

Dissertation for M. A. Honours, Cultural History

An examination of the theme of alienation in the nineteen-sixties in the science fiction novels of  
J. G. Ballard and Philip K. Dick.

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My intention in this study is to make clear a link between a popular yet deeply cerebral cultural form, science fiction, and the cultural mood of the 1960s. I have chosen two authors whom I admire and whom I feel made important contributions to the understanding of our position in relation to our social structures, inherited values and prevailing economic, cultural and technological conditions.

It is my contention, and I believe it is supported by writing from a variety of disciplines of the time, that an important force in American and British culture of the 1950s and '60s was the rediscovery of the split in expectation in the Western view of the self. Writers such as Pappenheim and Seeman looked upon "modern man" as an essentially divided construct, attempting to answer emotional needs with economic or 'scientific' remedies. Increasingly, Freudian views of the self and Marxian ideas of how humans are divided from themselves came to look simplistic and caricaturish. For some (J. G. Ballard among them), the return was to other forces in nineteenth-century philosophy; the thinking of Carl Jung was truly popularized in the 1960s. Fritz Pappenheim, as we shall see, looked to Georg Simmel for his description of the inevitability of cultural decay.

J. G. Ballard and Philip K. Dick share common preoccupations in their writing: a sense of desperate discomfort with the known experience of life, a quality of indifference or even dread towards the apparent progress of science and technology, and an identification with the existentialist predicament. They are, however, very different types of artist. Ballard's writing enters his apocalyptic oeuvre from the influence of Jungian psychiatry and seeks to solve the problem of alienation through identifying the restrictions upon human behaviour which are real and those which are self-created or culturally fixed. In the 1960s he wrote three novels around the theme of apocalypse, The Drowned World<sup>1</sup>, The Drought<sup>2</sup> and The Crystal World<sup>3</sup>, in which his heroes discover in the scenes of disaster an assimilation with the world; an answer to their own conflicts.

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1Ballard, J.G., The Drowned World, Victor Gollancz, London, 1962

2Ballard, J.G., The Drought, (original title: The Burned World), Paladin, London, 1990

3Ballard, J.G., The Crystal World, Flamingo, London, 1966

As Gregory Stephenson<sup>4</sup> has pointed out, Ballard's apocalypses are the settings for inner journeys, owing much to Conrad's Heart of Darkness<sup>5</sup>, and the actual threat of the end of everything leans towards being a redemptive occurrence; a release from a pattern of existence which is fundamentally divided.

The inner journeys which the heroes of Ballard's 1960s novels undertake are the journeys of the shaman and the medicine man: the route to enlightenment described by Campbell in the 1940s.<sup>6</sup> The solution to the distress and displacement felt by his characters is embodied in the apocalypse they fear and, by overcoming time, entering a state of timelessness, they are redeemed.

In many ways, Dick is a more difficult writer to understand. Under constant financial pressure, he wrote nineteen novels in the 1960s, most of which are under-written, even chaotic, psychological romps, in which bitter, alienated heroes attempt to establish some sense of reality or authenticity in worlds where sense impressions are almost bound to be untrustworthy. In Ubik<sup>7</sup>, for example, the "pre-cog" (telepath) hero fights to establish a sense of reality in a comatose state of "half-life", where all his experience is generated from his own subconscious and is subject to interference by a malicious half-lifer who wishes to dominate all the residents of a sort of living mortuary. Ubik may be seen as the quintessential Dick pot-boiler of the sixties; paranoid, unresolved and amphetamine-soaked.

However, whilst churning out this repetitive and often alarming style of writing (the 1960s short stories can be unhinging if read in sequence<sup>8</sup>) Dick managed to produce three very fine novels indeed: The Man In The High Castle, Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep? and The Three Stigmata Of Palmer Eldritch. In my third chapter I shall look at these three novels in some depth, since they are not, as the three Ballard novels are, a series of related works, although they share that

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4 Stephenson, Gregory, Out Of The Night And Into The Dream: A Thematic Study Of The Fiction Of J.G. Ballard, Greenward Press, New York, 1991

5 Conrad, J., Heart Of Darkness, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973

6 Campbell, J. The Hero With A Thousand Faces, Bollingen Foundation Inc., 1949, edition, Paladin (Harper Collins), London, 1988

7 Dick, Philip K., Ubik, London, Panther, 1978

8 Dick, Philip K., We Can Remember It For You Wholesale, Volume 5 of **The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick**, Grafton, London, 1991

unity which stems from the work of an author consistently re-examining those themes which matter to him.

For both Ballard and Dick the novel represents a form which attempts to make a link between experienced reality and our power to control or manipulate that reality. In their work, alienation manifests itself in the distress of their characters. Received forms of perception are found to be inadequate, stifling or even morally incomprehensible and the Western cultural course, towards individualism and technological mastery of nature, is shown to be a dehumanizing and alienating pattern of behaviour; a move away from confronting and accepting our true human nature. For Ballard, the answer lies in the inward journey, while for Dick, less easy with detachment and possessed of a powerful sense of moral outrage at the grotesqueness of mid-century Western culture, such an answer represents a denial of our individual responsibilities to one another.

By looking at the sociology, philosophy and literary criticism of the 1950s and '60s, I believe it is possible to find a strain of thought – a cultural preoccupation, if you like – which makes the writing of these two authors comprehensible in terms wider than those of genre fiction. It is the assertion of this study that J. G. Ballard and Philip K. Dick do not represent isolated voices within an ignored genre, but that they touched upon and gave artistic form to the central crisis in twentieth century Western culture; the crisis of de-individuation, self-estrangement, anomie, or, as many thinkers termed it, alienation.

J. G. Ballard wrote four novels and numerous short stories during the 1960s. He began the decade as a pilot in the R.A.F. (flying Vulcan nuclear bombers)<sup>9</sup> and ended it as a major literary figure. His experience in the air force and his childhood experience of the Sino-Japanese war, most of which he spent as a civilian internee in horrendous conditions, underpin his detachment from social norms; the constant awareness within his work that human moeurs are a small part of objective reality and a restriction on the impulse to know one's true place within the world.

My interpretation of Ballard's work is heavily informed by Gregory Stephenson's study Out Of The Night And Into The Dream.<sup>10</sup> This is a considered and, in my opinion, definitive study of Ballard's fiction since it acknowledges the place of Ballard's writing within several traditions: the science fiction, post-imperial and post-modern (in the literal sense of being beyond modernist concerns) traditions being foremost among them.

The Drowned World, The Drought and Crystal World are the three major Ballard novels of the sixties. They are novels of apocalypse, in which a change in external reality – a global deluge, a global drought and finally, the transmigration of all matter in the universe into crystal – creates environments which mirror the crises within the protagonists' souls. The three novels are structurally similar but the catastrophes serve to explore different Jungian conditions: The Drowned World explores a landscape of the unconscious in which fertility and shadow run riot; The Drought is a metaphorical representation of the ego-conscious self - barren, sterile and purposeless; Crystal World describes the transportation of the self into a state of true self-realization, in which the forces of social conditioning, self-estrangement and isolation are transcended by a process of absorption into a unified environment.

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9 Erratum: Ballard had, in fact, left the RAF in 1955 and was working as an editor and advertiser throughout much of the sixties. My bad.

10 Stephenson, Gregory, Out Of The Night And Into The Dream, *A Thematic Study Of The Fiction Of J. G. Ballard.*, Greenwood Press, New York, 1991

A number of elements within the three novels point towards the conclusion that Ballard understood that life in mid-century Western culture was structured in opposition to the attainment of true human self-realization. I really only have space enough to study the three most important. These are: (1) his protagonists, searching for an undefined goal; (2) the references to mythical, literary and scientific antecedents of a search for enlightenment; (3) the awareness of the fragility of the environment onto which human culture is projecting its ego-dominant, destructive drive. I shall not be studying these in separate order but will try to illustrate all three points in a continuous, integrated discussion.

Structurally, the plots of the three novels all bear striking relationships to Joseph Conrad's Heart Of Darkness, as has been pointed out by Stephenson. Heart Of Darkness hangs over Drowned World like a borrowed jacket, in the depiction of the forest, in the encounters with isolated, disinherited people driven by their own inner passions and delusions and in the sense of progression, both geographical and psychic, which the expedition and the protagonist experience. More striking still is the description of the African coastline which opens Crystal World. Sanders, the hero, standing aboard a packet steamer that has been delayed in entering the harbour due to some, as yet, unspecified emergency in the area, gazes across at the coast and is struck by the overwhelming power of the forest, even at a distance, and disturbed by the strange light which emanates from it. Like Marlowe in Conrad's novel, Sanders is to enter the forest without a clear idea of what he will find in it. However, unlike Marlowe, and following more in the footsteps of Kurtz, or Kurtz's disciple, the Russian Harlequin, after attempting to reject the temptation that the transmuted forest holds for him, Sanders decides to allow the forest to absorb him.

Whilst Heart Of Darkness seems to provide the jumping-off point for the Ballard novels, this is only one of a series of influences within the works. Gregory Stephenson has identified a number of thinkers who influenced Ballard. Among these, the theory of mythology as described by Joseph Campbell is prominent. Campbell, author of The Hero With A Thousand Faces<sup>11</sup> explains the

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11 Campbell, J., The Hero With A Thousand Faces



various mythologies of the world in terms of a unified, essentially similar 'monomyth'. The monomyth describes the quest of the exiled individual to challenge the identity taken from social interaction and to learn the true self, thus to return and enrich the social group with their wisdom. That wisdom, Campbell says, was absorbed into social rites; rites usually expressive of acceptance of things as they are: "...submission to the inevitables of destiny".<sup>12</sup>

At the end of his book, Campbell addresses the issue of "The Hero Today". The pattern of social relationships sits, he thinks, in entirely different order. "The social unit is not [any longer] a carrier of religious content, but an economic-political organization."<sup>13</sup> The hero cycle of the modern age is no longer of renewal within a cycle of exile and return, but of awakening as if from dreams, from the blinding illusions of religious perception.

One knows the tale; it has been told a thousand ways...The dream-web of myth fell away; the mind opened to full waking consciousness; and modern man emerged from ancient ignorance, like a butterfly from its cocoon, or like the sun at dawn from the womb of mother night.<sup>14</sup>

This absolutist perception of the modern history of humans is, however, just as much myth as the ancient descriptions of creation, though that is not to say that they express the same things.

There has been a dramatic change of focus, from the group to the individual.

The problem of mankind today, therefore, is precisely the opposite to that of men in the comparatively stable periods of those great co-ordinating mythologies which now are known as lies. Then all the meaning was in the group, in the great anonymous forms, none in the self-expressive individual; today no meaning is in the group – none in the world; all is in the individual. But there the meaning is absolutely unconscious. One does not know toward what one moves. One does not know by what one is propelled. The line of communication between the unconscious zones of the human psyche have all been cut, and we have been split in two.<sup>15</sup>

This split in the human psyche is a crucial point. Campbell widely acknowledges the influence of Jung in his work and, as Stephenson shows in exhaustive detail,<sup>16</sup> the presence of Jungian theory is impossible to dismiss in Ballard's work. The books are about the individuation

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12 Campbell, P 384

13 Ibid. P 387

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid. P 388

16 Stephenson, Introduction, Pp 5-6, 30, 50, 58

process to the extent that one may identify each character in The Crystal World with his or her anima or animus (“...the personification of the unconscious in the form of a figure of the sex opposite our own”<sup>17</sup>), and characters such as Ventress and Thorenson fence around one another in the role of shadow-haunted demons. Sanders, for instance, meets in Louise Peret his anima. She is as haunted as him, but more connected to her unconscious impulses, acting upon them rather than worrying about them as Sanders does. Moreover, Sanders’ relationship with the priest, Balthus, is a relationship of shadow; when Balthus accepts the divinity or spiritual nature of the cataclysm, he acts as an example to Sanders.

For the protagonists of Ballard’s fiction, life is a process of movement from a state of extreme alienation to a resolution in which they come to see their surroundings as mirrors of their internal struggles. In The Drought, the changed landscape carries from early on a moral dimension for the characters. Johnstone, the fascistic clergyman, is seen by the hero, Ransom, as “...imposing his own fantasies on the changing landscape, as he himself had done.”<sup>18</sup> Various responses to the drought are illustrated: for Johnstone, it provides a possibility to take an active role in directing the lives of his flock in a way that had been denied to him before; for the local fishing community (who become, literally, “fishers of men”) it is a trigger for a bout of anarchic brutality in which the dry land is treated like a sea; for Ransom himself, it is the landscape of his own desolation, and an opportunity to explore the forces of his personal aridity.

The Drought is particularly interesting because the cause of the cataclysm is linked directly to technological growth. The oceans, polluted by human industry, have developed a mono-nuclear shell which may be broken, but will always reform. This prevents evaporation of sea water and thus brings an end to rain. While this a convincing apocalypse in terms of the story, I don’t think it is meant as a serious warning of an imminent end to the natural hydrological cycle. The strengths of

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17 Stephenson, P 5

18 Ballard, J. G., The Drought (original title, The Burned World), Paladin, London, 1990

this particular cataclysm are its general metaphorical nature (the end of everything and the drying up of the world) and its inherent sense of justice (as ye sow...).

The task for Ransom is to overcome his self-estrangement and to undergo individuation. In a way familiar to Campbell, he faces characters of grotesque natures who all make different demands on him. He helps some of them and merely observes the rest, until they gang up and kill one of their number, Lomax, the water hoarding capitalist, a foul, manipulative androgyne whose identity is subverted by his need to control. Lomax sees himself as Prospero<sup>19</sup> but to Ransom he is the serpent, extracting what power he can from stored wealth and bamboozling displays. With his death, the strange, fearful community in the desert is released from the spell of the dominant one and Ransom is free to walk away.

On the very last page of the book, Ransom notices "...that he no longer cast any shadow onto the sand, as if he had at last completed his journey across the margins of the inner landscape he had carried in his mind for so many years."<sup>20</sup> As a final symbol of his release, in the final sentence of the book, it begins to rain.

In The Crystal World the message is even clearer: the ego-force must be overcome and to do this is to accept the promptings of the unconscious and to assimilate oneself into the true environment; not the human-created one, but the wholeness of nature.

This message is restated on the penultimate page of the novel, when Sanders tells his friend and fellow doctor, Max, that the lepers who seek treatment from them can no longer find help in human agency. Leprosy has been a symbol of estrangement throughout the book and this final rejection of his ambivalent view of its sufferers marks for Sanders the point at which he realizes the significance of what has happened to him and to the rational world which he had, until recently, inhabited. Where, in the rational society, the lepers' oppression was expressed in the decay of their

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19 The Drought, P 180, in which Lomax addresses Quilter as "my Caliban".

20 The Drought, P 188

bodies, in the crystallized forest they are the most receptive to the promise the crystallization represents. Eventually, they are drawn in and, in a high point of poetic description, are seen running through the crystal world like a joyous carnival, celebrating their imminent absorption. And, it is their example, the experience of the oppressed, which draws Sanders back into the forest.

(For Suzanne [Max's wife] and Sanders),...for both of them, the only final resolution of the imbalance within their minds, their inclination towards the dark side of the equinox, could be found within that crystal world... "It seems to me, Max, that the whole profession of medicine may have been superseded – *I don't think the simple distinction between life and death has much meaning now.* Rather than try to cure those patients you should put them into a launch and send them up-river to Mont Royal (the forest where the crystallization has taken hold)".<sup>21</sup> (My italics)

Such an abrogation of professional responsibility might seem harsh but, within the world-view of the book, it is in fact a positive kindness to the sufferers. The importance society has hitherto put on the individual has enslaved us in an overarching terror of death so that we are no longer able to recognize the eternal within us. With the coming of the apocalypse, that has changed, and a new validity is given, both to life and death: death is overcome. The crystallization of the forest still holds a sort of spurious ambiguity, even at the end of the book; most of the people who have experience of it are afraid of it, but the reader has also noticed that those who are absorbed by the forest are transformed, and Sanders has found peace within the forest for which he knows of no substitute in the outside world. The awful passage in which, in trying to save his friend, Captain Radek, from the forest, Sanders mutilates him by tearing him, both physically and mentally, from the unity of the crystal, is the first clear message that the crystallization is perhaps not so much a threat to humans as a redemption for them.

When Sanders enters the forest for the second time, he comes across the priest, Balthus, whose spiritual crisis (which pre-dated the apocalypse but has reached a point of climax within it) is about to be resolved by merging with the crystallized forest. His last words are important to our

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21 Ballard, J. G., The Crystal World, Flamingo, London, 1966, P 173.

study since I believe they mark an important distinction between the approaches of our two writers to the subject of human spiritual identity: alienation and religious experience.

“Can’t you understand? Once I was a true apostate – I knew God existed but could not believe in him...Now events have overtaken me. For a priest there is no greater crisis, to deny God when he can be seen to exist in every leaf and flower”.<sup>22</sup>

I would like to suggest here, as a preliminary to looking at the Dick novels, that to Ballard this is not a statement of metaphysics but an existential construct. For Ballard, the religious faith of Western institutions is inherently flawed and even in denial of the obvious existence of the numinous. The crisis for the priest is a crisis of role; an ego construct obscuring his natural ability to perceive God.

As with Barney Mayerson, in The Three Stigmata Of Palmer Eldritch, by Philip K Dick, Balthus has come to feel that the religious experience is the experience of life, and that any cultural constructs which do not recognize that, many branches of Christian faith included, obscure the actual experience of life. While, for Ballard, this is but an element within his work, it is a crucial and central part of Dick’s work. In looking at the Dick novels, I hope to establish that, unlike Ballard, who was working through the modernist scheme and beyond, Dick rejected the values of a society which had thrown away its one clear conception of the numinous and, in his view, replaced it with nothing but junk and destruction.

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22 The Crystal World, P 162

As with Ballard, I have chosen three books by Philip K. Dick, published in the 1960s and generally seen as his most significant work of that decade. In his quality scale rating of Dick's life's work (an admirable attempt to define the necessary parameters of any catalogue of this prolific author's writing), Lawrence Sutin<sup>23</sup> rates all the three novels I discuss in the top two percent of Dick's writing.

Whilst Dick's writing is difficult to summarise, working as it does on a basis of multiple perspectives within settings of uncertain solidity, I believe it is fair to say, as Sutin does, that by the mid-1950s, the dominant themes of his mature work were established around the questions, "What is reality?" and "What is human?". The underlying response was, I believe, expressed in a tone of distressed alienation.

Dick was a staggeringly well-read man. What makes Sutin's biography so fascinating is that while he does not ignore the more famous influences on Dick's world-view (that is, his drug use and the attendant peculiarities of his behaviour), he also traces the philosophies and spiritual sources which he studied and from which he drew.

Throughout his life the range of his reading was virtually limitless, from technical papers on physics to Binswanger's *Daseinanalyse*, to Jung, Kant, William Burroughs, the Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Bhagavad Gita.<sup>24</sup>

Dick never managed to settle his relationship with the outside world. For him, the question, "What is reality?" became a solipsistic trap. In a recent television documentary, the author and critic Brian Aldiss said that Dick, "...like many a good man, went round the bend."<sup>25</sup> Certainly, in the final decade of his life, (he died in 1982) he suffered from intermittent hysterical periods and underwent a visionary religious trauma which lasted for several years and culminated in his spiritual masterwork, *Valis*. However, the religious experience had always been a strong element in his

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23 Sutin, Lawrence, *Divine Invasions, A Life of Philip K. Dick*, Grafton, 1991

24 Sutin, *Divine Invasions*, p3

25 Finch, Nigel and Wall, Anthony, (Series Editors), *Philip K. Dick: A Day in the Afterlife*; Arena, BBC, 9<sup>th</sup> April, 1994

science fiction writing and stemmed, as Aldiss stresses in The Trillion Year Spree,<sup>26</sup> from his understanding that the environment in which he grew up (America of the 1940s and 1950s) was a monument to the human ability to reinterpret and ignore reality.

We can never be certain what is ground-level reality, and yet we never tire of these webs of maya – of illusion. What is unwavering in Dick’s work is his moral sensibility. He recognises and portrays the actuality of evil: a kind of being, lacking in empathy, sympathy or any sense of common humanity – be that being paranoid, psychotic, junkie, autistic, or fascist.<sup>27</sup>

The strengths of Dick’s novels are their pace, clarity of plotting in describing complex situations and the sense of flawed decency with which he makes his heroes human. Frank Frink, in The Man in the High Castle, is a Jewish man living in a world ruled by Nazis: a man condemned to death from the day of his birth. Yet his concerns are the concerns of an ordinary man who understands the wrongness of the world: he thinks about his ex-wife, takes pride in his work, and, through the *I Ching*, struggles to gain some understanding of his surroundings.

The Man in the High Castle is my favourite of the three novels. It is set in the 1990s in a world in which the Axis powers have ruled since their victory in the Second World War. Germany is globally dominant and the Nazi ethos has reshaped the world largely in its own image: Africa is gone, nuked out of existence, and constant war in the Balkans keeps Europe in a state of emergency while the Nazis embroil themselves in their internecine struggles and divert their population with grandiose dreams of the conquest of space.

The novel is set in America, which is divided into three parts: the German-controlled Eastern Seaboard; the Japanese West Coast, and a neutral buffer zone. The Japanese are depicted as humane, wise politicians who have drawn on Taoism both to help organize their conquered territories and to understand a world in which the dominant power is, without question, evil: childlike, rapacious and evil. The saintly, courageous character, Mr Tagomi, is forced to a

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26 Aldiss, Brian with Wingrove, David, Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction, Grafton, 1988

27 Aldiss and Wingrove, Trillion Year Spree, p417

realization of the depths of evil while considering the implications of a change of power in the Reich.

There is evil! It's actual, like cement.

I can't believe it. I can't stand it. Evil is not a view...

It's an ingredient in us. In the world. Poured over us, filtering into our bodies, minds, hearts...

Why?...

We're blind moles. Creeping through the soil, feeling with our snouts. We know nothing. I perceived this...now I don't know where to go. Screech with fear, only.

Run away.

Pitiful.<sup>28</sup>

The Buddhist Tagomi is later forced to shoot two Nazi assassins in order to save a diplomat in whose power it may be to prevent the destruction of Japan. His grief for this act is as poignant and humane a description of moral loss as I have ever read. The shock throws him, for a while, into a separate order of reality, where America is not Japanese and he is treated without the deference to which he is accustomed. Upon his return he feels free to act upon his conscience and insult a German official by saving Frank Frink, who is due to be deported for extermination. His tirade is heroic and possesses a deep moral certainty in a novel in which the primary tone is moral ambiguity. Following this act, Mr Tagomi succumbs to a heart attack. We are not told whether he survives, but are left hoping that he does.

All the characters in The Man in the High Castle are lost souls. One could go through them, assigning them to the categories of alienation drawn up by Melvin Seeman in 1959 (in a paper I shall discuss in my next chapter). They are all constantly surprised by the gaps in their experience and the philosophies by which they attempt to order that experience, which is, perhaps, as fair a definition of alienation as one could wish to find. Childan, for instance, the trader in spurious

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<sup>28</sup> Dick, Philip K., The Man in the High Castle, Penguin, London, 1962, p97



historical artefacts, stumbles from one set of self-serving beliefs to another throughout the book, before realizing his true place in the world. At first, he clings to the code of manners he has adopted in his dealings with the Japanese. This is rooted for him, as a white American, in blind snobbery and a desire to get on in the world. His friendship with Paul Kasoura, the Japanese businessman, prompts him to develop a latent form of racial hostility, before eventually being guided by Paul's Taoism to understand what it is within himself he must value.

Childan's moment of revelation is one of the emotional climaxes in a highly charged book. He has become sole agent for Frink's jewellery business and has gifted a piece to Paul Kasoura through motives he is unable to fully comprehend. His conscious reason is the desire to seduce Paul's wife but this is so improbable that we realize that Childan's motives are deeply confused. Paul represents for him a useful business contact but also social elevation: the grace of the imperial overlord.

In the climactic passage, Paul reveals to Childan that the piece of jewellery possesses true artistic merit, *wu*: a Chinese term referring to inherent solidity, truth, poise or honesty. As genuine American art, it represents a threat to Japanese cultural hegemony in their conquered territories and Paul, as if judging Childan, offers him the choice between selling out the property to be reproduced *ad infinitum*, in order to cheapen its cultural value, or to follow a less lucrative course of behaviour and preserve its value.

Calmly, even harshly, Paul said, "Robert, you must face reality with more courage."

Blanching, Childan stammered, "I'm confused by -"

Paul stood up, facing him. "Take heed. The task is yours. You are the sole agent for this piece and others of its ilk. Also, you are a professional. Withdraw for a period into isolation. Meditate, possibly consult the *Book of Changes*. Then study your window displays, your ads, your system of merchandising."...

...Childan thought, He's actually saying: Which are you, Robert? He whom the Oracle calls 'the inferior man', or that other for whom all the good advice is meant? Must decide, here. You may trot on one way or the other, but not both. Moment of choice now.

And which way *will* the superior man go? Robert Childan inquired of himself. At least according to Paul Kasoura. And what we have before us here isn't a many-thousand-year-old compilation of divinely inspired wisdom; this is merely the opinion of one mortal...

"You wrestle with yourself," Paul observed. "no doubt it is in such a situation that one prefers to be alone." He had started towards the office door.

"I have already decided..."

Robert Childan said, "Paul -" His voice, he noted, croaked in sickly escape; no control, no modulation...

"Paul, I...am...humiliated..."

"The men who made this," Childan said, "are American proud artists. Myself included. To suggest trashy good-luck charms therefore insults us and I ask for apology."

Incredible prolonged silence.

"I demand," Childan said. That was all; he could carry it no further. He now merely waited...

Paul said, "Forgive my arrogant imposition." He held out his hand...

Calmness descended in Childan's heart. I have lived through and out, he knew. All over. Grace of God; it existed at the exact moment for me. Another time – otherwise. Could I ever dare once more, press my luck?"<sup>29</sup>

What Childan realizes in his revelation is that chance can never be ironed out of life. The lie of rational, utilitarian individualism, the promise of success in return for conformity, has been the screen between him and reality. By telling him to "...face reality with more courage", Kasoura is recognizing the web of illusion behind which the remains of American culture, and, we guess by extension, the Nazis in the book, hide. For Paul, and for Tagomi, there is a root reality: the way; the Tao of Taoism; the true pace of life from which no action should ever veer too far.

To what extent is The Man in the High Castle a comment upon nineteen sixties American culture? In many ways, the political scope of the Nazi empire in the book rings true as a parody of U.S. imperialism, complete with Kissinger-like *realpolitik*. There are bullying diplomats, closer to terrorists than consuls, wars triggered by imagined insults and, over it all, the true Satan of the

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29 Extracted from Chapter 11 of The Man in the High Castle.

twentieth century: the threat of nuclear cataclysm. The focus of the book, however, is on the hearts and minds of men, some of whom have a certain amount of scope for effective action; most of whom feel their impotence keenly, and all following courses of action in which they have little faith.

The setting of Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?<sup>30</sup> is much less rooted in historical parody. Its setting is a more traditional science fiction one: Los Angeles, circa 1990, in the final few decades of life on Earth as the planet, irrevocably scarred by nuclear war, awaits the end of everything. The human population is gradually being evacuated to colony planets, - Mars, the moons of Jupiter and so on, but we are led to believe that as an alternative to extinction, this is not to be dearly wished.

The economic impulse is as strong as ever, though. The creation of a breed of slave androids, almost indistinguishable from humans, has led to its own problems. They are banned from Earth but many of them retain a desire to escape the colonies and come home. The androids are not well-intentioned victims; such a plot would be too obvious for Dick. Instead, they are frightened, consequently brutal, and fascinated by their inability to experience the human quality of empathy.

Empathy has been heightened by the creation of a religion, Mercerism, which, through the use of a gizmo that links the consciousnesses of all its participants, attempts to give them a sense of peace, and of acceptance. The structure of the experience which is endlessly replayed by Mercer (who is eventually uncovered as a fraud by the ruling corporations, but who retains his sense of moral authenticity to the end of the novel) resembles the legends of tomb worlds in which lost souls are buried.

Do Androids Dream... is a novel about people who no longer have the choice of concentrating on life: life is in decline. Their values, their fascinations and their comforts are by way of distractions. Television, which Dick never trusted, is parodied mercilessly and a device

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30 Dick, Philip K., Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, republished as Bladerunner, Grafton, London, 1968

called the Penfield Mood Organ, which can inject into one any mood one wishes to experience, has a setting, 888, which promotes "...the desire to watch TV, no matter what's on it."<sup>31</sup>

In the opening chapter of the novel, Dick has fun exploring the possibilities of a marital argument, given the existence of the Penfield. The protagonist, Deckard, is an enthusiastic user of the mood organ. His wife, Iran, is less sure.

At his console he hesitated between dialling for a thalamic suppressant (which would abolish his mood of rage) or a thalamic stimulant (which would make him irked enough to win the argument).

"If you dial" Iran said..."for greater venom, then I'll dial the same...Dial and see; just try me"...

He sighed..."I'll dial what's on my schedule for today...will you agree to also?"

"My schedule for today lists a six-hour self-accusatory depression," Iran said.<sup>32</sup>

There is nothing in Deckard and Iran's world to rejoice over. They have absorbed the Mercerist view (which has soaked into popular morality) that caring for an animal is the only pure good a human can do but, in actual fact, the animals are dying out anyway, and that noble preoccupation has become little more than a commercial scam. Deckard himself owns an artificial sheep as he can't afford a real one and he must keep up appearances. It is not easy, even with the help of the Penfield, to avoid falling into despair, hence Iran's use of therapeutic, artificially induced, depression.

"At that moment," Iran said, "when I had the TV sound off, I was a 382 mood; I had just dialled it. So although I heard the emptiness (of their partially abandoned apartment block) I didn't feel it. My first reaction consisted of being grateful that we could afford a Penfield Mood Organ. But then I realised how unhealthy that was, sensing the absence of life, not just in this building but everywhere, and not reacting – do you see? I guess you don't. But that used to be considered a sign of mental illness; they called it "absence of appropriate effect." So I put it (despair) on my schedule for twice a month; I think that's a reasonable amount of time to feel hopeless about everything"...

"I'll dial for both of us," Rick said...At her console he dialled 594: pleased acknowledgement of a husband's wisdom in all matters...<sup>33</sup>

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31 Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, p9

32 Dick, *Do Androids Dream...?* Extracted from chapter one.

33 Ibid

In Do Androids Dream...? The hopelessness of the surroundings creates a setting in which alienation is the true and only response to what remains of life. Distortion of truth, the building up of false belief systems in order to sustain hope in a hopeless situation, is a survival trick. Isadore, the “chickenhead” (mentally impaired by radioactive dust) realizes that the two great diversions, Mercerism and TV, are in competition: Mercer and Buster Friendly, the computer-generated TV and radio talkshow host “...are fighting for control of our psychic souls.”<sup>34</sup> This is a theme which also appears in a rather more complicated form in The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch.<sup>35</sup>

Wealthy and ambitious, Palmer Eldritch has just returned from a six-year exploratory trip to the Proxima system, where he has become possessed by an interplanetary intelligence and picked up a new type of drug called Chew-Z, which can take people completely out of their true experience into their own mental world. This drug, which threatens the monopoly position of Can-D, a drug which allows people to experience group involvement in miniature settings called Perky-Pat layouts, turns out to be a less than benevolent substance, but only after a great many colonists on Mars (who live in such miserable conditions that any drug experience is welcome) have become contaminated by its vast, isolating and destructive view of reality. Unnervingly, Palmer Eldritch, complete with mechanical jaw, eye and arm, appears in all Chew-Z trips, and it becomes apparent that Eldritch is attempting to live in his customers’ consciousness.

Eldritch, at first, looks like the devil to the reader, and his main opponent, Leo Bulero, owner of Perky-Pat layouts, seems to be a beleaguered god. However, Barney Mayerson, a former employee of Bulero’s who has gone into voluntary exile on Mars, comes, by the end of the book, to realise that God cannot be merely a repository of one of these qualities. Eldritch is not an evil demon. Rather, he is closer to being God: magnificent, dispassionate and sorrowful, embodying everything; the good and the ill.

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34 Dick, Do Androids Dream...? p61

35 Dick, Philip K., The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch, Macfadden Books, New York, 1966

“That thing...has a name you’d recognise if I told it to you. Although it would never call itself that. We’re the ones who’ve titled it. From experience, at a distance, over thousands of years. But sooner or later we were bound to be confronted by it. Without the distance. Or the years.” Anne Hawthorn said, “You mean God.”

It did not seem necessary to answer, beyond a slight nod.

“But---evil?” Fran Schein whispered.

“An aspect,” Barney said. “Our experience of it. Nothing more.” Or didn’t I make you see that already? he asked himself. Should I tell you how it tried to help me, in its own way? And yet – how fettered it was, too, by the forces of fate, which seem to transcend all that live, including it as much as ourselves.<sup>36</sup>

Leo Bulero, in trying to destroy Eldritch, is attempting to assassinate God.

This is a chaotic story to try to tell in under two hundred pages and not all the silliness of the plot is ironed out in the writing. However, the impression left by the book, the picture of smallness, the insignificance of the human scale when weighed against the cosmic scale, makes this a truly brilliant piece of mid-twentieth century comment. I realize that my reading of the novel conflicts with Sutin’s and is only partially in agreement with Aldiss. I think this is understandable, given the frenetic pace of the book and the enormity of the ideas to which it alludes. However, one idea I have not seen in print concerning The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch is its similarities with Voltaire’s Candide.

In his 1946 introduction to his translation of Candide, John Butt said that the subject of Voltaire’s “...wittiest novel...is the problem of suffering.”<sup>37</sup> His exposition of Voltaire’s concerns is as applicable to The Three Stigmata... as it is to Candide.

However much we may try to avoid the problem, we are all confronted at some time with this difficulty, that the Creator has made a universe where suffering abounds. If the creator is good and all powerful, as we are told he is, could he not have made a better world? If he could, what prevented him? If he could not, can we still believe that he is good and all powerful? Can we, indeed believe in him at all? Or if we do, can we believe he is at all concerned with men and their sufferings? In times of widespread disasters such questioning becomes more general and more urgent.<sup>38</sup>

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36 Dick, The Three Stigmata... Pp 177-178

37 Butt, John, Trans., Voltaire, Candide, Penguin, London, 1947

38 Butt, Candide, P1

Compare the quote from The Three Stigmata... on the page before last with the following passage, from Candide.

“Master,” said he, “we have come to ask you a favour. Will you kindly tell us why such a strange animal as man was ever made?”

“What has that got to do with you?” said the dervish. “Is it your business?”

“But surely, Reverend Father,” said Candide, “there is a great deal of suffering in the world.”

“And what if there is?” said the dervish. “When his majesty sends a ship to Egypt, do you suppose that he worries whether the ship’s mice are comfortable or not?”<sup>39</sup>

There are other clues in The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch to suggest that the novel was at least inspired by aspects of Candide. Candide is an attack on optimism and Leo Bulero is most definitely an optimist. The foreword of The Three Stigmata... is a memo by Leo to his troops saying that he believes in the human ability to do whatever they want to do. The name of his product is Can-D. Could Leo Bulero be Pangloss? If so, Sutin and Aldiss have both seriously misread The Three Stigmata..., and I would not wish to set myself against such an eminent critic as Aldiss. Perhaps it would be better not to dispute it, but simply to tend our garden, as both Candide and Barney Mayerson decide to do.

Either way, while I agree with Aldiss that Dick’s shining quality was his “...moral sensibility”,<sup>40</sup> at least insofar as he identifies with the suffering of his characters, I am less sure that Aldiss’s implication that Dick knew what constituted evil and what constituted good holds water. In my next chapter I am going to examine alienation from the viewpoint of Christian doctrine and the secular experience of alienation, and I hope to show that, as far as Dick was concerned, an absence of believable values was at the very root of the confusion which he depicted so vividly in the 1960s and that that experience was by no means his alone.

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39 Butt, Candide, p141

40 Aldiss and Wingrove, Trillion Year Spree, p 417

In 1959 the sociologist Melvin Seeman published a paper in the American Sociological Review entitled *On The Meaning Of Alienation*. The summary of the reprint contains the following statement.

The problem of alienation is a pervasive theme in classics of sociology, and the concept has a prominent place in contemporary work.<sup>41</sup>

In the essay, Seeman posited five distinct phenomena which, he asserted, fall within the meaning of the long-used term, 'alienation'. Because this is the clearest contemporary account of the term and because Seeman's essay was widely reflected upon in the sixties, I will provide a quick summary of his five classifications.

POWERLESSNESS is the term Seeman coined as an extension of the classic Marxist use of the term 'alienation'. In Marxism, alienation has a very specific meaning, denoting a worker's alienation from control of the circumstances of her or his work. More broadly, Weber saw this as universally true; the soldier is alienated from control of his or her circumstances, as is the bureaucrat, the scientist or anyone who is unable to dictate the ends to which their work is aimed.

Seeman's precise definition of powerlessness is "the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes or reinforcements he seeks."<sup>42</sup>

It is in such a state that Frank Frink feverishly consults the Book of Changes, worrying about his absent wife when his life is in danger. Similarly, Sanders' obsession with treating leprosy sufferers, despite his ambiguous feelings towards the disease, and his chasing after Suzanne in an attempt to do something decisive, even though he is aware that his life has no direction, are signs of a consciousness of powerlessness.

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41 Seeman, Melvin, *On The Meaning Of Alienation*, The Bobbs-Merrill Reprint Series In The Social Sciences,, American Sociological Association, 1959

42 Ibid.



MEANINGLESSNESS is defined as occurring “when the individual is unclear as to what he ought to believe – when the individual’s minimal standards for clarity in decision-making are not met.”<sup>43</sup> Seeman has drawn this idea from the work of Karl Mannheim and expands it by saying that...

...as society increasingly organizes its members with reference to the most efficient realization of ends (that is, as functional rationality increases), there is a parallel decline in the “capacity to act intelligently in a given situation on the basis of one’s own insight into the interpolations of events”.<sup>44</sup>

As we have seen, this condition was, by the 1960s, a functional norm in the view of society posited by the more progressive science fiction authors, Dick and Ballard included. Childan, for instance, is most certainly a victim of functional rationality. He has no interest in the artefacts he peddles. He is concerned only with reward; reward which, he comes to understand, is only an empty promise.

NORMLESSNESS stems from Durkheim’s idea of anomie, and refers to the situation in which values aimed for are dictated by attainability rather than initial desirability, as a result of the desire for success, whatever the setting. This extends the concept of anomie, which refers to a situation in which social norms have broken down. Seeman cites R. K. Merton’s assertion that “...common values have been submerged in the welter of private interests seeking satisfaction by virtually any means which are effective.”<sup>45</sup> This might be seen as Tagomi’s crisis, for, though he draws comfort from the *I Ching*, at one point, in despair, he sees what life is like when one is deserted by one’s god.

I cannot face this dilemma, Mr. Tagomi said to himself. That man should have to act in such moral ambiguity. There is no way in this; all is muddled. All chaos of light and dark, shadow and substance.<sup>46</sup>

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43 Ibid.

44 Mannheim, Karl, Man And Society In An Age Of Reconstruction, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1940, cited in Seeman, P 786.

45 Merton, R. K., Social Theory And Social Structure, Illinois Free Press, Glencoe, 1949, Cited Seeman, P 787.

46 Dick, The Man In The High Castle, P 184

ISOLATION refers to the situation of the person who, perhaps reacting to the conditions of the previous categories, removes him or herself from social norms as an act of rebellion or social conscience. This category might profitably be linked to the values of the existential outsider, who informs both Ballard's and Dick's construction of their hero figures. Seeman's specific definition of isolation is of the condition of those "...who, like the intellectual, assign low reward value to goals or beliefs that are typically highly valued in the given society."<sup>47</sup>

SELF-ESTRANGEMENT, Seeman's final category, is the least satisfactorily explained but would seem to describe the situation in which one works not for the satisfaction of the work itself but for the effect that work will have on others; one is following a path in the hope of reward for selling out one's own values. Seeman is uncomfortable with this concept, describing it as an idea cloaked in "rhetoric"<sup>48</sup> but includes it because it was an idea which a number of scholars of industrialization saw as a growing trend.

Seeman concluded his essay by pointing out that while the terms might seem strange, the experience of alienation was, in the mid-twentieth century, a common one. He stressed the common nature of alienation, despite the peculiarity of the language.

Perhaps, on closer inspection, the reader will find only that initial strangeness which is often experienced when we translate what was sentimentally understood into a secular question.<sup>49</sup>

Seeman's paper is useful because it recognizes the varied sources of discontent which are covered by the blanket term 'alienation'. No one else has been as specific on the subject and yet he manages to encompass the full range of debate concerning worries about social place, role, uncertainties of perception and withdrawal. Seeman addressed alienation as an academic subject, conscious of the existence of a nebulous force in people's lives and attempting to define it in order

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47 Seeman, P 789.

48 Ibid. P 790.

49 Ibid. P 791.

to facilitate the search for its causes. For our two novelists, alienation is merely a part of the background of the worlds they are describing; a given element of life in their culture.

We must be careful not to lump Ballard and Dick together in these categories. Ballard's novels have, I believe, a precise purpose; that is, to illustrate what he believed to be the answer to the twentieth century experience of alienation. Thus, his illustrations of the condition are merely the starting point for the journey of individuation. However, it would be fair to see all his protagonists as being subject to isolation. As we saw in my second chapter, they are all withdrawn from their surroundings, by way of protest or as a response to dissatisfaction towards the societies of which they are a part. Moreover, I think it is fair to say that the depth of their complaints are due to a sense of normlessness: Ransom, in particular, seems to look upon the world without comprehension, wanting to believe in something but finding as an answer only the drought.

While Seeman's approach was to draw from the emotional experience of alienation an acceptable intellectual summary of the categories of this experience, Fritz Pappenheim, in *Alienation And The Modern Man*,<sup>50</sup> sought to describe the historical development of the idea and to show how it coloured all aspects of experience in modern culture, in order to find a way clear of the problem. In his introduction, he stated,

[The author]...believes that a society dominated by the forces of alienation stifles the fulfilment of human potentialities, that in such a society respect for the individual and for the dignity of man cannot be implemented but will remain in the realm of ideas and philosophical pronouncements.<sup>51</sup>

Pappenheim's definition of alienation is of absorption "...in the relentless pursuit of ...interests [to the extent that]...this pursuit shapes every phase of [the] encounter with reality."<sup>52</sup> This definition is very close to Seeman's description of normlessness and the similarity with the situation described by anomie is marked. As an illustration, he cites the example of a man who won

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50 Pappenheim, Fritz, *Alienation And The Modern Man*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1959.

51 Ibid. P 17.

52 Ibid. P 12.

a photographic competition by submitting a photograph of someone dying in agony after a car crash.

Can we say that this aloofness and lack of participation are traits characteristic only of persons like the photographer who, witnessing the pain of another human being, thinks solely of using his camera? Such a consoling thought would not be realistic. There seems to be a tendency in all of us to become indifferent bystanders. In the way we associate with other people or respond to important happenings we tend toward fragmentary encounter. We do not relate to the other person as a whole, or to the event as a whole, but we isolate the one part which is important to us and remain more or less remote observers of the rest.<sup>53</sup>

The great strength of Pappenheim's book is the constancy of his human understanding which, even as he describes the sterility of twentieth-century society, shows understanding of its motives and a personal negation of its values. For instance, why do we cling to our alienated view if, as he asserts, we lose so much to it? Because...

...as a result of his detachment, the alienated man is often able to achieve great successes. These, as long as they continue, engender a certain numbness, which makes it hard for him to realize his own estrangement. Only in times of crisis does he start to sense it.<sup>54</sup>

To a novelist, of course, it is just such "times of crisis", containing that quality of being able to reveal the true nature of the conditions of life, around which a novel may successfully be built. In The Man In The High Castle, all the main narrative characters are pitched into moments of self-realization; in Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep?, bounty Hunter Rick Deckard is forced to face the fact that his life has relied upon constant denial of the horror of his calling and that the consolatory systems upon which he has relied are false. In the three Ballard novels, the moments of truth are global and racial ones, in which the experiences of the main characters echo the apocalyptic *zeitgeist*.

Pappenheim's historical account of the study of alienation is necessarily selective, but it pinpoints ideas which might be seen as causal or explanatory of the rise of alienation as well as

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53 Ibid. Pp 12.

54 Ibid. Pp 13-14.

documenting reactions against the condition. Crucial to his argument is a piece of writing from early in the century; the essay *The Conflict In Modern Culture*<sup>55</sup> by Georg Simmel.

Georg Simmel (1858-1915) wrote widely and with startling perception on topics of social change, the impact of technology and the place of human beings in a changing society. He was not so much a social scientist as a social philosopher, concerned with the rapid shift of values which his era underwent. *The Conflict In Modern Culture* may, to an extent, be seen as an attempt to sum up the central beliefs of his career.<sup>56</sup> Simmel identifies the tendency of all cultures to develop “forms” around their more precious areas of cultural concern; i.e., art, religion, science, philosophy, etc. These forms will inevitably separate themselves from the life which inspired them; it is in the nature of art, for instance, to develop its own body of values and agenda.

..although these forms arise out of the life process, because of their unique constellation they do not share the restless rhythm of life, its ascent and descent, its constant renewal, its incessant divisions and reunifications.<sup>57</sup>

In response to this, the force of ‘life’, values of immediate experience, will tend to attack these forms, creating new and more vigorous forms; the development of the avant-garde, if you will. These renewing forms, initially more vital and true to their culture, will eventually become ossified in the same way and will, in turn, be replaced.

In the nineteenth century, however, a new and greater resistance to forms was emerging. Whilst every era has had a central idea to unify its patterns of culture (the ancient Greeks held to being; the middle ages, God; the renaissance, nature, and so on), “...unlike men in all these earlier epochs, we have been for some time now living without any shared ideal, even perhaps without any ideals at all.”<sup>58</sup> The revolt against forms had become, Simmel says, a revolt against form itself.

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55 Simmel, Georg, *The Conflict In Modern Culture And Other Essays*, Etzkorn K. Peter, Transl, Teachers College Press, University of Columbia, New York, 1968.

56 *Der Konflikt Der Modern Kultur*, published in 1918, was a late work, written, at least in part, in 1924, although, as Etzkorn states, “very little is known about their composition...It [Der Konflikt...] may well be one of his last statements concerning the broad issues of the dynamics of culture, aesthetics and social life.” Etzkorn, P 4.

57 Etzkorn, P 11.

58 Ibid. P 15.

Thus life perceives “the form itself” as something which has been forced upon it. It would like to puncture not only this or that form, but form *as such*, and to absorb the form in its immediacy, to let its own power and fullness stream forth just as if it emanated from life’s own source, until all cognition, values and forms are reduced to direct manifestations of life. ...This is probably only possible in an epoch where cultural forms are conceived of as an exhausted soil which has yielded all that could grow, which however, is still completely covered by products of its former fertility.<sup>59</sup>

What I think Simmel did not foresee was the globalization of monopoly capitalism and the hold that its attendant values were to have upon the political, social and cultural structure of twentieth century European and American life. In a way, I am tempted to suggest that Dick’s fascination with Simulacra indicates the Western fascination with representations of life, rather than with life itself. This is an idea expounded by Jean Baudrillard in his book Simulations.<sup>60</sup> The word comes from a passage in Ecclesiastes.

The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth – it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true.<sup>61</sup>

The idea of a true representation of something that has no existence except in its representations is an alarming one. However, much of what we do in modern society is geared towards the acquisition of tokens of an abstract concept. We are constantly chasing things which have no existence except as concepts. Where is the reality?

For Ballard, some certainty may be achieved through the process of individuation. His terminology, though, is the language of rationalism: Jungian theory. Jung represents the major coherent attempt in modernist thought to come to terms with the spiritual aspect of life. However, there is one more commentator whose ideas I would like to briefly discuss before concluding this paper.

Patrick Masterson’s book Atheism And Alienation<sup>62</sup> is a more modern attempt to look at the sources of alienation, and his approach is rather different from those secular thinkers whose ideas

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59 Ibid. P 12-13.

60 Baudrillard, Jean, Simulations, Semiotext (e), Incl, New York, 1983.

61 Cited in Baudrillard, Jean, Simulations, P 1.

62 Masterson, Patrick, Atheism And Alienation, Gill and Macmillan Ltd., Dublin, 1971.

are rooted in the modernist project and who trace alienation little further back than Fauerbach and Weber. Alienation, he says, had a meaning in a culture ordered by monotheistic ideology.

The hierarchical order and constant rhythm of the cosmos, which so intimately determined the agricultural activities of man, appeared as absolutely given rather than humanly constituted, and thereby facilitated the affirmation of a divine source... In such a cultural context, permeated by a lively sense of the sacred, it was readily accepted that the alienated man, the estranged man, was the man who did not believe in God or who did not live out the consequences of belief in God.<sup>63</sup>

Metaphysical belief was reinforced by everyday experience, in other words, and thus, the purpose of life was not a question to be consigned to the academic, or even to the priest. If there is any truth to what Masterson says, the unified culture was the culture in which spiritual beliefs were a commonplace part of social interaction.

Speaking very generally, one might say that until a new conception of man and of nature began to develop in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a conception still in the making today, man found his identity, meaning and purpose, both as an individual and as a member of society, in terms of a sacred world-view.<sup>64</sup>

The effect of Descartes' *cogito* was to force the question of what is real into a position of subjectivity; to attempt to develop a humanly comprehensible view of the cosmos from a position other than human. To Masterson, this made alienation a universal concern.

Through the exploration of his subjectivity, through his quest for forms of social life which would respect and foster the aspirations of this subjectivity,...man has worked relentlessly towards a new self-understanding of his condition. As this new self-understanding developed, the affirmation of God was no longer automatically accepted as the unifying and utterly basic principle of man's integrity, meaning and value. Rather, with increasing emphasis, it tended to appear as something alien, threatening and dehumanizing.<sup>65</sup>

Whilst for Masterson, the root of the error of rationalism is its rejection of the religious form which had previously been the central unifying principle of European culture, I believe that this does not mean that a return to Christian orthodoxy is the answer for the alienated individual. Where I use the term god, I assume a definition informed by Durkheim's ideas of religion; the arena in

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63 Masterson, Pp 2-3

64 Masterson, P 4.

65 Ibid. Pp 12-13.

which we may have some understanding of religious thinking is the social. It is for each person to attempt to define their spiritual belief; the days of a unified conception of European religiosity are gone. In the final years of his life, Dick tried, with enormous effort and solemnity, to come to some accommodation with the conflict between his rational perception of what he knew and experienced and his spiritual perception of the existence of a god. His attempt is often belittled as madness, particularly by those science fiction authorities such as Aldiss whose roots are in positivist, progressive, atheistic thought. Yet, few people question that Valis (Vast Active Living Intelligence System) is a sensitive and honest attempt to describe a new and broader conception of what constitutes God.

Of course, if we are honest, we have to realise that alienation as a concept is a bit of a fudge. It is an attempt to package unhappiness and to assign to it causes and treatments. Predictably, Marx, following Fauerbach, blamed human unhappiness on the ruling institutions of the society which he wished to reform; Christian authorities tend to blame it on atheism. Predictable enough. However, the modernist project's aim was, on the surface, at least, to increase the sum of human happiness,<sup>66</sup> and thus, dissatisfaction, particularly such widespread dissatisfaction as makes itself apparent in the popular movements of the 1960s and beyond, is a legitimate and even vital subject for study.

I have now presented all my evidence. In my final pages I shall attempt to sum up my conclusions.

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66 Almond, Chodorow and Pearce, Progress And Its Discontents, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1982, Pp 1-4.



By the nineteenth-sixties, the pretence that Western culture in any way addressed ordinary spiritual concerns was threadbare. The rise of dissatisfaction led to a broadening of the institutions of transmission of ideas. Science fiction became the repository for the most vital and energetic social comment in literature. "Science fiction is the true literature of the twentieth century."<sup>67</sup>

The most significant British SF. was the work of J. G. Ballard; in the States, Philip K. Dick was the pre-eminent science fiction author throughout the decade. While they addressed political, ecological and cultural concerns with wit and originality, the striking element in their work for me is the sense of distress which is the lot of most of their characters.

Ballard's characters are redeemed from this distress by inner journeys which mimic the hero quest described by Joseph Campbell. For Dick's characters, set in arenas of decline and hopelessness, there is no such easy redemption. Only in The Man In The High Castle is there even a glimmer of hope at the end of the novel, and that is at the cost of constant work and conflict.

This view becomes comprehensible when the idea of alienation, which was a topic of intense interest to sociologists in the late nineteen-fifties and throughout the sixties, is examined. However, the actual meaning of alienation is itself complex; it has variable tones of meaning, force and consequence, depending upon who is using the idea. Nonetheless, we might usefully sum it up as unhappiness which is other than a direct reaction to immediate adverse physical circumstances, with the attendant suspicion that the true focus of life is unknown.

Through Ballard's writing we have a technique for overcoming the personal experience of alienation, informed by ancient wisdom, modern cultural and anthropological studies and his own, unique, experience. Through Dick, we see a less comfortable or easy set of preoccupations; for Dick, the group identity remains the root of the personal, and if the group course is not going well, then he is unable to see a way out of his alienation.

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67 Amis, Kingsley, New Maps of Hell, Victor Gollancz Ltd., London, 1960

Dick's writing from the sixties leads us to ask, what is it that modern society lacks, to cause this sense of alienation? Through Masterson, Seeman, Pappenheim and Simmel, I have come to the following (provisional) conclusions.

Whilst rationalism fails to find an accommodation with the numinous – the spiritual – it will be an incomplete ideology, inadequate to frame the experience of life in a fully comprehensible social and cultural structure. “Mysticism” is still anathema to science, and is regarded with positive mistrust in individualist, legalistic, capitalist thought, even to the extent that a preoccupation with spiritual matters can be grounds for being labelled mentally ill.

In the place of involvement with the spiritual we have ritual, and, worse, we have not unified ritual practice, drawing group identity into commonly understood practice, but a plethora of ritual practices; ideas of social propriety and frozen cultural forms inherited from an earlier epoch, which have changed little to accommodate the greater knowledge and changed world-view which has been the success of post-enlightenment history. Where once the individual stood before his or her god as a part of a group who all understand their common role before god, we now have the basic function of individual usefulness; that is our sole relationship with group identity. Ballard knew this and asserted that individualism had to be based in true accommodation with the self; if you are going to worship the self (a questionable project in any case), you must have a knowledge of what the individual is. Dick, a more complicated and less sanguine thinker, strove to find a balance between the awareness of the sanctity of nature, threatened by economic activity, and the obvious, natural awareness of what Wittgenstein called “the transcendental presence of the other”; the numinous, spiritual experience.

Therefore, I would like to suggest that the dissatisfaction which was so much a part of the mid-century cultural upheaval undergone by Western culture had, at its root, a desire to build, not to tear down cultural forms. The great period of revolution was the early part of the century, before

war and poverty squandered the energy of the revolutionaries. The sixties were a period of reinvention, and the task of reinvention goes on.

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