Don't Turn That Dial: Advertising, Mass Media, and the God Character in the Novels of Philip K. Dick

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DON'T TURN THAT DIAL:

ADVERTISING, MASS MEDIA, AND THE GOD CHARACTER IN THE NOVELS OF

PHILIP K. DICK

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Don’t Turn That Dial: Advertising, Mass Media, and the God Character in the Novels of Philip K. Dick

Abstract

“Don’t Turn That Dial: Advertising, Mass Media, and the God Character in the Novels of Philip K. Dick” seeks to explore the Science Fiction (SF) novels of Philip K. Dick through two themes: the parity of divinity and reality and the use of advertising and mass media as a divine tool. These themes are reflected through Dick’s god character, which appears throughout his works. This parallel of reality with divinity means that any character that claims to be able to generate reality is worshipped as a religious figure. In Dick’s novels from the 1960s, there are false god characters which generate an illusory reality using mass media and advertising that acts to occlude authentic reality for the other characters. The sixties novels that are examined are Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (1968), The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich (1965), Lies, Inc. (1984, first published as The Unteleported Man in 1966), and The Simulacra (1964). In the theological novels of the eighties, Valis (1981) and The Divine Invasion (1981), a true god character arrives that possesses the power to impart the quality of realness onto objects. He uses advertising and mass media to communicate instructions to the other characters about how to access an authentic reality, which includes other human beings, and achieve divinity.

This examination of Dick’s treatment of the god character brings to light his unique take on a popular topic in the SF genre: the question of technology’s effects on the human psyche. His novels can be read as a warning against mass media and advertising’s oversaturation of everyday life. If mass media and advertising comprise too much of human perception, we are in danger of forgetting how to recognize authentic reality and experience empathy toward other human beings: a trait that Dick considers crucial to being human.
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A THESIS

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By

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Introduction

Philip K. Dick (1928-1982) is an American author whose work is predominantly in the Science Fiction (SF) genre. Dick’s published works include 45 novels, over one hundred short stories, as well as essays, letters, and an extensive journal detailing his religious experiences and philosophy called *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick* (2011), published posthumously by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. He published his first novel, *Solar Lottery* (1955), at 24 years old, and the last novel published during his lifetime, *The Divine Invasion* (1981), marks a writing career spanning over half a century. Because of the extensive nature of Dick’s oeuvre, critics tend to divide it into several periods.

Dick’s most prolific period was the 1960s, during which he wrote over twenty books including those considered his “canonical novels” (Rossi 401). The “canonical novels” include Dick’s most famous work, the source work for the film *Blade Runner* (1982), *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1966) as well as, among others, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich* (1964), *The Man in the High Castle* (1961), *Dr. Bloodmoney* (1963) and *Ubik* (1966). Critics have given these works the most attention and they are widely considered Dick’s best. Other Philip K. Dick novels of the 1960s include *The Simulacra* (1963), *The Penultimate Truth* (1964), and *The Unteleported Man* (1964, published as *Lies, Inc.* in 1984).

The last group of novels Philip K. Dick wrote, referred to as the “theological novels” (Rossi 414), were published in the early 1980s shortly before his death. They were the result of a paranormal experience the author had during February and March of 1974. The theological novels consist of the Valis Trilogy which contains *Valis* (1981), *The Divine Invasion* (1981), and *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* (1982). According to Lawrence Sutin’s biography, *Divine Invasions* (1989), the experience, termed 2-3-74 by Dick himself, allegedly involved an information-rich beam of pink light fired at his head that caused “[Plato’s] anamnesis...the experience of recollecting eternal truths, the World of Ideas, within ourselves” (Sutin 211). Though these phenomena occurred at other times as well, they were most intense during February
and March of 1974. According to Dick, they informed him about a correct diagnosis for his son’s illness, an alternate, ancient Roman personality living inside of him, as well as various other epiphanies about the nature of the universe. Along with writing the theological novels, Dick spent the rest of his life attempting to explain these experiences in an extensive journal he called the Exegesis. In *Pink Beams of Light and God in the Gutter: The Science-Fictional Religion of Philip K. Dick* (2004), Gabriel McKee states that by the time of his death, this journal contained over 8,000 pages (McKee 5). In 2011, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt published a much edited version of the first part of the exegesis, containing only 976 pages.

Critics’ views range widely on the literary quality of the theological novels. Darko Suvin has expressed his opinion that Dick’s earlier work is “usually inferior” to the Valis Trilogy (Suvin 385). On the other hand, in *Terminal Identity* (1993), Scott Bukatman states that “With a reduced emphasis on the broader social formations through which “reality” gains meaning, works such as *VALIS* (1981) are, to my mind, less compelling and surely less relevant” (Bukatman 55).

Whatever views scholars hold on the quality of the theological novels versus the rest of Dick’s work, they generally tend to maintain a critical barrier between them. In *Philip K. Dick: Exhilaration and Terror of the Postmodern* (2003), Christopher Palmer discusses “the question of Dick’s abandonment of politics for theology” (Palmer 223) in the Valis Trilogy. Umberto Rossi states that “the entrance of God on the literary scene of Dick’s novels changes everything, and makes everything more difficult for the critics (and the critical embarrassment around these novels is proof of this)” (Rossi 414). Indeed, there are many good reasons that critics perceive this rift in Philip K Dick’s writing. After publically disclosing his supernatural experience, it is not a leap to conclude that Dick’s mind was not functioning properly after 1974. Dick himself, throughout his fiction and nonfiction work, offers the hypothesis that he is simply mentally ill and too obsessed with attempting to find a logical explanation for what happened to him. Further, the theological novels differ from most of Dick’s other writing in many ways, the major difference
being that Christian mythology and other overtly religious topics are a major part of the narratives.

But there are good reasons to see continuities between these two periods as well. The goal for this project is to articulate an important connection between Philip K. Dick’s novels of the 1960s and the “theological” novels. Lawrence Sutin speaks of two main questions that Dick attempted to answer throughout his life: “What is Real?” and “What is Human?” (Sutin 3). I argue that Dick’s fiction is united by two themes. The first is that divinity and absolute reality are equivalent to one another. Therefore, any character that has the power to generate reality is considered a god. Second, throughout Dick’s fiction, characters attempt to gain access to the real world through popular culture as represented by mass media, and specifically advertising. Throughout Dick’s oeuvre, certain types of characters, for which I use the general term “god characters,” are present. In the novels of the 1960s, these god characters use their power over mass media to create an illusory world that bars access to an objective reality. In the theological novels, the god character uses it to deliver a message with instructions that provide a way to objective reality.

In the novels of the 1960s, the god characters manifest themselves through what I call “TV icons”. Using structuralism and poststructuralist theory, I will demonstrate that mass media allows the TV icons to acquire the godly powers of omnipresence and immortality, which they use to create a religion around advertising and consumption and a fake reality from which the other characters are unable to escape. McKee quotes Dick in a 1974 letter expressing the opinion that “I don’t feel I was ‘picked’ by a Future Force, as its instrument...anymore than when you are watching a TV program the transmitter has picked you” (qtd. in McKee 55). This is a telling metaphor because it shows the importance Dick placed on television as the transmitter of information. In the first chapter, I use the novels Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (1968), The Simulacra (1964), Lies, Inc. (1984, originally published as The Unteleported Man in 1964) and The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich (1964) to identify these characters, as well as the
theme of communal experiences, and analyze the way in which advertising-as-religion acts as an unsatisfactory solution to the quest for a true reality in these books.

According to Sutin, much of Dick’s work is autobiographical. The theological novels possess this quality much more overtly than the others, but many of Dick’s female characters, for example, are based on one or another of his five wives. Similarly, Dick spent many of his formative years working at two Berkeley stores owned by the same man, Herb Hollis, where he performed, among other duties, the job of a radio and television salesman and writer of advertising copy for the shops (Sutin 51-53). His writing clearly reflects this firsthand experience with advertising and mass media.

For Dick, advertising and mass media are not things to be dismissed as background amusement. Their presence in the world deserves our close attention because of the impact they have on our lives. In “Future Advertising: Dick’s Ubik and the Digital Ad”, Mark Poster states that “for Dick, TV ads are not trivial, obnoxious interference with entertainment; nor are they artless products of pecuniary impulses. They are instead the spiritual center of the world” (Poster 28). Scott Bukatman states that in Dick’s fictional worlds, “The imploded environment of television serves as an ersatz collectivism [and] advertisements detail the horror of public existence” (Bukatman 50). In the first chapter, I demonstrate the way TV icons as god characters bring these two points of view together. By using their power over mass media, they are able to generate a sort of reality, which allows them to be worshipped as gods by the other characters. However, this is an inauthentic reality that only serves to obscure the real and disassociate Dick’s characters further from it and one another.

In the second chapter, I focus primarily on Valis (1981) and The Divine Invasion (1981) in order to demonstrate that the god character that made its entrance in the theological novels is a positive manifestation of the TV icons in the earlier books. The TV icons were worshipped because they used mass media to create the illusion of being able to generate reality. The god of the theological novels, on the other hand, is the authentic god Dick’s characters have been
searching for throughout his novels because he actually possesses the power to impart reality onto objects. Mass media and advertising continue to be used for a divine purpose, but this time to deliver a message of salvation which is equivalent to a path to absolute reality.

One of the reasons Dick’s sixties novels are not often examined in conjunction with the theological novels is that many critics believe Dick turned to Christianity in the latter books. In McKee’s study, *Pink Beams of Light and God in the Gutter*, he examines primarily the full unedited, unpublished version of Dick’s exegesis, as well as *Valis* and some of Dick’s letters. McKee attempts to prove that while many critics believe that Dick’s theological writings were Gnostic in nature, they are in fact Christian in the more traditional sense. While McKee traces some interesting connections between the Exegesis and Christian doctrine, to argue that Dick’s theology was Christian more so than it was Gnostic seems rather unsatisfactory, especially when one considers the Valis Trilogy and specifically *Valis*. *Valis* is a novelization of Dick’s 2-3-74 experiences and contains a condensed version of the Exegesis. In *Valis*, the main character, Horselover Fat, constantly wavers between Gnosticism, conventional Christianity, and other religious texts in order to explain his belief system. For example, in Chapter 5, Fat quotes the New Testament in which it says that “we shall be like [God] because we shall see him as he really is” (Dick 68). To Fat, this is proof that he had a theophany in which he was enlightened of the fact that he is one with God. Immediately after this realization, Fat puts forth a theory that stems from this argument, which is that “Man and the true God are identical…but a lunatic blind creator and his screwed-up world separate man from God…This is Gnosticism. In Gnosticism, man belongs with God against the world and the creator of the world” (Dick 68). Fat employs many different texts in the construction of his personal philosophy. Therefore, I believe that while Dick draws on a variety of mythologies in order to explain 2-3-74 and create his theory of the universe, it cannot be said that he adheres strictly or even predominantly to any pre-established doctrine. In fact, I believe the many references to established religions draw attention away from the secular themes in the theological novels: namely, that advertising and mass media has turned our
attention away from authentic reality, which includes a connection with other human beings. This connection is what constitutes Dick’s idea of divinity. This is a critical gap in Philip K. Dick criticism that I intend to work towards correcting.

To this end, I explore the hypothesis that the TV icons in the earlier novels are a manifestation of the “lunatic blind creator” that Fat speaks of in *Valis*. I argue against the theory, which seems to be the predominant one in Philip K. Dick criticism, that god only “appeared” in Dick’s theological novels and that the god of the Valis Trilogy is Christ. Rather, the god of the Valis Trilogy is the result of the evolution of the god character throughout Dick’s body of work. McKee quotes Dick’s 1977 letter in which he describes the concept of mimicry: “Zebra [one of Dick’s names for the god of *Valis* and the exegesis] mimics our reality. In a sense, Zebra *is* our reality, posing as an infinitude of separate objects.” (qtd. in McKee 61). McKee expands on this: “Zebra, the mimicking being, does not simply pretend to be our reality...In some sense its mimicry is more authentic than the objects themselves which it mimics; its divine fakery is more real than our mundane actuality.” (McKee 61). Thus, Zebra, the god character of the theological novels, mimics the mediums that the god characters of the 1960s novels use – advertising, mass media – to occlude reality, in order to deliver its message of absolute reality. Dick’s characters live in a world where their idea of reality is created by advertising and mass media. Therefore, the only way for the true god to communicate with them is by using these mediums. Using mimicry, this god takes the figures of mass media and imparts the quality of realness onto them so that they may guide the other characters to a perception of absolute reality.

There is an Appendix at the end of *Valis* that lists fifty-two theses from Horselover Fat’s exegesis, his musings on the nature of the universe that have appeared in the novel. Thesis 14 reads: “The universe is information and we are stationary in it, not three-dimensional and not in space and time. The information fed to us we hypostatize into the phenomenal world” (Dick 230). The TV icons of the sixties novels use mass media to feed people information that leads them to hypostatize an inauthentic reality. Another one of Dick’s names for the god of *Valis* is a
“plasmate” or “living information” (Dick 231). This plasmate can bond with a human to create a “homeoplasmate” (Dick 232), a being that can perceive true reality. Thesis 26 reads: “It must be realized that when all the homeoplasmates were killed in 70 C.E. real time ceased; more important, it must be realized that the plasmate has now returned and is creating new homeoplasmates, by which it has destroyed the Empire and started up real time” (Dick 232).

Before 1974, in Dick’s fictional environment, the world was inauthentic because the blind gods, the TV icons of the sixties novels, had been using information to create an illusion that covers up reality. After 1974, the plasmate Zebra uses information to reveal the world that has henceforth been covered up. In the Valis Trilogy, characters obtain their divine message through popular films, popular music, and television commercials. As in the novels of the sixties, mass media is still the divine language; it is simply being used for a different purpose.

Although he does not spend a lot of time on analyzing Dick’s fiction in his biography, Lawrence Sutin states that in Valis, “the path to God lies through scattered pop-trash clues” (Sutin 259). If one considers this in conjunction with what Scott Bukatman says about advertising and TV serving as an “ersatz collectivism” and to “detail the horror of public existence” in Dick’s earlier work, it becomes clear that the theme of advertising as a divine tool has a direct and crucial impact throughout Philip K. Dick’s writing.

By approaching Philip K. Dick through the god character, I would like to construct a more coherent picture of Dick’s entire body of work, rather than concentrating on the effects 2-3-74 had on his writing. By looking at the god of Valis and The Divine Invasion in conjunction with the TV icon god characters of the earlier novels which are not affiliated with Christianity or any other religion, I will also be exploring some of the under-examined secular aspects of the theological novels. Using the work of the above critics and others, I want to demonstrate how the two themes of the equivalence of divinity and reality, and the use of mass media and advertising for divine purposes brings Philip K. Dick’s work together. These themes demonstrate that, rather
than a disjointed collection of novels, Dick’s fictional body of work can be seen as a single coherent narrative.
Chapter 1

New and Improved Reality! Worshipping the Pure Simulacrum

The purpose of this chapter is to determine the way in which advertising acts as a religion in Philip K. Dick's novels of the 1960s. This theme is established through two motifs: the communal experience as it appears in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich* (1965); and the TV icon as god character that appears in *Lies, Inc.* (1984, first published as *The Unteleported Man* in 1966), *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), and *The Simulacra* (1964). Advertising becomes a religion because, for Philip K. Dick's characters, a god is someone with the power to create reality. The communal experiences, as well as the TV icons, promise Dick's characters a way to a common reality. This reality, however, is inauthentic, and therefore does not bring Dick's characters the contentment they seek: a connection to a common, authentic reality and other human beings.

In his personal philosophy, which is inextricably tied to his fiction, Dick illustrates the concept of common reality through the idea of the *idios kosmos* (private world) versus the *koinos kosmos* (shared world), which he borrows from the Ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus.

Gabriel McKee, in *Pink Beams of Light and God in the Gutter: The Science Fictional Religion of Philip K. Dick*, defines what this duality meant for Dick. The *idios kosmos* is a unique private world, one's individual perception. The *koinos kosmos* is the shared world that everyone can perceive. To this end, Dick says that "No person can tell which parts of his total world view is *idios kosmos* and which is *koinos kosmos*, except by the achievement of a strong empathetic rapport with other people" (qtd. in McKee 21). In the 1960s novels, Dick's characters attempt to reach the *koinos kosmos* through the use of consumer products. These products claim to provide a communal experience which acts as a metaphor for watching television commercials. These communal experiences seem to guarantee authenticity because many people share them simultaneously. Therefore, these experiences become a sort of religious rite. Advertising and mass media lead Dick's characters to believe that if they use certain consumer products or
worship certain media personalities, it will give them access to a common reality. Instead, they become trapped in an inauthentic world that only acts to distract them from reality rather than achieve it. In this way, Dick expresses his belief that advertising leads people to forget the difference between reality and illusion, and accept the latter for the former.

Like any religion, the religion of consumerism established through the communal experience motif has deity figures at its head. In the second half of this chapter I identify what I call the TV icon characters throughout Dick’s writing that act as the godheads of this religion. I examine three of these characters: President Omar Jones of Lies, Inc., Buster Friendly and Wilbur Mercer of Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, and Nicole Thibodeaux of The Simulacra. Using advertising and mass media, these god characters wield absolute power not only over the other characters’ lives, but also over their very perception of reality. The other characters look to TV icons for guidance to an absolute reality. However, the reality that the TV icons create using the language of advertising, though it claims to provide a path to the koinos kosmos, is in truth unrelated to what is for Dick the true reality and only acts to conceal the real world, leaving Dick’s characters unsatisfied. This is because this illusory reality does not provide the empathetic bond that, for Dick, is needed to reach the koinos kosmos (shared world).

Two critics of postmodern SF literature aptly describe the communal experience as it appears in the work of Philip K. Dick. In talking about radio show contestants in Myths and Structures (1970), Jean Baudrillard says that “They have had what they wanted: communion – or, rather, that modern, technical, aseptic form of communion that is communication, ‘contact’” (Baudrillard 103). Scott Bukatman, in Terminal Identity (1993), states that “In the society of the spectacle, all images are advertisements for the status quo… A citizenry alienated by the industrial-capitalist mode of production is granted an illusion of belonging and participation: the fragmentation of the productive and social realms is replaced by the appearance of coherence and wholeness” (Bukatman 37). Baudrillard’s and Bukatman’s postmodern subject attempts to use technology and consumerism in order to reach commonality with other people. In the same way,
Dick’s characters attempt to reach a common, objective reality through the communal experience, but only succeed in consuming the illusion of such a thing. This quest for a common reality shared with other people is a divine one in Dick’s fiction.

A powerful example of this struggle for a common reality through consumer products that promise a communal experience appears in the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). In that world, the majority follows a religion called Mercerism, named after Wilbur Mercer, a man of unclear origins. Mercerism seems to contrast with Christian ideals, which emphasize avoiding excess of physical possessions. For example, in the New Testament of the Bible, it says that “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. – Matthew 19:23-24. In the world of Mercer, one cannot reach god unless one participates in the system of consumption. A central rite of Mercerism seems to be the mental and physical “fusing” with Mercer as he ascends a hill while rocks are being hurled at him. During this experience, the participant becomes Mercer. According to the description of John Isodore performing this ritual toward the beginning of the novel, it is done using a “black empathy box” (Dick 17) with “twin handles” (Dick 18) which one grasps in order to experience the fusion. It is important to note that, being a household item, the empathy box is a common consumer good. The television advertises the empathy box and thus pushes the idea that all who want to function in society must purchase one. John Isodore experiences the mental fusion with Mercer “As did everyone who at this moment clutched the handles” (Dick 18). The empathy box seemingly provides a *koinos kosmos* because everyone has the same experience simultaneously: that of being Wilbur Mercer. However, the only type of connection it provides to its users is the commonality of all having bought this product.

The connection of the empathy box to mass media becomes apparent when the light it produces is compared to an “imitation, [a] feeble TV image” (Dick 18). It is a poor copy of the television, which in itself is already a primary source of representation, the image of the object rather than the object itself. Like the television, people use the empathy box to access reality. The
imagery suggests that using the empathy box is similar to watching television, but there is a sense of a religious ritual to the scene. The “usual faint smell of negative ions” makes Isodore feel “buoyed up” (Dick 18), calling forth images of burning incense. Because divinity is equal to reality in Dick’s work, Dick’s characters hold anything that claims to produce reality, such as the empathy box or the television, in sacred reverence.

The picture the empathy box produces appears as “apparently random colors, trails, and configurations which, until the handles were grasped, amounted to nothing” (Dick 18). This emphasizes the fact that without technology, and specifically television, Dick’s characters cannot perceive reality, or at least share reality with other human beings. They have become dependent on the world created by the television and have become so detached from actual reality that they no longer remember that it exists. The world of the empathy box is more real to Isodore than what is outside of it. When he is grasping the handles, “the mutual babble of everyone else in fusion broke the illusion of aloneness” (Dick 19). Here, Isodore describes aloneness as the illusion when the actual illusion is the communion, and Isodore is truly standing alone in his living room. The dream world of the empathy box eclipses Isodore’s actual reality, until it is inaccessible to him.

Empathy, a central concept in *Sheep*, speaks to the dehumanizing effect Dick believes mass media and advertising have on people living in the contemporary world. Rick Deckard, the android bounty hunter, administers the “Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test” because “empathy...existed only within the human community” (Dick 26). However, during the course of the novel, several characters, including Rick Deckard, question their own identity as androids or humans. Perhaps the reason for this is that advertising and mass media has made the people of *Sheep* forget how to empathize with each other. They have been disconnected from the *koinos kosmos* and connected into the illusory world of the television.

Other signs of religion through advertising and consumption occur in *Sheep*. To achieve “true fusion with Mercer” (Dick 8), one must own and take care of an animal. However,
biological animals are very rare and therefore must be purchased at exorbitant prices. Society considers not owning an animal “immoral” (Dick 7) and therefore everyone strives to purchase one. Rick Deckard, the android bounty hunter, carries around a “creased, much studied copy of Sidney’s Animal and Fowl Catalogue” (Dick 7) as if it were a bible. John Isodore supports this notion when he says that “Sidney’s [Animal and Fowl Catalogue] never makes a mistake... We know that, too. What else can we depend on?” (Dick 37). The use of the plural pronoun is important here. Isodore is on the outskirts of society because he is a “special”: he is mentally deficient due to the radiation from the unknown apocalyptic event that occurred before the beginning of the novel. It is hard for him to get a job, and he does not own an animal. But when he thinks of his belief in Sidney’s Animal and Fowl Catalogue, he feels that he is part of a common reality. Again, the commonality of the characters in Sheep does not consist of a joint world but rather individuals in a system of consumption. Further proof of animal ownership’s primary function as a symbolic religious ritual is that for those who cannot afford a real animal, an “electric” one can be manufactured for a much lower price. Even if the people of Sheep cannot consume in the prescribed way of Mercerism, they must still perform the symbolic ritual of consumption. An animal, like a Christian cross, acts purely as a symbol of faith in Mercerism.

The scene in which Rick Deckard finally purchases a living animal with the bounty money he receives from killing androids at the end of the novel is important to this idea of consumption as religion in Sheep. The analogy of the animal salesman to the car salesman is unmistakable, even comical, here. After Deckard inquires about rabbits, the salesman comes back with an up-sell pitch: “I’d like to see you step up to the goat-class where I feel you belong. Frankly you look more like a goat man to me” (Dick 147). In fact, when Deckard first attempts to purchase an animal in the beginning of the novel he thinks to himself that “They expect you to car-trade, like in the old days” (Dick 28). Deckard’s goat is identical to the car in its standing as a consumer object, and Mercerism connects salvation directly to this consumer object in the world of Sheep. Instructions for how to attain this salvation can only be found among the pages of the
consumer catalogue where these objects are advertised. Because the characters in *Sheep* rely on advertising as a religion to create their reality, they must follow the rules that the system of consumption dictates or risk being left out of the religion.

While *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968) contained a religion based on consumption, in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich* (1965), consumption turns into a religious experience. In this novel, colonists on Mars purchase miniature layouts which, when taken with an illegal substance called Can-D, transports them into the layouts and allows them to become, momentarily, the “perfect” couple (the women become Perky Pat, and the men become her boyfriend, Walt) with the “perfect” consumerist lifestyle. When Dick describes the sequence in which the colonists take Can-D and are transformed into the Perky Pat fantasy, the narrative characterizes their happiness primarily using consumer products: “He owned a Jaguar XXB sports ship...His shirts came from Italy and his shoes were made in England” (Dick 42). It is as though they are transported into the commercials they see on their television screen. As in the case of the electric sheep replacing the living one, the colonists in *Eldrich* are unable to really consume because Mars remains an undeveloped planet. Therefore, they must act out the rituals of consumption using their miniature set ups and worshiping the icons of commercials.

When the imaginary Walt, actually six of the male colonists in one body, is about to meet up for a date with Perky Pat (who encloses six of the female colonists herself), the thing that convinces her to join him is that she will be able to show him the bathing suit she just purchased, specifically a new one, and not the old one that’s “completely out of fash now” (Dick 44). In describing the bathing suit, Perky Pat says “It’s really daring, it hardly exists, actually you sort of have to have faith to believe in it.” (Dick 44). It is easy to brush this off as a playful turn of phrase, one that is even somewhat cliché. Yet the use of the word faith underscores Dick’s religious discourse. The bathing suit is an illusion; its only value is symbolic. Instead of providing the colonists with access to the real world of Earth which they are unable to experience, the Perky Pat layouts trap them in the inauthentic world of advertising, one that has no relation to actual
reality except to make the colonists forget that it exists. Therefore, in order to believe in the bathing suit and the world in which it functions, the colonists have to develop a religious faith.

This propagation of the production/consumption system appears in other SF as well. Part of the conditioning propaganda that children are required to submit to in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) for example, is the slogan “Ending is better than mending” (Huxley 55). This is a strong example of the idea of consumption for consumption’s sake in Huxley’s novel and a message against the evils of capitalism. Indeed, many critics read Philip K. Dick as primarily an anti-capitalist writer. Eric S. Rabkin in “Irrational Expectations; or, How Economics and the Post Industrial World Failed Philip K. Dick” states that “nearly everything – people, goods, time, even reality – can be replicated or mass produced” in Dick’s fiction (Rabkin 185). While Dick’s work certainly contributes to anti-capitalist discourse, I believe that the manic push for consumption in his novels also serves to underscore advertising’s ability to distract people from the idea of reality.

The reader learns about the systematized worship of mass media in *Eldrich* through a colonist named Sam Regan, who explains the difference between “a believer [who] affirm[s] the miracle of translation – the near sacred moment in which the miniature artifacts no longer merely represented Earth but *became* Earth” and an unbeliever to whom “the layouts were merely symbols of a world which none of them could any longer experience” (Dick 36). This parodies the Catholic versus Protestant notions of the Eucharist. The Catholics believe that the communion cracker and wine become the actual body of Christ during the Eucharist. The Protestants believe that the food and wine are merely symbolic. However, this idea of the way a symbol applies to its corresponding reality can also be applied to post-structuralist thought. In order to understand the way that the layouts in *Palmer Eldrich* relate to the reality they claim to represent, it is helpful to refer to Jean Baudrillard’s concept of the progressive phases of the image.

In “The Procession of Simulacra”, Jean Baudrillard discusses how simulation is opposed to representation insofar as representation is “the principal of the equivalence of the sign and the
real” (Baudrillard 6). The layouts in *Palmer Eldrich* promise to deliver this equivalence of the Perky Pat experience, which is the sign, to the authentic reality of Earth. Baudrillard lists four successive phases of the image as it undergoes the process of simulation:

“[1] it is the reflection of a profound reality;  
[2] it masks and denatures a profound reality;  
[3] it masks the absence of a profound reality;  
[4] it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum”  

(Baudrillard 6).

When the colonists participate in the communal experience of the Perky Pat layouts, they are experiencing these phases of the image. Worshipping what they believe to be an equivalence of the sign and the real, the actual subject of the colonists’ reverence is the pure simulacrum. The believers in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich* have adapted the fourth and final of the successive phases of the image: for them, the images they see during the Perky Pat experience have become their own illusory reality, their own pure simulacrum which is not connected to any physical reality. The unbelievers still cling to the third phase of the image: they believe that the Perky Pat dream world is a symbol whose signifier is an authentic Earth which actually exists somewhere. This is where Baudrillard’s theory becomes important. The TV icons claim to be able to generate reality through mass media and advertising. However, the actual end product is Baudrillard’s pure simulacrum which exists independently from any reality and thus becomes its own inauthentic reality. Perky Pat and Walt’s date takes place on a beach, but in the actuality of the book, Earth has become too hot for people to safely be able to go outside any longer. Therefore, those actually living on Earth would never be able to visit a beach. While the colonists believe they are having an authentic Earthling experience, what they are experiencing no longer exists, if it ever did. Thus, the miniature layouts of consumer products create an illusion of an objective reality while contributing to the disassociation Dick’s characters feel from it.
This disassociation from an objective reality is felt not only in regards to the world, but other human beings as well. Even while they are in the fantasy worlds, Dick's characters fail to achieve a *koinos kosmos*. During the Walt and Perky Pat experience, while the colonists have no problem enjoying the things their avatars have supposedly purchased, once it is time for something interpersonal or intimate the fantasy ceases to be perfect. At the moment when Pat and Walt are to (presumably) make love on the beach, Sam Regan is too worried about his supply of Can-D back in his hovel, the moment is ruined, and the fantasy ends (Dick 47). The Perky Pat layouts are supposed to provide a shared experience and contact with other human beings and the environment of Earth, but instead the colonists are each trapped in the commercial fantasy world to the point where they are not even able to connect with others in the same fantasy. The fantasies achieve the propagation of consumption without the benefit of communion with other people. Again, this dynamic parallels John Isodore's situation in *Sheep*. John feels that the empathy box makes him part of a community when in reality he remains alone and the box is creating a further rift between him and the world.

Though the colonists of *Eldrich* and John Isodore of *Sheep* claim fulfillment, it is never a sustained contentment, and they are not able to enjoy anything in their personal lives. In fact, happiness is just another product that those in charge of advertising and mass media push on Dick's characters. The store that Rick Deckard calls in the beginning of *Sheep* to try to haggle for an animal he cannot afford is called the Happy Dog Pet Shop. Pat is perky, and in *Sheep*, the other iconic figure, on par with Wilbur Mercer, is the TV show host Buster Friendly. Happiness is like a slogan drilled into Dick's characters' heads using the marketing strategy of repetition. At no point however, even during translation to the fantasy worlds, do any of them actually experience the emotion. Even what Walt and Pat feel toward their possessions can at best be described as superficial pride rather than actual joy. Dick's characters are unsatisfied with the illusion of a joint reality, no matter how perfect it may claim to be: being unable to reach the real thing makes them unhappy. For Dick's characters, then, the only path to contentment is to reach a
profound reality where the sign is equivalent to the real. The worlds they reach through the communal experiences centered on consumerism abolish the real entirely, and serve to cut the participants off from the real by forcing them to accept the illusory worlds.

If reality and divinity are equivalent in Dick’s fiction, and when mass media and advertising claim the ability to create reality, then those in control of advertising and mass media become gods. In Dick’s novels of the sixties, I will refer to these got characters as TV icons. The TV icons possess two crucial characteristics that grant them their divinity through mass media and advertising. The first is omnipresence, which allows them to permeate the existence of the other characters until they have completely overtaken their reality. The second is immortality: television allows these characters to detach themselves from their signifiers, making the signifiers into TV icons which can live forever because they do not possess a physical counterpart and have become pure simulacra. This is what makes the TV icons evil deities. They are the opposite of authentic reality, which is equivalent to divinity in both Dick’s SF and personal philosophy.

One such TV icon is President Omar Jones of *Lies, Inc.* (1984). As in *Sheep*, many natives of Earth have immigrated to a colony, called Whale’s Mouth, on a distant planet. However, the trip by teleportation is one way only, and the Whale’s Mouth immigrants are unable to neither return nor report back anything about the new colony. The only information those left on Earth have of Whale’s Mouth are the “3-D, multi-color, brilliantly artistic, exciting brochures displaying the ecstatic life beyond the Telpor nexus” and the “ceaseless, drive-you-mad [TV] ads all day and night” (Dick 25). The way in which advertising provides omnipresence is already beginning to emerge here. The world of *Lies, Inc.* over-saturates its subjects with advertising language. Even the brochures themselves have to be promoted with four different adjectives before one gets to the “ecstatic” immigrant life. The description has an almost manic feel to it: the advertising must not stop so that the subject is continuously thinking about the world that it depicts. S/he is constantly in this dream world, until the dream world becomes the reality that occludes everything. Like the Perky Pat fantasy, the inauthentic world that the characters of *Lies,*
live in through advertising has no resemblance to the actual state of things. The colony at Whale’s Mouth is eventually revealed to be a world at war, with its immigrants used for labor.

President Omar Jones is the president of Newcolonizedland, the colony at Whale’s Mouth. Although there is talk of brochures and ads, he is the main pronouncer of the message of emigration in the novel. The first time he appears in the narration, it is as a recorded image on TV (and indeed that is the only way he is ever encountered) delivering his message: “Well you folks back home, all bunched together there in those little boxes you live in – we greet you, wish you luck...And we’re just wonderin’, folks, when you all are going to team up with us and join us here in Newcolonizedland. Eh?” (Dick 48). Supposedly coming from an important government official, Omar Jones’ colloquial talk sounds unexpectedly more like a used car advertisement than a presidential speech. Omar Jones is described to be the “highest official in residence” (Dick 47) at Whale’s Mouth, but just what his political power entails is never clear. Rather, he seems to be primarily the spokesperson for the advertising campaign of emigration. His divine power to create reality comes from his monopoly over the television set.

Mass media grants Omar Jones the divine power of omnipresence by allowing him to remain an oppressive force throughout the novel without ever appearing in person. The main character of the novel is Rachmael, a man who decides to make the long journey to the new colony by spaceship so that he can report back on the actual conditions there. When he gets to Whale’s Mouth, a policeman drugs him and when he wakes up, finds himself in a room with strange human beings, called weevils, who turn out to have psychic powers that negate the illusion to which the rest of Newcolonizedland’s citizens are subject. While they are speaking to him and each other, President Omar Jones performs on TV. In this moment in the novel, the way in which television grants the godly power of omnipresence is especially clear. Omar Jones is able to be the most overpowering force in the scene without being physically present. It is the sign of Omar Jones, the image on the television screen that allows him to overtake the psychic environment of the room, not the physical reality of the man behind the TV icon.
The content of Omar Jones' speech reveals the degree to which advertising possesses the characteristics of a religion in *Lies, Inc.* On the television, the President is engrossed in "dilating on the rapture of one's first experience at seeing a high-grade rexeroid ingot slide from the backyard atomic furnace which, for a nominal sum, could be included in the purchase of a home at the colony — and at virtually no money down" (Dick 94). The overlapping use of religious language — rapture — and the use of advertising language — no money down! — makes the combination of salesman and god in the figure of Jones apparent. Indeed, even though Jones is clearly executing a sales pitch, the reaction to his words of one of the weevils is as though he'd been listening to a prophet: "This man...is speaking for us; it's everyone here in this room up there on that screen...to deny him is for us to repudiate our own selves" (Dick 94). Omar Jones’ spectators have become completely consumed in the fake utopian world on Mars that he advertises, they are living entirely in the universe conjured up by the television.

The idea that irreality or the pure simulacrum is evil is illustrated through Omar Jones' speech. As the characters of *Lies, Inc.* realize that Omar Jones' omnipresence comes from an illusion, Dick depicts him as progressively more sinister and frightening. Rachmael's experience with the weevils is a highly disorienting sequence for him. This is because he has just been shot with LSD and is still recovering from the hallucinations it has caused. Further, he is not sure about whether he is on Terra or Newcolonizedland, who the people with him are or how he got there. The reader feels Rachmael's confusion and disorientation. Yet the one thing that remains constant is President Omar’s image on the TV screen. As the situation becomes more and more surreal, the reader is constantly reminded of the television, the "never-failing" (Dick 100), "unending" (Dick 117) President Omar Jones on the TV set in the living room. As Rachmael's perception of the situation changes, so do the adjectives used to describe Jones. At first he is "long-familiar" (Dick 94). Then, he then becomes "hypnotic, droning" (Dick 95). When the other characters in the scene are discovering the truth about their surroundings, he is "enlarged to godlike proportions" (Dick 97). The more it is acknowledged that he is the center point of the
present reality, the more frightening and unfamiliar Omar Jones becomes. After one of the weevils, Gretchen Borbman, bids everyone to “re-examine the structure of the ‘reality’ you think is in jeopardy. Yes, the TV set” (Dick 122), Omar Jones’ speech becomes “the crushing din of the TV set with its compulsively hypomanic dwarfed and stunted figure” (Dick 123) and an “oozing cyclopean entity” (Dick 124). As the fact of the Omar Jones-manufactured reality becomes apparent, his presence becomes more oppressive, overpowering, and terrifying. This further emphasizes that a manufactured reality is not enough for Dick’s characters; they need an authentic reality to be content. The more apparent it is that the reality they have come to expect is nothing but Omar Jones’ creation, and that he is not creating reality but rather illusion, the more evil his presence becomes.

The irony is increased by the fact that these particular characters are some of the few that can see through the illusion that Jones propagates. For that very reason they are kept in isolation until they can be “cured”. In classic Dickian fashion, those who can see through illusion are branded insane. The difference between Dick’s schizophrenics and the weevils, however, is that schizophrenia has been established as a mental disorder: Dick must change the reader’s established opinion that schizophrenics do not see a “real” reality. Thus, it is possible to maintain more objectivity towards the weevils: the reader is unsure which is the illusion and which is the true environment of Whale’s Mouth. This makes the fervent response to Omar Jones’ speech all the more akin to a religious experience. In order to believe what Jones is saying, the weevils must disregard their own senses and, just as in the case of Perky Pat’s bathing suit, have faith.

Two deity figures that claim to be able to create reality appear in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*. In *Lies, Inc.*, no official religious leader character opposes Omar Jones. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*’s TV icon Buster Friendly, however, has a mirror rival in Wilbur Mercer. In *Lies, Inc.*, Omar Jones is both the face of mass media and the deity worshipped for his apparent ability to generate reality. In *Sheep*, however, Buster Friendly is the media icon while Wilbur Mercer is the openly acknowledged religious figure. Therefore, it is important to
examine whether Mercer’s presence in the world of *Sheep* undermines Buster Friendly’s standing as a god character.

Although Friendly and Mercer are officially rivals in the novel, conspicuous similarities between them are present throughout the narrative. Buster Friendly is the host of a wildly popular television show in *Sheep* which combines news, entertainment, advertising, gossip, and politics. The first time we hear of Buster Friendly, he is doing a news program during which a “commercial...for Mounteback Lead Codpieces” comes on (Dick 2). The show’s title, Buster Friendly and His Friendly Friends, is another example of the manic happiness that is pushed on Dick’s characters as a consumer product. The codpieces presumably protect men from radiation that is the result of nuclear war that has created Sheep’s world. This is when Rick Deckard’s wife Iran turns the TV set off and notices the emptiness and lack of life in the apartments around them, feeling that she should be properly depressed at the situation. Without Buster Friendly, Iran is faced with the fact of her inability to experience any personal emotion or any reality whatsoever not connected with the empathy box or the TV: “I realized how unhealthy it was, sensing the absence of life, not just in this building but everywhere, and not reacting” (Dick 3). Advertising has taken away Iran’s ability to empathize, making her into an android. Even this crisis of realization, however, has to be resolved within the system because Iran uses her “Penfield mood organ” that she’s “grateful we can afford” to help her experience despair (Dick 3). The company name attached to the product is important. It makes one connect the object to the marketing campaign by which it was sold. And, because they share the function of mood alteration, it is hard not to compare the mood organ with the empathy box. Here, a connection between Mercer and Buster is already beginning to form. Both push products prescribed through advertising that allow them to produce an illusory reality. Though the two products come from different sources, the difference between them is essentially no more important than that between a toaster and a microwave oven.
As the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that, despite their official opposition to one another, Mercer and Friendly are both in fact TV icons. The characters of *Sheep* are not able to look outside these TV icons for an authentic reality because mass media allows them to occlude reality completely with illusion by being omnipresent. When John Isodore meets the android Rachael Rosen, he expresses the same incredulity at her lack of knowledge of both Mercer and Friendly: “It seemed odd to him that this girl had never heard of Earth’s most knee slapping TV comic” (Dick 56) and “Don’t you participate in fusion? Don’t you own an empathy box?” (Dick 58). While Buster and Mercer seemingly exist in two very different realms, they are on the same level of recognition as icons. They represent a society without whom its citizens would have no identity. Like Omar Jones, mass media and advertising grant Buster and Mercer the divine quality of omnipresence. Isodore describes Mercer as “an archetypal entity from the stars, superimposed on our culture by a cosmic template” (Dick 61). Mercer is not part of culture, he is culture. Similarly, Buster Friendly’s show is on both TV and radio twenty-three hours a day not only around all of Earth, but the entire universe, even far out where it is not known that life exists (Dick 64-65). When Rachael Rosen mentions to Isidore that a bounty hunter enjoys murder, he is skeptical because “Buster Friendly…had never mentioned it” (Dick 129) and “It’s not in accord with present-day Mercerian ethics” (Dick 129-130). These are the two sources that comprise reality. If it is not found in either, it does not exist.

As TV icons, Buster Friendly and Wilbur Mercer obscure reality with an illusion in both space and time. They are both everywhere in space and they exist forever in time. This is what allows them to create a reality that the other characters find believable. An important concept that grants these figures immortality and makes them into god characters is that they are not men but icons. Listening to Friendly’s show, Isidore wonders why Buster dislikes Mercerism. He decides it is because Buster and Mercer are in competition: “They’re fighting for control of our psychic selves” (Dick 66). When Isidore shares this revelation with his boss, he expresses the opinion that Mercer will win because he is eternal in his unending uphill battle. His boss replies that “Buster is
immortal, like Mercer. There’s no difference” (Dick 67). Here, Jean Baudrillard’s successive phases of the image once again apply. The Mercer and Buster that the other characters in *Sheep* experience “[have] no relation to any reality whatsoever: [they are their] own pure simulacrum” (Baudrillard 6). Long after the beings behind these two icons have ceased to exist, the icons will persist.

As long as the illusory reality the TV icon creates is enough to act as a believable but unsatisfactory answer to Dick’s characters’ search for a *koinos kosmos*, the person behind the icon is insignificant. The moment at the end of the novel when Buster reveals Mercer as a fake is relevant here. Buster’s “top trained research workers” discover evidence that Mercer’s ascent up the hill is most likely staged, and the man known as Mercer is an unsuccessful Hollywood actor (Dick 181). Buster declares that “the figure of ‘Mercer’ could well be merely some bit player marching across a sound stage” (Dick 183). What Buster cannot comprehend is this is exactly the fact that makes Mercer immortal. Whether he was a true martyr or an actor does not matter, what matters is the icon that will exist as long as people have faith in the image.

The idea that both Buster and Mercer are pure simulacra as TV icons is emphasized by the fact that they are revealed as fake at the same moment. After Mercer’s reveal, the androids explain to Isodore that “Buster is one of us” (Dick 186). This poses a simple answer to the question of why Buster reveals Mercer: Buster is an android who is against the humans’ claim to empathy as justifications for killing his kind, and the proof of Mercer’s artificiality will put an end to that kind of thinking. Irmgard, one of the androids, claims that it proves that “everything [they] believe in is true” (Dick 182). However, the fact that the narrative reveals both artificialities at the same time points to a more complex conclusion. Just as it does not matter whether Mercer is an actor or the man who has had the experiences he claims to have, it also does not matter whether Buster is human or an android. After the exposé, John Isidore rushes to his empathy box in a panicked attempt to verify Friendly’s words. Mercer appears to him and tells him that “They [Buster and the androids] will have trouble understanding why nothing has
changed” (Dick 189). The system works with the help of both of these two figures, and it will continue to work because advertising and mass media allow them both function at the level of the signified, not the signifier.

As I mentioned earlier, besides working in tandem to create inauthentic reality, Mercer is similar to Friendly because they are both promoters of consumption: they need to keep the system of advertising going so that they may retain their powers of omnipresence and immortality. The scene after which Rick finally achieves the goal of purchasing an animal that he has had throughout the novel speaks to this idea. After Rick comes home with the goat and they get it on the roof of their apartment building, his wife Iran insists that they immediately “run downstairs and give thanks to Mercer” (Dick 150) because “it would be immoral not to fuse with Mercer in gratitude” (Dick 151). Again, Dick ties consumption to religious morality in the world of Sheep. Indeed, before Iran indulges in the empathy box she urgently inquires of her husband: “What are the monthly payments on the goat?” and upon seeing the contract is appalled at “the interest alone” (Dick 153). Similar to the weevils reacting to Omar Jones in Lies, Inc., the casual shift from religious (“give thanks to Mercer”) to economic (“monthly payments”, “contract”, “interest”) language here is another indicator of the prevalence of religion as consumption in this novel.

A third TV icon speaks to the idea of the god character as generator of a fake reality in Dick’s fiction. Nicole Thibodeaux of The Simulacra (1964) is important to include here because she also contributes to the topic of women which is a popular line of discussion among Philip K. Dick scholars. Lawrence Sutin, in his biography Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick (1989), talks of “the look and character of “the dark-haired girl” – Phil’s anima and obsession – that guided him persistently in his choice of wives and lovers and in his depiction of the ambiguous (fiercely brave/waywardly evil) heroines that appear in so many of his novels” (Sutin 22). Indeed Rachael Rosen, the android lover of Rick Dekkard in Sheep, is described as “Black-haired and slender, wearing the new huge dust-filtering glasses [and a] brightly striped long coat”
(Dick 35). Pat Conely, a woman with powerful psychic abilities who attracts Joe Chip in *Ubik* is given an entire paragraph describing her copper skin, “large dark eyes…ersatz canvas workshirt and jeans [and] heavy boots caked with what appeared to be authentic mud” (Dick 24). These descriptions give Dick’s dark-haired girls a sense of authenticity and being grounded in reality because the reader can picture their physical appearance in his or her mind.

The final TV icon to be discussed here, Nicole Thibodeaux, does not seem to quite fit the mold mentioned above. A prominent difference is that until the very end of the novel, she is not physically described at all. Nicole is the face of government. Every four years a new “der Alte” is elected by the people to be Nicole’s husband. However, Nicole holds all the political and social power. Inexplicably, Nicole has remained young and beautiful in her role as the First Lady for decades. Like the other TV icons, Nicole appears primarily as an image on a television screen. There are a number of scenes describing the act of watching Nicole, yet her appearance is left to the reader’s imagination. Nicole shares this ambiguity of appearance with Perky Pat, who’s only described physical characteristics in *Palmer Eldrich* are that she has blonde hair (Dick 43) and bigger breasts than Fran, one of the colonists inhabiting her (Dick 46). These are not Dick’s dark haired girls with their “huge, dust filtering glasses” (*Sheep* 35), “heavy boots,” and “authentic mud” (*Ubik* 24). Perhaps their descriptions remain minimal because Dick depicts them as the archetypal perfect woman, embodying whatever that means to each person. They function at the level of the signifier, and therefore have no connection to any real women. Dick describes Ian Duncan, a struggling member of the society in *The Simulacra*, as studying a textbook that contains information he needs to pass a test in order to stay in his apartment complex. The text states that it is the public that brought about Nicole’s popularity and the power she holds above the der Alte. This was in response to “a need for mother, wife, mistress, or perhaps all three? Anyhow they got what they wanted; they got Nicole and she is certainly all three and more besides” (Dick 17). By now, the pattern of the way in which a TV icon is made into a god character that seems to have the power to generate reality has emerged. An ideal image is created
through mass media which is completely separate from the actual person behind that image. This
gives the TV icon power over time, or immortality, since their image is able to exist forever. That
person then creates a need for a certain lifestyle that either they or those they empower possess.
Mass media helps to spread the need for that lifestyle everywhere, thus giving the TV icons
power over space, or omnipresence. Because of this, the average person must accept the illusion
created by the TV icons as reality, and they attribute the divine power of creating reality to the
TV icons. However, this world consists only of signifiers that do not coincide with any signified,
and thus it serves to cover up reality with pure simulacra.

Nicole upholds her power of omnipresence through advertising by making sure that her
presence is mandatory in every home, and that she is the source of the other characters’ constant
need to consume. Toward the end of the novel, Ian Duncan is once again watching Nicole on TV
“exhibiting a piece of Delft tile”: “See the tile” Nicole was murmuring in her husky voice. Don’t
you wish you had a tile like that? Isn’t it lovely?” (Dick 174). As with Omar Jones and
Rachmael, Nicole seems to be “smiling directly at him” (Dick 174), making Ian feel a false
individuality while further converting him to another identical subject in the system of
consumption. When speaking to the owner of the company that produces the der Alte simulacra
(that figure is, as in the case of all Dickian TV personalities, revealed as fake), the Assistant
Secretary of state says, “I think Nicole in general detests the old, the outworn, the
useless... Which is a good shorthand description of your chief product” (Dick 34-35). Like Perky
Pat and her bathing suits, Nicole encourages a constant change in fashion so that the consuming
subject continues to consume and never becomes permanently satisfied. Earlier in the narrative,
the TV in Ian Duncan’s living room comes on automatically, and he speculates that the program
might be “a thorough scrutiny... about a new hobby or passion of Nicole’s. Has she taken up
collecting bone-china cups?” (Dick 17). This indicates not only that Nicole’s tastes are always
changing — first the china cups, then the tiles, then on to something else — but also that these
programs are mandatory to view. In order for Nicole’s devotees to retain their faith in her
inauthentic world, they must maintain the state of the consuming subject that Jean Baudrillard describes in *Myths and Structures*: “[the consuming subject] is engaged in – has to engage in – continual activity. If not, he would run the risk of being content with what he has and becoming asocial” (Baudrillard 80). Therefore, the need to consume must remain constant, but the objects of the need must continually change.

The motif of prayers elucidates the inextricable link of the god character to advertising. The apartment building in which Ian Duncan lives has mandatory meetings for the residents, which start with a prayer. In one such prayer, the requests include to “raise the funds for the roof repairs” and “that Nicole Thibodeaux be free of her sinus headaches which have caused her not to appear before us on TV lately” (Dick 13). As in *Sheep*, financial concerns intermingle with religious ones as Nicole “appears before us” as if she is a holy spirit. However, while in *Sheep* the TV and the empathy box are separate objects with seemingly separate purposes, here the communal experience of worshipping Nicole and the consumption of entertainment media and advertising are combined within the television. Nicole’s subjects must continue to consume mass media in order to retain their faith in her.

The fact that Nicole creates an illusory reality that disassociates the other characters from their authentic reality is underscored by the idea throughout the narrative that Nicole eclipses the individual ego until it is nonexistent. Ian Duncan tells his friend Al, “What’s unreal and what’s real? To me she’s more real than anything else; then you, even. Even than myself, my own life” (Dick 122). When Ian and Al are set to perform music for Nicole at the White House Ian rejoices that “*She knows of our existence*. In that case, we really do exist...we’re brought into being, validated consensually, by Nicole’s gaze” (Dick 117). Here, Ian has become so engrossed in the world of advertising that Nicole projects, that he attributes to her not only the creation of reality, but the creation of man as well. One can picture the same words being uttered by John Isodore about Mercer: the world of advertising and mass media eclipses one’s own reality. Like a god, Nicole has the power to grant existence. Sean Cubitt, in “Consumer Discipline and the Work of
Audiencing" sees the process of gaining personal control through the consumption of media thus: “the viewer/reader...grants the fleeting phantasms of the media the opportunity to come to some kind of flesh-and-blood existence” (Cubitt 88). In the world of The Simulacra, the opposite is true. Instead of the viewer granting “the fleeting phantasms of media” a kind of existence, it is the media that is bringing the viewer into existence, and instead of a fleeting phantasm, Nicole is reality itself. For Dick, divinity means being able to perceive the reality of one’s own human existence, which Nicole takes away from her subjects.

The world that the TV icons create to obstruct reality functions at the level of the signifier. Therefore, those that have trouble with symbols and metaphors have trouble participating in society. “I don’t have a head for abstractions” Ian Duncan pleads with Nicole’s image on the TV screen, “Couldn’t I just concentrate on concrete reality?...Let me go Nicole” (Dick 18). This moment is important in two ways. First, Duncan himself is not in control of leaving Nicole’s reality, only she has the power to allow him to do so. Second, even the act of talking to Nicole on his television set shows Duncan’s inability to grasp abstractions.

The difference between the signifier of Nicole the TV icon and the signified of the person behind the icon becomes most clear when, in the last moments of the narrative, Dick finally describes Nicole. The description echoes that of his more typical female heroines: “slender and young, with short-cropped hair, wearing blue cotton trousers and moccasins and a white shirt” (Dick 228). The man who sees her is confused by her appearance: “I know her, Nat said to himself, I’ve seen her a million times. He knew her and yet he did not; it was terribly strange” (Dick 228). At this point, the country is on the verge of a revolution. Nicole has (for the moment) denounced her power and chosen to be teleported out of the White House to the rural family farm of her musician friend. She is still herself, but she is no longer the icon worshipped by the nation. Nat is seeing the signifier and not the signified, which is what he finds so uncanny. Umberto Rossi talks about the concept of the author-god in Dick’s writing: “Dick, the ultimate creator of...worlds...operates and intervenes through an archon who is no more than a servant of the real
demiurge, namely the novelist” (Rossi 182). This is one of the moments in Dick’s fiction where the concept of the author-god makes the most sense. Philip K. Dick has imparted the quality of realness onto Nicole: he has turned her from a TV image into a real person within his world. Therefore, if a god is someone with the power to create reality, then Philip K. Dick the author is god within his fictional worlds.

It is Nicole the image on TV that has all the power, the woman behind Nicole has none, and has nothing to do with that image. The fact that the current Nicole is one in a series of actresses that have been portraying the First Lady since her death decades ago emphasizes this idea of the difference between the TV icons and their signifiers. Nicole, with her power over time, lives on and stays young for decades, while the actresses that play her come and go. The TV icon, being an image only, is immortal, while the real women behind the TV icons are not.

In Philip K. Dick’s novels of the sixties, advertising and mass media have several important roles. They allow for a communal experience akin to watching television that creates an illusory common reality that acts to disassociate its participants from the real world. The participants of the communal experience come to believe this illusory reality above their real lives and in that way the TV icons use advertising to occlude the real. Advertising also gives TV icons the power to become deities of this religion of consumption. It allows them to be everywhere at once thus consuming reality with their omnipresence, and it grants them immortality by allowing them to detach the image on the TV screen from the person behind that image. By promoting the system of continual consumption, these icons retain the adherents to their religion. Thus it seems that they possess the divine power of creating reality, while only creating the illusion of reality.

The quest for a koinos kosmos continues for Dick’s characters throughout his fiction. In the Valis Trilogy, the true god reveals himself by communicating to people through advertising and mass media. Because Dick’s characters are living in a world where reality is completely occluded by the illusion created through advertising and mass media, the true god must use these mediums in order to communicate with them. Through the concept of mimicry, the true god
infiltrates the inauthentic world of Dick’s characters by copying the icons of mass media and then imparting the quality of realness onto them. Unlike Dick’s TV icons of the sixties, the god character of the theological novels actually possesses the power to create reality, which is what makes him the deity Dick’s characters, as well as the author himself, have been seeking throughout Philip K. Dick’s career.
Chapter 2

Media Solutions for Reality Access

Advertising and mass media are used for religious purposes throughout Dick’s works. In the sixties novels discussed in the previous chapter, those in control use advertising and mass media to simulate reality that acts to disassociate the other characters from authentic reality. In the theological novels about to be discussed, *Valis* (1981) and *The Divine Invasion* (1981), the true deity uses advertising and mass media in order to communicate with other characters and give them instructions on how to reach absolute reality. The true god of the Valis Trilogy possesses the power to impart the quality of realness onto objects, which is what gives him his credibility. Using this power, he infiltrates the illusory world created by advertising and replaces it with the real, a concept that Philip K. Dick called mimicry, thereby slowly releasing Dick’s fictional world from the grip of illusion. The god characters of the sixties novels, which created this illusory world in which Dick’s characters exist, appear as the Gnostic blind creator gods in the theological novels. When the gods of the sixties novels are compared to the god of the theological novels we are able to better understand Philip K. Dick’s philosophy. In the contemporary world, mass media and advertising have comprised so much of our lives that we begin to accept it as reality and worship those who create it as gods: makers of the world. The real divinity lies in the natural world that is outside of the illusions advertising and mass media produce, which includes other human beings.

*Valis* (1981) is the first and best known installment of the Valis Trilogy. The troubled main character, Horselover Fat, begins to believe that he has encountered god after he is hit with an information rich beam of pink light that reveals to him what he believes to be the key to the secrets of the universe. Phil Dick, Fat’s alter ego as well as the fictional counterpart of the author himself, is the third person narrator of this highly autobiographical novel. Fat prescribes to the Gnostic-like belief that the deity in charge of his world is a “lunatic blind creator” that has “separate[d] man from God” (Dick 68). Here, Fat is providing an appropriate description for the
TV icons of the sixties novels. Because divinity is equivalent to reality for Dick, the TV icons separate man from god by occluding reality with the illusion created by mass media and advertising. In *Valis*, however, for the first time in Dick’s fiction, an authentic God appears in order to deliver instructions on how to break through the “screwed-up world” (Dick 68) of the blind creator.

There are other clues in the novel that the evil deity Fat speaks of is the TV icon god characters of the earlier novels. Fat imagines that one of the forms the evil deity has taken is that of Dionysos. In his musings towards the end of the novel, Fat/Phil states that “if your god takes you over, it is likely that no matter what name he goes by he is actually a form of the mad god Dionysos” (Dick 179). This act of taking over is performed by the TV icons when they usurp the identity of the other characters. Hence Ian Duncan of *The Simulacra* imagines that he himself comes into existence due to the fact that Nicole acknowledges it, and the weevils of *Lies, Inc.* proclaim that to deny Omar Jones is to deny their very selves. Divinity comes from our own perception of reality. Therefore, when someone tries to manipulate others’ perception of reality, it is an evil act because it acts to disassociate people from divinity.

There are several clues, too, that *Valis*, unlike Dick’s earlier work, deals with actual rather than illusory reality. Fat’s name for the illusory reality we live in is the Black Iron Prison. Toward the beginning of the novel, Phil Dick the narrator mentions that “Once, in a cheap science fiction novel, Fat had come across a perfect description of the Black Iron Prison but set in the far future” (Dick 48-49). Although Phil sites a fictional novel, *The Android Cried Me a River*, it is reminiscent of Philip K. Dick’s earlier work: the world the TV icons created is the Black Iron Prison. Mention of the future in the above quote is relevant here as well. While most of Dick’s other fiction takes place in a usually unspecified future, *Valis* is set in 1970s California, closer to the reality of the author and his readers.

Another indication that the theological novels deal with actual reality rather than simulated reality is that in these novels people physically die. In most of Dick’s earlier work,
characters become trapped in alternate worlds or hallucinations, forget their identity, or become cryogenically frozen. Physical death, however, is rarely if ever achieved. Carl Freeman has stated that in Dick’s earlier work, “the commodity structure has produced the technology to deconstruct even the distinction between life and death” (Freeman 14). Advertising and mass media saturate everything with illusion to such a degree that even death is impossible. One of the unique aspects of the theological novels is that they feature physical death. McKee states that “Revelation, for Dick... is ‘death before dying’... the phenomenal world is subjectively destroyed for the one who experiences this, and in its place is left only the divine reality” (McKee 56). If death is a way to achieve divine reality, then this is accomplished by characters in the theological novels only. This leads to the conclusion that true reality, one outside the illusions of advertising and mass media, is achieved in these novels.

Dick presents the idea of divine answers being communicated through mass media and advertising from the beginning of Valis along with the idea of physical death. Fat’s friend Gloria commits suicide. Immediately after learning of her death, Fat “cried and watched TV” (Dick 11). Already Fat is looking for clues to a spiritual crisis on the TV screen. This moment signifies two things: Fat is accustomed to looking for answers on the television screen because he lives in a world where mass media is used to create an artificial environment that everyone believes in, and it is a foreshadowing of where Fat will look for and find divine clues later in the novel. Because the television is the primary source of reality for Fat, god uses this medium to communicate with him.

The television is a central link to divinity throughout Dick’s work. When Fat describes the pink information-rich light to his friends, he says “it’s exactly what you get as a phosphene after-image when a flashbulb has gone off in your face... Sometimes it showed up on a TV screen” (Dick 20). At this point it is helpful to recall that the empathy box in Sheep is also compared to an “imitation, feeble TV image” (Dick 18). Similarly, as part of his divine experience, Fat describes seeing the contemporary world superimposed onto the world of ancient
Rome thus: "he experienced a superimposition of the two for a while, like techniques familiar in movies. In photography" (Dick 41). Whatever divine being is speaking to Fat, it is using the same instruments that the TV icon god characters of the sixties novels used in order to create their illusory world.

In fact, there is a direct analogy between commercials and divine teachings in *Valis*. McKee quotes Dick as saying that "God speaks to us from popular novels and films" and that god is "found at the outskirts or trash or bottom level of this world" (qtd. in McKee 59). McKee then connects this to Dick's discussion of Christ's parables (McKee 59-60). This idea surfaces in *Valis* as well. Fat tries to explain to his friend Sherri that "Christ veiled his teachings in parable form so that the multitude – that is, the many outsiders – would not understand" (Dick 75). If god's teachings are hidden in popular culture, then there is perhaps no better analogy in popular culture to parables than that of a television commercial: a short allegorical story designed to convey a message. Indeed, when Fat decides to embark on a journey to find the source of the pink light, he compares it to an "American Express Travelers' Checks TV ad" (Dick 127). This reference seems out of place in the conversation the characters are involved in at the moment, but it gains meaning in light of Dick's idea of parables. Just as Christ communicated with his disciples through parables, the god of the Valis Trilogy communicates with other characters through television commercials. This emphasizes the fact that for Dick's characters, advertising has replaced authentic reality. God is no longer able to communicate with them directly because they have forgotten that anything exists beyond their illusory world.

While the god of the Valis Trilogy shares characteristics with Christ, there are also parallels to the TV icons. However, the TV icons possess the inauthentic versions of the characteristics the god of *Valis* shares with them. The TV icon god characters of the sixties novels achieved immortality through advertising by becoming pure simulacra. The actual men and women behind the TV icons have nothing to do with their all powerful signifier on the TV screen. When Fat is describing Zebra, one of his names for the god character appearing in the novel, he
says that it is “pure living information. Immortal, benign, intelligent and helpful” (Dick 120). While the TV icons detached themselves from their signifiers, Zebra never had a signifier to begin with. It is pure information, and thus a pure symbol that has immortality because it does not possess a physical counterpart.

Mass media surfaces once again to deliver a divine message when Fat and his friends find the information they had been looking for in a film bearing the novel’s name. The movie contains the same information that Fat received through the pink light but in a hidden form. The group is only able to decipher the message they need to continue their quest to locate the true divinity with access to reality by performing a literary analysis of the film and finding recurring images, motifs, and metaphors (Dick 148-149). Umberto Rossi, in *The Twisted Worlds of Philip K. Dick* (2011), believes that this tendency for the god of *Valis* to create worlds which could then be deciphered like a book points to the idea of the author as god (Rossi 224). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, this is an interesting point and certainly makes sense in light of the importance Dick places on texts in general throughout his work. I would add, however, that Dick imparts godly powers not just on the author, but on the reader as well. Both the TV icon gods of the sixties novels and the god of the theological novels use languages consisting of symbols for their purposes. For Dick’s characters, the path to divinity lies in being able to interpret the correct language. Divinity lies outside of the world of mass media and in other people.

This also speaks to another possibility touched on by Rossi in relation to his author-god hypothesis. Rather than a Christian god, the god of the Valis Trilogy may be the representation of humanity as a whole. By linking mass media to divinity and by asserting that the divine consists of an authentic earthly reality, Dick is suggesting that god is not a superior being that exists in some supernatural realm but is rather present in human beings themselves. Rossi states that it signifies that *Valis* may be “postmodernist metafiction, not religious preaching” (Rossi 224). Indeed, several instances in the novel point to the possibility that the god of *Valis*, despite being referred to using religious terminology, is actually secular. The most telling clue is the short
paragraph that is at the very end of the Appendix of the novel, the last words of the narrative:

"From Ikhnaton this knowledge passes to Moses, and from Moses to Elijah, the Immortal Man, who became Christ. But underneath all the names there is only one Immortal Man; and we are that man" (Dick 241). This highlights the idea that there is no divinity above that of man, which means that all human beings can attain divinity by remembering how to perceive authentic reality. When one considers this in conjunction with the sixties novels, it is evident that Dick is not preaching Christianity in the theological novels. Rather, they are a warning against getting too immersed in the world of symbols because it causes one to forget the reality of living men.

Events in the novel also point to the fact that individual characters possess the characteristics of god. One of the phrases from Fat’s exegesis, the musings on the universe that he works on throughout the narrative is, “He lived a long time ago but he is still alive”. This is referring to the Immortal Man, one of Fat’s names for god. At one point, however, during Fat’s stay in a mental institution, he contemplates that “He lived a long time ago but he is still alive. He is still alive, Fat thought. After all that’s happened. After the pills, after the slashed wrist, after the car exhaust. After being locked up. He is still alive.” (Dick 52). Here, Fat refers to his own suicide attempts. This sudden shift in who the Immortal Man is referencing points to the fact that god and Fat may be the same person. If Fat is Phil Dick and Phil Dick is Philip K. Dick, and if, as according to Fat quoting Pascal, “All history is one immortal man who continually learns” (Dick 230), then perhaps “god” is the combined consciousness of every living human being. Indeed, when Fat and company finally meet the source of Valis, a little girl named Sophia, she tells them that “Man is holy, and the true god, the living god, is man himself. You will have no gods but yourselves” (Dick 198). This brings new light on the Horselover Fat/Phil Dick duality as well. Phil’s personality has split: he believes himself to be two people. However, if the Empire, which is another name Fat has for the Black Iron Prison is “the institution, the codification, of derangement” (Dick 235), then perhaps Fat/Phil’s derangement is simply a microcosmic version of the derangement of the world. All human beings live in a deranged world where they have split
off from each other and now believe they are separate from one another. Advertising and mass media have made them lose access to the *koinos kosmos*: the common reality that gives them divinity. The fact that upon meeting Sophia, Phil reabsorbs his alter ego and once again becomes one person supports this idea: the divine child has led Phil back to the *koinos kosmos*.

Sophia’s advice about death to her group of visitors supports the notion of a secular god as well. To Phil Dick’s question, “Where is Gloria now?” Sofia replies, “She lies in the grave” (Dick 191). To his question of “Will she return?” the answer is “Never” (Dick 191). Therefore, according to the voice of god in *Valis*, there is no Christian afterlife. Perhaps the dead rejoin some sort of common consciousness or perhaps they are gone forever, but the conversation with Sophia points away from a Christian concept of an individual soul or a divine being that stands above and controls all humanity. Rather than being converted to Christianity, as critics such as McKee would posit, Dick seems to have converted Christ into a figure apart from Christianity, a joint human consciousness able to manipulate information to create reality. This, too, is the state the characters of the sixties novels were attempting and failing to recreate with the communal experience using consumer products. They were attempting to become the Immortal Man by fusing with Mercer or translating to a world where they are Perky Pat and Walt. They participated in an unsatisfactory simulation of this joint consciousness described in *Valis*. Advertising led them to believe that they had to participate in the system of consumption in order to perceive reality when the actual task lay in simply acknowledging one another as part of a shared reality.

The most telling clue that god communicates with other characters through advertising comes at the end of the novel. Sophia is killed in a freak accident and Phil’s counterpart Fat has split off once again and gone off to travel the world in search of the next god’s messenger. The last scene of the novel is Phil at home, searching for clues in TV commercials for a supermarket chain (Dick 225) and dog food (Dick 226). Phil wonders, “had the signal gone out? Out over the airwaves by one of the largest TV stations in the world, NBC’s Los Angeles outlet…with this split-second information which would be processed…received and stored and perhaps decoded”
The choice of words in this description is meant to remind the reader of the way in which a TV terminal receives information. Here, it is helpful to recall the analogy Dick makes in his 1974 letter, quoted by McKee in Pink Beams, in which he compares being the recipient of the pink light to a TV terminal receiving a message from a transmitter: “I don’t feel I was ‘picked’ by a Future Force, as its instrument...anymore than when you are watching a TV program the transmitter has picked you” (qtd. in McKee 55). In Valis, it is suggested that this is literally true. Eric Lampton, one of Sophia’s caretakers, says that Sophia is “A terminal of VALIS...An input, output terminal of the master system VALIS” (Dick 193). Thus, Sophia is a terminal of some transmitter just like Phil’s television set. Phil is able to acquire divine knowledge from the television in Sophia’s absence. This shared characteristic between Phil and Sophia emphasizes the idea that people must look to each other rather than the television in order to achieve divinity.

In order to understand the different ways television is used as a divine tool in Dick’s work, it is important to compare the image of Fat watching TV after Gloria’s death to the last image of the novel. Phil narrates this moment in first person: “I sat before the TV set in my living room. I sat; I waited; I watched; I kept myself awake. As we had been told, originally, long ago, to do; I kept my commission” (Dick 228). Dick bookends the novel with these scenes: Phil/Fat watching television in order to find salvation. Fat, the alter ego, is watching to find answers about a personal friend’s death, an issue related to the idios kosmos. Phil watches to look for a divine message that will lead him to the koinos kosmos. Horselover Fat, then, represents the idios kosmos: he is the alter ego that only Phil can see. Phil Dick represents the koinos kosmos: he is real to himself as well as everyone else. The television remains the medium that both halves use in order to seek answers about the two different sides of the universe. The difference between Fat and Phil is that Fat believes that the television, the deliverer of mass media and advertising, comprises the reality that he seeks. Phil has experienced anamnesis: he has awoken from the amnesia that Fat suffers from in the beginning of the novel, and now looks to the television for
instructions on how to break through the inauthentic world created by mass media to achieve authentic reality.

Mass media remains an instrument of religious communication in the second installment of the Valis Trilogy, *The Divine Invasion* (1981). In this novel Herb Asher, who has emigrated from Earth to a distant planet, is instructed by god to pose as the husband of another colonist, Rybys Romney who, through divine conception, is carrying god inside her womb. The couple attempt to smuggle god into Earth so that he can put an end to the reign of Belial there. However, they suffer an accident during the trip in which Rybys dies and the child, Emmanuel, suffers brain damage which causes him to forget what he is. This forgetting is reminiscent of the state that Horselover Fat of *Valis*, and Philip K. Dick himself were in before encountering the pink beam of light and experiencing anamnesis. Here, too, is further proof that god is the combined force of humanity in the Valis Trilogy. Emmanuel forgets the path to divinity in the same way the Horselover Fat does, and they both have to go through the same process of remembering. This suggests that Emmanuel and Fat are the same type of being. As in *Valis*, the narrative points to the idea that god is the combined force of humanity rather than a single supernatural being. For the characters of *The Divine Invasion*, this anamnesis has to be delivered through advertising and mass media because those are the only channels of communication in the world of illusion in which they live.

The characters in *The Divine Invasion* are living in a world created by mass media and advertising. This is emphasized by the fact that their lives and the narrative itself are propelled along by these things. Herb Asher, one of the main characters, is living on a distant planet called CY30-CY30B outside the Solar System. He has emigrated there because of government advertising: “SKY OR FRY was the slogan showing up on government TV commercials. You either emigrated or they burned your ass in some fruitless war” (Dick 6). Had it not been for advertising, Herb would not have ended up where he was at the beginning of the novel and the story would not have taken place.
The idea that the god of the Valis Trilogy reveals an occluded authentic reality and not an illusion is demonstrated through the concept of *Sein vs. Das Nichts* in *The Divine Invasion*. During the course of the novel Herb, like Horselover Fat, gets hit with a beam of pink light which reveals information to him. Herb contemplates that his involvement with Linda Fox, a celebrity singer appearing on television, will reveal the difference between *Sein* and *Das Nichts*: “*Sein* equaled being equaled existence equaled a genuine universe. *Das Nichts* equally nothing equaled the simulation of the universe, the dream – which I am in now, he knew” (Dick 190). Here is the forgetting that Dick’s characters experience which must be rectified by anamnesis: the fake world of media makes them forget and accept the inauthentic world.

In *Valis*, Horselover Fat watches television in order to define his reality before he encounters the pink beam of light that gives him instructions on how to achieve absolute reality. In the same way, the characters of *The Divine Invasion* depend on mass media for reality before the arrival of the true god. This is why mass media continues to be used as a divine tool in the theological novels: since it encompasses characters’ reality, it is the only way for god to reach them. Even Herb’s job on CY30-CY30B emphasizes the importance of mass media. Herb receives “high speed entertainment” which he then stores and “run[s] them back at normal and select[s] the material suitable for the overall dome system on his own planet” (Dick 15). This is reminiscent of two important things in Dick’s work. First, like the colonists of *Palmer Eldrich*, the occupants of CY30-CY30B are re-creating an illusory Earth through mass media which they believe is “information that connects us with home and keeps us human” (Dick 15). They think that mass media is what keeps them human, but in truth it is depriving them of the path to humanity: empathy with other human beings. Like Herb, the other occupants of CY30-CY30B spend all their time consuming mass media which makes them forget how to interact with one another. Second, Herb is doing the same thing that Phil and friends did in *Valis*: interpreting information from mass media and sending a message back out that will be understood by the
public. Like Phil in *Valis*, Herb looks exclusively to mass media to define his reality, which is why god must use that medium in order to communicate with him.

In fact, when god does contact Herb, it is through the song of Linda Fox, a popular celebrity singer that he obsessively listens to on the radio. Linda Fox has the same status as a TV icon in Herb’s world as Nicole of *The Simulacra* or Perky Pat of *Palmer Eldrich*. Just as with the other novels, Herb defines himself through Linda Fox. He longs to be alone so that he can be “free to be what he truly was, the connoisseur of the undying lovely. The beauty and perfection towards which all things moved: Linda Fox” (Dick 31). In this moment too, Herb recognizes Linda Fox’s immortality as an icon. Presumably, he understands that there is a human person behind the singer, but the “undying” is attributed to his image of her. When another inhabitant of the planet, Rybys, the woman who will eventually give birth to the god of the novel, questions Herb’s belief in Linda Fox, he contemplates that her criticisms are unimportant because “the Fox will outlast you” (Dick 24). He thus attributes an inhuman immortality to Linda Fox: mass media has given her this divine trait. In this way, Linda Fox is like the TV icons of the sixties novels.

The fact that Herb Asher’s reality consists entirely of an illusory world created by Linda Fox and other TV icons is made clear when he describes his fantasies about her. He says that “He and Linda Fox lived on Earth, in California, at one of the beach towns in the Southland” and compares it to “a living commercial for beer” (Dick 18). This situation is familiar to the Perky Pat date the colonists go on in *Palmer Eldrich*. The connection with religion becomes even more concrete when Herb assures the reader that even though some of his fantasies about Linda Fox are sexual in nature, “the truly spiritual was what mattered the most...The total package was highly spiritual. It was amazing how spiritual an elaborated beer commercial could get” (Dick 18). One can make the argument, then, that Herb’s entire world is an elaborated beer commercial. The real world has been obstructed by a fake world created by mass media. Therefore, the only way for god to reach human beings is by mimicking mass media, which is why god speaks to Herb Asher through a pop song.
Another instance of god communicating to the characters in *The Divine Invasion* through mass media also illustrates Dick’s concept of mimicry here as it is described by McKee: “Zebra, the mimicking being, does not simply pretend to be our reality...In some sense its mimicry is more authentic than the objects themselves which it mimics; its divine fakery is more real than our mundane actuality.” (McKee 61). Rybys Romney watches a soap opera called ‘The Splendor of Elias Tate’. Like the film *Valis*, it is presented in the form of cheesy science fiction: “‘Get your fucking mandibles off me!’ the elderly man shouted, flailing about. The flash of laser beams ignited the screen.” (Dick 37). The idea that the message comes from the lowest forms of mass media is emphasized by the fact that the soap opera comes on right after a commercial for hemorrhoid cream. As Rybys and Herb watch the soap opera, Rybys receives a visitor to her dome who turns out to be Elias Tate himself. Elias informs the pair that he is a reincarnation of the prophet Elijah and that he is there to guide the couple in their holy quest. In order to penetrate Herb’s inauthentic world comprised of advertising and mass media, god must take the form of mass media such as a soap opera. After god does this, he attributes the quality of realness to the thing which he mimics. In this way, he used the image of Elias Tate as the star of a sci-fi soap opera in order to penetrate into Herb and Rybys’ illusory world; he then made Elias Tate real so that he may guide the couple as Elijah. In this way, the other characters are guided away from television, which is the illusion generator, and toward other real human beings, which is where divinity lies.

The power to make things truly real is the definitive attribute of god in the theological novels. The TV icons of the sixties novels create the illusion of being able to generate reality, while Emmanuel actually possesses this power. Emmanuel, Rybys’ son and the incarnation of god in the novel states that his foremost power is the ability to make things real: “That is the power I have, and it is not the power of enchantment; it is the most precious gift of all: reality” (Dick 173). Elias Tate informs Herb and Rybys that “The universe exists because Y-h remembers it...if Y-h forgets, the universe ceases” (Dick 57). If the definition of god is a being which can
grant reality, it explains why the TV icons of the sixties novels were religiously worshipped. They created a reality comprised of mass media, but it was an inauthentic reality and thus those gods were false or evil gods. Herb and Rybys’ mission is a dangerous one. They know that because Earth is ruled by Belial, the government will mistake Rybys’ baby for the antichrist and try to murder him: they fear the same fate for Emmanuel that Jesus had to endure. Rybys contemplates that the people of Earth “are living in a cheap horror film” (Dick 66). Just as Herb Asher is living in an “elaborated beer commercial” (Dick 18), the people of Earth are living in a cheap horror film. Salvation is possible if god can be smuggled into this cheap horror film and reveals the occluded reality from within it. This further emphasizes that without Emmanuel’s help, the people in *The Divine Invasion* are living in an inauthentic world created by TV icons such as Linda Fox using mass media.

Other characters in charge of the world in *The Divine Invasion* share characteristics with the TV icons as well. The government of Earth consists of two parties: the Scientific Legate and the Christian-Islamic Church. Even though most people choose between the two (Herb is Scientific Legate while Rybys is Christian) and in public they are opposed to each other, in private they work in tandem. Umberto Rossi sees these two parties as representing “the global competition of the two superpowers, USA and USSR, the former trusting in God…the latter purportedly believing in Marxist scientific thought and technocratic materialism” (Rossi 239). The matching ideologies, as well as the fact that the leader of the Scientific Legate’s name, Nicholas Bulkowky, is a Russian one support Rossi’s conclusion. In addition, later in the novel it Dick mentions that the Scientific Legate sprang from the Communist Party. In other novels such as *Lies, Inc.* and *The Penultimate Truth*, the government of the future is a world government, with only one or two totalitarian leaders that rule over Earth. Therefore, despite the tensions between the USA and the USSR at the time of Dick’s writing of *The Divine Invasion*, it is plausible that he would imagine the two nations working in tandem in such a way. There is another parallel, however, that is important to examine in regards to this discussion: that between Buster Friendly
and Wilbur Mercer in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?. In The Divine Invasion*, there are two public figures. The religious one is Cardinal Fulton Statler Harms, Chief Prelate of the Christian-Islamic Church. The other is secular: Nicholas Bulkowsky, Procurator Maximus of the Scientific Legate. Both men are bolstering Belial’s influence on Earth by creating the illusory world of mass media in order to cover up reality. Just as in *Sheep*, they seem to be in opposition but both are actually needed in order for the illusory world to function. Harms, Bulkowsky, and Linda Fox are all TV icons that generate an inauthentic reality in *The Divine Invasion*. This is more proof that the Black Iron Prison mentioned in *Valis* is the inauthentic reality of the TV icons. Using mimicry, Emmanuel imparts the quality of realness onto Linda Fox in order to communicate with Herb Ascher.

In order to understand this concept of god mimicking mass media and then transforming it into the real in *The Divine Invasion*, it is important to examine the character of Linda Fox. In the first half of the novel, the narrative firmly establishes her as a TV icon: an inauthentic construct created by mass media. Because her image as a celebrity figure is wholly separate from the person behind that celebrity, Linda Fox the pop singer is a pure simulacrum just like the TV icons of the sixties novels. Linda Fox is presented in this way so that when Emmanuel is able to make her real, he is proven to be the authentic god character: the antithesis of the TV icons.

Linda Fox’s standing as pure simulacrum is acknowledged by some of the characters. Rybys chides Herb for liking her because “She is a joke media personality. She is pure hype” (Dick 22). In fact, like Nicole of *The Simulacra*, the government of Earth creates Linda Fox in order to mollify the masses. The conversation Nicholas Bulkowsky has with his wife about Linda Fox is telling in this regard. Those in charge of mass media are able to create an illusion that is perceived as reality, but they are not able to confer authenticity onto that illusion which is why they stand in opposition to the true god in the theological novels. Bulkowsky says that “it is a fact that [Linda Fox] does not exist. We ought to know. We were the first to imagine her” (Dick 89). Like the true god, Harms and Bulksowky create a world with their minds. However, because they
are false gods, they cannot impart the quality of realness unto the world they have created. This also speaks to the idea of detaching the signified from the signifier. It is made apparent that there is, in fact, an actual person behind the Linda Fox celebrity figure. Bulkowsky contemplates poisoning her if she does not comply with his demands and recalls her panicked reaction when she is presented with that threat (Dick 88). Therefore, what he means when he says she does not exist is that the person he threatened to poison is unimportant to the Linda Fox the colonists listen to on their radios and watch on their televisions. Bulkowsky asserts that “Linda Fox is not a person. She is a class of persons, a type. She is a sound that electronic equipment, very sophisticated electronic equipment, makes...She can be stamped out like tires” (Dick 89). Like the actresses playing Nicole of The Simulacra, the woman or women that act as the physical presence behind the celebrity are unimportant.

Emmanuel himself stresses this point of Linda Fox’s lack of realness when he tells Herb that “you listened to an illusion. She does not exist, that image. Your Fox is a phantasm, nothing else” (Dick 141). This is what makes the character of Linda Fox so important in the novel: she is used to demonstrate Emmanuel’s ability to grant things the quality or realness. He takes an icon of mass media that is acknowledged by everyone, including himself, to be inauthentic, and makes her real. Because he is able to do this, he is understood to be an authentic and benevolent god, in opposition to the evil irreality the TV icons create.

The philosophy of Dick’s fiction is based around the idea that the ultimate good is reality and the ultimate evil is, as Emmanuel says, “the ceasing of reality, the ceasing of existence itself...the slow slipping away of everything that is” (Dick 146). As the discussion in the previous chapter demonstrates, even if the illusion Dick’s characters feel is designed to be a happy one, they remain dissatisfied because it is an illusion. The colonists of Palmer Eldrich fail to become perky like Pat, and Rick Deckard’s wife Iran of Sheep is dissatisfied with the emptiness of her life despite the empathy box and the Penfield mood organ. In the same way, when Emmanuel is taken to an illusory reality created by his friend Zina, another divine child, he rejects it based on the fact...
that it does not contain the quality of realness. Even though Zina’s illusory world is a happier one than the real world of the novel, Emmanuel prefers reality: “Gray truth is better than the dream...It is the final truth of all, that truth is better than any lie however blissful” (Dick 176).

This further emphasizes the fakeness of the worlds generated by the evil god characters of the sixties. Both the Perky Pat fantasy in Palmer Eldrich and the illusion of Whale’s Mouth in Lies, Inc. are better than the reality in those novels, but their blissfulness belies their inauthentic nature and they are unsatisfactory to the characters experiencing them because they lack realness, the most important quality of all. The gods of the sixties novels are rejected because the quest for the divine in Dick’s fiction is equivalent to the quest for reality, the koinos kosmos.

Emmanuel demonstrates his authenticity as a god when he decides to confer the quality of realness onto Linda Fox. He promises to make her real and wagers with Zina that the real Linda Fox will be more satisfactory to Herb than the pure simulacra of the media image. At the end of the novel, Emmanuel wins the wager and Herb accepts the real Linda Fox even though she is flawed, unlike her signifier (Dick 203). Thus, god first infiltrates Herb’s inauthentic world using mimicry by speaking to him through the mass media icon Linda Fox. He then uses his divine power to impart the quality of realness onto Linda Fox. This is a microcosmic example of god’s ability to deliver absolute reality in The Divine Invasion and a form of Dick’s call for contemporary society to turn away from mass media and toward other human beings.

The evil gods of the sixties novels created Das Nights or the Black Iron Prison using mass media and advertising. The god of the Valis Trilogy uses mass media and advertising as tools for communication to bring about Sein. This further illuminates Phil’s statement at the end of Valis that he must keep himself awake. The people trapped in the Black Iron Prison are in an eternal night: they are continually asleep, unaware of an authentic reality beneath the world. In Dick’s novels of the sixties, those who hold power use advertising and mass media as image generators to create this inauthentic world that occludes reality. Dick’s characters must be guided out of Das Nights: the state in which mass media is the only reality they know and into Sien:
being, in which they are able to interact with reality and each other. In the theological novels, advertising and mass media are used once again, but this time as tools of communication to achieve this purpose.

By using Science Fiction as the genre through which mass media is employed as divine communication (a film in *Valis*, a soap opera in *The Divine Invasion*), Dick connects himself to his characters. Just as god uses SF to deliver crucial information in Dick’s fiction, the author himself tries to deliver an important message to his readers using his own SF. In *Philip K. Dick: Exhilaration and Terror of the Postmodern*, Christopher Palmer states that “the possibility that Philip K. Dick [the author] believes in VALIS…defeats our attempt to defend ourselves by saying that it is only a novel” (Palmer 236). This idea appears in *The Divine Invasion* as well because Philip K. Dick the author connects himself to his characters by doing the same thing that they are doing. This points to the fact that Dick believes what he describes in his fiction, and that he means for his readers to come away from his work being more than just entertained.

What, then, should the reader take away from the theological novels if she or he considers them as being in continuity with the novels of the sixties? I believe that Dick is not calling for his readers to stop worshipping one deity in exchange for another. Unlike the TV icons, the god of the theological novels does not make every other character in the world acutely feel his presence. When Emmanuel makes Linda Fox real for Herb Asher, Herb is unaware of who performed this feat or even that anything extraordinary had occurred. In *Valis*, the god figure tasks human beings to deliver its message rather than attempting to make its presence known to everyone. The goal of the god of *Valis* and *The Divine Invasion* is not to make the world aware of his existence but rather to deliver the message of reality. Thus, Dick’s philosophy does not consist of whom or what to worship but rather that worship itself is unnecessary. Simply by being able to perceive earthly reality, one can achieve divinity.
Conclusion

According to Lawrence Sutin’s biography *Divine Invasions*, Philip K. Dick struggled with his identity as a Science Fiction writer. He longed to break into the realist genre, but his attempts in that field were unsuccessful during his lifetime. Nevertheless, as this thesis demonstrates, Dick shared a common concern with many other SF writers: the effect of technology on the human psyche. I believe that Dick’s unique approach to this question involves figuring advertising and mass media as a divine tool throughout his work. In the process, he determines that in an environment increasingly controlled by mass media, human beings are in danger of forgetting how to distinguish between reality and the world of the television. Further, I have attempted to demonstrate that reality is equaled to divinity throughout Dick’s work. By keeping this idea in mind, it is easier to understand that Dick is not preaching Christianity or even religion in the traditional sense in the theological novels. Rather, they are the conclusion to the argument that he began to explore in the novels of the sixties: that advertising and mass media work to occlude reality in contemporary society.

What my exploration of Dick’s sixties novels aims to establish, and what makes his model in part postmodern, is the importance he placed on the power of the text. Advertising and mass media, through the manipulation of symbols, become powerful weapons that give their creators godly powers. Through the use of these powers, those in control of advertising and mass media are able to pose as deities that are worshipped unequivocally, because they imbue both space and time with illusion until authentic reality is inaccessible.

The conclusion that Dick comes to in the theological novels, stemming from these ideas, is that if those that are able to create the illusion of being able to generate reality can pose as gods, then those that can do so in actuality are the true gods, and that Earthly reality is divine in itself: divinity is natural rather than supernatural.

Philip K. Dick’s work often eludes the understanding of critics, biographers, and lay readers alike. In the introduction to his biography, Lawrence Sutin warns his readers that
“Phil...was very fond of...outright putting people on” (Sutin 7). Sutin declares that he will therefore “provide alternative or clarifying accounts when I can, and for the rest...let the reader...beware and enjoy” (Sutin 8). Sutin must acknowledge that even Dick’s closest friends were far from having him completely figured out. Therefore a biographer, even a thorough and conscientious one like Sutin, must do the best he can. Perhaps this tendency of Dick’s to put people on and jump wildly from theory to theory is what prompts Christopher Palmer to state that Dick’s work “does not lend itself to a steady chronological exposition” (vii) and that one should not “subject [Dick’s] fiction to a simplifying or patronizing thesis” (viii). Dick himself, however, has stated of his fiction that “no one book or story tells it all. Many of them must be read” (qtd. in McKee 39). As the majority of the criticism of Dick’s novels demonstrates, the question of whether he succeeded in delivering a coherent message through his works is up for debate. However, Dick did intend to “tell it” in his writing as a whole.

Towards the goal of finding a unifying philosophy for Philip K. Dick’s oeuvre, this thesis has attempted to contribute both to the idios kosmos of Dick’s fiction and the koinos cosmos of his contribution to literature and philosophy as a whole. Speaking to the former, the parity of reality and divinity and the use of mass media as a tool of the divine aim to provide, if not the answers Dick was looking for his entire life, at least a pair of unifying ideas that help to shape Dick’s works into a narrative with a coherent goal. These ideas remain central in Dick’s writing regardless of his ever-changing theories.

Dick’s contribution to literature (and perhaps philosophy as well), is a unique take on postmodernism, a postmodern positivism. Many scholars, especially those with a postmodernist perspective, see Positivism as a naïve ideal. Friedrich Nietzsche, as early as 1873 in “On Truth and Lying in an Extra-moral Sense,” states that “truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions” (Nietzsche 263) and that what we consider facts are “anthropomorphic through and through, and [do] not contain one single point which is “true-in-itself,” real and universally valid, apart from man” (Nietzsche 264). For Nietzsche, then, Positivism, the belief in
the “ability of the mind to achieve a purely factual, scientific knowledge of the world” (Rivkin and Ryan 262) is idealistic. Jean Baudrillard, in “The Procession of Simulacra” also calls “the principal of the equivalence of the sign and the real” a utopian one (Baudrillard 6). These scholars believe that since man can only perceive the world through metaphor, a direct, common experience of reality is impossible. This is not the case for Philip K. Dick.

In the novels of the sixties he acknowledges that metaphors and symbols in the form of advertising and mass media, as texts, can work to block direct access to the world. However, in the theological novels, he proposes that these same things can be used to decipher a divine message that contains instructions for how to achieve absolute reality, and that it is possible to perceive reality through empathy with other human beings. Like Nietzsche, Dick acknowledges that man must necessarily access the world through symbols. But what sets him apart from other postmodern thinkers is that he does not concede that this means a common objective reality is impossible. This is perhaps what prompts Jason P. Vest to call Dick’s genre of fiction “postmodern humanism” (Vest xii). Vest states that while postmodernism “contributes to an overall loss in the ability of postmodern subjects to imagine alternatives to the current system” (Vest xi), Dick’s fiction exhibits “a profound compassion for the individual’s difficult struggle to overcome these obstacles” (Vest xi). This, according to Vest, allows Dick to maintain “humanist values within postmodern contexts” (Vest xii). Dick does not deny the postmodern assertion that “the world, its social systems, human identity even, are not given, somehow guaranteed by a language which corresponds to reality, but are constructed by us in language” (Butler 21). Rather, he believes that this does not necessarily prevent the individual from being able to experience a positivist reality of his or her world. Therefore, along with exhibiting a “postmodern humanism”, this thesis has illustrated that Dick’s fiction also acts as postmodern positivism.

Though not an established school of thought, the idea of postmodern positivism has been used by literary critics. For example, Terry Eagleton has said that Samuel Beckett’s work is “a kind of postmodern positivism, for which things are not endlessly elusive but brutally [sic]
themselves” (Eagleton 110). Beckett, an Irish avant-garde poet and novelist who wrote in English and French, lived and produced his work around the same time as Dick. Beckett was “fascinated by the sheer inert materiality of objects like pebbles or bowler hats” (Eagleton 110) and part of his literary quest was to find the words to express this materiality. I have only examined the idea of postmodern positivism as it applies to Dick’s science fiction work, but an exploration of Dick’s versus Beckett’s approach to this idea could be fruitful in fleshing out a school of thought whose presence in literature has thus far only been touched upon by critics.

Philip K. Dick may never have succeeded in his lifelong quest to find the answer to the question “What is Real?”. However, as modern technology advances after his death, his predictions about the increasing penetration of mass media and advertising into the perception of everyday life seem to be fairly accurate. Many of the studies examining the relationship between human interaction and the rise of technology attest to this. I believe that reading his work as a sudden turn from politics to zealous Christianity after a psychotic break delegitimizes Philip K. Dick as a philosopher and a scholar. Rather, I have read religion throughout Dick’s writing as a metaphorical tool to demonstrate the power of the text and the value of human empathy.
Works Cited


Endnotes

1 For more on Heraclitus and other pre-Socratic philosophers see Ancilla to Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Complete Translation of the Fragments in Diels, Fragmente der Vorsokratiker. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983)


3 See, for example, Allison Cerra and Christina James’ excellent book length study Identity Shift: Where Identity Meets Technology in the Networked-Community Age. (Indianapolis, Indiana: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2012)