

# The Search for Reality in Philip K. Dick's VALIS and The Exegesis

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Lončar, Dino

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J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Study Programme: Double Major MA Study Programme in English Language and  
Literature – Teaching English as a Foreign Language and German Language and  
Literature – Teaching German as a Foreign Language

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*To my mother – her kindness and patience*

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## **Abstract**

In his novels and stories, Philip K. Dick is preoccupied with the question: “What is real?” and at one point, his literary and biographical interests merge. Namely, on 2 March 1974, after a visit to the dentist due to which he was under the influence of sodium pentothal, Dick had a mystical encounter with what he calls VALIS: a higher and more rational mind that “invaded” his. This single experience was the spark which would lead Dick on a long and painful writing journey of over eight thousand sheets of paper, resulting in the following works: *VALIS*, *The Divine Invasion*, *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*, *Radio Free Albemuth*, and *The Exegesis*. This paper will discuss Dick’s psychological-philosophical-theological views of reality as represented in his diary titled *The Exegesis* and analyse how they appear in his novel *VALIS*. Most notably, the paper will show that Dick’s texts, even though they do not and cannot give an answer to the key question concerning the nature of reality, prompt the readers to think critically about themselves and the world, showing them that the ultimate freedom is the freedom to think. Even if one commits errors in their thinking process, contemplation helps one on their inner journey to self-realization and peace.

**Keywords:** Philip K. Dick, science fiction, reality, contemplation, *VALIS*, *The Exegesis*.



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## Introduction

Although traditional literary criticism views him as nothing more than a prolific genre author, Philip K. Dick wrote a significant body of ground-breaking texts, influencing many other writers. For Ursula K. Le Guin, he was the American Borges: “The fact that what Dick is entertaining us about is reality and madness, time and death, sin and salvation – this has escaped most critics. Nobody notices that we have our own homegrown Borges, and have had him for thirty years” (33); for Stanislaw Lem he was “a visionary among charlatans” (54); for Roberto Bolaño he was a counter-culture icon: “one of the ten best American writers of the twentieth century, which is saying a lot. Dick was a kind of Kafka steeped in LSD and rage” (196-7). Finally, for the wide public today, he is the cult writer whose works inspired many Hollywood adaptations such as *Blade Runner*, *Minority Report*, *The Man in the High Castle*, *A Scanner Darkly*, and others. The works that were adapted into films tend to be both interesting and accessible to a wide audience. However, his experience on 2 March 1974, resulted in the creation of a new trilogy of novels (including *VALIS*) and a diary (*The Exegesis*) which remains perplexing and sometimes impenetrable. The works represent a mystifying combination of the personal, autobiographical and fictional.

This thesis will focus on *VALIS* and the published, abbreviated version of *The Exegesis* edited by Pamela Jackson and Jonathan Lethem. There is no real plot in *The Exegesis*, rather the reader is introduced to Dick’s meditations and thoughts, and the plot of *VALIS* is very simple and echoes Dick’s mystical experience. The main character Horselover Fat (who is an alter ego for Dick; Philip meaning in Greek: ‘Horselover’ – lover of horses, and Dick meaning in German ‘fat’) experiences a meeting with a higher being: *VALIS* – *Vast Active Living Intelligence System*, and embarks both on a spiritual and psychological journey in order to find himself, and on a literal journey to find an alien female baby – a supposed saviour of humanity. Referring to the metaphysical nature of the journey, Jonathan Lethem suggests that “*The Exegesis* is the sort of book associated with legends and madmen, but Dick wasn’t a legend and he wasn’t mad. He lived among us, and was a genius” (qtd. in *The Exegesis*, cover). Dick’s experience and struggle with reality is the focus of this paper. The novel *VALIS* and his diary, *The Exegesis*, will be examined to establish how reality appears in Dick through different angles and to show that the texts suggest that the ultimate freedom is the freedom of thought.

The first chapter will consider the relationship between reality and paradox. Dick’s writing is full of paradoxes which occur in every single approach to understanding the texts. The focus of the second chapter is the novel and it will show that Dick’s work displays many different literary traits and features (most of them characteristic of the Modernist literary movement). The third

chapter examines the topic of the author and the role of the author in these particular texts. The fourth chapter examines the personal beliefs of the author in the context of religion and religious tradition and its role in the texts. The fifth chapter presents then how these personal-religious views transfer into the sphere of politics and public life. Finally, the sixth chapter examines these realities and their interaction with mental health. This chapter is followed by a Conclusion containing the thesis' findings.

## 1. Reality and Paradox

Paradox, or antinomy, according to *Merriam-Webster* can be defined as “a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true” (“Paradox, n.”) Dick’s texts start and end with a paradox. In fact, the element of the paradox is so essential to Dick’s work that it will be considered first.

Typically, human beings tend to avoid paradoxes, because whatever they are (apart from being verbal wisdom), they cannot be the *real* truth; that is, people think that reality cannot be built on a contradiction. People prefer clarity in their thinking and like clarity even in their so-called “enemies,” identifying them as fully negative. Therefore, paradoxes are perceived as either nonsense or as tricks of the human mind that are contrary to reality itself.

Arguably, people like to think in terms of metaphysical necessity. One famous paradox in the Western culture, according to *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* is: If God is all-powerful, can God create a stone so heavy that not even he/she can lift it? (Hoffman and Rosenkrantz). Sister Miriam Joseph approaches this in the light of classical (Aristotelian) logic and explains why it is a flawed and nonsensical question that does not and cannot reflect reality:

The relation is metaphysically necessary if it could not be otherwise for the reason that it would be impossible, inconceivable, involving sheer contradiction.

Metaphysical necessity is such that not even God can make it otherwise. God is the source of order, not of disorder and confusion. To be unable to do what is contradictory is not a limitation of His Omnipotence; it is not an imperfection but a perfection. Thus God cannot make a square circle, nor can He make a stone so big that He could not lift it. (ch. 5)

However, for Dick and his world-view, it is perfectly “normal” to question this and think in paradoxes as they appear in reality, scientific theory, and myths: dead people being alive, one person being many, remembering and living in different realities, time being non-linear or even

stopping, and so on. This occurs in many of his works, and it is found in *VALIS* and *The Exegesis* as well.

At the beginning of *VALIS*, Dick writes about the theological-psychological crisis that the protagonist Horselover Fat is in: “It was a Chinese finger trap, where the harder you pull to get out, the tighter the trap gets” (2). The idea suggests that reality is paradoxical. Further on in *VALIS*, he writes that it would be an error of judgement, “missing the point,” *not* to think of this:

I’m missing the point. What we have here is a Zen paradox. That which makes no sense makes the most sense. I am being caught in a sin of the highest magnitude: using Aristotelian two-value logic: ‘A thing is either A or not-A’. . . Everybody knows that Aristotelian two-value logic is fucked. What I am saying is that – (144)

Dick believes that one should question everything. However, regarding the question of what one ought to believe, Dick leaves it blank and does not finish his thought: “What I am saying is that –” (144), because he wants to encourage himself and the reader to think in terms of paradoxes since, according to him, they point to the truth and allow for freedom of thought. The goal here is neither to assert the view that Sister Miriam Joseph is right/wrong nor that Dick’s view is right/wrong; instead, it is to illustrate the importance of the paradox in *VALIS* and *The Exegesis*. And it is in *The Exegesis* that Dick gives the following explanation of this fundamental problem:

Here is the puzzle of *VALIS*. In *VALIS* I say, I know a madman who imagines that he saw Christ; and I am that madman. But if I know that I am a madman I know that in fact I did not see Christ. Therefore I assert nothing about Christ. ~~Or do I? Who can solve this puzzle?~~ I say ~~in fact~~ only that I am mad. But if I say only that, then I have made no mad claim; ~~I do not, then say that I saw Christ.~~ Therefore I am not mad. And the regress begins again and continues forever. ~~The reader must know on his own what has really been said, what has actually been asserted.~~ Something has been asserted, what what is it? Does it have to do with Christ or only with myself? This paradox was known in antiquity; the pre-Socratics propounded it. A man say, ~~truthfully~~, ‘All Cretans are liars.’ When an inquiry is made as to who this man is, it is determined that he was born in Crete. What, then, has he asserted? Anything at all? Is this the semblance of knowledge or a form – a strange form – of knowledge itself? ~~There is no answer to this puzzle. Or is there?~~ Zeno, the Sophists in general, saw paradox as a way of conveying knowledge – paradox, in fact, as a way of arriving at conclusions. This is known, too, in Zen Buddhism. It sometimes causes a strange jolt or leap in the person’s mind; something happens, an abrupt comprehension, as if out of nowhere, called satori. The paradox does not tell; it points. It is a sign, not the thing pointed to. That which is pointed to must arise ex nihilo in the mind of the person. The

paradox, the koan tells him nothing; it wakes him up. This only makes sense if you assume something very strange: we are asleep but do not know, at least not until we wake up. (491)

The special formatting occurs in the original; the words “~~in fact~~” and “~~truthfully~~” are, whether consciously or unconsciously, crossed out. This shows that, for Dick, few things are certain and it is difficult both to define and explain them. He emphasises that the reader has to decide on their own. That is why he fails to finish some of his thoughts and crosses out or underlines words, suggesting that reality is far more complex than language. In this, he echoes the ideas of Modernists, who opted for experimentation in order to find the truth about the human existence.

According to Rebecca Beasley, “Modernist literature often foregrounds the limitations of language as a form of communication: many of its protagonists puzzle over how best to express themselves” (“Modernism”). Similarly, the tradition of the Theatre of the Absurd, which continues this line of thinking, examines the reality (that is, human existence) by means of representing absurd situations, expansive plots, and having the characters utter unfinished statements (“Theatre of the Absurd”). Dick applies these ideas introducing them into the realm of science fiction and autobiographical writing, which explains his avant-garde status among the writers of his genre. Thus, the paradox points us to the limits of our thought, language, and reality. In the Dickian view, reality, whatever it is, is deeply puzzling and depends on interpretation. Korzybski explains that this is precisely what is meant in the statement that reality is an abstraction – it is based on interpretation (371-372). That reality can be understood as interpretation in the way that one understands a literary text, a poem, story, or novel, is the topic of the following chapter.

## 2. Reality and the Novel

Dick wrote both of his texts during the 1970s and early 1980s, yet they prominently feature modernist traits: inner subjectivity and experience, stream of consciousness, contemplation of time-space and (limits) of language, free indirect discourse, and others, along with postmodern irony and humour. In English Modernist literature, most notably, Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, the inner life and experience of one day is captured through the technique of stream-of-consciousness. In Dick’s *The Exegesis*, only one brief moment is captured – the moment of Dick encountering VALIS (a form of alien higher consciousness and revealing light). In its entirety, *The Exegesis* is written in the first person point of view and using stream of consciousness to represent inner subjectivity in the form of a diary. The diary documents Dick’s thoughts regarding this single

experience that is stretched out on thousands of pages. The novel *VALIS*, through its complex fictional and (non-factual) autobiographical nature, provides plot and action to the purely contemplative thought about doubt, faith, consciousness, and similar phenomena, which is available in *The Exegesis*. Therefore, both texts complement and complete each other (*The Exegesis* being the contemplative source, and *VALIS* being the novelization of these thoughts). Not only that, but it is in these texts that Dick examines his own consciousness thoroughly. Dick shows and explains this in *The Exegesis*:

And this is *me* (as H. Fat), rendered into fiction forever. And yet the real truth is that I embody doubt, not faith; and yet, when I as I am am rendered into art by me the artist, doubt – absolute doubt – becomes or is seen as absolute faith, as Fat searches for the Savior, while I sit here night after night not believing. Which is the truth? *VALIS* enters the info flow of the macromind, so it – not I – will survive. And, as Plato said, that which is eternal alone is real. (689)

Clearly, in addition to the ruminations concerning the divine and the real, Dick also contemplates about his own identity in this complex and puzzling constellation of phenomena that is the reality. He also understands that fiction writing (in the form of *VALIS*) is a significant part of his soul-searching:

Reality outside confronts me as a mystery, and so does my own inner identity. The two are fused. Who am I? When is it? Where am I? This sounds like madness. But when I read the Scriptures I find myself in the world which is to me real, and I understand myself. (261)

While *The Exegesis* represents the inner, spiritual search, in the novel *VALIS* an actual search for the “fifth saviour” (*VALIS* and pure consciousness) occurs: “The Savior? Yeah, I’ll find him. If I run out of money I’ll come home and work some more and go look again” (140). Thereby, it is in the texts that consciousness becomes a relevant and essential question for literature as well. Even more so, Dick’s texts appear to be literary attempts to understand consciousness and arrive at a state of clear/pure consciousness, a desire prompted by his encounter with *VALIS*: “I will know what this pure consciousness was, ere I die trying” (*The Exegesis* 728). This illustrates how important consciousness is in Dick’s texts and how it grows into art: narration, story, and context. In *VALIS*, at first the narration appears to be in the third person objective narration, but the narrator turns out to be Dick’s consciousness and to feature many traits of Modernism. For Virginia Woolf, Modern fiction must be marked both by innovation and by its focus on the spirit, that is the mind

(158), which requires a different type of writing: less materialistic, and thus less “realistic.” Similarly to what Dick will be doing in *The Exegesis* several decades later, Woolf explains that the mind receives all kinds of impressions which shower the mind shaping thus the life we live (160). In other words, rather than being fixed in the solidity of the material world, she claims that:

life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We are not pleading merely for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it. (Woolf 160-61).

And it is precisely for the fact that consciousness seems to appear in human beings in terms of narration, story and context, that is, in terms of fiction, that this problem becomes so relevant for Dick’s texts and for literature. Furthermore, some thinkers and writers on the subject of consciousness talk about it in similar terms – terms of fiction (Frankish).

The philosopher Roger Scruton elaborates on the relation of art and consciousness in his book *Beauty*: “Consciousness finds its rationale in transforming the outer world into something inner – something that will live in memory as an idea . . . when dissolved in consciousness, the inwardness that redeems both itself and the person who truly observes it” (55-56). Dick transforms all of this into his art and arrives at precisely this same conclusion: “for me as the asker in 3-74 the answer (singular) came: What is out there really is the same as what is in here really” (*The Exegesis* 250).

As Dick expands his paradoxical thoughts from *The Exegesis* into the novel *VALIS*, what appears to be a clear and realistic third person objective narrator, turns out to be a subjective first person narrator – the consciousness of the main protagonist Horselover Fat, Dick’s alter ego: “I am Horselover Fat, and I am writing this in the third person to gain much-needed objectivity” (3). Joyce’s alter ego, Stephen Dedalus, explains in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* that such a shift from first person into (subjective) third person perception in the artists’ mind is in accordance with literary tradition:

The simplest epical form is seen emerging out of lyrical literature when the artist prolongs and broods upon himself as the centre of an epical event and this form progresses till the centre of emotional gravity is equidistant from the artist himself and from others. The narrative is no longer purely personal. The personality of the

artist passes into the narration itself, flowing round and round the persons and the action like a vital sea. This progress you will see easily in that old English ballad *Turpin Hero* which begins in the first person and ends in the third person. The dramatic form is reached when the vitality which has flowed and eddied round each person fills every person with such vital force that he or she assumes a proper and intangible esthetic life. The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself, so to speak. (207)

This mix of seemingly objective third person narration that is, in fact, a subjective first person narration, is known as free indirect discourse (free indirect style). One of the early pioneering works to feature free indirect discourse is Jane Austen's *Emma* (Gunn 35). But it is in Modernism and in writers like Woolf and Joyce that free indirect discourse would become a clearly prominent feature. A Modernist example of free indirect discourse is seen in the following passage from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, where the main protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway, contemplates on the topic of marriage and her choices in life:

So she would still find herself arguing in St. James's Park, still making out that she had been right—and she had too—not to marry him. For in marriage a little licence, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him (Where was he this morning for instance? Some committee, she never asked what.) But with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into. And it was intolerable, and when it came to that scene in the little garden by the fountain, she had to break with him or they would have been destroyed, both of them ruined, she was convinced. (Woolf)

In line with the idea of free indirect discourse, although formally not identically, the first-person and third-person narration merge in *VALIS*, as seen in the following passage where both the “I” and “he” refer to the same person – Horselover Fat:

I DID NOT THINK I should tell Fat that I thought his encounter with God was in fact an encounter with himself from the far future. Himself so evolved, so changed, that he had become no longer a human being. Fat had remembered back to the stars, and had encountered a being ready to



return to the stars, and several selves along the way, several points along the line. All of them are the same person. (129)

The mixing or merging of perspectives occurs as Dick expands his vision and his writing from *The Exegesis* into a form of a science-fiction autobiographical novel that is *VALIS*. Dick's approach echoes Katherine Anne Porter, another Modernist writer, who comments on the phenomenon by saying: "I shall try to tell the truth, but the result will be fiction" (qtd. in DeMouy 350).

A decade after Dick's death, Robert Anton Wilson, a writer who both influenced Dick and was greatly influenced by Dick himself, wrote an illustrated screenplay whose title is also a statement: *Reality Is What You Can Get Away with* (1993); this view of reality is certainly true for Dick's view on both fiction and reality. In 1978, Dick writes a speech in which he claims: "Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away" ("How to Build a Universe That Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later"). Both Dick and Wilson come to see reality as something both solid and elusive. Their fiction is made up, but this might be partially true for reality as well. In that sense, reality appears (almost) like a "true magic trick." However, both Wilson and Dick struggled and suffered because of their desire to find something true and real, and thereby they do not deny reality. It seems that their world-view corresponds with the view that is presented by Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* (1939), another example of strong Modernist influence visible in Dick's work. Namely, Joyce presents a view of reality as being a *chaosmos* (cosmos + chaos), and everything being in flux "every person, place and thing in the chaosmos of Alle anyway connected with the gobblydumped turkery was moving and changing every part of the time" (118), which is similar to how Dick views reality.

Another way to read these texts is to see them as pure science fiction. It is the play with reality that is in accord with Dick's understanding of science fiction. Science fiction, for him, is not an action-adventure story set in space; instead, science fiction is the genre of playing with ideas (Breux and Luxereau 4). Encyclopædia Britannica offers a similar definition of science fiction: "a form of fiction that deals principally with the impact of actual or imagined science upon society or individuals" ("Science fiction"). The play of ideas, that is, speculation is one of the reasons why science fiction is also called speculative fiction. It is a genre that tries to merge science and art – fact and fiction, which, according to Raymond Chandler, is a welcome combination in fiction:

There are two kinds of truth: the truth that lights the way and the truth that warms the heart. The first of these is science, and the second is art. Neither is independent of the other or more important than the other. . . . The truth of art keeps science

from becoming inhuman and the truth of science keeps art from becoming ridiculous. (7)

This extensive search for reality that is seen in the texts, then, is where Dick stands out among science fiction writers. His science fiction is closer to the lives of real (ordinary) people than to those of scientists, astronauts or aliens. And it is Dick's direct and "slice of life" style that makes his extraordinary science fiction ideas and stories feel more real and believable. According to Dick, his "science fiction realism" is a result of the influence of the nineteenth-century European Realists: "the slice of life realistic novel that I write is essentially based on the 19th century French realistic novels. For instance, if I were to name my favorite novels, I would name *Madame Bovary* . . . and Stendhal's *The Red and The Black* . . . Those would be my two favorite novels" (qtd. in Breux and Luxereau 4). As human contemporary reality more and more resembles science fiction, it is Dick's realistic approach that makes his stories feel so prophetic.

Yet another way of reading Dick's texts is to read them as theory-fiction. Apart from speculative fiction, the term theory-fiction is becoming popular for works of contemporary fiction that examine reality and are in accord with postmodern theory. These works of fiction are "theoretical" (essayistic) in nature and try to balance the distinctions of hard scientific fact with the playfulness of art; as Holt says, they are "the space where fiction bleeds into reality" ("The Terrifying Ambivalence of Theory-Fiction"). In other words, the artificial and real are blended together in a text. In his elaboration on theory-fiction, Fisher explains:

The becoming-fiction of theory is necessarily accompanied by the becoming-real of fiction. All of which calls for some kind of account of what fiction is – or could be – in cybernetic culture – . . . [it] is now no longer adequate to consider fiction to be on the side of the false, the fake or the imaginary. It can be considered to belong to the artificial, once we understand . . . that the Real, far from being opposed to the artificial, is composed of it. (*Flatline Constructs* 156)

While some works of postmodern and new-wave science fiction might fall under such a label (Dick's texts being one example), the clearest example of theory-fiction is presented in an extraordinary research paper written by Elaine N. Aron. In a very persuasive and believable way, she imagines and describes having dinner with Carl Jung, Martin Buber, and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, thinkers whose ideas she is greatly influenced and puzzled by:

Three men—Jung, Buber, and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi— are invited to dinner with the author in her active imagination. . . . Meanwhile, the author has not just dabbled

but devoted her life to these three paths, simultaneously. The conflict among these men had become an inner struggle demanding resolution. (1)

The encounter is purely fictional, but Aron imagines the outcomes of her meeting with these people and their different world-views very realistically. Throughout her paper, she quotes all three thinkers, cites sources, and shows the reader the thinkers' actual views of the human condition. In short, everything is true and accurate – except that the dinner never actually happened. Dick's *VALIS* is a similar case and even features an appendix that consists of passages, quotes, and thoughts from *The Exegesis*. While *VALIS* has a story (a plot), *The Exegesis* is purely inner thought; it is a diary documenting Dick's conscious thoughts and feelings. And it is in *The Exegesis* that Dick claims: "my writing is simply a creative way of handling analysis. I am a fictionalizing philosopher . . . my novel and story writing ability is employed as a means to formulate my perception" (692), therefore the term theory-fiction also appears as an adequate reference to Dick's texts.

However, the term theory-fiction that Fisher and others propose appears like a double-edged sword, and, arguably, this is also a problem for Dick's texts. On the one hand, it is problematic because real scientific theories are not trivial daydreams, but based on true (empirical) evidence and observation, as explained by the Nobel-prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman: "It doesn't make any difference how beautiful your guess is . . . It doesn't make any difference how smart you are, who made the guess, or what his name is. If it disagrees with experiment, it's wrong. That's all there is to it" (qtd. in Pomeroy). The "danger" of theory-fiction is that viewing it as an actual theory, that is, if one chooses to read them in a dogmatic manner, might lead a person to *really* believe in pseudo-science, conspiracies, and illusions (even Dick himself expresses and emphasises his own doubts inside these texts). On the other hand, the benefit of such a view of reading and writing fiction is that it directly challenges the reader's world-view and leads him/her to become aware of contemporary pseudo-realities that Dick and Fisher warn against. Being aware of them can actually help the reader *not* to believe in pseudo-science, conspiracies, illusions (this is one of Dick's goals as an artist). The idea is that a person (the reader) will escape pseudo-realities and false narratives by facing them directly, as suggested in *VALIS* when Horselover Fat contemplates about his meeting with Linda and Eric Lampton: "It is amazing that when someone else spouts the nonsense you yourself believe you can readily perceive it as nonsense . . . as I had listened to Linda and Eric rattle on about being three-eyed people from another planet I had known they were nuts. This made me nuts, too" (232).

Whatever label is used: science fiction, speculative fiction, or theory-fiction, the point is to see that the novel remains a means for a journey to find reality, which is actually a traditional idea, frequently found in Modernist novels, but in other novels as well. These elements exist in many other works, such as Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, and Fernando Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet*. All these texts are marked by a high degree of experimentation, in particular in their successful fictionalization of fact, or factualization of fiction. *VALIS* and *The Exegesis* contain many diverse elements, many of them Modernist and experimental, which contribute to the difficulty of both classifying and interpreting them: their language is focused on capturing (spiritual) experience; they are essayistic nature; they can be seen as both (Fat's) biography or (Dick's) autobiography; they represent a philosophical or psychological examination and reflection of the character that is embedded in the actual text; they are experimental in style, and contain a critique of art or society. In *VALIS*, Dick expresses the ambivalent, paradoxical, and polyvalent nature of reality and text:

The remedy is here but so is the malady. As Fat repeats obsessively, **“The Empire never ended.”** In a startling response to the crisis, the true God mimics the universe, the very region he had invaded, he takes on the likeness of sticks and trees and beer cans in gutters – he presumes to be trash discarded, debris no longer noticed. Lurking, the true God literally ambushes reality and us as well. God, in very truth attacks and injures us, in his role as antidote. As Fat can testify to, it is a scary experience to be bushwhacked by the Living God. Hence we say, the true God is in the habit of concealing himself. Twenty-five hundred years have passed since Heraclitus wrote: “Latent form is the master of obvious form,” and, “The Nature of things is in the habit of concealing itself.” (74)

Dick's turn toward what is essentially literary Modernism is a result of his attempt to find, understand and, possibly, construct, a new reality, which is what the Modernists were trying to do in the aftermath of the First and Second World Wars. There existed a strong urge to attempt to understand the world that began to see lamentable. All of this shows how personal these (meta)physical experiences and texts are to Dick. Therefore, the following chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the author's relationship with and attitude to reality.

### 3. Reality and the Author

Deeply personal, both *The Exegesis* and *VALIS* present a unique case of an established and experienced writer reflecting on his career and work. And Dick is speaking to the reader as a fleshed out Philip K. Dick. Yet, at the same time, he is not really there; in *VALIS* he writes about his imagined self and alter ego: Horselover Fat, and in *The Exegesis* Dick claims to have (psychologically) died: “in 1974, come to the end in some real and perhaps even ontological sense; mentally I had in fact died. Yet the next day I found myself in the magic spatial world of total freedom, a world of infinite extension” (712). In this, he evokes another paradox: he is dead, and yet narrates as well as acts in the plot through different (multiple) personalities. Considering this and the fact that *VALIS* is a fictional autobiography, it is not possible to consider the author to be the main authority and read the text purely biographically; another option, then, would be to consider the text as the main authority.

In contemporary literary criticism, thanks to thinkers like Roland Barthes and his essay “Death of the Author,” it is well-established that the authority for the literary text is the text itself, or the reader as the text’s impersonal destination (Barthes 148), and not the author. More so, not only is the author not considered an authority but is also disregarded completely. In Barthes’ view, literature is: “that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing” (142). This is true for Dick’s texts – yet, it is also wrong. Namely, Dick makes it clear that his 1974 experience and writing was both a real and a fictional experience; it was an experience of meeting *VALIS* (a higher mind/consciousness or God) and of meeting himself: “If, in reading this, you cannot see that Fat is writing about himself, then you understand nothing” (*VALIS* 34). Throughout the novel, Dick explains that he is writing about himself in a painfully humoristic way: “No wonder Fat started scratching out page after page of his exegesis. I’d have done the same. He wasn’t just theory-mongering for the sake of it; he was trying to figure out what the fuck had happened to him” (114). Yet, Dick tells the reader that Dick (Horselover Fat) cannot be fully trusted: “If Fat had simply been crazy he certainly found a unique way of doing it” (114). And lastly, the narrator, Dick himself, expresses how terrifying and absurd it all seems: “Fat had scared the shit out of me” (118). Still, throughout *VALIS* and *The Exegesis*, even though Dick challenges the reality of his 1974 experience, he never gives up on it; it appears that through this experience and these texts his consciousness was able to connect to reality again. This is yet another paradox: Dick tells the reader to both believe and not believe him as a reliable authority. Even more so, it is not possible to entirely believe Dick since he is well aware that what he is writing is fiction. Ultimately, Dick is

both a reliable and an unreliable narrator with a (painful) sense for irony, tragedy and humour. Reading *VALIS* seems as if Dick is analysing, interpreting, and correcting his own texts while he is writing them. Or, to further use Barthes' metaphor, this is like the case of Schrödinger's cat where Dick is, in his texts, both alive and dead (and reborn).

Therefore, *The Exegesis* and *VALIS* could be considered to be his most Dickian texts; namely, *VALIS* is a novel that was written by Dick and is about a fictional version of Philip K. Dick called Horselover Fat, whereas *The Exegesis* presents the inner world of Dick's thoughts. It seems impossible to completely divide Dick (and his consciousness) from his texts, despite the fact that (some) scenes in *The Exegesis* and in *VALIS* are imagined and non-factual. During the period of Dick's existential dread and amphetamine addiction, it was precisely his 1974 experience that gave him the inspiration to revitalise his work. Therefore, *VALIS* and *The Exegesis* present a unique case of an author looking back at their work, re-evaluating their career, and proving to both himself and his readers the truth and reality that is found in these texts.

Further, *VALIS* and *The Exegesis*, arguably, feature and document a deeply personal and even transpersonal account. The term "transpersonal" refers to the experience of transcending the ego or the self. According to Mark C. Kasproff and Bruce W. Scotton,

[t]ranspersonal theory proposes that there are developmental stages beyond the adult ego, which involve experiences of connectedness with phenomena considered outside the boundaries of the ego. In healthy individuals, these developmental stages can engender the highest human qualities, including altruism, creativity, and intuitive wisdom. For persons lacking healthy ego development, however, such experiences can lead to psychosis. (12)

This experience and meeting with consciousness, then, is of such importance that Dick needs to find an answer to it and embarks on a writing journey. Dick writes in *The Exegesis*: "I will know what this pure consciousness was, ere I die trying" (728). Dick's experience and invasion of his mind by *VALIS*, the "higher mind," was such a metaphysical revelation that he needs all his knowledge to understand it. He has to turn to philosophy, psychology, religion, literature, culture, politics, cinema and many other sources from different domains of knowledge for this long writing journey.

It is by writing and reading these texts exhaustingly that Dick enables himself and his reader to enter into this experience and state of mind – this "artistic Nirvana":

something strange happened to me; I burned out. I could not think in complete sentences; I'd begin a sentence of thought and it would end in the middle. It was as

if I'd used up all my thoughts, as if there are only a finite number and I had come to the last one; there literally were no more left in me. Now, this absolutely total exhaustion of thoughts in me somehow seems to me related to the phosphene graphics trip; the common factor is the using up of time, a running out of time . . . I had, as in 1974, come to the end in some real and perhaps even ontological sense; mentally I had in fact died. Yet the next day I found myself in the magic spatial world of total freedom a world of infinite extension. (*The Exegesis* 712)

The texts are very personal and are contemplations regarding personal beliefs, similar to experiences that are found in the well-known state of religious ecstasy or Nirvana. Therefore, the next chapter shall focus on reality in the context of religion.

## 4. Reality and Religion

In *VALIS* and *The Exegesis*, it seems, Dick openly talks about his religious views and his mystical experience, which makes them mystical and/or theological texts. It is established that Dick's experience was about himself, but it was also about ego-death which means that it was about the void (not himself).

To say that these texts are mystical means that they have a spiritual and mysterious component; that they are theological means that they concern themselves with religion in some way. This paper will understand the word *religion* as referring to a natural collective of connections: thoughts, literature, beliefs, practises and experiences. According to *Online Etymology Dictionary*, "the interpretation of many modern writers connects it [the word religion] with religare 'to bind fast' . . . via notion of 'place an obligation on,' or 'bond between humans and gods'" ("Religion, n."). Such a definition is apt since Dick does not take absolute side with one specific religion; instead, Dick combines his knowledge of various religious traditions into one coherent and rational way to understand one's self. As he writes in *The Exegesis*: "So for me, religion and rationality – that is, the divine in the real, the truly real – are one. It is Christ and it is the rational. . . it is exactly what I saw it is in *VALIS*: the inbreaking of the rational principle, the logos, into the rational. But I am talking about my own mind, not world" (881). Therefore, for the purpose of this chapter, all theistic and atheistic human (cultural) beliefs related to reality will be regarded as religious or as having valid religious aspects. Mircea Eliade considers Marxism to be a religion (206) and John Gray distinguishes seven types of atheism in his eponymous book, *Seven Types of Atheism*.

It is natural for the individual to think in terms of religious or spiritual meaning regarding their own personal reality. My colleague, Zvonimir Prpić, told me once that: “If you don’t have some kind of a God, then you have some kind of an Ungod,” and thereby echoed Carl Jung’s assertion from his *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*: “man has, everywhere and always, spontaneously developed religious forms of expression” (123). Jung elaborates on the statement that religious thought is present throughout human history and culture, and that it is deeply anchored in the human psyche and imagination: “the human psyche from time immemorial has been shot through with religious feelings and ideas. Whoever cannot see this aspect of the human psyche is blind, and whoever chooses to explain it away, or to ‘enlighten’ it away, has no sense of reality” (123). Certainly, these thoughts and experiences do not necessarily prove or disprove the existence of some kind of Order/Disorder, Void, Chaos, Tao, Divine Mother, Holy Father, Lord, Karma, or whatever word or concept one may believe in. Surely, people do not have to agree, and are permitted to use yet another and more personal approach for the interpretation of reality in order to feel at home in this world. Through such interpretation people give a story and meaning towards time-space and make the world in home (Eliade 184). Later on in *The Exegesis*, Dick also expands his view to the entire world and develops ideas regarding both ecology and theology, that is, eco-theology:

God gives birth to the universe through his injury, suffering and death . . . Creating is a giving birth by him and causes him suffering . . . [God] may die – and hence withdraw from creation and creating, and it is our fault as a species. He has placed himself at our disposal but, due to our cries, his suffering becomes too great. He is the great friendly fish . . . offering his body to us to eat: this is creation itself: the very world (reality) we live in. It (reality) is an offering, a sacrifice, but we respond wrongly and wrong him. This is not just the Savior; this is God himself, converting himself into world – at terrible cost to himself. (This is, I guess, eco-theology).  
(803)

For the religious person and for Dick, a world that is not properly interpreted and understood by the individual is empty of hope. As St. Hildegard writes: “We cannot live in a world that is interpreted for us by others / An interpreted world is not a hope / Part of the terror is to take back our own listening / To use our own voice / To see our own light” (qtd. in Kujawa-Holbrook “Introduction” XV).



Therefore, the light that Dick encountered in 1974 and the religious search that emerged out of it is not a search (only) for the sake of religion, but it is about understanding the fundamental building block of the human psyche. Mary Midgley explains the importance of this in the following passage from her book *The Myths We Live By*:

We are accustomed to think of myths as the opposite of science. But in fact they are a central part of it: the part that decides its significance in our lives. So we very much need to understand them. Myths are not lies. Nor are they detached stories. They are imaginative patterns, networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of interpreting the world. They shape its meaning. For instance, machine imagery, which began to pervade our thought in the seventeenth century, is still potent today. We still often tend to see ourselves, and the living things around us, as pieces of clockwork: items of a kind that we ourselves could make, and might decide to remake if it suits us better. Hence the confident language of “genetic engineering” and “the building blocks of life.” (1)

Dick makes the very same claim as Midgley; namely, that the (archaic) religious world-view and the (modern) technological world-view might differ in certain points, but that they are not in any real conflict but merely in a verbal conflict, since both contribute to the understanding of reality: “‘So we’re not dealing with religion then,’ I said, ‘but with a very advanced technology’” (*VALIS* 204). Dick shows that technology and myth seem to work together, or at least that they may be interchangeable in some way. Considering the 2003 essay by Nick Bostrom titled “Are You Living in a Computer Simulation,” in which Bostrom discusses the likeliness of a posthuman civilization living in a computer simulation (243), it can be seen that—some of these ideas are already found in Dick, prior to Bostrom:

The keystone is restored memory, which is a recollection of ourselves not as separate entities but as ‘stations’ in a quasi-computer like proto-organism, a vast incorporeal energy which thinks, and whose thoughts are the physical cosmos—we are, each of us, microanalogs of it: just as each cell of our bodies contains all the information to retrieve the whole human, each whole human psyche contains the aggregate information—is the information . . . (*The Exegesis* 269)

However, when Dick has one of his long and paradoxical dialogues with God, he is expressing both doubt and faith. In *The Exegesis*, God tells Dick: “You are not the doubter, you are the doubt itself. So do not try to know; you cannot know. Guess on the basis of the highest pile of computer punch

cards. There is an infinite stack in the heap marked INFINITY” (640). After this, Dick and God engage in a long dialogue:

God said, “And your theories are infinite, so I am there. Without realizing it, the very infinitude of your theories pointed to the solution; they pointed to me and none but me. Are you satisfied, now? You saw me revealed in theophany; I speak to you now; you have, while alive, experienced the bliss that is to come; few humans have experienced that bliss. Let me ask you, was it a finite bliss or an infinite bliss?”

I said, “Infinite.”

“So no earthly circumstance, situation, entity or thing could give rise to it.”

“No, Lord,” I said.

“Then it is I,” God said. “Are you satisfied?”

“Let me try one other theory,” I said. “What happened in 2-3-74 was that—” And an infinite regress was set off, instantly.

“Infinity,” God said. “Try again. I will play forever, for infinity.”

“Here’s a new theory,” I said. “I ask myself, ‘What God likes playing games? Krishna. You are Krishna.’” And then the thought came to me instantly, “But there is a god who mimics other gods; that god is Dionysus. This may not be Krishna at all; it may be Dionysus pretending to be Krishna.” And an infinite regress was set off.

“Infinity,” God said.

“You cannot be YHWH who You say You are,” I said. “Because YHWH says, ‘I am that which I am,’ or, ‘I shall be that which I shall be.’ And you —”

“Do I change?” God said. “Or do your theories change?”

“You do not change,” I said. “My theories change. You, and 2-3-74, remain constant.” (641-642)

Ultimately, they come to the conclusion that it will go on as long as Dick wants it to go on, and that too is a paradoxical situation: “‘Infinity,’ God said. I was silent. ‘Play again,’ God said. / ‘I cannot

play to infinity,' I said. 'I will die before that point comes'" (640-42). Yet, regarding the subject of God, Dick encounters a problem that is reminiscent of the importance of doubt expressed in Simone Weil's essay "Atheism as Purification," from her book *Gravity and Grace*:

God exists: God does not exist. Where is the problem? I am quite sure that there is a God in the sense that I am quite sure my love is not illusory. I am quite sure that there is not a God in the sense that I am quite sure nothing real can be anything like what I am able to conceive when I pronounce this word. But that which I cannot conceive is not an illusion. (114)

Dick summarizes this paradox using his own word play: "*GOD IS NO WHERE / GOD IS NOW HERE*" (*VALIS* 28). Dick arrives at the conclusion that he will not find out who or what the true God is, no matter how long he continues to play this "game." As paradoxical as all of this might appear, it is well established in traditions such as Taoism. In the first poem of *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu writes: "The Tao [way] that can be told is not the eternal Tao / The name that can be named is not the eternal name" (1).

Further, for Dick and the religious person, reality reveals itself through religion, that is, through the mystical experience. Out of this grows a belief system with its own language, symbols, and meaning. As Eliade points out: "It is the irruption of the sacred into the world, an irruption narrated in the myths, that establishes the world as a reality" (97). For the religious person, this is the process of becoming aware of the world.

Despite Dick's remarkable as well as comical power of doubt and self-criticism, he is aware of how unreal it all seems: "Art, like theology one giant fraud" (*The Exegesis* 726). Yet, because this appears to be such an important subjective experience, Dick has to take his religious and fictional experiences seriously. Maya Deren explains: "Myth is the facts of the mind made manifest in fiction of matter" (1). Therefore, in the texts, all these things: myth, religion, mystical experiences, and so on, are facts of the mind – and not necessarily facts of the natural world – as Dick indicates in the above presented passage: ". . . I am talking about my own mind, not about world" (*The Exegesis* 881). However, this does not mean that these subjective views are irrelevant illusions split from reality or that they are meaningless things to think about; Dick thinks and writes about them in thousands and thousands of pages.

While Dick and the reader arrive at a certain science-fiction view of reality based on subjective experience, this does not mean that because of their inner subjectivity these thoughts are

invalid or not empirical. In her book *Are You an Illusion?*, Midgley goes further and says that true and objective empiricism is actually built on (awareness) subjectivity:

Thus, however surprising this may be, it is an objective fact in the world that our own experiences – the subjective sources of thought – are every bit as necessary for it as the objective ones such as brain cells. Your mind is not an optional spare part; it is you, considered as a thinker, feeler and chooser rather than just as a physical object. . . . Subjectivity, then, is not an irrelevance, not a shameful secret; it is the basic stuff of experience. Experience is what we start from and what every demand for verification must come back to. And since empiricism itself just means “belief in experience” empiricists are supposed to take this first-person activity seriously. (56)

Dick too emphasises that, even though it all seems rationally absurd, the focus is on his own experience:

What is important is that this was perceptual to me, not an intellectual inference or thought about what might exist . . . It was/is alive. It had a certain small power or energy, and great wisdom. It was/is holy. It not only was visible around me but evidently this is the same energy which entered me. (*The Exegesis* 5)

The experience of having a mystical encounter is often along the lines of possession or being swallowed by a bigger entity. To Dick, his 1974 experience of seeing the light and meeting VALIS is more of a divine “invasion” of his mind: “Some mental entity using reality as a carrier for information— what does this mean? That we humans are not alone and that we are not the highest life form on this planet. And it is aware of us and intervenes in our lives; yet we see it not” (*The Exegesis* 728-729). Whatever it is, the religious experience seems like a meeting of the personal self (*I*) and some kind of other mind/entity/consciousness (*Thou*). Martin Buber, an influence on Dick in this subject (*The Exegesis* 379), writes the following:

To the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude. . . . There is no *I* taken in itself, but only the *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* and the *I* of the primary word *I-It*. When a man says *I* he refers to one or other of these. The *I* to which he refers is present when he says *I*. Further, when he says *Thou* or *It*, the *I* of one of the two primary words is present. (3-4)

In this view, for the religious person, religious experience is then a part of the transpersonal experience and the acknowledgement of something other than what seems to be pure ego. The divine appears as some foreign other and sacred *Thou*.

While Dick combines various religious beliefs throughout his texts and does not absolutely side with a single religion, his experience and his distrust in a (rational) universe/reality that includes suffering and death lead him to Gnosticism – the belief that the creator deity, usually referred to as Sophia (Wisdom), who created the world was blind and deranged, while the real God is hidden and spiritual (“Gnosticism”). Dick elaborates on this belief: “‘The creator deity, . . . may be insane and therefore the universe is insane. What we experience as chaos is actually irrationality’” (*VALIS* 92). However, since Gnosticism is, depending on the person, considered to be one of the oldest heresies, Dick is not happy about the fact that his 1974 experience was Gnostic: “I think anyone versed in Gnosticism who read my notes would say ‘You’re a Gnostic.’ I am not happy about this, but it is so, based on 3-74” (*The Exegesis* 203). Yet, he acknowledges it as one explanation of his experience that led him to write these texts and understand his experience of 1974. In order to find the Gnostic saviour, the characters in *VALIS* search for the alien girl saviour, but to understand their quest, the reader has to look into *The Exegesis*:

The girl who whispers to me and acts as my advocate—the girl in the pink flannel nightgown and slippers—when I saw her (in my mind) I saw the Savior, St. Sophia, born the second time, the Savior I have been told is soon-to-be incarnated. That's why she was so concrete, right down to her nightgown. *VALIS* is correct: he would take female form—or has taken!—this time. (489)

This is another proof of the connection between the two fictional and autobiographical texts. Both in *VALIS* and *The Exegesis*, Dick thinks of the divinity and saviour as being female. One of the reasons why this is the case is a biographical fact from Dick’s life, that is, his grief for the death of his twin sister. Namely, as Feehan writes:

Dick did not know his twin sister; she died when he was so young that no real memories remained. But he needed her . . . the twin and the quest to find that hidden Other “originates” the tragedy of the man. Grief is transformed into desire. Jane, Philip K. Dick’s twin sister, became an obsession—to know her, to see her living, to understand what part she played in him. Dick felt himself to be protean, fluid, continuously changing, split down the middle. (199)

Dick himself says this in *The Exegesis*, “[f]rom a Jungian viewpoint, that which characterized my birth of the whole self, or rebirth (of the soul), was an experience with spiritual realities and values” (203). The dead twin with whom Dick tries to connect becomes a motive seen throughout the texts. While he is talking to and talking about his sister, Dick writes that: “Christ becomes the female spirit Sophia in a male body, a syzygy. Ah! Yes! This is the complete person! The missing half which Plato wrote about. . . . Not either-or but both-and” (203). The explanation why, among other things, Dick perceives the saviour as female is also a motif found in Gnosticism (and other religions). In Elaine Pagels’ book *The Gnostic Gospels*, she examines the feminine aspect of divinity:

Even more remarkable is the gnostic poem called *the Thunder, Perfect Mind*. This text contains a revelation spoken by a feminine power: “I am the first and the last. I am the honored one and the scorned one. I am the whore, and the holy one. I am the wife and the virgin. I am (the mother) and the daughter. . . . I am she whose wedding is great, and I have not taken a husband. . . . I am knowledge, and ignorance. . . . I am shameless; I am ashamed. I am strength, and I am fear. . . . I am foolish, and I am wise. . . . I am godless, and I am one whose God is great.” (55-56)

Alongside his dead twin sister – the saviour entity – and VALIS, Dick also hears and talks with what he calls Thomas, an early Christian rebel spirit and another part of Dick’s psyche. He is a character of wisdom that represents another fictional dead twin: “Thomas is the authentic personality of the time-traveler, and hence Thomas is really myself—the actual me who was sent here: like a cuckoo’s egg. I am not PKD; I am Thomas—there was no theolepsy; only anamnesis” (*The Exegesis* 299). Dick’s Thomas is connected to Gnosticism as well. Namely, Pagels explains in *Beyond Belief* that:

Thomas is not a proper name but means “twin” in Aramaic, the language that Jesus would have spoken. As Professor Helmut Koester shows, although this disciple was called by his Aramaic nickname, the gospel itself explains that his given name was Judas (but, his admirers specify, “not Iscariot”). Since this disciple was known by the name of Thomas, both the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of John also translate Thomas into Greek, explaining to their Greek readers that this disciple is “the one called ‘Didymus,’” the Greek term for “twin.” (39)

This “psychological unification” of selves and the dissolving of ego are present in *The Nag Hammadi Library* and Gnostic gospels:

When you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female, when you make eyes in place of an eye, a hand in place of a hand, a foot in place of a foot, an image in place of an image, then you will enter [the kingdom]. (“The Gospel of Thomas” 129)

In the religious view, Simone Weil proposes in her essay “The Self” the following: “We possess nothing in the world . . . except the power to say ‘I’. That is what we have to give to God – in other words, to destroy. There is absolutely no other free act which it is given us to accomplish – only the destruction of the ‘I’” (*Gravity and Grace* 26). Weil does not suggest destroying the person, but destroying ego (narcissism), because the impersonal is sacred:

The human being can only escape from the collective by raising himself above the personal and entering into the impersonal. The moment he does this, there is something in him, a small portion of his soul, upon which nothing of the collective can get a hold. If he can root himself in the impersonal good so as to be able to draw energy from it then he is in a condition, whenever he feels the obligation to do so, to bring to bear without any outside help, against any collectivity, a small but real force. (*An Anthology* 77)

This is exactly where Dick’s journey leads him. He is concerned with the reality and unreality of meaning, life and personal identity:

Somehow it all has to do with identity. There is no way by which any of us can assess his life as successful or meaningful. The kind of identity which confers meaning onto a given life is gratuitous Gift to the individual part by the whole . . . ; objective meaning may exist, but the person in question will not know it unless this merciful and priceless insight is bestowed. You could, by your own efforts, cause your life to have meaning – but still not know it . . . Meaning and knowledge of meaning are not usually correctly distinguished. I think perhaps all lives have meaning – even in a sense equal meaning – but what we lack, and cannot acquire by our own efforts, is certain knowledge of it. (*The Exegesis* 296)

These beliefs then grow into other branches of thought and influence the view of society and reality that Dick lives. It is not surprising then that “the social feeling is so much like the religious as to be mistaken for it” (Weil, *Waiting for God* 45). Because of the close connection between the religious and the social, after having addressed the personal/individual issues, the thesis also has to take into account the social relevance of some of Dick’s ideas. Therefore, the next chapter is focused on politics.

## 5. Reality of Politics

Dick is not a political writer, but he is not apolitical either. *VALIS* and *The Exegesis* are the texts where Dick is arguably the most (dis)passionate and clearest about his politics and where he integrates them in his religious and personal beliefs. Thereby, he continues to develop his own brand of the 1950s and 1960s counter culture, that is, political-cultural thought. Such an understanding of the world and combination of religion and politics was common during the era, as Camile Paglia notes: “[they] were passionately committed to political reform, yet they were also seeking the truth about life outside religious and social institutions. Despite their ambivalence toward authority, however, they often sought gurus—mentors or guides, who sometimes proved fallible” (58). Paglia then elaborates on the problem and how the political beliefs became absurd: “One problem was that the more the mind was opened to what was commonly called ‘cosmic consciousness’ . . . the less meaningful politics or social structure became, melting into the Void” (58). In *VALIS*, Dick proposes the (paranoid) belief that 1970s America is an illusion (*The Exegesis* 17), and that the “Empire” under Richard Nixon is controlling the people’s “Republic”; that the Empire has assassinated Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, and Dick’s friend Bishop Jim Pike (17). The Gnostic beliefs that are expressed in the texts make Dick doubt the reality of contemporary politics and become anarchistic. Further, he proposes that the political reality is in fact a prison that can be escaped only through (Gnostic) knowledge: “In Feb. of 1974 I momentarily withdrew assent to the reality of this world; a month later this world underwent visible changes, and its true nature became perceptible to me: it is, as the Gnostics said, a prison” (*The Exegesis* 271).

Typically, one might not connect religion with civil disobedience; it might appear paradoxical, since religion is too often connected to dogmatic obedience. However, the complexity of the problem is well expressed and argued by Martin Luther King, who explains that critical thinking is needed to understand when to obey and when not to obey:



One may well ask, “How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?” The answer is found in the fact that there are two types of laws: there are just laws, and there are unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that “An unjust law is no law at all” . . . To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. (7)

Even more disobedient is Anarchy, “usually defined as a society without government, and anarchism as the social philosophy which aims at its realization” (Marshall 3). While it might seem paradoxical again, non-violent anarchism can be found in religious thought as well. The Christian anarchist and workers’ right activist Dorothy Day said: “we were born into a state and could not help it, but accepted God of our own free will” (qtd. in Marshall 82). This branch of thought, non-violent religious anarchism, is seen in thinkers like: Jacques Ellul, Dorothy Day, Leo Tolstoy, Simone Weil, Philip K. Dick, and others. Dick expresses this thought in *The Exegesis*:

Why eventually will laws be necessary at all? I foresee a godly anarchy. No authority here on earth will have to tell any man what to do or even educate him; the Logos will do that – link him up. A truly egalitarian society should result. Without proof of this Inward Light there could be no rational justification for anarchy. With proof (as I have) there is no rational excuse to maintain any sort of centralization of power; no state of any sort, as we conceive it. We will be linked anyhow. We cannot not be. The social implications are beyond calculation, for good. (168)

Religious anarchism clearly favours individual spirituality and morality over institutional dogmas, as the former benefits the individual person, whereas the latter favours the collective which is closely connected to the institutions.

Throughout *The Exegesis*, Dick addresses various thinkers. But, when it comes to his views regarding culture and politics, Dick most notably refers to Joachim de Fiore as a crucial thinker relevant for the idea of religious anarchism: “But what I must keep in mind is my insight of yesterday that the key to it all is Joachim’s three ages, and that the third is as revolutionary” (*The Exegesis* 598). Peter Marshall explains what Joachim’s three ages are:

[Joachim of Fiore] divided the history of humanity into three ages, corresponding to the three branches of the Holy Trinity. The first was the age of the Father, under the Jewish Laws of the Old Testament, laws based on fear and servitude; the second, of the Son, under the Gospel, the age of faith and filial obedience. In the coming third age of the Holy Spirit, he taught that all law would pass away since all people would act according to the will of God. And masters, both spiritual and temporal, would disappear . . . (77)

What stands in opposition to this is expressed in Dick's "ultimate" phrase mentioned throughout the texts: "The Empire never ended" (*VALIS* 74). With his idea of the contemporary (Roman) Empire, Dick is referring to his hallucinatory vision of being stuck in Rome: "Real time ceased in 70 C.E. with the fall of the temple at Jerusalem. It began again in 1974 C.E. The intervening period was a perfect spurious interpolation aping the creation of the Mind. 'The Empire never ended,' but in 1974 a cypher was sent out as a signal that the Age of Iron was over" (*VALIS* 178). He refers to this in *The Exegesis* as well: "I was a member of a secret group which Rome was dedicated to destroy; this made me part of the Fish sign secret society, killed on identification and disclosure" (147).

As strange as Dick's beliefs seem, the archetypal fears in *VALIS* and *The Exegesis* are surprisingly relevant with regard to identity and the feeling of being trapped in pseudo-realities or false narratives. While the language and images that Dick uses sound, depending on one's point of view, either prophetic or mad, when examined in the context of contemporary and current cultural criticism and politics, they do appear meaningful. Dick no longer seems to be a strange outcast when other writers and thinkers use similar metaphors for political pseudo-realities, such as Mark Fisher in "Exiting the Vampire Castle," Guy Debord in *Society of the Spectacle*, Martha Nussbaum in *Monarchy of Fear*, Christopher Lasch in *Culture of Narcissism*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* (though Hardt and Negri differ in opinion with Dick), and others. Moreover, the struggle that Dick faces in his texts, namely, the struggle with identity that Dick always comes back to, is now a very prominent and controversial topic that evolved into a theoretical and critical field called identity politics, tipping the scale in favour of Dick's prophetic qualities.

According to Merriam-Webster, identity politics is "politics in which groups of people having a particular racial, religious, ethnic, social, or cultural identity tend to promote their own specific interests or concerns without regard to the interests or concerns of any larger political group" ("Identity politics"). As such, it is exclusive and frequently detrimental to the society as a whole. Identity politics is seen when in public life a person is valued or judged solely on the basis of a superficial identity or fake identity, often based on a stereotype. This is seen in the controversial

claim by the current US presidential candidate and Democrat Joe Biden: “If you have a problem figuring out whether you’re for me or Trump, then you ain’t black” (qtd. in Swerdlick). Joe Biden, like anybody else of course, is free (and ought to be free) to exercise his freedom of speech and expression the way he wants, but this unlucky or unwanted verbal slip is an example that showcases how, in public life and politics, identity politics seems more and more prominent, complicating the already complex political issues by trying to make them seem simple. Joe Biden’s statement is neither the first nor the last example of contemporary identity politics:

Former president Ronald Reagan is sometimes quoted as having said, “Hispanics are conservative, they just don’t know it yet.” That’s condescending, but still not the same as saying that Latino Democrats aren’t really Latino. Biden’s comment veers closer to Trump’s remark last year that “I think if you vote for a Democrat, you are very, very disloyal to Israel and to the Jewish people.” (Swerdlick)

Francis Fukuyama illustrates the importance of the concept by saying: “Identity politics has become a master concept that explains much of what is going on in global affairs” (“Against Identity Politics”). Thus, identity politics appears both in Dick’s texts and in contemporary politics as an ever-growing controversial topic indicating the struggle of identity fought both within the modern person and within the society.

The contemporary political reality that Dick sees as the (Roman) Empire is, surprisingly, a view that other thinkers and writers share. For instance, in her essay “The Great Beast” Simone Weil asserts: “Rome is the Great Beast of . . . materialism, adoring nothing but itself” (143). Adoring and hating oneself while being obsessed with identity is connected with the predicament of narcissism that one of Dick’s contemporaries, Christopher Lasch, writes about in his book *The Culture of Narcissism*. In the book, Lasch analyses post-60s American ideology and politics. The zeitgeist of artificial realities, technological identities, and feelings of the lack of real human contact present in Dick’s works as well as in culture (Matek 74-75) is also expressed by Lasch in the following paragraph:

Our growing dependence on technologies no one seems to understand or control has given rise to feelings of powerlessness and victimization. We find it more and more difficult to achieve a sense of continuity, permanence, or connection with the world around us. Relationships with others are notably fragile; goods are made to be used up and discarded; reality is experienced as an unstable environment of flickering images. Everything conspires to encourage escapist solutions to the

psychological problems of dependence, separation, and individuation, and to discourage the moral realism that makes it possible for human beings to come to terms with existential constraints on their power and freedom. (248-249)

Dick's texts are an attempt to regain the self from narcissism by questioning the reality that one lives in, which includes the inner self as well as society; they also represent an escape from "the Empire" by capturing the transpersonal experience and the various selves: "Fat had remembered back to the stars, and had encountered a being ready to return to the stars, and several selves along the way, several points along the line. All of them are the same person" (*VALIS* 128). Fisher talks about these attempts of escaping the Empire and of escaping narcissism in his book *Capitalist Realism*:

Morality has been replaced by feeling. In the "empire of the self" everyone "feels the same" without ever escaping a condition of solipsism. "What people suffer from," [filmmaker Adam] Curtis claims, "is being trapped within themselves – in a world of individualism everyone is trapped within their own feelings, trapped within their own imaginations" (74).

The apparent pseudo-realities of contemporary time as well as the reason why Dick says that time itself seems to be stuck is further explained by Guy Debord's statement 154, which contains his critique of society becoming a spectacle – an illusory fiction: "The reality of time has been replaced by the advertisement of time" (ch. 6).

Apart from the unreality of identity and time, another feature of the Empire is the character of the Emperor. Dick considered Richard Nixon to embody that character, and at present the current US president Donald Trump is depicted, whether ironically or non-ironically or both, precisely as the character "God Emperor Trump" (Harvard). This is neither a positive nor a negative critique of politics or politicians but a demonstration of how up-to-date Dick's language and metaphors are. President Trump also seems aware of how unreal political and public life appear. In his bestselling book *The Art of the Deal*, he says something that could have been said by one of Dick's characters:

The final key to the way I promote is bravado. I play to people's *fantasies*. People may not always think big themselves, but they can still get very excited by those who do. That's why a little hyperbole never hurts. *People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular*. I call it truthful hyperbole. It's an *innocent* form of exaggeration—and a very effective form of promotion. (58, my emphasis)

All these features are an indication for the truth behind the phrase “unreality of politics” (Lasch 24), a truth and reality that is in Dick’s texts. This is the reason why Dick’s texts offer no real ideological solution, since ideology *is* the problem: **“To fight the Empire is to be infected by its derangement. This is a paradox; whoever defeats a segment of the Empire becomes the Empire; it proliferated like a virus, imposing its form on its enemies. Thereby it becomes its enemies”** (*VALIS* 146).

While all Dick’s claims, whether true or not, are grounded in reality, they are also likely grounded in a paranoid view of reality that is often times suggested to stem from psychological distress, which Dick certainly suffered from throughout his life as well as in the aftermath of the 1974 incident. Therefore, the next chapter focuses on mental health.

## 6. Reality and Mental Health

Dick is aware that the 1974 experience that he is writing about is hard to believe, and that some readers, reviewers or scholars might attribute these texts to some kind of mental illness, specifically schizophrenia. Indeed, the very first paragraph of *VALIS* indicates how important the topic of mental health is to Dick’s experience of 1974 and his texts: “Horselover Fat’s nervous breakdown began the day he got the phone call from Gloria asking if he had any Nembutals” (1), and Dick himself suggests that his experience could have been connected to schizophrenia:

Also, in 3-74 I may have suffered a lurid schizophrenic episode because of the inordinate stress, I regressed to such a primitive stage that I animated my environment. I saw a world of 1,000 years ago because I had regressed into the racial unconscious. . . . I had been partially psychotic for years, and in 3-74 I broke down totally. Due to *actual* stress. . . . I was taken over by my own S-F universe. Schizophrenia with religious and paranoid coloring – of the ecstatic type. A sense of the “cosmic” – vast mystical forces, with me in the center. Like a titanic psychedelic drug trip. . . . And now I exhaust myself trying to explain 3-74. I was lithium toxic. And had a schizophrenic breakdown. (*The Exegesis* 370-371)

The description bears a great similarity with Barbara O’Brien’s account of schizophrenic visions in her memoir *Operators and Things: The Inner Life of a Schizophrenic*. Namely, O’Brien suggests that one’s personality and beliefs may have influence over psychotic visions:

If your temperament were such that you would not be able to accept the fact that a Man From Mars might just pop into your room the vision appearing before you would not be a Man From Mars. It might be, instead, the awesome figure of God. Or the terrifying figure of the devil. Or it might be a much less conventional figure. In all probability the figure, regardless of the form it took, would have three characteristics: it would represent authority; it would have superhuman powers; and its weirdness would, in some way, seem plausible and acceptable to you. (3)

Specific visions and experiences shown in the case of Horselover Fat can be said to be related to Dick's personality:

Fat woke up and saw ancient Rome superimposed on California 1974 and thought in *koine* Greek, the lingua franca of the Near East part of the Roman world, which was the part he saw. He did not know that the koine was their lingua franca; he supposed that Latin was. And in addition, as I've already told you, he did not recognize the language of his thoughts even as a language. Horselover Fat is living in two different times and two different places; i.e., in two space-time continua; that is what took place in March 1974 because of the ancient fish-sign presented to him (*VALIS* 117).

It is vividly described just how serious and deep these visions and experiences are; namely, the one who has them may believe that they are living in two dimensions or that they are physically experiencing whatever it is that is going on in their mind. Indeed, Dick often talks about the visions in such an existential and claustrophobic way that they often feel close to reality. Furthermore, through his narration in the texts, the reader sees how Dick's (un)consciousness takes the part of the director and actor, that is of the ultimate authority. This appears valid for actual sufferers of schizophrenia as well. According to O'Brien,

[i]n most cases of schizophrenia, however, the unconscious appears to prefer not the techniques of the actor, but those of the director. It does not create a new personality but, instead, stages a play. The major difference is that the conscious mind is permitted to remain, an audience of one sitting lonely in the theater, watching a drama on which it cannot walk out. (5)

Thus, Dick's own descriptions, insights, scenes, narration and style might appear to justify the assertions that Dick may have suffered from some form of mental illness while writing. And it is certainly an important theme present in the texts, since throughout the texts Dick writes and

contemplates about the issue of people suffering, psychological and otherwise: “Comprehension of pain (spiritual and mental, especially) is the basis of my writing, as is my awareness of the frailty of life and how easily it passes over into death” (*The Exegesis*, 691).

Dick, always being the doubter, appears to fluctuate between two views regarding the issues of mental health: the first one being that the insane individual might be a product of a sick social reality, and the second one that mental illness is an individual reality. The first is present in counter-culture writers such as A. Ginsberg, K. Kesey, W. S. Burroughs, and others, as well as in the anti-psychiatrist movement of the 1960s and 70s, who protested against electroshock therapy, lobotomy, cruel treatment of patients, and institutions in general. They argue that the insane person is a product of an insane society. This view is well-described in Laing’s book *The Politics of Experience*: “What we call ‘normal’ is a product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection and other forms of destructive action on experience . . . It is radically estranged from the structure of being. The more one sees this, the more senseless it is to continue with generalised descriptions” (23-24). Similarly to this, in *VALIS* Dick argues: “it is sometimes an appropriate response to reality to go insane” (2). However, while such a view might be useful in the consideration of social context, it has a downside. Namely, the danger of this view is that, if taken too far, it can grow into fake empathy or even ignorance, which would prevent the ill from getting the help they need. Luhrmann boldly offers another important perspective on mental illness in her book *Of Two Minds*:

Madness is real, and it is an act of moral cowardice to treat it as a romantic freedom. Most people who end up in a psychiatric hospital are deeply unhappy and seriously disturbed, and many of them lead lives of humiliation and great pain. To try to protect the chronic mentally ill by saying that they are not ill, just different, is a misplaced liberalism of appalling insensitivity to the patients and to the families who struggle so valiantly with the difficulties of their ill family members. Most people who are really schizophrenic are far too ill to serve as religious experts. (12)

This view is seen in Dick’s texts too, since they are a contemplation on the nature of suffering, and Dick does not glamorise nor romanticise the suffering. In *VALIS* he writes: “A QUESTION WE HAD to learn to deal with during the dope decade was, How do you break the news to someone that his brains are fried? This issue had now passed over into Horselover Fat’s theological world as a problem for us – his friends – to field” (26). The unglamorous existential suffering that Dick is

describing is seen throughout the texts, most notably, in the conversation between his alter ego Horselover Fat and Phil – Dick’s rational voice:

“You want me to tell you the truth?” I Interrupted.

Fat Blinked. “Sure, Phil.”

In a harsh voice, I said, “There is no Savior. St. Sophia will not be born again . . .”

Silence

“The Fifth Savior –” Fat began timidly

“Forget it,” I said. “You’re psychotic . . . You’ve been crazy for eight years . . . Give up and forget. Okay? Will you do me that one favor? Will you do all of us that one favor?” (VALIS 242-243)

While there are reasons to think that the voices and visions appearing to Dick might have been a consequence of schizophrenia, it seems that this would be a problematic claim, considering how complicated both schizophrenia and the inner world of consciousness really are.

The complexity of the issue is underlined by the fact that even hard-working, well-meaning and knowledgeable professionals sometimes over-diagnose and misdiagnose patients as schizophrenic, as studies such as the 2019 study by Coulter et al show. Elyn Saks’ memoir *The Centre Cannot Hold* points to the conclusion that a psychiatric diagnosis regarding schizophrenia is no easy or trivial matter:

And then there was the whole mythology of schizophrenia, aided and abetted by years of books and movies that presented people like me as hopelessly evil or helplessly doomed. I would become violent, as the delusions in my head grew more real to me than reality itself. My psychotic episodes would increase, and last longer; my intelligence would be severely compromised. Maybe I'd end my life in an institution; maybe I'd *live* my life in an institution. Or become homeless, a bag lady whose family could no longer care for her. I'd be that wild-eyed character on the city sidewalk that all the nice baby carriage-pushing mommies shrink away from. *Get away from the crazy lady*. I'd love no one; no one would love me. For the first time in my life, I truly, deeply understood what people meant when they said, “It broke my heart.” (168-169)



Furthermore, Saks explains that at one time, her situation worsened and it became hard to use words:

The only barrier between me and the door out was me. I simply had to *stop* it. Stop voicing the hallucinations and delusions, even when they were there. Stop babbling incoherently, even if those were the only words that came to my lips; no, no, it was better to be quiet. Stop resisting; just behave. Being in a psychiatric hospital is nonsense, I thought. I'm a law student, not a mental patient. *I want my life back, damn it! And if I have to bite my tongue until it bleeds, I am going to get it back.* (176)

This is also seen with the main protagonist in *VALIS* when he says: "When you are crazy you learn to keep quiet" (49). Also, even though one can find humour in Dick, he emphasises: "Mental illness is not funny" (40). It is seen in both Saks' memoir and Dick's texts that talking and understanding are necessary, since they are inherent to people, and one has to talk, write, and analyse things in order to come forward to arrive at a moment of bliss. In the chapter "Attention and Will," Simone Weil expresses a similar idea: "[a]ttention . . . is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love. Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer" (*Gravity and Grace* 232). Saks was able to feel such a connection with her Kleinian psychotherapist; Horselover Fat, the protagonist of *VALIS*, has this type of rapport with the character of Dr. Stone:

"Then I'm right about Nag Hammadi," he said to Dr. Stone. "You would know," Dr. Stone said, and then he said something that no one had ever said to Fat before. "You're the authority," Dr. Stone said. Fat realized that Stone had restored his – Fat's – spiritual life. Stone had saved him; he was a master psychiatrist. Everything which Stone had said and done vis-à-vis Fat had a therapeutic basis, a therapeutic thrust. Whether the content of Stone's information was correct was not important; his purpose from the beginning had been to restore Fat's faith in himself, which had vanished when Beth left – which had vanished, actually, when he had failed to save Gloria's life years ago. Dr. Stone wasn't insane; Stone was a healer. He held down the right job. Probably he healed many people and in many ways. He adapted his therapy to the individual, not the individual to the therapy. I'll be goddamned, Fat thought. In that simple sentence, "You're the authority," Stone had given Fat back his soul. (66-67)

For Horselover Fat, this means that he has to find his own unique way to find some kind of closure regarding suffering and reality. Therefore, a generalisation can be troublesome. In their article “Not What the Textbooks Describe: Challenging Clinical Conventions About Psychosis,” Nev Jones and Mona Shattel suggest that:

very few people’s experiences of “psychosis” or “schizophrenia” in fact map onto conventional understandings of either psychopathology or healing. The psychoses, for lack of a better term—that is, the experience of voices, visions, special messages, and alternative realities—are both profoundly heterogeneous and conjoined in their complex intersections with identity, culture, and fundamental processes of thought and perception. For many people with enduring psychosis, at least some, if not all of the time, “psychotic” experiences cannot be separated from the self: to experience psychosis, that is, is to experience a radically changed self.

(1)

Also, the experience of hearing voices that are present in Dick’s text is not necessarily a sign of mental illness. The study by Luhrmann et al. suggests that voices that people hear depend on individual experience and cultural background, and these things are not necessarily destructive or negative in regards their relationship to the person who hears them: “Participants in the USA were more likely to use diagnostic labels and to report violent commands than those in India and Ghana, who were more likely than the Americans to report rich relationships with their voices and less likely to describe the voices as the sign of a violated mind” (1). Taking this into consideration, it seems to be particularly important to consider mental illness from various perspectives within the American or Western context, as the Western world-view is less inclined to accept that there are variations in how individual psyches function. The above passages from Saks and Dick, as literary responses to and confrontations with the issue, are echoed in the following paragraph of Jones and Shattel’s scientific study:

To heal, for many, was not simply to “get away from” (or suppress) voices or alternative realities, but to make peace with what had been lost and what gained, to establish (real or imaginary) boundaries between themselves and distressing external forces, or to more comfortably occupy a space in which their alteration of thought and perception could more comfortably co-exist with “everyday reality.”

(3)

Dick's characters embody faith as much as doubt, health as much as illness, and find themselves in constant dialectics arguing back and forth in order to accept reality and the suffering. Sometimes, Dick claims that this was not schizophrenia: "Being in therapy at the time (Fat was always in therapy) he asked that a Rorschach Test be given to him to determine if he had become a schizophrenic. The test, upon his taking it, showed only a mild neurosis. So much for that theory" (*VALIS* 114). And it is on the subject of the mentioned so-called "diagnosis" regarding Dick and his 1974 experience, that it seems apt to turn to Kyle Arnold's book *Divine Madness of Philip K. Dick*:

some might conjecture that on top of his amphetamine psychosis, Dick also had a schizophrenic condition. Dick scholars cite as evidence of schizophrenia can be explained by the amphetamine psychosis we know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, Dick had. . . . Despite bouts of psychosis, Dick was able to write forty- four novels and 121 short stories during his lifetime. When examined through a clinical lens, Dick's life history doesn't appear schizophrenic. Rather, the clinical themes that stand out in his life are trauma and addiction. . . . If anything, [after 1974] he made better decisions and took better care of himself than usual. By definition, an *improvement* in functioning can't be considered a sign of mental illness. (211-212)

Arnold is less exclusive and more understanding than some other critics, accepting the fact that different minds (psyches) function differently in line with the fact that different people live different kinds of lives.

Regardless of the nature of Dick's suffering, in his texts mental health appears as a topic relevant for the understanding of reality, which he questions from all perspectives: "Horselover Fat is insane; therefore he is not in touch with reality. . . ." (*VALIS* 37). But then, on the same page Dick continues and explains that reality itself appears to him insane: "the universe itself – and the Mind behind it – Therefore someone in touch with reality is, by definition, in touch with the insane: infused by the irrational" (37). No matter how critical Dick is, and how much he tries to discredit the reality of the 1974 experience, he cannot give up on it. Dick writes these eight thousand sheets of paper in order to be thorough and find the truth behind his 1974 experience; because he is aware that polemics regarding a person's mental health do not engage with arguments nor give rational answers to propositions regarding reality. According to William James: "In the natural sciences and industrial arts it never occurs to any one to try to refute opinions by showing up their author's neurotic constitution. Opinions here are invariably tested by logic and by experiment, no matter what may be their author's neurological type" (18).

It is, however, certain, that although the texts result from a psychological crisis, they also showcase the therapeutic aspects found in writing and in art:

There is really nothing more to say when we come back to the beginning of all beginnings that is nothing at all. Only when you begin to lose that Alpha and Omega do you want to start to talk and to write, and then there is no end to it, words, words, words. At best and most they are perhaps *in memoriam*, evocations, conjurations, incantations, emanations, shimmering, iridescent flares in the sky of darkness, a just still feasible tact, indiscretions, perhaps forgivable. (Laing 156)

And the evidence presented in the texts suggests the complexity of the inner mind and that it is possible to make things more bearable when one accepts the reality of people as individuals worthy of love and sympathy. Philip K. Dick's works may contribute to the readers' better understanding of complex introspective issues that happen with and to the conscious mind that is in great psychological distress, and how to cope with great existential struggles that are encountered in life. In that sense, these texts, that at first seem to fail to capture reality, are triumphs of examining the inner world and recovering reality: "VALIS is, then, the return from madness or near-madness . . . By the time I wrote VALIS the battle had been successfully won" (*The Exegesis* 881).

## Conclusion

Although Philip K. Dick is typically seen as a contemporary American SF writer, the texts analysed in this thesis have distinct features of (European) literary Modernism, including experimentation, use of the stream of consciousness technique, orientation toward the inner life of the protagonist, and open ending. In a typical Modernist vein, these literary features serve as a means to construct a coherent view and understanding of reality; the narrator is on a desperate quest for the unattainable truth as well as for self-realization. Both of Dick's fictionalised autobiographical texts, the novel *VALIS* and the diary *The Exegesis*, overflow with good and bad ideas the author comes up with on his quest for "reality." Each of the chapters has shown that human life and its relations to different phenomena of human life (such as consciousness, mental health, religion, politics, and so on) rely on paradox and that, while thinking about them is necessary, one should not be obsessed with finding one definitive answer. Ultimately, the texts become even more puzzling since the understanding of much of what is written depends on the

relationship between the text and the consciousness of the individual reader; the search goes on and so does consciousness.

Dick challenges and invites his readers to think outside the boundaries of their every-day reality. Well aware that it is not possible to explain or show “reality” to his readers, since it depends on the individual, Dick instead makes it his task to show his readers what reality is *not*. The Nobel-prize-winning economist Friedrich Hayek touched upon the issue of human inability to know the one true (real) state of things in relation to economic forces and fluctuations: “The curious task of economics is to demonstrate to men how little they really know about what they imagine they can design” (76). By extension, the idea could be applied to Dick’s texts and the role of the artist in the search for reality by saying: *the curious task of the artist is to demonstrate to people how little they actually know about what they imagine to be reality*. Certainly, human beings, due to their belief in “progress,” think that, because of the collective growth of information and knowledge, people are closer to reality and believe in fewer superstitions than the “unenlightened” people of the previous generations. Yet, this might very well be a (contemporary) fallacy in a time when more ideologies and pseudo-realities exist than ever before; more information is accompanied by more misinformation. Being deeply interested in the issues of the fake and the real (Matek 82), Dick makes it his task, as an author, to make more people aware of such fallacies and to give a defence mechanism to the defenceless in most of his works, but most notably in his essay “How to Build a Universe That Doesn’t Fall Apart Two Days Later”:

So I ask, in my writing, What is real? Because unceasingly we are bombarded with pseudo-realities manufactured by very sophisticated people using very sophisticated electronic mechanisms. I do not distrust their motives; I distrust their power. They have a lot of it. And it is an astonishing power: that of creating whole universes, universes of the mind. I ought to know. I do the same thing.

Thereby, Dick allows the freedom that is necessary for thought, speech and the humanist reality that goes beyond superficial differences: “What you teach is the word of man. Man is holy, and the true god, the living god, is man himself” (*VALIS* 219). He concludes this due to the fact that all ideological solutions end up in a void, and rather than turning to ideology, people should be turning to one another and the basic humanist principles of everyday life: “My ideological solution is a failure; if I believe in it I have gone mad. . . . What solution do I propose that works? . . . Humor, love and beauty. And a firm rootedness *in the particular; in the ordinary*” (*The Exegesis* 692).

One thing is certain, Dick's works will always be a source of new ideas and new "theories" or "revelations" that will explain reality – and then get refuted again. Dick's texts are a journey on which the reader learns what reality is *not* and how important it is to question it, to think on one's own. Dick welcomes the reader to seek their own answers. More so, his literature reminds the reader how careful he/she ought to be in interpreting reality in order to hopefully escape pseudo-realities and see the other being as a person, even though they might (strongly) disagree with them. Establishing such a relationship with others is what Dick considers to be "the best in humanity" and it is seen in his view of his friend and fellow science fiction writer Robert Heinlein:

when I was ill, Heinlein offered his help, anything he could do, and we had never met; he would phone me to cheer me up and see how I was doing. He wanted to buy me an electric typewriter, God bless him—one of the few true gentlemen in this world. *I don't agree with any ideas he puts forth in his writing, but that is neither here nor there.* One time when I owed the IRS a lot of money and couldn't raise it, Heinlein loaned the money to me. . . . *he knows I'm a flipped-out freak and still he helped me and my wife when we were in trouble. That is the best in humanity, there; that is who and what I love*" (qtd. in Webb 155, my emphasis).

In the end, Dick and the reader are left with the last paradox: in order to avoid false beliefs, one has to believe in something – their own conscious reality.

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