12
From Exegesis to Ecology

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> [God] saves the world as it passes into the immediacy of his own life. It is the judgment of a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved. It is also the judgment of a wisdom which uses what in the temporal world is mere wreckage.[1]

12.1 Introduction

One of the major transversal themes of the twentieth century was the rise of environmentality – that is, of environmental awareness in the broadest sense. Beyond the flourishing ecological sciences and associated environmentalist social movements, across a wide range of spheres, from geography to politics, from psychology to computing and the rise of digital media, things that had previously been seen as functioning in isolation – organisms, minds, nations, objects, systems – came to be understood as inseparable from their environments. This entailed a growing recognition not only of the effects of an environment upon a system, but also of the ways such systems or bodies are always-already environmental (the human body, for example, as host for trillions of microorganisms which do not just 'live inside' it, but dynamically constitute it). This shift in perception was coupled with a set of historical and material transformations by which bodies, systems and objects are increasingly distributed across their apparent environments. This may be most readily observable in today's 'technical distribution of cognition,' as our knowledge-oriented activities, from academic study to shopping, operate through an increasingly complex, media-networked, computational environment.[2] But a similar observation could be made of virtually any kind of entity that formerly enjoyed relative isolation.

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1 Some of the countries that were the most 'self-contained' at the begin-
2 ning of the twentieth century, such as the US and China, were among
3 the most internationally dispersed and globally active by its end. The
4 weather and climate as reflections of human conscious and unconscious
5 activity went from the status of pathetic fallacy to one of scientific legit-
6 imacy with the acknowledgment of the Anthropocene.[3] As Erich Hörl
7 has elaborated, a range of 'unnatural ecologies' have now fomented a
8 'far-reaching ecologization of sense culture... necessitating a general
9 ecologization of thought'.[4]
10 It may be that the rise of ecological thinking was crucial to the condi-
11 tions that finally made Philip K. Dick's 'Exegesis' publishable in 2011,
12 nearly thirty years after his death. His relationship with the Vast Active
13 Living Intelligence System (VALIS), the account and examination of
14 which is at the heart of this immense collection of journal-style reflec-
15 tions, letters, quasi-philosophical and theological speculations, has
16 been widely regarded, even among scholars, fans and friends, as the
17 craziest aspect of a life and mind already lived a long way from the
18 shores of normality.
19 Yet if we consider the other 'VALISes' that were just beginning to emerge
20 into global consciousness at the moment Dick began to experience con-
21 tact with this mysterious entity, it could as easily seem that he was sim-
22 ply 'tapping in' to a particular sensitivity to the cultural transformations
23 of his time (and space). As Erik Davis reminds readers of the 'Exegesis,'
24 Dick's 1970s California was 'the petri dish of our digital age'[5] – though a
25 digital age, we should add, increasingly characterized by environmental
26 forms and modes of thought, as much as arrangements of zeros and ones.
27 In 1974, the year Dick had his first and most intense experiences with
28 VALIS, the term 'Internet' appeared in print for the first time, James
29 Lovelock and Lynn Margulis published the second of two papers propos-
30 ing the Gaia theory, and Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*
31 (1972) had just appeared – all emerging, more or less, from California.[6]
32 The fact that a publisher considered a 900-page, annotated edition
33 of this text worthwhile must have to do with an increased receptivity,
34 within literary and cultural studies and beyond, to critical paradigms
35 that move beyond the traditional search for textual meaning. For litera-
36 ture and its study have not been exempt from the rise of environmen-
37 tality: during the second half of the twentieth century the close reading
38 approaches of practical criticism, Russian formalism and New Criticism,
39 which advocated treating the literary text as a largely self-contained,
40 autonomous object, gradually gave way to various ways of recognizing
41 the text's inseparability from its historical, social and political contexts,

1　along with a growing appreciation of the constitutive role of hyper- and
2　metatextuality. In the wake of poststructuralism and deconstruction,
3　discerning the meaning and effects of a text, rather than an end in itself,
4　was increasingly regarded as a function of the postcolonial, feminist,
5　neo-Marxist and other political programs of cultural studies and associ-
6　ated new disciplines. Meanwhile, literature itself was gradually being
7　resituated within its wider technical and media contexts, through the
8　work of figures such as Marshall McLuhan, and in a quite different,
9　though no less influential manner, Friedrich Kittler, followed by a range
10　of subsequent studies of literature's positions and functioning in the
11　new media environment of the information society.[7]
12　　Thus to propose to read the 'Exegesis' ecologically, as I do here
13　through a combination of perspectives, is to recognize that such a read-
14　ing is partially made possible by cultural developments with which it
15　is already actively bound up: these developments, as we will see, all
16　relate to a shift from a hermeneutic to a post-hermeneutic understand-
17　ing of 'code,' which the 'Exegesis' both registers and enacts, in twisting
18　the (exegetical) search for meaning into the production of dynamic,
19　informational forms. In a quite non-mystical sense then, this ecological
20　entity has already approached and begun to interact with us, both along
21　specific pathways and as part of the general rise of environmentality,
22　before we begin trying to work out what to do with it.
23
24　**12.2　Building ecologies**
25
26　The different perspectives through which I explore the environmen-
27　tal or ecological character of the 'Exegesis' here all become ways of
28　accounting for the reality of VALIS against a widespread tendency to
29　dismiss its ontological existence, even when recognizing its significance
30　as a vehicle for the expression of interesting cultural, philosophical,
31　theological and psychological ideas.
32　　For some it may seem strange to claim an affinity with such contem-
33　porary associations as environmentality, immanent distributed systems,
34　and ecological thinking for a body of writing which associates itself
35　directly with the religious exegetical tradition; that is, with the search
36　for the Logos, the fundamental truth and meaning of the world, taken
37　to be encoded within religious scripture. Conversely, such a connec-
38　tion may reflect the always-already information-theoretical structure
39　of most monotheistic and a number of related (for example, Gnostic)
40　religions, and is perhaps no more strange than seeing some of the most
41　committed materialist thinkers of our time discovering a universalist,

1 revolutionary politics in Saint Paul,[8] proclaiming that the 'God [of
2 monotheisms] doesn't exist yet' but 'could come to exist at any moment
3 in the future,'[9] or imagining a future Christianity as a unified theory
4 of Christianity and heresy.[10] Furthermore, the apparent strangeness of
5 Dick's text is mitigated as soon as we recognize that, despite his declared
6 intentions, the work he undertakes can only be considered exegetical in
7 anything but a conventional sense.
8   In early 1974, following a particularly low couple of years in a life
9 already permeated by crises – a period which had seen the collapse of
10 his fourth marriage, a mental breakdown and suicide attempt, and the
11 loss of his house – Dick had a series of intense, seemingly mystical expe-
12 riences. Believing he had been contacted by some other-worldly, divine
13 or alien being, which, among many other names, he came to refer to
14 as VALIS, he spent the rest of his life trying to understand these experi-
15 ences and the message he felt this entity was attempting to communi-
16 cate.[11] Thus while conducted largely through writing, the central focus
17 of his exegetical activity was an apparently non-textual set of experi-
18 ences, which he referred to using the shorthand 2-3-74. As the task –
19 and the text – of the 'Exegesis' grew, the objects of interpretation did
20 come to include textual phenomena, including encyclopedia articles,
21 his own science fiction novels, and, perhaps inevitably, earlier entries
22 of the 'Exegesis' itself. Yet with these were intermingled numerous other
23 non-textual materials – dreams, symbols, snippets of popular culture,[12]
24 personal and political events, such as the death of his cat Pinky and the
25 resignation of Nixon,[13] physical objects, such as a necklace bearing the
26 Christian fish symbol worn by a girl delivering pain medication to his
27 door, or a small wooden figure of a saint with which he 'communed'.[14]
28   If non-textual phenomena began to take on interpretive significance,
29 many of the text-based materials on which Dick's exegetic activities
30 focused seemed to become 'object-like,' adopting a certain (partially)
31 self-contained structure, allowing them to be (re)combined repeatedly
32 with one another. This is perhaps most readily observed in his extensive
33 use of phrases and statements 'heard' inside his own head – variously
34 attributed to an early Christian called Thomas, the late Bishop James
35 Pike and a feminine AI entity.[15] Phrases such as 'the empire never ended'
36 and 'perturbations in the reality field' acquired an aphoristic or koan-
37 like status, allowing him to return and repeatedly attach new meanings
38 to them in light of new theories and arrangements of other objects and
39 ideas. A similar effect took place with other apparently verbal formulas,
40 whether they originated from Virgil, a text on physics, or a drunken
41 conversation with friends. Perhaps the greatest number of these 'verbal

1 objects' came from the pages of Dick's beloved encyclopedias, from
2 which he extracted and made use of a great variety of phenomena and
3 ideas from world religion, mythology, anthropology, psychology, phi-
4 losophy and natural science. Pamela Jackson, one of the editors of the
5 'Exegesis,' notes that many of the 1977 entries are comprised of pages
6 'in which whole encyclopaedia entries are copied out by hand'.[16]
7   The tendency to employ textual and non-textual materials alongside
8 one another, integrating and imbricating them within a single, if het-
9 erogeneous construct, is one basis on which I think it is useful to view
10 this endeavor in media-ecological terms. One could try to conceive
11 these disparate elements as collectively constituting a vast scripture that
12 Dick is trying to read, to interpret. However, it seems more apt – if not
13 demanded by the unconventional (or anti-conventional) nature of the
14 'Exegesis' – to understand each as an object or object-idea which can be
15 repeatedly detached from its position in a physical or virtual (in either
16 case real) environment and reinserted elsewhere, its relative autonomy
17 rendering it infinitely connectible or compatible. On this basis we are
18 better able to conceive the way Dick's exegesis, though purporting to be
19 a hermeneutic undertaking, simultaneously consists in the production
20 of the text it is supposed to interpret – with 'text' now understood in
21 its etymological sense as something woven, constructed, built, but also
22 as something always in a dynamic process of flux. In place of a pre-
23 existing, sacred text, Dick posits a growing collection of information,
24 objects, ideas and experiences, held together not only through his crea-
25 tive production of speculative links between them, but arguably also
26 through processes which cannot be ascribed to his activity as a subject,
27 conscious or unconscious, and which in a very material (though not
28 entirely mechanical) sense take place beyond the scope of his inten-
29 tional influence. Rather than citing or interpreting, Dick collects and
30 arranges object-ideas, putting them together to see if and how they fit,
31 what they can do, in a manner that could be likened to (or constitutes
32 at least one way of understanding) Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*.
33 This experimental approach to the work itself perhaps finds its simplest
34 expression in the significant amount of time Dick would spend physi-
35 cally reorganizing the order of the pages.[17]
36   Precedents for this kind of experimental, object-manipulating, quasi-
37 aesthetic activity are found throughout the history of twentieth-
38 century art: Dick effectively treats encyclopedia entries, philosophical
39 or other ideas, along with material things, processes and events, as
40 'found objects' for putting together Dadaist assemblages or bricolage.
41 Yet it is only recently that such activities have been situated within

1 informational (media-ecological) contexts. For instance, in Matthew
2 Fuller's book on media ecologies, he references Kurt Schwitters'
3 *Merzbilder* – in which fragments of found objects were combined to
4 make collage artworks by 'sticking shoes, sausage wrappers, tickets, and
5 wire to a backing board in order to conjure up or discern a relationship
6 among them'.[18] Like Schwitters, Dick can be understood as attempting
7 to literally make sense of the world around him, employing anything
8 to hand: exegesis or interpretation gives way to building, constituting,
9 constructing, almost from the outset.
10   Dick himself was fond of an account of his work by the Polish ~~science~~
11 ~~fiction~~ writer Stanislaw Lem. In Dick's paraphrasing, Lem had suggested
12 that 'within the degenerate molecules, the trash of today, he (PKD) res-
13 urrects a power buried for eons.'[19] Schwitters likewise sought out 'waste
14 materials picked up in the streets and parks of Hannover' from which
15 to construct his *Merzbilder*.[20] Both artists combine arbitrariness (virtu-
16 ally anything could be useful) with intuitive processes of selection and
17 dynamic, creative processes or effects that cannot be said to originate
18 entirely from the artistic (or thinking, active) subject, but which could
19 be said to arise from the things themselves – or from relations within
20 and across them that can be reduced to neither subject nor object, but
21 in fact 'live' beyond either: 'What lies hiding within each object? A
22 garden, so to speak'.[21]
23   An influential precedent for the notion of a media ecology that is
24 still predominantly made of words is Deleuze and Guattari's concep-
25 tion of a rhizome book – as discussed, and arguably embodied, in
26 *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). They suggest that most books possess either
27 a root-like (tree-like) structure, with a hierarchical organization of
28 knowledge branching out into subdivisions from a core idea or princi-
29 ple; or a radicle system, in which the central trunk has been aborted, but
30 the resulting multiplicity of smaller roots still implies a certain overall
31 unity. Whereas both types effectively situate themselves outside reality
32 in order to provide a representation of (some aspect of) it, whether as
33 ordered or chaotic, the rhizome book is understood as contiguous with
34 reality, refusing any hierarchical organization or dualistic, representa-
35 tive logic.[22] Instead, it connects together multiplicities of heterogene-
36 ous elements, which are regarded as belonging to equivalent planes, all
37 equally connectible with one another. Hence they write:

38
39   We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will
40   not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it func-
41   tions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not

transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed.[23]

Whether or not the volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* live up to this ambition – effectively, that of situating themselves as radically immanent within the real – is open to discussion. Certainly, their collaborations have been hugely influential for the thinking of immanence, and what a commitment to it (philosophical or otherwise) might entail – even if, for some, they remain too attached to the authority of philosophy, or to privileging certain kinds of knowledge, to allow their work to be understood as completely enfolded within the real.[24] Still, they raise the prospect of a book, a text, a media-ecological construction made of writing, objects, concepts, processes, phenomena, that would not 'mean' anything except this constructability, but which would 'do' a great deal, regardless of the involvement of human thinkers, writers or media. Dick's 'Exegesis,' while claiming an association with a classical tradition in which underlying meaning is everything, in which reality really can be represented, communicated, and thus read, in practice goes in the opposite, Deleuze–Guattarian direction: it becomes an immanent, media-ecological construction that is only (if deceptively) 'colored' by a thematics of transcendence.

12.3   Made of code

As Kittler emphasizes, *écriture automatique* became a possibility, if not a commonplace, as soon as the typewriter was taken seriously: 'Ever since the invention of the phonograph, there has been writing without a subject. It is no longer necessary to assign an author to every trace, not even God.'[25] The whole of the 'Exegesis' is premised on the idea that something has come to Dick from outside – and yet, has, in a sense, irrupted within him, becoming him, transforming him, or, in his often-repeated informational twist on the Catholic Eucharist, transubstantiating itself into him.[26] Yet even for Dick, it was conceivable that that to which he attributed supernatural or mystical power might be simply his writing-machine, thinking (for) him: 'My books are forgeries. Nobody wrote them. The goddam typewriter wrote them; it's a magic typewriter.'[27] Indeed, many of Dick's accounts of his encounters with VALIS emphasize the media of inscription by which these transformative communications take place. In dreams, he receives 'information in the form of printed matter, visual matter such as photographs, audio stuff in the form of phonograph records – it all floods over me at a high rate

1 of print-out'.[28] He also describes its effects in mediatic terms, suggest-
2 ing that 'we're radio waves: it modulates us; we're the carrier signal'[29]
3 or conceiving those who encounter VALIS as 'transistors, diodes, wires
4 condensers and resisters, all none the wiser'.[30] Sometimes VALIS appears
5 to operate in multimedia modes:

7   One night I found myself flooded with colored graphics which
8   resembled the non-objective paintings of Kandinsky and Klee, thou-
9   sands of them one after the other, so fast as to resemble "flash cut"
10   used in movie work. This went on for eight hours... I was certain that
11   those tens of thousands of lovely, balanced, quite professional and
12   esthetic harmonious graphics could not be originating within my
13   own brain. I have no facility with graphics.[31]

15 Like Rilke discussing an early classroom experience of constructing
16 a makeshift phonograph in the confessional essay 'Primal Sound,'
17 which Kittler cites in full in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Dick does
18 not remember the content or 'meaning' of these communications.[32]
19 Though he is sure that information was being transmitted, it is the
20 modes or media of transmission that have left the greatest impression.
21   Could the mediatized language of the 'Exegesis' have something
22 to do with the actual media environment in which Dick worked? If
23 Nietzsche's writing, indeed his thought, was altered by his use of the
24 typewriter, as Kittler repeatedly suggests,[33] can we identify possible ways
25 in which something similar could have taken place for Dick? Like many
26 twentieth-century writers, he was deeply attached to his typewriter(s).
27 As his third wife Anne Dick recalls, when she knew him 'the only
28 things he treasured were his Royal Electric typewriter, his Magnavox
29 record player, his books and records and his set of the Encyclopedia
30 Britannica'.[34] The collective mention of these treasured possessions is an
31 apt reminder that Dick's typewriter was very different from Nietzsche's –
32 and not only in terms of appearance and make: with the typewriter's
33 centenary already passed and the information age exploding into life,
34 as Dick was well aware,[35] it would not be long before typewriter, record
35 player, books and encyclopedias would be fused into a single assem-
36 blage. Like others, Dick already inhabited a multimedia environment
37 that he took with him from one living space to the next, unconsciously
38 anticipating the 'general digitization of channels and information'
39 that would erase 'the differences among individual media'.[36] No longer
40 'a simulacrum of a feedback loop relaying sender and receiver,'[37] by
41 this time the typewriter was dreaming of being a computer keyboard

1 connected to a network of networks. And if the typewriter had released
2 the eye from its focus on the pen-in-hand, freeing it to take in the vis-
3 ible environment, perhaps the information network does something
4 similar for the dependence on vision per se, making possible an aware-
5 ness of environmentality in more general, non-visual terms.
6   The language of information theory and technology recurs through-
7 out the 'Exegesis,' as Dick develops extended accounts of VALIS as a
8 kind of artificial intelligence or supercomputer. Yet while the details of
9 these accounts continually shift and mutate, as they are plugged into
10 other object-ideas, processes and theories, the 'active living' character
11 of VALIS remains a near-constant feature: furthermore, it is repeatedly
12 construed in ecological terms, as a (vast) living environment both
13 encompassing and constituted by other life forms. In one recurring
14 model, human individuals are understood as 'stations' in a quasi-
15 computer-like proto-organism, a vast incorporeal energy which thinks,
16 and whose thoughts are the physical cosmos.[38] Elsewhere Dick uses
17 more directly cybernetic language, referring to a 'vast living organism
18 which governs and regulates our every move,' suggesting that 'we are in
19 an information-processing entity' which 'uses us to receive, modulate,
20 store and transmit information [...] a cybernetics or biological model
21 will both work. Basically it knows'.[39]
22   Does it make sense, then, to suggest that, as with the self-advertising
23 techniques of the early typewriters,[40] the emergent informational media
24 network announces itself through the pages of the 'Exegesis'? Like
25 many ~~science fiction~~ writers, Dick had already dreamed of versions of
26 the Internet and other new media forms that have since become inte-
27 gral to the fabric of everyday life.[41] Yet what is at work in the 'Exegesis'
28 is not so much a matter of foresight or the manifestation of the outward
29 characteristics that new media might display, but rather a registering,
30 something like an unconscious diagnosis, of their ecological mode of
31 existence – or, as he suggests, an effect of his becoming-substrate or
32 medium for their operations and inscriptions.
33   In undertaking a work of exegesis, Dick sets himself the task of crack-
34 ing a code. He aims to decipher a set of messages or 'communications'
35 in alien forms which, as we have seen, he himself helps produce. Yet for
36 all his varied explanations for what VALIS might 'actually' be (including
37 Dionysus, a form of Christ, of God, perhaps in her secret, true female
38 form, an organism composed entirely of energetic information, a secret
39 machine constructed by Soviet scientists, an alien artificial intelligence,
40 a future or ancient version of himself, the mind of an ancient revolution-
41 ary fighting against the Roman Empire, a being from a parallel reality

either hallucinated or 'unlocked' through self-administered megadoses of vitamins…), the only certainty he retains is that it is a code – and even then, not necessarily in the sense he originally entertained.

The notion of VALIS or God as producing itself through the rearrangement of object-processes recurs, with different inflections, throughout the 'Exegesis'. Dick develops a variety of accounts of the way 'it is assembling itself from the universe, which it uses as parts which it incorporates and arranges coherently and meaningfully'.[42] We should also observe that, despite the many transcendental God-like entities from mystical and science fictional discourses that Dick draws on in attempting to understand VALIS, he also emphasizes, in many different ways, that it is ultimately an immanent God with which he is concerned. This is conveyed, for example, in references to a section from Virgil's Aeneid, discussing the 'immanent mind';[43] Spinozan references to God as immanent within the universe;[44] the notion of God as 'born within the human soul' which he draws from Jung's reading of Meister Eckhart;[45] and mentions of Bateson's 'immanent mind that narrates information to each living entity'.[46] Thus the question of the transcendent status of God or VALIS is frequently eclipsed by a 'functional definition,' according to which it consists simply in 'imposed pattern' with 'no corpus separate from whatever it chooses – or seizes on – to arrange' – effectively becoming indistinguishable from the 'Exegesis' itself.[47]

Dick implicitly moves from what Kittler identifies as an older, more general understanding of code as any form of encryption, towards a narrower, contemporary, informational understanding, whereby its salient property is not the possibility of its being deciphered, but its capacity for self-reproduction. From the latter perspective,

> only alphabets in the literal sense of modern mathematics should be known as codes, namely one-to-one, finite sequences of symbols, kept as short as possible but gifted, thanks to a grammar, with the incredible ability to infinitely reproduce themselves.[48]

The processes and activities through which VALIS and the 'Exegesis' emerge may not strictly be codes in this technical sense; they are not composed in a mathematical alphabet: but over the years in which Dick is engaged in these processes, one can observe a shift whereby the notion of a linguistic-hermeneutic code, as the encryption holding the secret (and thus of media as the carriers of meaning), gradually gives way to a notion of nonlinguistic code in something closer to Kittler's more information-specific sense, characterized by pattern repetition,

1 self-perpetuation, auto-reference and reproduction (hence of media as
2 primarily ecological, immanent to themselves): 'it assembles itself intact
3 in a human brain from a collage taken from song lyrics, ads, novels, TV,
4 movies – any and all info media, verbal and graphic,' and, in the pro-
5 cess, 'even describes itself'.[49] In the course of this shift, the ontological
6 and epistemological bases are established for the 'Exegesis' to constitute
7 no longer a key to or search for VALIS, but its literal extension.
8   Dick begins by producing a media-ecological construction, piecing
9 together objects, processes, ideas, moving them around and recon-
10 necting them to see what they might do in other arrangements. This
11 may have been something he had been doing for years previously in
12 the production of his fiction, perhaps reflected in the tinkerers, hoard-
13 ers, inventors and repairmen that populate his novels, traceable right
14 back to the obsessive-compulsive collector Jack Isidore in *Confessions*
15 *of a Crap Artist* (1979; written in the late 1950s). Yet where Dick ends
16 up, like so many of his fictional characters, is with an alternative
17 world that takes over the tinkering, constructing process from him,
18 and begins, or continues 'assembling itself'. What starts as a kind of
19 psychological, ethical, or aesthetic exercise in experimental construc-
20 tion gradually bootstraps itself into a kind of autopoietic system that is
21 able to continue this activity in a semi-independent manner. Far from
22 something that would require a mystical explanation, such a shift, not
23 only through discourses of cybernetics and systems, but in our growing
24 general environmental understanding, increasingly comes to character-
25 ize the contemporary world.
26   Does all this amount to a banalizing of the 'Exegesis'? The sugges-
27 tion that it is nothing more than an intimation of the burgeoning
28 networked information society, with its far-reaching transformation of
29 the human subject? Surely the same account could be made of a range
30 of post-war texts, literary or otherwise: indeed, Kittler's own readings
31 of Pynchon could be said to do just this, in particular with regard to
32 *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), which appeared almost at the same moment
33 Dick entered into contact with VALIS. Meanwhile, Katherine Hayles
34 has brought out the cybernetics embedded in Dick's ~~science fiction~~;[50]
35 and, in quite different ways, Erik Davis and Scott Lash have identified
36 Dick's significant place within the more general interpenetration of
37 information and modern mysticism, as a transcultural phenomenon
38 touching nearly every sphere of contemporary life.[51] Such approaches
39 should alert us to the likely potential of the 'Exegesis' for thinking the
40 transformative effects of information upon our existence. At the same
41 time, I want to suggest that its potential is even greater for engaging

1 with and revealing the increasingly environmental, and, in Hörl's sense,
2 general-ecological, character of our age. Through it, Dick participates in
3 the production, in large part through the unconventional deployment
4 of actual encyclopedia entries, of what Hörl calls, following Simondon,
5 a 'fourth, indeed ecological encyclopaedism,' potentially contributing
6 to our understanding of 'the new sense of mediation and processuality
7 at the level of the evolution of technical objects and of the historicity
8 of objecthood or objectivity in general.'[52]
9
10 ## 12.4 Dickian ecosophy
11
12 An important aspect of the ecological (rather than simply informational)
13 character of the 'Exegesis' is arguably to be found in its unconventional
14 political dimension. Despite various references to contemporaneous
15 public voices of protest, Dick does not usually take up a standard activ-
16 ist or left-wing countercultural position. Rather, his protests tend to
17 be simultaneously ontological, aesthetic, and psychological as well as
18 political. In this, they resonate with Félix Guattari's 'ecosophy,' a term
19 he coined to refer to the new ethico-politico-aesthetic articulation
20 which he saw as called for by the scale and transhuman scope of the
21 contemporary transformation of the Earth. Crucially, for Guattari, ecos-
22 ophy would be an approach that refused to make fundamental distinc-
23 tions between action on the psyche, the socius and the environment.[53]
24   In Guattari's view, although the 'new ecosophical logic' will at times still
25 require people to act as 'good activists,' at other times 'individual and col-
26 lective subjectivities will "pull out" without a thought for collective aims'
27 and 'creative expression as such will take precedence'.[54] Without, perhaps,
28 having arrived at any clear and satisfying conclusions regarding tech-
29 niques or models for transforming the world, Dick can be said to engage
30 in a version of the intense and prolonged activity which Guattari proposes
31 in order 'to radically decentre social struggles and ways of coming to one's
32 own psyche'.[55] Indeed, whatever else it may be, the 'Exegesis' constitutes
33 an array of ways of exploding the conception of self in late capitalist
34 modernity. Furthermore, across the diversity of these approaches, the
35 theme or process of 'environmentalizing' subjectivity recurs:
36
37   I produced the vortex (Zebra) and broke down space, time, causal-
38   ity, and self (ego) in order to deal with a trap… What broke down…
39   forms the totality of the subjective – i.e. the idios kosmos. What
40   is pointed to here is a sort of field theory about the human being,
41   replacing the discrete particle view.[56]

In another sense, 'being possessed' was being outside of oneself, and outside the environment as well, at a third point... from which one could see both oneself and the environment as an interacting entity... So it may not have been a coming into me, but a me going outside of me.[57]

It is not a something. It is made up of the arrangement of the data. It can be any object, any process, any person – and at that time controls that object, process, person. It is me today, not me tomorrow.[58]

In attempting to escape the 'traps' of selfhood, causality, space/time, Dick can be said to be pursuing something like Guattari's 'different logic... of intensities, of auto-referential existential assemblages'.[59] The reference to a 'field theory of the human being' echoes Bateson's ecology of ideas as existing beyond the boundaries of an individual psyche, whose significance Guattari recognizes.[60] Indeed, Bateson even suggests that 'the larger Mind of which the individual mind is only a subsystem... is comparable to God and is perhaps what some people mean by "God," but it is still immanent in the total interconnected social systems and planetary ecology'.[61] If Dick sees the need for a 'divine sacrifice,' it is nevertheless a sacrifice 'of self'.[62]

For Dick and Guattari such challenges to the conventions of everyday ontology and selfhood already constitute ethical or political challenges. The latter identifies a direct target for the ecosophical struggle in what he calls 'Integrated World Capitalism' (IWC), which operates increasingly through 'semiotic regimes':[63] the ecosophical challenge to IWC will entail developing an awareness of its infiltrations of 'the most unconscious subjective strata'.[64] Dick, meanwhile, frequently couches his encounters with VALIS in terms of a struggle against the not dissimilar figure of the 'black iron prison' (BIP), which he associates with imperial Rome: 'It is a thing (the BIP). It fires controlling stimuli at us which we are compelled to respond to in fixed ways.'[65] His encounters with VALIS interrupt these controlling stimuli, moving him in the direction of alternative (environmentalized) ways of understanding and relating to self and world. It is thus, for example, a direct vision, bypassing conscious decision-making processes, of the spatial environment of the Roman Empire superimposed over his Californian world that triggers his understanding of the BIP, an experience that is simultaneously a metaphysical and political vision: 'I hadn't gone back in time, but in a sense Rome had come forward, by insidious and sly degrees, under new names, hidden by the flak talk and

phony obscurations, at last into our world again.'[66] Whether or not Dick believes himself to be rebelling against a genuinely metaphysical power or a form of contemporary capitalism is ultimately of less significance than the fact that his responses to it challenge, arguably through a micropolitics operating within the sphere of mental ecology, 'the entropic rise of a dominant subjectivity'.[67] And it is only through the breaking down of the spatiotemporal structures of psychological experience, the 'trap' of 'the totality of the subjective' that the BIP comes into view.

While it is possible, in Dick's case, to attribute this link between the Roman and contemporary forms of empire to the random misfiring of a fractured psyche, the same connection is increasingly widely perceived among philosophers and political theorists, notably those inspired by the reconstruction of Pauline political theology, such as Agamben, Badiou, and, to an extent, Žižek.[68] Guattari himself identifies the two dominant modes of modern ecological crisis as the 'imperium' of the global market and the dominance of military-policing control mechanisms, operative through semiotic regimes; while Kittler highlights the link between the Imperium Romanum and the operation of modern cybernetic power through 'command, code and communications technology'.[69]

Even without exploring in detail the proximities and divergences between Dick's ecological exegesis and Guattari's micropolitics, we may appreciate that they share a tendency to think and operate, as Guattari puts it, 'transversally,' refusing easy separations between the natural and the cultural, the individual and the social spheres.[70] It should be clear even from the few snippets of the 'Exegesis' we have considered that it operates in something like the 'ethico-aesthetic' spirit of Guattari's ecosophy. If Dick is unable to quite believe that VALIS is entirely his creation (for the good reason, perhaps, that as an ecological form, it is not, even if it emerged in combination with his own imaginative and experimental processes), he is quite able to see a purposive politics in his novel *VALIS*, which dramatizes the events of 2-3-74 within a larger narrative:

> It is not spontaneous autobiography; it is a forgery, a very artistic forgery; only someone knowing about modern nonobjective protest art – especially that of Weimar! – would know what *VALIS* really is... It is not what it seems to be – it is not quasi-psychotic confession; it is an artifact. Look out; it will delude you. Yes, it is picaresque!

And it is a maze; it deliberately deceives – for the highest possible reason: not an artistic one, but to raise *die rote Fahne* [the red flag]. It is of the 30s. It is dada out of antifascist Weimar. It is, in the final analysis, revolutionary (and does not have to do with religion; it has to do with revolutionary action against the state!)[71]

Here Dick himself links his artistic output to the work of artists from the era and milieu of Kurt Schwitters, forming non-obvious protests against the permeation of culture by the logics of bourgeois nationalist, capitalist and imperialist power structures. Yet the difference is that the novel Dick is referring to is already a kind of second- or even third-order eco-aesthetic construction, arranged from the raw data that are largely collected within the 'Exegesis' (third-order because it would be possible to conceive the 'Exegesis' itself as already a second-order observation of a system emerging across Dick's conscious and unconscious fantasies, visions and dreams, his existing fiction and experience, culminating in the 2-3-74 experiences). If the 'Exegesis' is media-ecological partially in the sense of a Kurt Schwitters collage or a Raoul Hausmann sculpture, it is also so in the more generalized sense pointed towards by Guattari. Linking the two is the shift from a view of everything as potentially readable code, to the narrower sense proposed by Kittler, of code as that which is capable of endlessly, dynamically (re)producing itself as immanent within the real.

Thus if contemporary technology 'puts code into the practice of realities, that is to say: it encodes the world,'[72] the 'Exegesis' responds not by decoding, whether in the classical sense of religious hermeneutics, or in the modern senses of psychoanalytic interpretation, the Marxist critique of ideology, and post-Frankfurt School (that is, British) cultural and media studies. Rather, it enables the emergence, through heterogenesis, of alternative, unique codes, capable of endless self-replication and mutation.

12.5   Conclusion: soter-ecology

I would not want, in all this, to downplay the significance of the soteriological dimension of the 'Exegesis.' For me at least, it is evident on nearly every page that Dick is seeking salvation through the production of this text. In a very late entry, he acknowledges that 'everything that has happened and that I have been shown, told, every revelation – it's all one vast soteriological engine/program'.[73]

1   Beginning with the pseudo-theological task of exegesis, Dick, through
2   an extended, laborious process, ends up producing the thing he is look-
3   ing for, which is both interior and exterior to himself, an ecological sys-
4   tem which has living and non-living parts, and which simultaneously
5   begins to reveal his own equivalent posthuman status. He allows the
6   God he is looking for to come into being, as a fundamental reconsid-
7   eration of the relationship between self and other, subject and object,
8   meaning and code. We should understand this God not in a mystical
9   sense, but as what Hörl terms an 'eco-technological subjectivity' that
10 belongs neither to the human nor the object nor to a singular entity
11 of any kind, yet traverses a range of individuated and individuating
12 forms and in so doing comes to constitute something like subjectivity
13 nonetheless.[74]
14 Thus if VALIS was able to perform a soteriological effect on Dick, it was
15 arguably precisely through enabling him to give up on the search for a
16 transcendent savior figure which had constituted the very motivation and
17 driving force propelling forward his exegetical labor from the outset. There
18 are several entries in later parts of the 'Exegesis' which suggest he was
19 moving towards recognizing this – writing, for example, that his under-
20 taking 'has been futile, has been delusion, and: has been a hell-chore…
21 but God delivered me from it, from my own exegesis'.[75] This delivery, he
22 goes on to state, was possible only through the realization that

24   all I had seen of God in 2-3-74 was a glint of color and a ripple of
25   wind in the weeds of the alley, acting on reality; that Valis was not
26   God but rather world ('the reality field') perturbed (from beyond
27   creation) by God… 2-3-74 was not a theophany, but was a more
28   sophisticated experience of world.[76]

30 When Dick's own living body left the world, the activity of the
31 autopoietic entity VALIS underwent a lull, but did not cease. Its eco-
32 logical subjectivity continues to grow and change, not least through
33 the new publication of the 'Exegesis' and our responses to it; so that
34 I may legitimately speculate, as Dick did of VALIS, that 'perhaps he is
35 collaborating in the writing of this right now'.[77] Yet for however much
36 this may conjure up thoughts and images of the transcendent, the
37 mystical, the otherworldly, its conditions of possibility ultimately lie in
38 nothing more than ecological materiality: it need have no secret being,
39 no existence beyond the plane on which I perceive glints of color and
40 ripples of wind, which may nevertheless constitute perturbations of
41 my reality field.

Notes

1. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Free Press, 1978), 346.
2. Mark Hansen, 'System-Environment Hybrids,' in *Embodiment and Experience: New Essays on Second-Order Systems Theory,* ed. Bruce Clarke and Mark Hansen (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 117.
3. Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, 'The Anthropocene,' *Global Change Newsletter* 41 (2000): 17–18.
4. Erich Hörl, 'A Thousand Ecologies: The Process of Cyberneticization and General Ecology,' in *The Whole Earth: California and the Disappearance of the Outside,* ed. Diedrich Diederichsen and Anselm Franke (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 127. The environmental perspective considered in this paper is indebted to Hörl's formulation of the emergent 'general ecology of media and technology.'
5. Erik Davis, footnote, in Philip K. Dick, *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick,* ed. Pamela Jackson and Jonathan Lethem (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), 19.
6. The term 'internetwork' was abbreviated to 'internet' in 'Request for Comments 675,' circulated among ARPANET developers in December 1974, http://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc675. The first public demonstration of ARPANET had taken place in 1972.
7. See, for example, William Paulson, *The Noise of Culture. Literary Texts in a World of Information* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), and Joseph Tabbi and Michael Wutz, eds. *Reading Matters. Narrative in the New Media Ecology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).
8. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism,* trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).
9. Quentin Meillassoux, 'Deuil à venir, dieu à venir,' *Critique* 1–2, no. 704–5 (2006) and paraphrased by Adrian Johnston, 'Hume's Revenge: À Dieu, Meillassoux?' in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism,* ed. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman (Prahran: re:press, 2011), 92–113, at 94.
10. François Laruelle, *Future Christ. A Lesson in Heresy,* trans. Anthony Paul Smith (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 28.
11. Though I have generally referred to it here by its best-known moniker VALIS, Dick applied a variety of names (such as Zebra and Firebright), to the putative entity, mind or system with which he believed himself to be in communication, as well as associating it with numerous figures from existing mythology (Brahman, Christ, Dionysos, Asklepios) and emerging from his own visions (Thomas, Sophia, the 'AI voice').
12. Ibid., 418.
13. Ibid., 127; 48 and 353.
14. Ibid., 48–9 and 110.
15. Ibid., 299; 22–3 and 204.
16. Pamela Jackson, footnote, in Dick, *Exegesis,* 234.
17. Ibid., 134.
18. Matthew Fuller, *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 1.
19. Dick, *Exegesis,* 35; cf. 326.

20   *Grove Art Online,* s.v. 'Kurt Schwitters,' by Richard Humphreys, http://www
     .oxfordartonline.com/. accessed January 2014.
21   Dick, *Exegesis*, 112.
22   Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and
     Schizophrenia,* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota
     Press, 1987), 3–25.
23   Ibid., 4.
24   This is the concern raised, all the more notably for his seeming affinity
     with their project, by François Laruelle in 'I, the Philosopher, am Lying,'
     in *The Non-Philosophy Project: Essays by François Laruelle,* ed. Gabriel Alkon
     and Boris Gunjevic (New York: Telos, 2012), 40–74. As John Mullarkey puts
     it, from a non-philosophical perspective, 'even though Deleuze embraces
     multiplicity and a variety of kinds of thought (artistic and scientific as well
     as philosophical)' he reserves the status of 'highest thought' for '(Deleuzian)
     philosophy alone – *he* explains the Real'; John Mullarkey, 'Introduction: The
     Non-Philosophical Inversion: Laruelle's Knowledge Without Domination,'
     in *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy,* ed. John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith
     (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 3.
25   Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,* trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-
     Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 44.
26   Ibid., 155 and cf. 32: 'it is becoming me; or rather, to be more accurate, it is
     shaping me so that I am becoming it.'
27   Dick, *Exegesis,* 22.
28   Ibid., 24 and cf. 37.
29   Ibid., 330.
30   Ibid., 387.
31   Ibid., 7.
32   Kittler, *Gramophone,* 38–42.
33   Ibid., 200 and 203.
34   Anne R. Dick, *The Search for Philip K. Dick* (San Francisco: Tachyon, 2010), 33.
35   See, for example, Dick's essays 'The Android and the Human' (1972) and
     'Man, Android and Machine' (1976) in *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick,*
     ed. Lawrence Sutin (New York: Vintage, 1995).
36   Kittler, *Gramophone,* 1.
37   Ibid., 37.
38   Dick, *Exegesis,* 269 and cf. 278.
39   Ibid., 279 and 386.
40   Kittler cites Mark Twain's typed letter to Remington, the manufacturers of
     his typewriter, in which he complains that every time he sends someone a
     letter written with his new Model 1 machine, people write back to enquire
     about it (*Gramophone,* 192–3). See also the image of a typewriter 'advertising
     itself' (205).
41   Apart from the widespread use of 'vidphones' and the like in Dick's sci-
     ence fiction, we might consider an example such as 'the Game' in *Galactic
     Pot-Healer* (1969), which seems to anticipate functions equivalent to email,
     multimedia Internet telephony and automated translation services. As early
     as 1911, Hugo Gernsback's *Ralph 124C41+* (Rockwell, MD: Wildside, 2008)
     depicted characters engaging in audio-visual, real-time communication over
     an international communications network.
42   Ibid., 462; cf. 70; 122 and 138.

43 Ibid., 50.
44 Ibid., 121.
45 Ibid., 182.
46 Ibid., 337.
47 Ibid., 463.
48 Friedrich Kittler, 'Code, or, How You Can Write Something Differently,' in *Software Studies. A Lexicon,* ed. Matthew Fuller (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 45.
49 Dick, *Exegesis*, 418.
50 N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999).
51 Erik Davis, *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (New York: Harmony, 1998); Scott Lash, 'Information Theology: Philip K. Dick's Will to Knowledge,' in *Intensive Culture* (London: Sage, 2010), 185–214.
52 Hörl, 'A Thousand Ecologies,' 123.
53 Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London: Athlone, 2000), 41.
54 Ibid., 52.
55 Ibid.
56 Dick, *Exegesis,* 456.
57 Ibid., 154–5.
58 Ibid., 373.
59 Guattari, *Three Ecologies,* 44.
60 Ibid., 54.
61 Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), 466.
62 Ibid., 317.
63 Guattari, *Three Ecologies*, 48.
64 Ibid., 50.
65 Dick, *Exegesis,* 328.
66 Ibid., 59.
67 Guattari, *Three Ecologies,* 68.
68 For an exploration of the ways Dick's challenge to the Black Iron Prison can be considered a struggle against key features of contemporary global capitalism, especially as understood through Pauline political theology, see James Burton, 'Machines Making Gods: Philip K. Dick, Henri Bergson and Saint Paul,' *Theory, Culture & Society* vol. 25, nos 7–8 (December 2008), 262–84.
69 Kittler, 'Code,' 42.
70 Ibid., 43.
71 Dick, *Exegesis,* 662.
72 Kittler, 'Code', 45.
73 Ibid., 888.
74 Erich Hörl, 'Die technologische Bedingung. Zur Einführung,' in *Die technologische Bedingung. Beiträge zur Beschreibung der technischen Welt*, ed. Erich Hörl (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 21.
75 Dick, *Exegesis,* 643.
76 Ibid., 644.
77 Ibid., 25.