived on March 20<sup>th</sup>; Tessa says it was March 2<sup>nd</sup>, the same day on which Phil died eight years later. Tess finds this ironic. The only factual error that I noticed was that she confuses the Sybil of Delphi with the Sybil of Cumae (the Cumaean Sybil is the one who ends up shrunken in the jar).

There are some fascinating revelations in the book, too. This is my favorite:

My husband remembered living in a world where Bobby Kennedy was elected President, instead of Richard Nixon. He came to believe that the world in which Kennedy was not assassinated was the real world, and that this world is an illusion. However, some powerful agency had changed history. When Bobby Kennedy was President, he remembered, we had pulled out of Vietnam, only to get involved in a bloody war in South America that led to a nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union. Thus, the agent of change was probably benevolent, even though the Nixon Presidency led to the Watergate Affair.

I have never heard of this before and, in a weird manner, it rather redeems Richard Nixon.

The memoir is so short that it's rather difficult to judge. It is not very well written reading, as it does, almost like a school assignment. Nor is it entirely coherent, either, jumping from topic to topic and timeframe to timeframe. I have the impression that it was done hastily in an effort to exorcise some ghost or to test the market for a more detailed work (such as "In Search of Valis" perhaps?). Tessa has written about her life with Phil on other occasions which seem to me much more carefully composed. I'm rather at a loss for why this has been published at all, to tell you the truth, though I'm happy that it is available. There have been some indications, too, that she has fallen on difficult financial times, which if true I am sorry to learn. *Dim Reflections* is not particularly good but it is a primary source for our understanding of PKD. With all its weakness, compared to Carrere's bogus biography *I Am Alive and You Are Dead* it's a godsend.

\*

So what about the "Pink Beam Experience?" You know the story: in February, 1974 Phil had his wisdom teeth removed under general anesthetic. He and Tessa returned to their apartment where they awaited a prescription of pain killers. In serious pain and apparently still half-zonked from the anesthesia Phil answered the door where a young woman from the pharmacy stood with the medication. She was wearing a necklace with a gold fish silhouette hanging from it. Phil remarked about it and she told him "This is a sign used by the early Christians." Immediately (or perhaps subsequently) there was a flash of pink light and Phil remembered ancient Rome. Over the next month he experienced a number of visions or mystical experiences which eventually convinced him that his mind was now inhabited by a second intelligence from the first century A.D. whom he later named Thomas. And so it goes... The whole episode goes under the term "2-3-74" (February-March 1974) and along with the break-in at his apartment on November 17, 1971 by persons or forces unknown, is the most mysterious episode in Phil's very complicated life. But did 2-3-74 really happen? I ask this because I have been re-reading the selected letters for 1974 in the Underwood-Miller edition and in the course of doing so noticed some inconsistencies and, more to the point, silences. Phil wrote a staggering number of letters in the course of his life. Underwood-Miller published a fair number of them in five volumes but by no means all of them. Still, I have to believe we have a representative sample of his correspondence. That being granted, the published letters barely mention the "experience" until quite late.

First, an inconsistency: Phil did not have his dental procedure in February; it happened in January. A letter to "Jamis" dated February 1 apologized for not writing as he "had two molars and a wisdom tooth which had grown down and become imbedded in my jawbone removed." While no date for this event is mentioned, Phil does remark that he had been out of it "for almost two weeks" and hadn't driven the car "for 24 days." That would suggest early January for the procedure.

None of the published letters written in February or March mention any unusual events though in March Phil did begin his curious correspondence with the FBI. On April 4<sup>th</sup> he wrote Claudia Bush that he was being hospitalized for hypertension. It is not until April 14<sup>th</sup> that there is any reference to what we now call 2-3-74. He wrote to Ursula K. Le Guin, "To me, on the basis of my recent religious experience, I feel (in all honesty) that we are in Rome again, with the early Christians persecuted and fighting for freedom." But that is the extent of it. He refers to an earlier phone conversation with Le Guin, which may have included more details but of course we do not have a record of that conversation. Further letters over the next several months to Le Guin never bring up this topic again.

While there is no mention of 2-3-74 as such in a letter to Claudia Bush dated May 9<sup>th</sup>, Phil does refer to what will be a key aspect of the experience mainly that he is sharing his mind with a second person. Phil is not that specific. What he does tell Bush is that there may be two of him. "I think there was a long-term split in me, not in the usual schizophrenic sense but in some time space continuum sense. I think the split has begun to heal, and in doing so, it allows 'lost' memories to return. What is more accurate would be to say there is a superimposition, like the A and B tracks in a stereo signal. Which blend. They were separate in me all my life,

and at last blend now, for the first time.” At this point Phil doesn’t suggest an alien intelligence is blending with his own. He sees it more as a form of amnesia. Significantly, he claims this has been so since at least 1971.

A month later, on June 28<sup>th</sup>, Phil wrote to Peter Fitting that for several months he had received “actual information about the future” in the form of “print-outs: words and sentences, letters and names and numbers.” Phil attributes this to somehow intercepting tachyons which carry information from the future backward in time into our present by a “very informed Entity.” “Without the tachyon theory I would lack any kind of scientific formulation” to account for this and necessarily attribute it to God. “For well over two months I was convinced that the Holy Spirit, which is to say God, was directing me, and in a sense that is true; it is a matter of semantics: at one time there would have been the only terms available to us; we would have talked about divine vision and so forth.” Now Phil can use the scientific terminology of modern physics. Phil may be disingenuous here. Fitting was a Marxist academic and unlikely to accept a purely religious explanation for the phenomenon Phil reports. On the other hand, a letter to Claudia Bush the next day also deals with what we might call the “tachyon theory.”

Soon enough, though, Phil is thinking the information he was receiving originates from the past, not the future. He came to this conclusion based on a number of dreams he experienced. In a series of letters to Claudia Bush running all through July Phil speculated that an ancient spirit, perhaps the Roman Sybil, was communicating with him, possibly with the help of the spirit of his old friend, Bishop Pike. Or perhaps the Sybil was really Phil’s Jungian anima. Or the Holy Spirit. The letters are all over the map in terms of possibilities. What is interesting here is that all of this and more will eventually appear in VALIS. In fact, much of VALIS now seems like a trimmed down version of these letters.

By July 25<sup>th</sup>, in a letter to Louise Zimmerman, Phil seems to have settled into a coherent story (coherent for Phil, I mean). He writes that beginning “in mid-March of this year” he had experienced a series of dazzling lights and strange dreams of ancient times. “I was sure that someone was trying to communicate with me. I was sure it came from above – maybe from the sky.” He saw “Books, lined yellow-tablet pages, galley proofs” containing prophecies as well as a “short, accurate description of my own state of affairs back during the days just after Nancy left me. [Nancy Hackett was Phil’s fourth wife; she left him in August 1970.] He has also acquired “a totally new personality, so new and so different that I have sought for several months for another name for myself...subjectively I feel I am not the person who used to use this body, although I do have his memories; however, I do not apprehend the world as he did, nor have I his ills, his fears...”

Finally, on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, in a letter to Ursula K. La Guin again, Phil fits most of the pieces together. He apparently sent a copy of his letter to Louise Zimmerman by way of introduction and then explained “I can’t fully explain it – which is to say, name who or what poured itself into me back in March and is still there, still here, I mean. Still in symbiotic relationship with me.” As to how this happened he writes “in February I had major oral surgery, and was at home recovering, still under the influence of sodium pentothal, and in severe pain. Tessa phoned the oral surgeon and he phoned a pharmacy to send out a pain killer. The doorbell rang and I went, and there stood this girl with black, black hair and large eyes very lovely and intense...a fascinating gold necklace around her neck...” This is the first mention of the girl anywhere in the available correspondence. “Soon thereafter the dazzling shower of colored graphics descended over me in the night.” And so forth. The final aspect of 2-3-74 appears in a November 30<sup>th</sup> letter to Claudia Bush: “when this first hit me in March I looked around and saw ROME! ROME EVERYWHERE! Power and force, stone walls, iron bars...” So now all the components of the pink beam experience are accounted for.

Whatever Phil might have said in his letters at this time, he was still cagey about his beliefs in a public forum. In an interview conducted September 10, 1976 by Daniel DePerez later published in *Science Fiction Review* he said:

And this comes out in my new book that Bantam bought. The guy realizes -- I mean, he's just an ordinary person like us, and it traces him from growing up in Berkeley, and it's semi-autobiographical -- and the satellite which has been orbiting Earth, suddenly reveals to him that it's actually A.D. 70. That it's the first century A.D. That everything he sees is just so much gingerbread over the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire is still in control. And nothing has really happened since the year 70, and that they have just kept plastering more layers of gingerbread over it, and that he has to deal with this problem. He has to deal with the tyranny which is really that of the Roman Empire. And I'm willing to admit that I halfway believe that.

Nothing about this being “real.” And nothing to indicate that “the guy” was Phil himself. But by

May 1979 he was more forthcoming. He told Charles Platt: "This outlook is based not on faith but on an actual encounter that I had in 1974, which I experienced an invasion of my mind by a transcendantly rational mind..."

I don't know what to think of it all. I believe something happened in March 1974 if for no other reason than that he began his Exegesis at this time, a strictly private record and he obsesses about his experience there. Tessa's recollections back up some of the incidents, too, though it is an open question how much weight we ought to give that testimony. I did have an interesting thought though. Phil was thinking about his next novel, or novels, rather. In 1974 he was writing chapters for a sequel to HIGH CASTLE (never finished), making notes for TO SCARE THE DEAD (never written) and RADIO FREE ALBEMUTH (written in 1976) and had already constructed the plot for what would become DIVINE INVASION (written in 1980). All of these were involved to some degree with whatever occurred in March 1974. It was as if he was writing these novels as experiments to figure out what had happened. So did certain elements of 2-3-74 actually *happen* or were they shaped by the writing of the novels? In other words: was Phil inhabiting one of his own novels? He ended up doing precisely that in VALIS of course. Novels are fiction by definition but letters are supposed to report events that actually took place so I find it perplexing that so little of 2-3-74 appear in Phil's correspondence and when it finally does it sounds so novelistic. Consider in this regard especially the non-appearance of the dark haired girl with the fish necklace. She is key to the whole 2-3-74 phenomenon but doesn't show up until suspiciously late in the game. Whatever happened that March – and I think that *something* really did happen – it's hard to accept that it was quite the Pink Beam Experience of lore.

\*

To celebrate its 85<sup>th</sup> year of publication, the March/April issue of *Weird Tales* ran a feature called "The 85 Weirdest Storytellers of the past 85 Years." Not surprisingly, Phil made the list. Here is what they wrote:

Philip K. Dick was the surviving twin, and spent his entire life looking for something – fiction, drugs, love, fame, God – to make him whole again. The worlds of PKD's novels are shattered and detoured, ridiculous and sublime, proximately paranoid and yet sometimes ultimately redemptive. Dick died before his time; his vision of consumer spectacle, political thuggery, and the slim possibility of transcendence fit the late twentieth century perfectly, leading Hollywood to eagerly borrow, and screw up, any number of his great stories. Philip K. Dick saw such rat-bastardy coming.

\*

I saw the new documentary, *Philip K. Dick: The Penultimate Truth*. It's pretty good and is certainly much, much better than *The Gospel According to PKD*. There is an interesting framing device of government agents setting up an office to investigate Phil. The spooks never speak but a loudspeaker in the room provides the narrative. It's all very Nixon-esque. The filmmakers interview an impressive array of people to try to get a handle on Phil: his second wife, Kleo, his third wife Anne (and her daughter, Tandy), Tessa and old girlfriends Joan Simpson and Doris Sauter. Paul Williams appears briefly and Ray Nelson at some length. That is just the beginning. They interview Phil's shrink, Tim Powers and K.W. Jeter as well one of Phil's childhood friends. Significantly no one from the Estate appears in the film. Perhaps they disapproved?

Ray Nelson has some new stories to tell that did not appear in the previous documentary. He clearly has the most fun with this project and loves talking about Phil. The information these people provide is all over the map with Kleo, Powers and Jeter providing the most insight. Powers believes Phil was visited by God; Jeter is much more skeptical, which is pretty much like their characters in VALIS. The talking heads video is interspersed with old photos and book covers as well as contemporary footage of Phil's "drug house" -- one of the girls who used to hang out there tours the place with the current owners and points out Phil's room where his file cabinet was blown open. Amazingly, there is some footage of Phil's Metz speech. This is new to me.

The film is strictly biographical. 3 STIGMATA is only book discussed at all though there is a bit about VALIS in passing. That struck me as sort of odd. Nelson, Powers and Jeter do refer to Phil the writer but mostly this is about Phil the man. For those of us who already know the details of Phil's life the film may therefore seem a bit thin. I'm convinced that any straightforward documentary of our guy is bound to fail to some extent because interviews and old photos will never get to the core of the issue. Phil experiences and books are so out there that maybe only a fictional biography can do them justice. I have some hope that this Bill Pullman flick, *Your Name Here*, will actually illuminate Phil better than any factual account. About the Estate-approved *The Owl In Daylight* I have less enthusiasm. We shall see.

\*

In the course of *Philip K. Dick: The Penultimate Truth* K.W. Jeter remarks how very pleased he was with Phil's last book, TIMOTHY ARCHER. Relieved, too. "Thank God," Jeter remarks. "This novel shows that Phil wasn't crazy after all." Or words to that effect. I wondered about that so I went back and re-read TIMOTHY ARCHER. It had been a long time since I went through it last. I saw Jeter's point. Was this Phil's declaration of sanity?

I know that Timothy Archer is based upon Phil's old friend, Bishop Jim Pike. Still, I have the impression that he is really based upon Phil himself – or Horselover Fats, if you prefer. The Angel Archer is not exactly based upon Phil but I think she is a stand-in for Phil. She is certainly a mouthpiece for Phil's views. Some of them, anyway. If I am right about this, Phil's take on Tim, while certainly his take on Pike, is also Phil's take on Horselover Fats. In other words, a critique of *himself* or that particular aspect of himself; the aspect that believes in, well, believes in all the stuff in the Exegesis. The "Philip K. Dick" character in VALIS is somewhat critical of Horselover (not the actual author, Philip K. Dick...you know, it's hard to talk about all these people in a coherent way). Ultimately, though, he is sympathetic. Angel is much harsher but the stakes are much higher in TRANSMIGRATION; madness leads not to some quest for the new savior, as in VALIS, but to death, lots and lots of death. It made me think that maybe Phil had finally shaken off his Pink Beam craziness and returned to a kind of clear-sightedness. TRANSMIGRATION is in some respects VALIS re-written but with a less ambiguous conclusion. I was especially struck how Angel refuses to believe that Timothy has returned from the dead in Bill Lundborg. That's exactly the sort of thing Horselover *would* have believed.

But did that mean that Phil himself, the real Phil, had likewise refused to believe? Maybe not. The book's outline was finished by 4/15/81 and the complete novel reached his agent a month later on 5/13/81. But as late as September and November of 1981 Phil was still soldiering away at his Exegesis....

\*

The manuscripts that Phil sent to his agent often bore different titles, titles of Phil's own devising. Terry Carr changed quite a few of them before issuing the novels for Ace Books. For example, SIMULCRUM was originally called "The First Lady of Earth." Not a terrible title by any means. When I first read it I had no idea at the time what the hell a "simulacrum" was, though it certainly sounded science fiction-ish. In 1964 "First Lady" would have instantly been connected to Jackie Kennedy and so even had some timely resonance. Still, many of Phil's own titles are awful. "The Electric Toad" for example for SHEEP. "In Earth's Diurnal Course" (aka DR. BLOODMONEY) is surely the worst title ever imagined! I doubt I would have known what "diurnal" meant but it would have been way, way too close to "urinal" for an Ace Books reader. Even so, a number of Phil's original titles strike me as interesting in their own right. Looking through them I noticed how disquieting, in fact how *sinister* many of them were:

- "A Glass of Darkness" (PUPPETS)
- "Hour of the T.E.N.C.H" (MAZE)
- "Womb for Another" (JONES)
- "Death of an Anti-Watcher (UBIK)
- "The Dead Grow Young" (COUNTER-CLOCK)
- "The Kneeling Legless Man" (DEUS IRAE)
- "To Scare the Dead" (VALIS)

Look carefully. These titles sound much more like horror novels than science fiction, don't they?

\*

From my friend Jerry: "I note Philip Dick's birthday was December 16th, I found out from Boing Boing of course and they illustrated it with a picture of Dick holding one of his cats... I am so tempted but I will not say the obvious. It occurred to me, Dick always loved his cats ... I'm holding myself in here, it occurred to me that his cats must have been witnesses to extraordinary events what would Dick's life have looked like from the point of view of his cats?"

\*

I re-read JONES recently. It had been a long time and I'm not sure what pushed me in that direction. I first read it in 1967 and it was certainly different from the usual Ace Books fodder I gobbled up back then. Reading it again I was reminded that Phil used to work with a much larger canvas with big set pieces. And he could create intense action sequences. The attempt to assassinate Jones during a rally in Chapter 13 is really well done.

\*

**Now Wait for 2-3-74...** John has written me concerning my ideas regarding Phil's "Pink Beam Experience" in 1974. He pointed out quite reasonably that we may not have all letters from that period so we really cannot be sure that lack of letters in February and March of that year means much. More to the point, whatever Phil experienced may have been so traumatic, that he was not ready to deal with the event so soon after it happened. I hope I'm doing justice to John's remarks here. They were more persuasive that I have put them here. In any case, I did reconsider my thinking on 2-3-74 and sent John the following reply (slightly re-written here):

...I think I may not have expressed myself properly in the issue of Orbit regarding 2-3-74. In effect I was arguing from the silence. I was certainly struck by the absence of references to the events in letters immediately after the events in question and then how the story emerged in bits and pieces over the next few months until we get what might be called the "definitive" version in the letter to LeGuinn. You are perfectly correct in stating that we simply may not have all of the letters from that time and the ones we do have paint an incomplete picture of the events. It's hard to prove a negative. Why no carbons of those letters? Why would Phil throw them away but retain the others? Then I had the sudden thought: what if "Thomas" threw them away? That freaked me out for a moment but of course there is no way to ever know that one way or the other. But working on the letters we do have, and prodded along by your comments, I have been re-thinking some of my conclusions. Well, I don't really have "conclusions," just speculations.

One reason the final version seems to emerge piece-meal (with several rejected possibilities, like tachyons, along the way) may be that Phil's original experience was so extraordinary as to be traumatic. As with any sudden traumatic event the sorting out of the elements of the event and the explanation for them came later, well after the fact. It was like "Bam!" and then "what the hell just happened?" As incredible as some of the experiences Phil relates (post hoc) I rather expect it was originally much, much stranger and may not have made any sense at all at the time. Poor Phil must have thought he was losing his mind. But he desperately needed to make sense of it somehow and so tried to find an explanation that fit the facts. As you know both from the letters and VALIS he tried a number of theories, much as he did with the break-in. And part of the explanation(s) required a narrative of events, including what you might call a "starting gun." In this case it became the girl from the pharmacy wearing the gold necklace. It's true that his dental surgery was in January but that doesn't preclude additional surgery later on, in March, and events then unfolded in the way Phil later describes. I assumed that the surgery in question had to be the one in January simply because there was no mention of additional surgery in subsequent letters; but this in itself means nothing. Plus, Tessa backs up the story of the girl coming to their apartment.

The idea that Phil may have been working on a novel at the time and that the novel shaped the narrative of his actual experience was frankly something that came to me as I was composing Orbit. I threw the idea into the essay pretty much without giving it a lot of thought. Now I tend to doubt this. It may be that Phil included some of his thinking on 3-4-74 in the course of composing his fiction at the time but I don't think the novel inspired the event; I think the event inspired the novel, certainly in the case of VALIS, though long after 1974.

I was much taken by your own experience of suffering a traumatic time in your life and only being able to record it afterward. You are right. That there is nothing in the letters in March and April concerning 3-4-74 proves nothing at all. It's arguing from silence again. Perhaps letters are missing; perhaps Phil was simply unprepared at that time to deal with 3-4-74, or at least unprepared yet to commit it to paper. The March and April letters are pretty prosaic but this doesn't mean Phil's life then was not in turmoil.

\*

I read Thomas Disch's new book, *The Word of God*. I suppose you've heard about it. Disch explains that he is a god. He takes the occasion to ramble on and on about divinity. I actually haven't read much Disch; *Mankind Under the Leash*, a bunch of short stories, *Camp Concentration* and lots and lots of book reviews. He's a decent writer though he does like to talk about himself quite a bit. His apotheosis here is a logical conclusion I guess. A good half of the novel's 180 pages concerns a plot to prevent his being born by murdering his father before hand. His father is really Thomas Mann and his assassin is Philip K. Dick. Phil is down in Hell and suffering from writer's block. He can be cured of this but first he has to do Satan a favor by killing Mann in 1939, thereby preempting the birth of Disch which then will result in Germany winning World War II. Phil would be bringing about the world of MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE. It's kind of neat idea for a novel; Disch is no slouch. Phil's soul-in-Hell enters his ten-year-old self of 1939 and he hightails it to Minneapolis to off Mann before he impregnates Dish's mother. The chapter in Hell is pretty good, the rest of the narrative less so. But it's a nasty little book. Why pick on Phil 26 years after his death? Okay, so Phil may have ratted him out to the Feds. Was Disch carrying a grudge that long? Was he jealous of Phil's postmortem fame? Phil sure didn't benefit from that though his money-grubbing heirs sure did. It's too mean-spirited and cruel to be just an elaborate joke. I'm perplexed. Check it out and see what you think.

\*

That fine site for nerds and geeks, Topless Robot, has compiled "The 10 Greatest Mind-Altering Drugs and Drinks in Science Fiction." Needless to say, Phil made the cut – three times! The winners are:

Stelazine  
Can-D and Chew-Z  
Substance D

Stelazine? What's with that? Surely JJ 180 would have been a better candidate.

\*

## Book Reviews

**Thomas M. Disch: "Sleazy forms of hell." *Times Literary Supplement*, January 18, 1985 p. 67.**

Writers who rely heavily on their ability to improvise should have careful editors. Through most of Philip K. Dick's career it would seem the only editorial attention paid to his manuscripts was a change of title. While this allowed him the freedom to wander, thematically, wherever he would, it also encouraged him to get away with murder. A "novel" like *Lies, Inc.* – originally published as *The Unteleported Man* – has pages, and entire chapters, so flagrantly ill-written that they merit a special niche in the Grub Street Hall of Fame.

This is not to suggest that *Lies, Inc.* represents a chance for jaded readers to go slumming in the sleazy but exciting slum of SF. Only momentarily does the book offer flashes of genuinely inspired bad taste, as in its lip-smacking depiction of an alien with a penchant for eating its own eyes:

Though not completely eaten, those which still shone with luster, regarded him as they rolled slightly; they continued to function, although no longer fixed to the bulbed, oozing exterior surface of the head. New eyes, like tiny pale eggs, had already begun to form, he perceived. They clung in clusters.

Apologists for trashy SF usually argue that lame prose and wooden characters are redeemed by a profusion of exciting "ideas," but there is little in *Lies Inc.* that merits being called an idea, and even that little is undeveloped, bungled, or trivialized. The plot's main premise is one suggested by Cyril Kornbluth's story, "The Marching Morons," and recapitulated by Kornbluth and Pohl's *The Space Merchants*: colonists departing from Earth for a new life in the stars have been duped and are to find, instead of the advertised utopia, one form or another of hell. Dick makes overt references to the Nazis' efforts to disguise the nature of their death camps, and the mad scientist villain in this novel, Sepp von Einem, in so far as he is characterized at all, is in the Nazi beast tradition of Hollywood B-movies. However, having made this grim hypothesis, Dick spends the rest of the book shying away from it. He never represents in any dramatic way the awfulness of his garrison world of

Whale's Mouth. Rather, characters arriving there either engage in shoot-outs with the cops (the kind of thing Dick could write in his sleep), or they are afflicted with a variety of LSD-induced hallucinations, none of which are developed with enough detail to yield their own narrative interest. Finally, because of the way this expanded edition of the novel was cobbled together, there is a howling discrepancy in the plot, which has the "unteleported" hero of the earlier version teleported for several chapters of superfluous padding, only in the last chapters to be restored to his earlier condition. Only a casual and undeveloped reference to an unwitnessed "time warping construct" gives an indication that Dick was aware of the problem. Narrative consistency? Not at the speed Dick was typing in 1964.

Dick's posthumous reputation is now so large that a case can be made for publishing whatever his estate can exhume from his files, but readers can't say they haven't been warned. IN a recent book of interviews with the author (*Philip K. Dick: In His Own Words* by Gregg Rickmann. Valentine Press. \$9.95), Dick, in April 1981, gives his own estimate of the book:

[*The Unteleported Man*]...was just a way to earn money. They offered me double their normal word rate if I'd do a novelette based on the cover.... And I did that. It wasn't very good.... The two parts don't fit together at all.

Berkley at a later time had hoped he would do a revision that might make the story cohere, but Dick found he couldn't "get back into the action-adventure stuff." It is ironic that while most of the mainstream novels on which Dick expended so much real effort and wasted so much hope still languish unpublished in a California library, even his most meretricious SF is reprinted in glossy new editions. Not, I suspect, because there is anyone who actually enjoyed his worst books, but because most paperback readers buy books as they do fruit, enjoying the good bits and throwing away whatever tastes overly rotten – in this case virtually the whole book.

Though its subtitle and university press provenance might lead one to suppose *Robots, Androids, and Mechanical Oddities* was a work of criticism dealing with Dick's science fiction, it is, in fact, simply a collection of stories. Dick produced fiction in mass quantities but most of it took the form of novels. His short stories are rarely as bad as his worst novels but most are pretty lackluster, if only because most were written in his apprentice years, from 1952 to 1956, in which period he published over seventy-five stories. Of the fifteen stories collected in this volume, ten are from this period, and only one of those ten is previously uncollected in one or more of the author's earlier collections. The editors' own contributions are scant – a three-page introduction and brief prefatory remarks before the individual stories – an full of bromidic hype.

Given the easy availability of most of these stories elsewhere, given the editors failure to even characterize and discuss the many less available stories that Dick wrote on the theme stated by the title (including his seminal essay "The Android and the Human") but which have been omitted from this collection, given the imminent publication of Dick's complete short stories, I can see no reason for burdening a bookshelf with this glorified paperback.