

A Matter of God: Entheogenic Substances in Philip K. Dick's Writings

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“If, in reading this, you cannot see that Fat is writing about himself, then you understand nothing.”¹

“Either he had seen God too soon or he had seen him too late. In any case, it had done him no good at all in terms of survival.”²

Horselover Fat / Phil. Kevin and David / Philip K. Dick

Science fiction is a strange child of twentieth century optimism and dystopian visions of the future. Popular culture associates the genre with lasers, aliens, spaceships, huge galactic empires and barely understandable technological slang that is mostly there to convince the reader that it is indeed hard science that the writer used in the making of such novels. This is what writers of the so-called “hard science fiction” tradition imitate doing. On the other hand, the futuristic setting and the technological otherworld that science-fiction novels depict often serve as a backdrop for the spiritual/religious subtext presented therein.

In order to demonstrate the validity of religious investigation in science fiction, I would like to examine a science-fictional novel by Philip K. Dick, a twentieth-century American author of SF, whose writing is frequently based on religious ideas. The paper focuses on two novels, *UBIK* and the *Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, both of which are heavily laden with religious imagery and concepts related to spirituality. Also, both novels use the vehicle of herbal and/or synthetic drugs to attain transcendental knowledge about the fabric of reality. In doing so, they evoke the concept of birth, rebirth and the intermediary, *bardo* state of existence of Buddhism, which I shall explore in depth.

However, despite the wide availability of mind-altering drugs, these experiences are not triggered by every drug trip. To resolve the issue of most characters' close contact with the divine, I will seek to understand this anomaly within the Gnostic tradition of Christianity (a branch of religious thought to which Dick himself subscribed) and its theological tenet of the *pneumatikoi*, the Chosen Ones who can catch a glimpse of the divine truth underneath the illusory nature of material existence. After a brief definition of what types of substances are used in the novels' religious rituals, I shall dedicate the rest of the paper to their appearance in *UBIK* and the *Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, and to their effect on the people undergoing the mystical experience.

As they are used by the characters in Dick's books in a spiritual setting for religious ends, I will call these substances entheogenic. The word comes from the Greek ἔνθεος and γενέσθαι, meaning "causing god to be within (a person)" and first used as such for the consumption of herbal parts in a paper by Carl A. P. Ruck and his colleagues³. In commenting on his two period-defining artistic milestones, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* and *UBIK*, I hope to detail the rituals and circumstances that surround entheogen-induced divine visitations. Also, I seek to understand the nature of these entheogenic experiences in the context of comparative studies of religion and to see how deeply do the ideas of Gnostic Christianity permeate the text.

"Entheogen" is not a popular or well-known term outside the academic fields of psychopharmacology and ethnobotany, even though its exact spiritual use has been with us since the beginning of ritual worship. Hallucinogens, as they also called, are part of a long tradition in mythology, acting as gift-plants from the gods, through which they speak to mortal men.

The most famous entheogen is the Indian *haoma* or Soma, a plant immortalised in both classical Indian mythology and, more recently, in the writings of Aldous Huxley. Schultes, Hofmann and Rätsch's landmark book on entheogens identifies Soma as *Amanita Muscaria*, the fly-agaric mushroom, and also informs the reader of its possible double as the Syrian Rue, or more correctly, harmal (*Peganum Harmala*).⁴ Also, speaking of Soma, the book asserts that though "[m]ost hallucinogens are holy mediators between man and the supernatural, [...] Soma was deified. So holy was Soma that it has been suggested

that even the idea of deity may have arisen from experiences with its unearthly effects.”⁵

These divine plants include peyote, exotic flowers, Mexican cacti and various reeds as well as the chemically synthesised LSD, all of which have been used for inducing or fortifying religious experiences. According to Stanislav Grof, religious experiences caused by LSD “appear to be phenomenologically indistinguishable”⁶ from the mystical insights gained and divine visitations recounted in religious scriptures all around the world.

Despite all this, we have two distinctions to make. First, we shall only speak of entheogen use when talking about psychoactive chemicals consumed in a (spi)ritual setting and mindset. Second, even when talking about entheogens, we also have to acknowledge the possibility that mildly or non-psychoactive substances can also act as true entheogens, as is the case with the Holy Sacrament’s bread and wine in Christian liturgy.

Entheogenic experiences appear in many of Dick’s novels. The rest of this essay will be devoted to finding out just how exactly did these influence his body of work, cataloguing these findings in some manner and, at last, synthesising the experiences themselves and the surrounding set and setting to figure out whether the teachings of one religious tradition or another would give greater meaning to these rituals.

Truth be told, this investigation could very well include his semi-autobiographical novel, *VALIS*. The beauty of researching Dick is that he himself researched his own life vigorously and obsessively. Because of his unwavering sense of divinity around us, he has created an extensive self-report of his 2-3-74 experiences in his Exegesis, some of which filtered into *VALIS*. In the end, however, *VALIS* shall not form the basis of further discussion, partly due to the spatial constraints, and partly due to the scope of the analysis. Thus we now turn to two other novels to explore their entheogenic-religious motifs. In strict adherence to Dick’s dual world-view, the positive example, *UBIK* shall be examined first, and the more ambiguous, the more complex novel, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* shall follow.

The story of *UBIK* is the adventure of a technician, Joe Chip, who works for Glen Runciter's organisation of anti-mind-readers. The organisation's main antagonist is Ray Hollis, who uses a wealthy tycoon, Stanton Mick to lure Runciter's team to Luna. The trap set up by Mick here kills Glen Runciter, who is transported back to Earth on a short notice to conserve the body in a state neither like death nor like life: half-life. Meanwhile, the team starts experiencing strange anomalies of reality. Things start moving back in time while at the same time the face of Runciter appears everywhere, the team get messages from him that suggests that he is alive and the team is dead. It turns out that the retrograde flow of time is caused by another half-lifer, against whom the half-living Ella Runciter pits her strength via the substance Ubik mentioned in the title.

This half-life is among the more prominent concepts of the novel's world. Half-life is a state when the body of the deceased person is cryogenetically frozen while the brain is kept alive in a simulated reality. Half-living bodies reside in mortuaries, where living people can establish contact with their beloved, thanks to the technological advancements of society in the future. For example, when the team seeks out Ella Runciter prior to going on their mission, she mentions a smoking cloud of red light in her half-life simulation, which his husband remembers from somewhere: "The *Bardo Thodol*, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, tells about that."⁷ The exact title of the book, which is usually used as a subtitle, means: Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate State.

"In Tibetan, the word *Bardo* means 'intermediate state.' There are six different kinds of Bardo. [...]he fourth is the Bardo of the Process of Death, *Chikai Bardo*; the fifth is the State after Death, *Chonyi Bardo*."⁸ The book of liberation through hearing chronicles dying thus. The smoking red light which Ella Runciter sees is part of the *Chikai Bardo*, the third stage of the dissolution of the elements: "When [...] fire, dissolves into the element air you will have the inner experience that everything is red, and will experience the sensation that everything around you is burning."⁹

Understanding half-life as some sort of a *bardo* is strengthened by the strange experiences of Joe Chip. The first ominous sign is the music of Giuseppe Verdi's *Dies Irae*: "He noticed then that subtle background music hung over the lounge. It had been there all this time. The same as on the chopper. 'Dies irae,

dies illa,' the voices sang darkly."¹⁰ The second clue is found when Joe Chip calls room service. Instead of a hotel clerk, another voice is talking to him: "Runciter's voice. Beyond any doubt."¹¹ At first, the communication with Runciter, and the realisation that his own life is but a mere half-life comes across by means of sounds and human voices, as the accurate title of the *Bardo Thodol* would imply.

Liberation and reincarnation, the two outcomes of the bardo state manifest in half-life in two different ways. Don Denny is the first to come to this conclusion:

'Manifestations of Runciter' - that's the second process, along with the decay. Some coins get obsolete; others show up with Runciter's portrait or bust on them. You know what I think? I think these processes are going in opposite directions. One is a going-away, so to speak. A going-out-of-existence. That's process one. The second process is a coming-into-existence. But of something that's never existed before.¹²

One of those outcomes is marked by destruction, an entropic process, the other, the negentropic one, countering it. In an irrational world, forces of decay and forces against decay fight each other. Let us note this dualistic account of things in life and death for the time being, because it will prove to be an important factor in positioning Dick's visions on the religious spectrum of experiences.

In fact, it will become so important, that after transporting Runciter's body to the Beloved Brethren Mortuary, the owner of said mortuary, Herbert Schönheit von Vogelsang is greeted by Joe Chip with these words: "There's been an accident." To which von Vogelsang replies: "What we deem an 'accident' is ever yet a display of god's handiwork. In a sense, all life could be called an 'accident.' And yet in fact—" ¹³ Vogelsang's lofty theological proclamation nicely echoes the teachings of the Gnostics: "Gnostics have their own – perhaps quite startling – view of these matters: they hold that the world is flawed because it was created in a flawed manner."¹⁴

The mark of imperfection found everywhere in the world left the gnostics to ponder upon a force other than god to have created it. Al Hammond's sarcastic

quip is wrought in the same manner: "If god approved of half-life, each of us would be born in a casket filled with dry ice."¹⁵ Taking and shaping the Gnostic teachings, Manicheists arrive at a similar conclusion: "Human life, just as any life in the Universe is merely the result of a divine defeat. Really, had the First Man won right at the start, neither the Universe, nor life, nor mankind would exist."¹⁶

In the next step of the *bardo* of death, "you will have [...] the external experience that all phenomena in the universe are being blown away by the winds of a great storm. You will hear a grinding roar like that of a thousand thunders."¹⁷ The same symptoms of near-death phenomena come up in the novel, when Joe Chip

became aware of an insidious, seeping, cooling-off which at some earlier and unremembered time had begun to explore him -- investigating him as well as the world around him. [...] What he saw now seemed to be a desert of ice from which stark boulders jutted. A wind spewed across the plain which reality had become; the wind congealed into deeper ice, and the boulders disappeared for the most part.¹⁸

And the unbearable sound of screaming and shouting can also be found here: "[O]n the great color 3-D screen a housewife critically examined a synthetic otter-pelt towel and in a penetrating, shrill voice declared it unfit to occupy a place in her bathroom."¹⁹

However, the disappearing universe, decay, the cold and death are not the only law of the land in half-life. It is antagonised by what Glen Runciter's team at first believe is their boss only, but in fact it is a group made up of Glen, Ella Runciter and the titular can of Ubik. Let us now go after this mysterious yet seemingly omnipresent Ubik, appearing at the beginning of every chapter.

If we only read these advertisements at the beginning of the chapters (all but the last one), we might get the feeling that Ubik is a consumer product, deeply rooted within the budding consumerist culture of the US. It could be a vacuum cleaner, a pain-killer, a wood polisher, a deodorant, a plastic bag, a cereal, even an aphrodisiac.

By examining the advertisement of the Ubique Elixir, we can draw several conclusions. For one thing, it is "guaranteed to restore lost manliness [...]"

as well as to relieve reproductive complaints in both men and women.”²⁰ in other words, it aids the negentropic processes within the system of the human body. Also, let us add to this an earlier description of Ubik, where it is said clearly that “Ubik powder is of universal healing value.”²¹ The big picture forming is of a panacea that not only heals everything but one that is available in every shape and manner. This image is fortified by the name itself: “There’s a Latin word very close to it: *ubique*. It means [...]. Everywhere,” Joe said.”²²

Joe Chip is informed of the existence of Ubik (a substance closely linked to Runciter) from a television commercial. He incorporates Gnosticism and the *bardo* state in a science fiction novel in a fitting manner. Here, Ubik is a consumer product which alleviates the fear of decay while in the early stages of half-life, in a world fundamentally insubstantial. Social criticism blends with and is strengthened by spirituality as doubt and belief gently undulate before turning into each other.

Ubik, however, is not only known by Joe Chip among half-lifers. Another member of the Runciter team, Francesca Spanish has dreams of Ubik, too. She relates one of these as follows:

[a] great hand came down from the sky, like the arm and hand of God. Enormous, the size of a mountain. And I knew at the time how important it was; the hand was closed, made into a rocklike fist, and I knew it contained something of value so great that my life and the lives of everyone else on Earth depended on it. And I waited for the fist to open, and it did open. And I saw what it contained. [A spray can, on which] there was one word, great golden letters, glittering; golden fire spelling out UBIK. Nothing else. Just that strange word. And then the hand closed up again around the spray can and the hand and arm disappeared, drawn back up into a sort of gray overcast.²³

The hand coming down from the sky is of a divine creator, like God, but not Him; the spray can is the prison of the physical and the moral constraints of man that form what in *VALIS* Dick will call the “Black Iron Prison”; the instinctive, sudden jolt of knowledge is gnosis itself; the cosmic importance of this event is explicitly referred to in the Ubik dream; the glittering, golden fire of

the letters symbolise both the ever-lasting divine spark of man that is the key to salvation, more so because gold is resistant to corrosion, while the fire can be interpreted as a cleansing fire.

Finally, the golden letters of the word UBIK, is the Word, the word of God. It is also a material substance in the half-life simulation, appearing as a gift of God, much like the entheogenic gift-plants. Its restorative powers give their users a sense of the divine, and if the consumption of a material object does just that, it deserves to be called an entheogen. This is how it introduces itself in the previously overlooked “advertisement” of the last, the seventeenth chapter:

I am Ubik. Before the universe was, I am. I made the suns. I made the worlds. I created the lives and the places they inhabit; I move them here, I put them there. They go as I say, they do as I tell them. I am the word and my name is never spoken, the name which no one knows. I am called Ubik, but that is not my name. I am. I shall always be.²⁴

Now that Ubik has been unmasked, it is time to look into the relationship of Runciter and Joe Chip, that will be just as revealing as the nature of Ubik. Take the team travelling to Luna as an example. Twelve people witnessed the death of Glen Runciter on Luna: seven men and five women. However, if we see the event from the perspective of the team members banished to half-life, we can conclude that twelve people *fell victim* to the blast: Glen Runciter lived and, according to Joe Chip, Zoe Wirt “had gotten out before the blast; he saw no sign of her.”²⁵ Seen from this angle, the assassination attempt left six men and six women in half-life.

In both cases, the importance of the number twelve surfaces with some tenacity. Could the twelve witnesses be the twelve apostles? One of the men travelling to Luna is Tito Apostos. His surname is a cognate of “apostle”. Apostle comes from the Greek *ἀπόστολος*, meaning “messenger”, “person sent forth”.²⁶ *Apostos* is the Spanish variant of the word. Having discovered that, the connection between the twelve people witnessing the death of Runciter and Christ is established, also strengthened by the fact that these twelve people came as envoys to Luna. The balance of feminine and masculine power is a further reference to the Gnostic view of the world.

This second balance reveals another fact: Joe Chip's initials coincide with Jesus Christ's. Reminiscent of an earlier point in the plot, where the image of Runciter-God emanates into the simulated world of half-life (including Joe Chip's pockets), after the death and resurrection of Chip, Runciter fishes out of his wallet at the end of the novel, only to find that the coins in it have the face of Chip on it. The Joe Chip-coins gain an increased significance as a symbol of resurrection, and it also suggests that the hierarchy of the two realities shifted and now Joe Chip resides in a higher state of existence. The simulated is real and the real is simulated.

To sum it up: we have a Holy Spirit in Ubik, a Son bearing the name Joe Chip. In order to complete the Holy Trinity, Runciter must be the Father. But can he bear that role in light of his actions throughout the books? First of all, after the bomb goes off, Joe Chip understands that he is on a mission now. He realises: "Since Mr. Runciter is injured, I'm now in charge – temporarily, anyhow, until we can get back to Terra."²⁷ Also, by the end of the book, his wife, Ella Runciter, an agent against the forces of decay gives Joe Chip a final task: "*I want you to replace me.*"²⁸ Now Chip's mission gains a religious meaning as well. Joe Chip shall be the heir to the Runciters, fighting against decay and its lord in half-life, Jory. This way the requirements of the Father-role are adequately fulfilled in the allegorical Christian reading. Now that every piece of the puzzle is available, the whole picture can be put together.

The entheogen-trinity is complete: Joe Chip uses Ubik, the divine present in the consumer society, which is also the proof of Runciter's existence, as a tool to attain knowledge. Runciter speaks to Joe Chip through Ubik, who uses products of Ubik to reach out and get in touch with the divine. The plum in the pie of Dick's social criticism is the fact that *theophagia*, eating one's way to God is taken literally to mean consuming God, which in a consumer society is not (only) through entheogenic drugs but everyday products. At the same time, he still retains the former entheogenic sense by interpreting the bardo-phenomenon as similar to the drug experience of using hallucinogens, like Timothy Leary did.²⁹

Analysing *UBIK*, we came to the conclusion that entheogen usage is firmly embedded in a Gnostic Christian context. Dick's 1964 novel, *The Three*

Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch takes this concept, and elaborates on it to warn its readers of the dark side of the entheogenic experience. Its story is more complex and more fundamentally related to drugs, which is the reason why I wished to leave it until after establishing *UBIK* as a positive example.

Two illegal substances are in the focus of this novel: Can-D, a drug facilitating empathy and wandering around the virtual doll-houses of P. P. Layouts, while the other is Chew-Z, a new rival of Can-D on the market, one which radically alters its users' experience of time and space, promising to give them eternal life. The recently settled desert-world of Mars, where most of this novel takes place, is a target of dealers in both drugs. By examining them, one could earn a deeper understanding of Dick's stance on entheogens and their effects on humankind.

The domineering drug in this tale is Can-D; the illegal substance "chewed by so many colonists, was grown, processed, and distributed by a hidden subsidiary of P. P. Layouts."³⁰ Chew-Z is another herbal drug, "coming from [...] heavily guarded plantations on Venus"³¹ and is produced from "a lichen similar to that used in the manufacture of Can-D".³² Can-D's effect on the body is insignificant: users of the drug simply doze off as they mellow out, but in this trance-like state of the mind, it affects the psyche in a tremendous manner, and "the reaction you get to Can-D depends – varies with – your imaginative-type creative powers."³³ It can be consumed communally as well, and after chewing it "the users' minds fused, became a new unity – or at least that was the experience."³⁴ Time spent under the influence of the drug is called "participation", or in Martian slang, "transit,"³⁵ both phrases being very revealing in the spiritual context of consuming the drug.

In the hopeless misery that characterises the lives of most Martians, Can-D has a special place in making life bearable. Leo Bulero, the novel's protagonist describes the situation to his new secretary, Pia Jurgens, as follows: "It's like religion; Can-D is the religion of the colonists. [...] One plug of it, wouzzled for fifteen minutes, and – [...] No more hovel. No more frozen methane. It provides a reason for living."³⁶ Here, Can-D is explicitly used in a spiritual setting. Travelling to Mars, Barney Mayerson is advised to choose a religion by the time he arrives because it will be expected of him. To convince him, they say: "[Can-

D] brought about a lot of conversions to the established churches ... although many of the colonists find in the drug itself a religious experience that's adequate for them."³⁷

Though the overtly religious terminology of the substance use is already a proof of concept, it is furthered by a comment made by Willy Denkmal, MD., an evolution therapist: "[B]lood and wafer; you know, in the Mass. Is very much like the takers of Can-D; have you noticed that affinity?"³⁸ The similarity of the Christian ritual to taking Can-D is one of the strongest arguments in favour of considering Can-D as an entheogen.

Translation, the word used for the miracle experienced under the effect of the drug is also used in a Christian context. It is capable of transforming the consumer's mind into a holy relic of sorts that can "travel" to the idealised version of Earth. Or, it might as well be that it can provide more than a simple religious experience. The pious Neo-American Christian, Anne Hawthorn confesses to Barney Mayerson that this might be the case: "[A]ll I know is religious faith and that doesn't equip me to understand this. These translation drugs."³⁹

One of the Martian settlers, Fran Schein confirms that suggestion in a debate leading up to transit. The question is about what they experience under the effect of the drugs. Fran takes the stance "that whether it's a play [...] of drug-induced hallucination, or an actual translation [...], I think we should abstain [from sex]. In order not to contaminate the experience of communication. [...] We lose our fleshly bodies, our corporeality."⁴⁰ In the harsh, unwelcoming world, the myth of starting a brave new life fades away, because it is contaminated by corporeality, a word that is both existing and a portmanteau at the same time.

When the ritual becomes empty of meaning and value, a habit without content, believers try to find new ways to bring the religious character to life in themselves. These are provided by Palmer Eldritch, the businessman and pilgrim who spent ten years in the Prox system to return with a plant, a lichen. To see how the image of pilgrimage befits that journey, note what Pia Jurgens confesses about space travel: "I actually thought maybe by going that far [a space traveller would] find God."⁴¹ The metaphor of travelling as pilgrimage entertains the

minds of new Martian settlers as well. This is why Barney Mayerson, still travelling, can claim that “[w]hether I like it or not I’ve been born again.”⁴²

According to Palmer Eldritch, the lichen he procured from Prox is used by the natives, too, “in religious orgies. As our Indians made use of mescal and peyotl.”⁴³ There is little doubt to the entheogenic properties of that lichen. Comparing it to peyotl and mescal is interesting, given the fact that the divine love Dick experienced with it is not part of the world that opens up after Chew-Z has been chewed.

The onset of the two drugs are rather similar, though. From this, Leo Bulero deducts that “[The Chew-Z world] was a nonexistent world, analogous to the irreal ‘Earth’ to which the translated colonists went when they chewed his own product, Can-D.”⁴⁴ If only it were so simple! Eldritch’s substance promises so much more. As he eloquently says: “I did not find God in the Prox system. But I found something better. [...] God [...] promises eternal life. I can do better; *I can deliver it.*”⁴⁵ The first person pronoun stands out, proving Eldritch’s personal powers are god-like in comparison to the mere drug-engineering of P. P. Layouts.

The greatest difference between Can-D and Chew-Z, the experience of eternal life is described by Eldritch as follows: “When we return to our former bodies [...] – *you’ll find that no time has passed.*”⁴⁶ It is “eternal life” as long as we consider the constraints of biological life dissolving in the subjective time of the entheogen properly “eternal”. Eldritch predicts that “[i]t will only be after a few tries that [users] realize the two different aspects: the lack of a time lapse and the other, perhaps the more vital. That it isn’t fantasy, that they enter a genuine new universe.”⁴⁷ Or so Eldritch says. We will soon investigate the claim in depth.

When trying to prove his omnipotence, Eldritch gestures towards the drug world and says:

[Y]ou didn’t construct this – establishment, here; I did and it’s mine. I created the glucks, this landscape [...]. [...] Every damn thing you see, including your body. [...] I willed you to emerge here exactly as you are in our universe [...]. [...] You see, that’s the point that appealed to [the head of the UN], who of course is a

Buddhist. You can reincarnate in any form you wish, or that's wished for you, as in this situation. With Chew-Z one can pass from life to life.⁴⁸

The motif of cleansing and contamination described before returns here: as believers slide from corporeality to the religious experiences provided by the entheogens, they enter the *bardo* state where they are cleansed by the fire similar to Ubik's flaming inscription. However, there is no transitory period with Chew-Z; under its influence, the believers create the universe anew. Or do they? Let us now evaluate this claim of Palmer Eldritch!

Countering Leo Bulero's claim that Chew-Z will be less popular because the world it projects is without boundaries or control, Eldritch says: "Whatever [problem] was could be abolished, [...]. If you found you didn't like it. And if you did like it [...]. Keep it, then. Why not? Who's hurt? You're alone in your—,"⁴⁹ and then he theatrically covers his mouth. He gave away the Grand Secret of Chew-Z. Compared to Can-D, Chew-Z only gives an "illusory world in which Eldritch holds the key positions as god."⁵⁰ Bulero's idea of Chew-Z, however, is quite unlike the real thing.

We have to leave the book for a moment to ponder on the identity of Palmer Eldritch himself to have an idea of this illusory world. "Palmer" was also the name of medieval pilgrims who, having returned from the Holy Land, carried palm leaves all the way back home as a memento of the journey.⁵¹ In this case, it is not a palm that serves as the function of the souvenir, but the lichen itself. "Eldritch" come from the Old English words *æl-*, "foreign, strange; from elsewhere" and *rīce* "dominion, sphere of influence", meaning: "otherworldly, belonging to the otherworld".⁵² Both the first and the surname coincide with the role Eldritch plays throughout the novel.

Leo Bulero realises the true effect of the lichen gradually. Only once the simulacrum of Palmer Eldritch starts to push the drug on Mars does his exact nature surface. Leo likens him to something herbal, "growing and growing like a mad weed."⁵³ And again: "The man's a protoplasm, spreading and reproducing and dividing, and all through that damn lichen-derived non-Terran drug, that horrible, miserable Chew-Z."⁵⁴ It is relevant that the drug is extracted from a lichen. It comes from the Greek word *λεικήνα*, originally meaning: "what eats

around itself.”⁵⁵ This way, it becomes clear that the all-consuming Chew-Z is more detrimental than Can-D, because it feasts on the user.

Palmer Eldritch is everywhere, he can enter anyone through Chew-Z, “it’s all the same, it’s all him, the creator. [...] The owner of these worlds [...] Eternal, outside of time and spliced-together segments of all other dimensions... *he can even enter a world in which he’s dead.* Palmer Eldritch had gone to Prox a man and returned a god.”⁵⁶ He is, however, not Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament. He is a blind, alien god, one that the Gnostic tradition knows well: it is Samael. John A. Tvedtnes claims that the Christian devil is the same as Samael, Aramaic for “the blind god.”⁵⁷

Applying our knowledge of Nag-Hammadi’s Gnostic texts to Palmer Eldritch, it reveals more of his demiurgic qualities. “In the course of her journeyings, Sophia [Wisdom] came to emanate from her own being a flawed consciousness, a being who became the creator of the material and psychic cosmos [...]. This being [...] imagined himself to be the ultimate and absolute God.”⁵⁸ This is the reason why, in his own ignorance, Palmer Eldritch can claim on his leaflet that he will deliver what God has promised, because he has no knowledge of the Gnostic god. The material and psychic cosmos, in this respect is the illusionary world under the influence of Eldritch, or, in *UBIK*’s terms, the half-life world.

There is a difference, however: Runciter-God is the ultimate Creator, the benevolent Gnostic god of knowledge, while Eldritch is merely a Demiurge: “What met Eldritch and entered him, what we’re confronting, is a being superior to ourselves [...]. But I know you’re wrong, Barney. Something which stands with empty, open hands is not God.”⁵⁹

Ubik is a negentropic force, but can we say the same thing of Chew-Z? Delving deep into the thoughts of Barney Mayerson, we see that while people spend their insubstantial time as choosers, “all over Mars that hideous drug is being distributed; think, picture, the numbers confined to Palmer’s illusory worlds, his nets that he casts. [It is called] Maya. The veil of illusion.”⁶⁰

This the very same thing that Eldritch says when he un.masks himself: “It’s not real, of course. That’s the truth. [... I]t’s an hallucination. What makes it

seem real is that certain prophetic aspects get into the experience, exactly as with dreams.”⁶¹ This prophetic aspect appears in *VALIS*, face to face, as Sophia, just like the Gnostics would call her. Quoting Hoeller once more: “Humankind contains a perishable physical and psychic component, as well as a spiritual component which is a fragment of the divine essence. This latter part is often symbolically referred to as the ‘divine spark’”;⁶² this is the way the Gnostic teachings explain the prophetic aspect of the world.

There is one more remarkable idea that Dick presents us about experiencing god. By taking Chew-Z, Barney Mayerson unites with Palmer Eldritch, and thus partakes in a *unio mystica*, the mystic union of man and god: “He heard, then, a laugh. It was Palmer Eldritch’s laugh but it was emerging from [...] Himself. [...] A great translation [...] had been accomplished, and possibly everything up to now had worked with this end in mind. [...] Now I am Palmer Eldritch.”⁶³

The *unio mystica* radically transforms the human mind, initiating a paradigm shift of values and principles. Leo Bulero cannot quite understand why Barney Mayerson would continue working on Mars without taking drugs. In the end, it is Anne who informs Leo that: “Part of you has become Palmer Eldritch, [...] and part of him became you. Neither of you can ever become completely separated again; you’ll always be —⁶⁴ this way, fused together, Leo and Palmer, yet not one or the other. The mystical union is complete.

The *unio mystica* has a peculiar (yet, when one knows about both of them, quite predictable) connection with entheogens: “The Hellenistic mysteries turned to archaic ritual behaviour (ecstatic dancing, tattoos, *the consumption of hallucinogenic plants*) to summon the gods, and even to attain the *unio mystica*.”⁶⁵ This is the same behaviour Dick mentions in *VALIS*:

The ancients possessed techniques (sacraments and rituals) used largely in the Greco-Roman mystery religions, including early Christianity, to induce firing and retrieval, mainly with a sense of its restorative value to the individuals: the Gnostics, however, correctly saw the ontological value to what they called the Godhead Itself, the total entity.⁶⁶

If we were to translate this to Dick's world-view, we would be safe to assume that entheogens can indeed facilitate this mystical union and attain *gnosis*, but one has to be careful, because the difference between meeting the benevolent, negentropic Runciters or the blind and all-consuming Palmer Eldritch is enormous, promising insanity to those who meet the latter face of God. Only those can avert mental breakdown and the entropic attraction of the three Stigmata who are prepared, who can figure out the fact that they are of the *pneumatikoi*, and seek knowledge thus.

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¹ Philip K. Dick, *VALIS* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 37.

² Lawrence Sutin, *Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2005), 46.

³ Carl A. P. Ruck, Jeremy Bigwood, Danny Staples, Jonathan Ott and Gordon Wasson, "Entheogens," *The Journal of Psychedelic Drugs* 11.1-2 (1979), 145-6.

⁴ Richard Evans Schultes, Albert Hofmann and Christian Rätsch, *Plant of the Gods – Their Sacred, Healing and Hallucinogenic Powers* (Rochester, Vermont: Healing Arts Press, 2001), 62.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Stanislav Grof, *Realms of the Human Unconscious: Observations from LSD Research* (London: Souvenir Press, 1993), 13-14.

⁷ Philip K. Dick, *UBIK*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 13.

⁸ Lama Lodö, *Bardo Teachings - The Way of Death and Rebirth*, (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications), 1982. Available: <http://www.snowlionpub.com/chapters/bate.htm>. Accessed: 2008-07-14. Italics in original.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Dick, *UBIK*, 90. Italics in original.

¹¹ Dick, *UBIK*, 94. Italics in the original.

¹² Dick, *UBIK*, 106.

¹³ Dick, *UBIK*, 78.

¹⁴ Stephan A. Hoeller, *The Gnostic World View: A Brief Summary of Gnosticism*, 1998. On-line publication. Available: <http://www.gnosis.org/gnintro.htm>. Accessed: 14 July 2008.

¹⁵ Dick, *UBIK*, 78.



¹⁶ Mircea Eliade, *Vallási hiedelmek és eszmék története*. (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2006), 544. (my translation)

¹⁷ Lama Lodö, *Bardo Teachings - The Way of Death and Rebirth*. (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications), 1982. Available: <http://www.snowlionpub.com/chapters/bate.htm>. Access: 14 July 2008.

¹⁸ Dick, *UBIK*, 119.

¹⁹ Dick, *UBIK*, 112.

²⁰ Dick, *UBIK*, 142.

²¹ Dick, *UBIK*, 166.

²² Dick, *UBIK*, 154.

²³ Dick, *UBIK*, 154.

²⁴ Dick, *UBIK*, 215.

²⁵ Dick, *UBIK*, 68.

²⁶ Douglas Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2001. Available: <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=apostle>. Access: 11 Sept 2008.

²⁷ Dick, *UBIK*, 68.

²⁸ Dick, *UBIK*, 206. Italics in original.

²⁹ Timothy Leary, et al., *The Psychedelic Experience: a Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (New York: University Books, 1964).

³⁰ Philip K. Dick. *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 17.

³¹ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 16.

³² Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 53.

³³ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 23.

³⁴ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 24.

³⁵ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 38.

³⁶ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 24.

³⁷ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 125.

³⁸ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 68.

³⁹ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 132.

⁴⁰ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 41.

⁴¹ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 25. Italics in original.

⁴² Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 128.

⁴³ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 76.

⁴⁴ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 80.

⁴⁵ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 86. Italics in original.

⁴⁶ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 87. Italics in original.

⁴⁷ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 89.

⁴⁸ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 88.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 176.

⁵¹ Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Available: <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=palmer>. Access: 19 September 2008.

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⁵³ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 184.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

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⁵⁰ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 191. Italics in original.

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⁵⁸ Hoeller. *The Gnostic World View*, Ibid.

⁵⁹ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 216-217.

⁶⁰ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 186.

⁶¹ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 204.

⁶² Hoeller, *The Gnostic World View*, Ibid.

⁶³ Dick. *Palmer Eldritch*, 200.

⁶⁴ Dick, *Palmer Eldritch*, 211.

⁶⁵ Eliade, *Vallási eszmék*, 477. First italics mine, second in the original. (my translation)

⁶⁶ Dick, *VALIS*, 97.