Stars in My Pocket

SF, Philip K. Dick, and the Space Age

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The trope of space exploration that attracted so many writers during the "golden age" of the genre remains an SF hallmark. We may, however, question its contemporary centrality after the waning of the intellectual climate that De Witt Douglas Kilgore labeled as "astrofuturism." Perhaps, just like David Hartwell argues in *Age of Wonders*, "When it comes true," meaning the Moon landing and other achievements from the American space program, "it's no fun anymore." This paper looks at the peculiar way Philip K. Dick embraced space exploration, anticipating its exhaustion and substituting in its place a more inner (perhaps "virtual") approach.

> He was a man obsessed with the idea which is at this moment circulating all over our planet in obscure works of "scientifiction," in little Interplanetary Societies and Rocketry Clubs, and between the covers of monstrous magazines, ignored or mocked by the intellectuals, but ready, if ever the power is put into its hands, to open a new chapter of misery for the universe. It is the idea that humanity, having now sufficiently corrupted the planet where it arose, must at all costs contrive to send itself over a large area: that the vast astronomical distances which are God's quarantine regulations, must somehow be overcome. […] In Professor Weston the power had at last met the dream.
> C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (70)

Prelude: A Dickian Odyssey

What was Philip K. Dick's view regarding the space program? Gary Westfahl, in "The Case against Space," and based solely on Dick's comments on an anthology edited by Don Wollheim,[1] categorizes him on the side of the optimists: "writing in 1969 […] Philip K. Dick maintained that 'it was essential that we send a man to the moon; exploration is natural to man; […] a force in man so powerful that it cannot be denied'" (194). These words might echo, when taken out of context, the final paragraph of *Solar Lottery*, that reads, in the mouth of one of the characters:

> "It isn't senseless drive, […] It isn't a brute instinct that keeps us restless and dissatisfied. I'll tell you what it is: it's the highest goal of man—the need to

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> grow and advance … to find new things … to expand. To spread out, reach areas, experiences, comprehend and live in an evolving fashion. […] To keep moving on … " (*Solar* 188)

Neither, though, gives an accurate portrait of Dick's position. In the first case, the circumstances surrounding the statement—the republication of a collection of stories about men on the Moon—were biased toward that kind of remark. In the latter, a deeper look at the novel is enough to tell a different story. And, as I will argue, that different story, when placed in the wider context of his work, leads also to an alternative—some might say "virtual"—concept of space.

The Stars, Our Destination?

The trope of space exploration has been a staple of "genre SF" since its birth, to say nothing of "proto SF" classics such as Jules Verne's *De la Terre à la Lune* (1865), or H. G. Wells's *The First Men in the Moon* (1901). Even today, despite the genre's evolution, it may still be considered one of its fetish tropes: it is not by mere chance that the trophy for the oldest and best-known SF writing prize, the Hugo Award, is a spacecraft. As stated by the late author and critic Thomas M. Disch, in *The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of*,

> there can be no question that the rocket ship is the genre's primary icon. […] the image of the rocket—preferably a 50s model kind with Pontiac tail fins—remains the sci-fi image of preference. […] It is an identifier, like the cross or the hammer and the sickle, with a single all-encompassing meaning, one that transcends all distinctions of class, taste, or even logic." (57)

Still deemed impossible in the late 1920s when science fiction as a publishing category was established, and unthinkable while the war effort became a priority, the exploration of outer space started to be taken seriously as the 1950s were approaching. The new geostrategic balance, polarizing the so-called civilized—i.e., more technically sophisticated—world between the American and the Soviet blocs into a Cold War climate, practically required that these governments invested in all kinds of propaganda devices to display, both to their citizens and abroad, that technical improvement (at least as important, in the collective imagination, as the comfort of citizens) was a direct function of the political regime. Space programs, enabled by the adaptation to a peaceful context of technologies developed in wartime, became

one of the most effective forms of that propaganda, while simultaneously allowing the conversion of a significant number of jobs. Again in the words of Disch:

> [In Verne's *De la Terre à la Lune*, a] group of artillery professionals, disillusioned by the prospect of peace following the Civil War, organizes itself as the Gun Club, an organization [...] which sounds like a hybrid of the National Rifle Association and NASA. The Gun Club transforms their gigantic cannons not into plowshares but into spaceships, and the story begins.
>
> This is uncannily close to how NASA got going in the wake of World War II, using the talents of the German rocket scientists who developed the V-2 rockets. *The space program has always been, in a functional sense, a work-relief program for the military during periods of peace.* (59, emphasis added)

Although other applications, such as communications satellites, came to be the real shapers of the second half of the twentieth century, the conquest of space was something that could arouse the ordinary citizen, promising the achievement, even in a version more in line with reality, of fantasies that science fiction had begun to stimulate in the preceding years. It is thus not surprising that both the engineering and the publishing fields were benefitting from that convergence in the popular imagination. Already in the early publications sponsored by Hugo Gernsback, scientists, engineers, and members of related professions saw in the genre a literature particularly fitted to their interests—among other reasons, because it dispensed with literary erudition—with the added incentive of serving as a vehicle for the vulgarization of science. With the advent of the space program, the connection became even tighter. The field of "genre SF" was in tandem with the propaganda, setting the tone for a public acceptance of huge governmental investment in space engineering, enhanced after the famous speech by John F. Kennedy on 25 May 1961.[2] Citizens' associations, such as "Interplanetary" or "Rocket" societies (whose key members belonged almost invariably to one of the two categories listed above: engineers and pulp writers), even if starting as mere affiliations of enthusiasts, gained notoriety, and with this came the tacit status of a pressure group. Meanwhile, a generation that grew up reading magazines such as *Amazing* was choosing degrees (and later occupations) that supposedly entailed the fulfillment of their teenage dreams, or becoming the new crop of science-fiction writers.

This was the intellectual climate that allowed for what De Witt Douglas Kilgore termed "astrofuturism" in his book with the same name: an "aesthetic, scientific, and political tradition [...] of speculative fiction and

science writing inaugurated by scientists and science popularizers during the space race of the 1950s" (1–2) in which "the space future is presented not as an impossible Arcadia, but as a feasible movement into new territories" (3). Substantiating my previous remarks, Kilgore continues:

> many of the key innovators and proselytizers found themselves on American soil, becoming the scientists and engineers who developed the technology of spaceflight and the American space program of the 1960s. They also became the popular science and science-fiction writers who presented the spaceflight project to audiences enthralled by its potential. In the books and articles they wrote and in the movies and television programs that they made or inspired, astrofuturists sought to convince the public and the government that the conquest of space was the next great goal of American civilization. (31–32)

Among the many "astrofuturists" whose apologetic writings could be examined,[3] Arthur C. Clarke deserves mention due to his relevance. That relevance is enhanced by the fact that he was one of the few early "astrofuturists" who remained active in what may be called its "second generation"[4]—beginning at the end of the 1960s, with the Moon landing—and even outlived it. A remarkable example of that cross-generational status is *Report on Planet Three and Other Speculations*, one of Clarke's works in science popularization, published in 1972 but gathering several pieces written mostly for mainstream magazines during the two previous decades.

Regardless of his optimism, a few caveats can be noticed in the introductions specially written for the compilation. One illustration of that suddenly more cautious tone is found in the introduction to "Vacation in Vacuum," originally published in 1963, and, in Clarke's own words, "the original inspiration of the space-station sequence" in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (cf. 45):[5]

> At the time, most readers must have thought that orbiting hotels were the wildest of fantasy, but now Barron Hilton firmly expects to be running such establishments before the year 2001 dawns. […] *I must confess that I now have my doubts* about the practicability—and stability—of the spherical swimming pool; but a hollow cylindrical one would certainly be built, and would be just as much fun. (45, emphasis added)[6]

By then, Clarke was already aware of dissenting voices, but, as we can see in "Next—The Planets!," presented in 1968 at the Fourth International Symposium on Bioastronautics and the Exploration of Space, his answer came in the form of a rebuttal:[7]

> Like all revolutionary new ideas, the subject has had to pass through three stages, which may be summed up by these reactions: (1) "It's crazy—don't waste my time." (2) "It's possible, but it's not worth doing." (3) "I always said it was a good idea." (70)

With the detachment that time has allowed us, we may now say that if (1) and (2) ever gave rise to (3), this lasted only for a very short span of time. More accurate is to say that instead of (3), a belief similar to that expressed in (2) was the one that gained more relevance: it was feasible, it's already been done, but it is not worth keeping doing it.[8] In *Age of Wonders*, David Hartwell explained it in the most diplomatic way—"Science is speculative (science is fiction?). When it becomes real, it's merely technology. Real space travel almost killed the science fiction field." (75)—but maybe even more accurate is the blunt description by Disch: "The moon was of use to NASA only while it was virginal dreamstuff. Once we had put some footprints on it, planted the flag in its dust, and take some souvenir snapshots, additional landings did not excite much attention. As the TV ratings plummeted, Congress grew stingy" (74–75).[9]

Phase I: Against the Sense of Wonder

This does not mean that all science fiction had a uniform (i.e., technophilic or astrofuturistic) attitude toward the space program. Before the failure of the "space dream" became clear to optimists such as Clarke, some writers found alternative paths for the genre, even if that meant getting closer to the margins of the literary field. In many cases, this was tantamount to a more or less declared embrace of fantasy (and thus of the impossible and the improbable), bestowing a mythical tone—often associated with a more baroque form—to tropes such as the conquest of space, interplanetary empires, or aliens. Cordwainer Smith is the name that most easily occurs as an early adopter of this approach. More contemporary writers as Iain M. Banks would opt for an almost parodic return to space operas as a metafictive, ironic, and sometimes openly erudite revisitation of these themes, compelling the genre to look at its own history.[10]

As I have mentioned above, Dick offers a very peculiar—if not unique—approach to that trope so characteristic of the SF genre. I would like in particular to focus on the period that consolidates his maturity as an author, the 1960s. Besides being the time when he wrote most of his significant

books, it is during this decade that—and this is the main thesis of this article—Dick embraced the trope of space, but, far from assuming an astrofuturist perspective, he restored to that very word—"space"—some of its other multiple meanings. While a few authors conceived space as something real and (technologically) available and achievable, and others conferred on it a density akin to myth,[11] Dick toyed with the concept, first applying it as a tool to juxtapose "outer space" and "inner space," then reworking the latter toward an even more abstract construct, anticipating the contemporary idea of virtual (or even cyber) space.[12]

But we must not ignore the previous period, his timid career outset during the 1950s, which provides us with some clues to this deconstruction of the trope. Already in some minor works in this decade, both novels and short stories, his settings are far from reflecting astrofuturistic euphoria. In *Solar Lottery*, the Flame Disc is portrayed as a futile hope, something whose discovery and conquest leaves the settlers frustrated in their expectations, a bitter taste anticipated at least twice in the novel. First while the Prestonite settlers are still in their way to the "Flame Disc":

> In a short while the ship would pass the final signal buoys and leave the finite, familiar universe behind. "A number of the group want to go back," Groves said. "They realize they're leaving the known system. This is their last chance to jump ship; if they don't do it now, they're stuck to the end."
>
> "How many would jump if they could?"
>
> "Perhaps ten. Or more." (86)

About a half of the group leaves the party (cf. 89), and the ones that arrive at the "tenth planet" seem to be in an even worse situation. That is the second occurrence:

> "That's our new home," Konklin said. "Big, isn't it?"
>
> "[…] You're sure that's a planet? Maybe it really is a space serpent. I don't think I'd like to live around a space serpent, no matter how big it is." (180–81)

Solar Lottery is, along with a few others such as *The Unteleported Man* (1966) or *Our Friends from Frolix-8* (1970),[13] a novel where the characters go further than the known planets of the solar system. Galactic empires, the staple of SF writers such as Isaac Asimov (in his "Foundation" series), are in Dick prominent by their absence. Interplanetary colonies, although more common throughout his work, are nevertheless, as if repeating the warning given in *Solar Lottery*, mere patchy solutions to social problems such as over-

population. And even then, we had to wait for another decade to see these subjects become more frequent in his *novels*: although space, aliens, and similar SF tropes remained common in the shorter fiction, in longer works he preferred more domestic settings.

There is, of course, the psychological explanation. According to this, and given that Dick suffered from agoraphobia and rarely left California, it should be no surprise that Earth is portrayed as a haven that ought not be abandoned even when—as in *The Man Who Japed* (1956) or at the end of *The Simulacra* (1964)—someone can expect to find only on another planet the living conditions and freedom denied by one of those totalitarian regimes so common in his fiction. But such an explanation is not enough to account for statements like this one by Christopher Palmer:

> SF is a strongly kinetic form; it is very concerned with journeying, moving outwards, opening out, travelling towards or in search of wonder. […] Little of this is present in Dick's SF, and not merely because he has scant concern with space flight, and is thoroughly sceptical of the idea that colonizing other planets would be a positive thing to do. (50)

Most of Dick's novels written in the 1950s confirm Palmer's remark. Their settings being mostly domestic, they provide a distorted mirror to the way that decade wanted to portray itself, as Fredric Jameson noted about *Time Out of Joint* (1959):

> If you were interested in constructing a time capsule or an "only yesterday" compendium or documentary-nostalgia video film of the 1950s, this might serve as a beginning. […] This is clearly […] to shift from the realities of the 1950s to the representation of that rather different thing, the "fifties" […]; in other words, its own representation of itself. (279, 281)

But how about those titles that depict less domestic scenarios? Is it legitimate to generalize from so few novels? The fact is that, apart from *Solar Lottery*, where the travel to the Flame Disc is of major importance for the narrative, out-of-Earth settings in the novels appear only in *The Man Who Japed*, and both confirm the pessimistic stance toward life away from Earth, at least assuming a political reading.[14] Slightly loosening the criteria to allow for those cases where space colonization is mentioned but is not a setting within the narrative, we have also *The World Jones Made* (1956) and *Time Out of Joint*. In these novels there is at least a more optimistic approach: Venus and the Moon, respectively, are places where the civilizational enter-

prise can start anew, free from the dystopia that Earth has become.

A quick look at the short stories allows a more accurate perspective on what otherwise may seem an ambiguous stance toward this SF trope. Space settings are far from uncommon in the stories and novelettes Dick wrote in this decade,[15] which actually comprise the overwhelming majority of his shorter fiction. But even if we admit that he was more willing to make concessions in his writing for this short-term market some oddities cannot remain unnoticed.

First oddity: Dick's fiction, and in particular these early short stories, is populated with aliens. However, with rare exceptions, the aliens come to meet the humans and not the other way around.[16] The specter of McCarthyism might explain some stories that portray them as predators, and the paranoia that ensues, as in "The Hanging Stranger" (1953), "Martians Come in Clouds" (1954), or "The Father-Thing" (1954), but in cases such as "War Game" (1959) they are (or strive to become) our equals, and the decision to leave their home planet to come to Earth results not from choice but rather from necessity—a pattern that would reappear in the following decade, for example with the character Lord Running Clam in *Clans of the Alphane Moon* (1964).

Second oddity: just like in *Solar Lottery*, space colonization is frequently seen as a delusive goal in the long run. In "Some Kinds of Life" (1953), an extraterrestrial mission fails to find life on Earth because all humans had to leave after exhausting the natural resources; in "Survey Team" (1954, which could almost be a sequel to that previous short story), the Terrans that six thousand years before had moved to Mars need to return to Earth, because the resources on their "new" planet are also exhausted. And in "The Impossible Planet" (1953) everybody thinks that the almost forgotten existence of planet Earth is nothing more than a myth.

Above all oddities, there are these two stories: "Mr. Spaceship" (1953), the tale of an old college professor who transplants his brain to a spaceship, extending his life and altering his experience of the universe outside him; and "Piper in the Woods" (1953), a story in which all the astronauts who are sent to a planet covered with vegetation suddenly crave to become trees, merging with the surroundings and losing their humanity. Perhaps that is the most important lesson to learn from Dick's early fiction about space travel: no matter how imperfect is our planet, leaving Earth also means leaving behind what makes us human.

Phase II: From Outer Space to Inner Space, and Then (Almost) to Virtual Space

By the 1960s Philip K. Dick had given up writing mainstream novels that kept being rejected, and novel-length SF narratives (instead of the slowly declining magazine market) became his main focus. There is some truth in Emmanuel Carrère's account in his more or less fictionalized biography, *I Am Alive and You Are Dead* (1993), according to which it was the relative success of less openly science-fictional narratives, *Time Out of Joint* and *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), that inspired this new attitude toward writing,[17] but we should not forget it was also the decade that brought us what Robinson termed "the Martian Novels" (51–64).

Instead of abandoning space settings, Dick would thus, at least for a few years, choose to embrace them even more, to varying degrees. *We Can Build You* (1972) is still a very "earthly" novel,[18] but almost all that follow until *Counter-Clock World* (1967) mention at least one other planet, usually a colony of Earth or a planet with which there is some kind of economic exchange[19] (or war, in the worst case scenarios), and the trend goes on until the "theological" novels of the 1970s. But as we move away from that "core" of the first half of the 1960s, little more remains than a few plot gimmicks and props, and the action stays firmly grounded on Earth.

Those other planets and space colonies (or occasionally spaceships) have, just like in the novels written in the 1950s, two contrasting roles in the narrative. Either they are a setting for the action—*Martian Time-Slip* (1964), *Clans of the Alphane Moon*, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1965), *The Unteleported Man*, *Nick and the Glimmung* (1988), *Ubik* (1969), *Galactic Pot-Healer* (1969), *A Maze of Death* (1970)—or just a place that, with a stronger or weaker justification, helps to set the science-fictional tone—*Dr. Bloodmoney* (1965),[20] *The Game-Players of Titan* (1963), *The Simulacra* (1964), *Now Wait for Last Year* (1966), *The Crack in Space* (1966), *The Zap Gun* (1967), *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). In what remains of this section, I will argue that these numbers are misleading, because even in those works that belong to the first category, Dick is running against the stream, i.e., not only is there no support for the space program—which was experiencing its biggest growth during this decade—but he also is becoming concerned with something else.

To demonstrate this, we should first recall Jameson—to be more precise, a paragraph placed between the two that were previously quoted about Dick's representation of the "fifties":

> Dick himself comes to mind as the virtual poet laureate of this material: of squabbling couples and marital dramas, of *petit bourgeois* shopkeepers, neighborhoods, and afternoons in front of television, and all the rest. (280)

This is apparently not an accurate portrait of his work in the 1960s, if we think of the fake realities of *Ubik*, or the austere post-apocalyptic scenario of *Dr. Bloodmoney*. Or is it? Does something remain from those more domestic settings of the previous decade, something beyond housewives addicted to barbiturates or anxiolytics and male characters in service jobs?

Martian Time-Slip and, to a lesser degree, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* clearly illustrate how all those traits can be simultaneously present—even the housewives. Mars, after all, is not that much different from Earth, as the people and the economic interests are still the same.[21] Nevertheless, instead of those novels, we shall take a closer look at the story that inspired the latter, "The Days of Perky Pat" (1963).

If we merely focus on the setting, "The Days of Perky Pat" could be a side dish to *Dr. Bloodmoney*, though lacking enough development to be a sequel. The story takes place in a post-apocalyptic Bay Area, with small and barely connected communities (Pinole, Berkeley, and Oakland), but, unlike that previous novel, most humans seem to have fled to Mars; only the survivors of the nuclear holocaust—the "flukes"—remain. Scarcity of food and other basics is not a problem, because care ships come occasionally from Mars, leaving rescue parcels with food and other supplies. The problem is civilizational decay, with the younger generation slowly receding to barbarism (hunting mutant animals instead of eating provisions from the parcels, for example) and their parents stuck in an alienated state, ditching reality for the Perky Pat layouts that recall happier times.

In *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, Dick would invert one of the premises, portraying settlers on Mars instead of survivors on Earth. Still addicted to that atavistic behavior with toys, they are also hooked on a drug that "translates" their conscience to the dolls, in a commodified simulacrum that becomes a fake reality—even if only as effective as the number of props they buy.[22] But "The Days of Perky Pat" is already inverted enough: adults behave like children while children[23] (in spite of their almost savage state) act more rationally than their parents, Mars is the new home for the rest of humankind while Earth has become an alien place, and the most predictable future seems to be the return to a pre-civilizational past, receding even further than what characters ask for:

> Can you appear some morning with a dust rag a million miles in surface area and restore our planet to pristine newness?
>
> Or rather, he thought, to pristine *oldness*, the way it was in the "ol-days," as the children call it. ("Days" 302)

Here applies what Eric S. Rabkin said about utopias—but again in an inverted way, because this is far from being a utopia—"there is trouble in paradise, and that trouble is sex" (4). After a competition between the Pinole and the Oakland "fluke-pits," the former win a set of Connie Companion—an older, married and pregnant doll, quite unlike the teenage Perky Pat.[24] But apart from the players who won the doll, the other characters reject this excessive outbreak of reality in the comfortably nostalgic and pre-adult world of layouts:

> Then Fran said in a choked voice, "And if they're married—you mean they've been—intimate?"
>
> Wynn raised an eyebrow, then nodded. "Sure, since they're married. Is there anything wrong with that?"
>
> "Perky Pat and Leonard have never—" Fran began, and then ceased. ("Days" 318)

A closing tension remains unsolved. Either the future belongs to the children who neither care about nor understand the childish behavior of their parents but are also straying from the civilizational values of a past they never experienced, or it belongs to the parents who can foresee a tiny bit of "progress" within the supposedly immutable world of Perky Pat dolls.

Might this brighter future come about in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (although it doesn't), or in *Martian Time-Slip* (where actually it does, at least in Manfred's vision)? In other words, is there a correlation, in Dick's fiction, between glimpses of hope versus bleak futures and the planet where they take place? In the 1950s, maybe, but not any more. For Barney Mayerson, in *The Three Stigmata*, being drafted to Mars is still something to be avoided. However, like the suspicions of Rachmael ben Applebaum concerning the colony planet in *The Unteleported Man*, those feelings might just as well be directed toward another place on the same planet. And *Ubik*'s Joe Chip or the spaceship crew in *A Maze of Death* have altogether different worries, those that involve the realness of their perceptions and their actions. Sure, planetary colonies keep being portrayed as harsh and unappealing territories, and Earth is still the model for an authentic home, but, in spite of these ideal roles and the way they can be contrasted, Dick's narratives slowly

become indifferent to the "physical" place of the action.

Something else is at stake, and that something, already present in "The Days of Perky Pat" but also, why not say it, in earlier novels like *Time Out of Joint*, is the retreat to an "inner space" (borrowing, with a slightly different meaning, a term coined by J. G. Ballard). Living on Mars (*The Three Stigmata*), being a prisoner in Whale's Mouth (*The Unteleported Man*), or being adrift in a spaceship (*A Maze of Death*)[25] are predicaments that only exacerbate an escapist urge to a fake reality that can take place as much on Earth as anywhere else.

Far from being in tune with the stereotypical astrofuturist SF writers, Dick began, then, to couple these spatial settings with a new set of metaphors. He would, however, gradually do without these settings altogether. The new metaphors are akin to those that Lynn Spigel describes in her *Welcome to the Dreamhouse*:

> by the end of the 1950s this metaphor for domesticity and domestic communications began to make way for a new set of metaphors that pictured the house as a vehicle for transport, or what I am calling a "mobile home." At a time when Americans were obsessed with the possibility of satellite technologies and outer-space travel, the mobile model of domesticity was spatially realized in images that depicted the home as a rocket. […] Everything from kitchen dinettes to family cars to toothpaste containers mimicked outer-space fashions. […] In other words, this new and improved family home validated itself through appeals to progress; no longer a place of insular stasis, the home was now a motor for change. (65–66)[26]

However, no matter how much the media (particularly product marketing and advertising) sold an idealist portrait of "houseware" as a form of freedom, this comes nothing short of an illusion.[27] This is precisely where Dick steps in as an acute reader of his times. The fake realities he portrays, like a double-edged sword, both point to the precarious—or even dubious—status of our own "real" reality (and its artifacts) and to the inevitable blending—conjectured as future but perhaps already present in his time—between "everyday" space and the inner space conveyed by technological (and particularly media) artifacts, instead of the hoped-for outer space.
Spigel touches the heart of the problem when she claims:

> Rather than seeing physical space as separate from the symbolic practices through which space is mapped (city planning, architecture, etc.) or as separate from the symbolic practices that create the imaginary spaces of stories/images, it seems more useful to understand how these kinds of space work in connec-

> tion with one another to produce our lived experience of space itself. […] This is why I think media analysis has a crucial place in the analysis of space and critical geography. (175)

Dick merely ups the ante when speculating on the power of technological devices to induce alternate realities. When that theme ultimately becomes a central feature of his fiction, space settings are reduced to mere genre conventions that help to set the tone. All the most significant titles from the second half of the 1960s strengthen this trend that was still faint in the "Martian Novels": the empathy box and the mood organ in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, the cold-pacs in *Ubik*, the simulation machine in *A Maze of Death*, and even the fake memory implants in "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" (1966) or the drugs in "Faith of our Fathers" (1967). Other planets are still part of the narrative in about half of these titles, but they are far from being essential to the intrigue. Precisely when the American imagination had increasing factual evidence so as to become more attuned to the space race, Dick slowly detached from the subject, resting in landscapes that, no matter if earthly or set away from our home planet, estranged everyday experience within itself.

His novels written after his 2–3–74 crisis confirm that trend—the messages supposedly sent from space in *Radio Free Albemuth* (1985) and *VALIS* (1981) are as unreliable as the narrators.[28] In a few of his final stories—up to the last one, "The Alien Mind" (1981), an amusement on not-so-divine punishment—space (and time) travel again becomes the manifest subject, but then even more inseparable from a sense of disappointment, of the pointlessness and ultimately inhumaneness of the whole enterprise, even if (or *particularly* when) aided by fake reality devices. "A Little Something for Us Tempunauts," the story of a team of time travelers forever caught in a loop—"the dreadful and weary miracle of eternal life" (274)—that neither allows them to return or to die trying, is one of those cases, but it is in "I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon" (1980) that we find the perfect and most unambiguous statement of that concern that Dick already displayed in the 1950s. There, the spaceship computer repeatedly feeds the astronaut Victor Kemmings with a fake reality, so that his mind does not deteriorate from lack of sensorial data during a ten-year journey in cryonic suspension. However, his buried memories keep interfering, leading to a loop:

> Oh, dear, the ship said to itself. And I've got almost ten years of this lying ahead of me. He is hopelessly contaminating his experiences with childhood guilt […]. And ten years from now it will take a lot to save—or rather restore—

> his sanity; it will take something drastic, something myself cannot do alone. (369)

But the apparently happy ending, evoking the better known concluding conundrum in *Ubik*, may turn out to be nothing more than another level of fake and artificial reality.

Implosion: The Real Space Program

A mystery remains, though. If themes related to space played—at least for a while—an important role in Dick's fiction, but even then mostly to make way for the peculiar approach suggested above, how do we interpret the progressive avoidance of so typical a theme within the genre of SF? Being out of tune with astrofuturism and the space program, was he in tune with something else?

A tentative answer—as we shall see, relevant enough so that we may understand the work of Dick in a broader context—can be found in some essays by the French theorist Paul Virilio. Virilio's understanding of our contemporary condition may be covered by concepts such as "implosion," "inertia," or even "crisis of the dimensions," the latter occurring as early as in *L'espace critique*, published in 1984. To Virilio, the relationship between space, politics, and technology is crucial in any social structure; therefore a closer look at this relationship is also crucial to understanding the cultural changes it engenders. The first step toward globalization was the revolution of transportation means, which led, thanks to the increased speed and mobility that it entailed, to a whole new way of relating to space. However, the revolution of communications, which could have been thought as contributing to an even greater acceleration, had the opposite effect, the effect Virilio calls "inertia." In his short book, aptly entitled *Polar Inertia*, that proposition is almost written in stone:

> Contrary to appearances, it is the audiovisual vehicle which has been thrusting itself forward since the thirties—radio, television, radar, sonar and the nascent electronic optics, first in the war and then […] in the "nuclear peace" that has seen the *computer revolution* indispensable for the running of the various policies of military and economic deterrence. Since the 1960s, then, the key arena has no longer been the communication routes of a given geographical territory […] but the electronic ether of telecommunications. *Now everything arrives without any need to depart*. (20)[29]

We can relate this trend with Dick's fiction. If there is a connection between the decline of public interest in the space program and the way his science fiction approached (or rather dropped) the theme, moving to what we have called the inner space,[30] that connection may be understood as the paradoxical result of acceleration.

In his work, Virilio makes barely any direct references to science fiction that would allow this inference, but we can extrapolate it from the abundant references to the space race. Although his position regarding the (un)usefulness of the space program is sometimes ambiguous, its instrumental role in the contemporary predicament he describes is at least clear. In another passage from *Polar Inertia*, his thesis returns, but now with a new illustration:

> the conquest of space proved in the end to be only of *images of space*. […] [I]t seems that the end of this [twentieth] century heralds a final shift with the advent of the static *audiovisual vehicle*, a substitute for bodily movement and an extension of domestic inertia which will mark the definitive triumph of sedentariness. (18)

Appearing as the supreme means of transportation, the one that would finally overcome the hardest obstacle—the globe and the gravity that compels us toward it—the conquest of space ultimately disclosed itself as an "undercover agent" of a silent change that had already bloomed, the communications revolution. It was, however, necessary to achieve "escape velocity" (the title of another of Virilio's books) to populate the stratosphere with the now ubiquitous communications satellites—ironically enough, one of the "heroes" of this achievement was the reclusive Clarke with his proposal of geostationary satellites. Thus, an essential step in entering the era of telecommunications—and of "inertia"—bloomed at the cost of another specter that haunted the imagination of the previous era, the "domestication" of space.

Were the accomplishments of the space program important, after all? Absolutely. But their relevance to the current state of affairs was the fact that, by overcoming the speed barrier beyond which the Earth becomes *just a planet*,[31] that very same barrier becomes second rank when compared to the ultimate one, the speed of light—that is, of the electromagnetic waves that are the very essence of the information society. By the very same coup, the apparent size of the Earth becomes contracted, not only by those almost instantaneous communication devices but also—perhaps with a stronger symbolic value—when its image can be viewed from space. From the perspective of an astronaut getting farther from the home planet, its apparent size shrinks more and more … with us still remaining on its surface:

> *Our planet is slipping away*: not as a cosmic express moving at thirty kilometres per second, but as a rapidly deflating toy balloon. Since we are always being told that distances are shrinking and the earth becoming smaller, it would seem an urgent matter to draw the consequences! (77)

When the only distances to be overcome became the ones measured by the speed of light—light-minutes for the Sun, 4.3 light-years in the case of the next nearest star—there are, perhaps paradoxically, fewer and fewer reasons for us to travel those distances that once achieved the human scale but that now are even more miniaturized. Maybe the Moon was not, after all, truly conquered; it was merely a symbolic threshold that, having been surmounted, became just another path,[32] thus allowing all other paths to be virtualized.

We must remember that, for the overwhelming majority of us who never had or will have the opportunity to go into orbit, the trip was—thanks to live TV—purely vicarious. Indeed, it was one of the first vicarious experiences through audiovisual media,[33] foreshadowing our contemporary condition in which, as Virilio argues, invoking the term "cocooning,"[34] work started to be replaced by telework, and shopping by teleshopping—the logical next step that definitely transformed in our imagination the living place into a "dream house," in Lynn Spigel's words.

As the virtual became triumphant,[35] the space we previously had to travel was contracted to the point of having barely no extension:

> [T]he dynamic land vehicle most symptomatic of this sporting involution is the dragster (and the hot rod), whose motto might be: "How to go nowhere, or anyway less and less far (400 metres, 200) but faster and faster?"
>
> This intensive competition perhaps tends, at the extreme, to make finishing line and starting line coincide—a feat similar to that achieved by the *live* televised interface. (22)

Coda

Perhaps without realizing it, Dick anticipated this contraction of the globe for which the feats of the space program were nothing more than catalysts—accomplishing the "reaction" that they helped to bring about, they became superfluous. Dick seemed to foretell this fate: the Moon was yet to be "visited" by Apollo 11 but he already had put aside more "traditional" treatments of space travel and space colonization. These tropes still appear—old habits are difficult to abandon, particularly when they constitute the

"hard core" of the genre—but increasingly as pure narrative conventions serving other purposes; as a formula, if you will, despite the negative connotation that the term acquired.

We may use as a counter-example the hard SF classic *Mission of Gravity* (1953), by Hal Clement, known for the scientifically accurate description of the heavy planet Mesklin, drawn from arduous calculations of physics and astronomy.[36] From that description emerges a "reality effect," or rather an effect of a rhetoric of scientificity, which by extension also confers a degree of verisimilitude to otherwise purely fanciful/imaginary features, like the planet and its natives. I am, of course, not assuming that the reader will mistake fiction for reality, but rather that, if we incorporate *Mission of Gravity* into a much larger network of discourses that were in tune with a positive view of the space program, that novel plays a role in strengthening the coherence of that network.

Instead, in Dick's *Solar Lottery*, published two years later, the pessimistic tone, although in a subtle way, is already flowing against the tide of that "metadiscourse." In the novels published in the mid-1960s where the trope of space exploration is also present, the exchange of a handful of realism for a significant amount of fantasy was already so great that Dick was seen by his peers as an author on the margins of the hegemonic discourse in the field of professional SF. By the time *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* was published in 1966 Mars is there almost exclusively to meet narrative and genre needs. While in *Martian Time-Slip*, written in 1962, both the trope of colonizing a planet and the portrayal of its native species were still, *malgré tout*, a central element in the narrative, a mere four years later the very same neighbor planet has a marginal importance; the spaces that truly shape the plot are the Bay Area where Deckard lives and hunts androids, the decrepit apartment of John Isidore, the movie studio where the actor who plays Mercer is stoned, and the "tomb world" that haunts Isidore and partly Deckard.

Two years further on, and the Plowman's Planet that is the scene for *Galactic Pot-Healer* invokes a fantasy world more like Middle Earth as imagined by Tolkien (or, at best, Mars and Venus in the versions of Edgar Rice Burroughs or C. S. Lewis) than the space operas of SF. Again, the only relevant spatial opposition is the one between the surface and the depths of the planet where the cathedral is submerged—an opposition whose function is to embody in the narrative a conceptual polarity.

As we have seen, what Dick wrote in the 1970s exacerbates even more this move from the concrete to the abstract, and ultimately to the virtual. Distinct

spaces certainly remain—a novel in which "everything arrives without any need to depart" (Virilio 20) would be boring, to say the least—but, coinciding with the trend identified by Virilio, the spaces become more and more shrunk around themselves. Moreover, in this later phase Dick's work tends to clump all places and times in some virtual universe that only the eye of God can embrace (or that other divine entity closer at hand, the fiction writer).

Between the diagnosis Virilio makes of the trend to virtualization that struck in the second half of the twentieth century (and leaked into being one of the key aspects of this new century) and the evolution of the way Dick approached the trope of "space," there is only a mismatch that must be acknowledged. Or rather, an *interruption*: Dick died in 1982, at a time when the technologies that led to the explosion of the virtual were still unknown outside universities, the "military-industrial complex," and think-tanks, while others were overcoming the first threshold that would introduce them to the general public (for example, the first popular microcomputer, the Apple II, appeared in 1977).

In 1980, while Dick was still busy with the "VALIS Trilogy," Bruce Bethke wrote a short story called "Cyberpunk." However, its publication, as well as the rise of the movement that would embrace its name, took place only after Dick's death (the short story appeared in the November 1983 issue of *Amazing*), giving substance to a new generation within the SF field, a generation that, partially but unequivocally inspired by Dick, went even farther, devaluing physical space—i.e., "meatspace"—in exchange for its virtual version, cyberspace, an analogue to Virilio's "cocooning" that is already hinted in Dickian novels such as *Ubik* and *A Maze of Death*.[37] The time was then ripe for that renovation.

Notes

1 The anthology, *Men on the Moon*, was first published in 1958, and reprinted in 1969, almost certainly piggybacking on the Moon landing. The section "That Moon Plague: Comments by Science Fiction Writers," where we can find Dick's testimonial, appears only in that edition (cf. Westfahl, "The Case Against Space" 205, note 3).

2 In that speech, Kennedy stated that, given the seemingly leading position of the USSR in space engineering, "it is time to take longer strides—time for a great new American enterprise—time for this nation to take a clearly leading role in space achievement," and, therefore, in a widely quoted sentence, "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth." This would be the most expensive of four goals, the cost rising in the following year to as much

as 531 million dollars. The others were the development of a nuclear rocket (30 million dollars), of communication satellites (50 million dollars), and of satellites for meteorological research (75 million dollars). A facsimile of the speech, with some instructive edits and amends, is available online at CNN's website, at http://archives.cnn.com/2001/TECH/space/05/25/kennedy.moon/speech.excerpts.pdf.

3 To avoid a long list of names attesting that potentially promiscuous relation between science and science fiction, specially in the period after the Second World War, it is enough to bring up the case of Wernher von Braun: while working with the American government in the Army Ballistic Missile Agency (ABMA) during the 1950s, he became the technical adviser for four Disney tele-documentaries about space exploration, and also of "Men into Space," a TV science-fiction series. And, confirms Kilgore, he was not alone in making the connection between fiction and technological development: "many astrofuturists who have served as professional scientists and engineers [...] point to boyhood reading of science fiction as the initial motivation for pursuing technical educations and careers in science and engineering. [...] As with any other field of literature, early exposure and continued affection led many of the astrofuturists to try their hand at writing science fiction" (64). Concerning that promiscuous relation, Kilgore also insists on the idea that often the intentions behind fiction were, to use an euphemism, extra-literary: "In short, the space future needed science fiction's characters, plots, narratives, and adventures to make it glamorous to the public" (65).

4 For Kilgore, the differences between these generations could hardly be more pronounced: "Up to this point [the rise of the second generation], the histories of rocketry and the spaceflight idea had proceeded hand in hand" (151). However, in the 1970s, "the reduction of funding for a manned space program and the eventual cancellation of the Apollo project broke the link between first-generation astrofuturism and the political coalition that made the space race possible. [...] The futurists of the second generation tend to be academic scientists and popular writers of science fiction and popular science rather than engineers in government service." Clarke adequately matched both profiles.

5 Other illustrations of his optimistic proselytism appear in that volume, even in the very same article. Another revealing instance of his captivating rhetoric is the description of a swimming pool in the center of the space station, the only place where artificial gravity cannot be produced: "You won't be particularly surprised to see people swimming around and around inside the sphere, but what *will* astonish you is the sight of a group in its center [...]. When you've gone about twenty feet and are still at some distance from the center, you'll break through the water and find yourself in a hollow space about ten feet across, breathing ordinary air. Yes, you are inside a bubble!" (51–52).

6 If we look even closer, there is no skeptical questioning about the economic feasibility of the enterprise or any hesitation about the technical ability to combine all variables needed to carry out such a project, still assumed as something achievable in the near future—a future that to us, today, is already past. For example, in another of those essays, "So You're Going to Mars?," published in 1952,

economic issues such as the costs of fuel are discussed. But all are ultimately considered mere nuisances that can easily be overcome: "I believe the cheapest round trip comes to about $30.000, and unless the firm is backing you or you've got a very elastic expense account—Oh, all, right, if you don't want to talk about it…" (58). In "Next—The Planets!," regular commercial space trips might become even more affordable due to economies of scale: "*What may be called the basic cost of a one-way ticket to space is thus the modest sum of $10*" (70).

7 His doubts would nevertheless become deeper during the following decades: "In the late 1980s, Clarke began rethinking many of the themes he had addressed earlier in his career. After astrofuturist hopes were dashed by the scaling down of the American space program, he had to reexamine his faith that the space future would follow inevitably from contemporary social mores or some transcendent technocultural drive. […] That reassessment took place not so much in Clarke's popular science, of which he wrote less as the years went by, but in his fiction" (for example, according to Kilgore, in the "Rama" saga) (Kilgore 126-27).

8 Cf. Gary Westfahl's "The Case Against Space," particularly when the author discusses the supposed predictive virtues of science fiction: "the mundane world said that space travel couldn't and shouldn't be done, science fiction said it could and should be done, and science fiction turned out to be half right" (203). With a slightly different wording, his introduction to *Space and Beyond*, a volume collecting the papers presented to the 1997 Eaton Conference, further elaborates on this: "Today, almost forty years since Kennedy's bold speech, we can only ask: What went wrong? While his immediate goal of placing a man on the Moon was quickly realized, the progress of the American space program since that achievement had been halting at best, and even the apparently simple task of returning to the Moon is now described as a possibility within the next fifty years. And despite the popularity of the franchised universes of *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, and *Babylon 5*, *American interest in space exploration seems at an all-time low*. If the frontier was a crucial defining aspect of the American character, and if space now offers the only genuine frontier available, *why has space become so unappealing?*" (Introduction 2–3, emphasis added). Unappealing as much to himself as to others: "I have reluctantly recognized that, deep in my heart, I no longer believe in the rhetoric I had read and written [his own *Islands in the Sky*], and I no longer regard human space travel as an important priority in the near future" ("The Case Against Space" 193). Oddly enough, as Westfahl himself recognizes, "I have been persuaded to oppose human space exploration *by its strongest advocates*" (emphasis added).

9 The tragic explosion of the *Challenger* shuttle in 1986 may have marked the symbolic death of the space program. In Gary Westfahl's paper for the 1997 Eaton Conference ("The True Frontier: Confronting and Avoiding the Realities of Space in American Science Fiction"), he corroborates that hypothesis with a gloomy comparison to the TV series *Star Trek*: "it remains an unsettling coincidence that the final flight of the *Challenger* conspicuously featured a seven-person crew whose politically attractive diversity—including two women, an African-American, and an Asian-American—mirrored the diversity of the original

seven-person cast of *Star Trek*" (63).

10 Perhaps as a reaction, the then newer generation of "hard SF" reintroduced those tropes with greater caution in the late 1970s and early 1980s, demanding even more scientific plausibility and a verisimilitude that allowed a new flirtation with realism—Larry Niven did it with *Ringworld* (1970); Kim Stanley Robinson, on the left of the political spectrum, tried it with the trilogy *Red Mars* (1993), *Green Mars* (1994), and *Blue Mars* (1996). But the disappointment with space settings prevailed again with the "Mundane SF Manifesto" (2002), an approach radical enough to abstain altogether from space travel and colonization or even contact with alien species.

11 By that "mythical density," I am alluding to concepts such as Cordwainer Smith's "pain of space" in "Scanners Live in Vain." Cf. Robert Gorsch in "Re-Mythologizing Outer Space with C. S. Lewis and Cordwainer Smith": "both Lewis and Smith represent 'space' in a *mythic* way. Their constructions of space are fundamentally retrograde, undoing science's centuries-long labor of de-mythologizing the universe and ridding it of angels and demons. These two writers re-mythologize the universe; they bring back the angels and demons" (128). Lewis brings the angels and Smith the devils, we might add: "Smith's universe becomes the dark complement of C.S. Lewis's. In Smith's universe, one does not escape, as Ransom does, the emptiness of ordinary existence and experience at first hand God's immanence on the universe; rather, one meets with the inexplicable, incomprehensible malevolence that haunts the margins of existence" (127).

12 Christopher Palmer, in the following excerpt from *Philip K. Dick: Exhilaration and Terror of the Postmodern*, also underlines Dick's metafictive strategies: "He borrows a variety of items from the SF megatext of the fifties and before: robots, psionics, telepaths, time travel, poscreds; Mars is the desert planet, home of a now departed or decaying civilization; cryonic suspension during space flight; giant computers occupying whole buildings, Orwellian organizations of mind control and mass surveillance, radiation mutants, and much more. But *he mixes, overlays, parodies and exaggerates*" (45, emphasis added).

13 *Our Friends from Frolix-8*—not to mention the sparse shorter fiction published from the 1960s onwards—is one of those atypical novels that get in the way of what could otherwise be a neat periodization of Dick's work, i.e., a novel from the early 1970s that feels like the early 1960s. Partially reversing the premise of *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, there is also a character that returns from the Proxima system, but: 1) the expected arrival happens at the end and not in the onset of the novel; 2) Thors Provoni is a benign and not an evil character like Palmer Eldritch; 3) there is intelligent life in Proxima willing to attend Provoni's hopes of changing Earth's political system. But then again, they may turn out to be as hostile as the "vugs" of *The Game-Players of Titan* (1963), or as mischievous as the "starmen" in *Now Wait for Last Year* (1966).

14 Those with a political inclination, like Allen Purcell, the protagonist of *The Man Who Japed*, know that no real lasting solution can be found outside the home planet, particularly when the refuge is itself part of the regime: "'As I see it,' Allen said, 'the Resort acts as *part of the system. Morec is one half and you're the other.*

Two sides of the coin. Morec is all work and you're the badminton and checkers set. Together you form a society; you uphold and support each other. I can't be in both parts, and of the two I prefer this.' 'Why?' '*At least something is being done, here. People are working.* You tell them to go out and fish'" (*The Man Who Japed* 102, emphasis added).

15 Or rather half-decade, as only four stories were written between 1955 and 1959: "The Unreconstructed M" (1957), "Recall Mechanism" (1959), "Explorers We" (1959), and "War Game" (1959). *Dr. Futurity* (1960), with the length of a small novella, may count as a fifth, but is an expansion of an earlier story, "Time Pawn" (1954).

16 That feature remained in a few lesser-known novels of the next decade. Cf. *The Game-Players of Titan*, *Now Wait for Last Year*, or *The Ganymede Takeover* (1967).

17 "This seemingly definitive double verdict—science fiction success and mainstream failure—was a blow to his vanity [...], but he was beginning to realize that if he was ever going to prove his mettle, it was going to have to be as a science fiction writer. [...] Maybe what he had written could only be marketed as science fiction, but it was something no one but he had the capacity to write" (Carrère 74).

18 Although the markets for the simulacra, of which the Abraham Lincoln android is the first working prototype, are the Martian colonies where they would become "famnexdos."

19 Barely none of which is set on Mars, in spite of Robinson's moniker. And we must also note exceptions like *The Penultimate Truth* (1964) or *The Crack in Space* (1966). The much more sparse production of short stories—many of which were first drafts or parts of the novels written during the same period—also follows this trend.

20 A novel that might be in the previous category, depending on how we classify the role of the character Walt Dangerfield. Chosen, along with his wife, as the first couple to emigrate to Mars, the coincidence of his departure from Earth with a series of nuclear explosions frustrates this goal. Lydia Dangerfield dies and, with the ship engaged in a perpetual orbit around the Earth, Walt is condemned to remain inside while he still lives. Escaping a perhaps worse fate—that of being a victim of a nuclear holocaust, like all those who remained on Earth—the limbo that is this perpetual orbit grants him a rather peculiar and "borderline" status, as a radio host for the survivors within reach of the ship turned into a communication satellite. Being simultaneously attached to Earth and outside it, our planet is for him an inaccessible frontier, an ironic reversal of the inaccessibility of other planets to us earthlings. In relation to the connections made later in this article between Philip K. Dick's fiction and Paul Virilio's ideas, Walt Dangerfield's role as a media host makes even more sense within Dick's work.

21 In the first of these, the native *bleekmen* may stand for an alternative and more solitary way of living, but only for those characters that recognize them as something other than second-class people.

22 Apart from the "translation" and the drug that enables it, in "The Days of Perky Pat" the characters also demand as many props (and that they are as realistic) as

they can get. Among them is the obligatory TV set: "'Oh, yes,' Fran said. 'The TV.' Their Perky Pat did not have a TV set; they had lost it to the Regans in a game a week ago, and Norm had not yet been able to fashion another one realistic-looking enough to substitute. So, in a game, they pretended now that 'the TV repairman had come in for it.' That was how they explained their Perky Pat not having something she really would have had" ("Days" 307).

23 The way that children are portrayed and their roles in Philip K. Dick's fiction is also a theme begging to be explored.

24 And also "Carved, not poured; she obviously had been whittled out of wood and then painted—she was not a thermoplastic. And her hair. It appeared to be genuine hair" ("Days" 317).

25 Actually *A Maze of Death* is one of the best illustrations of what we may call Philip K. Dick's "virtualization" of space: it is within an "unreal" space (to say just enough to avoid spoilers) that the characters can deal with their "real" predicaments. Greimas (Greimas and Courtés 1982) would speak of a "paratopic space," a place for a "rite of passage" that, in previous novels by Philip K. Dick (cf., among others, *The Man Who Japed*, quoted above, or even *The Unteleported Man*) was still located somewhere in the "physical" realm. Another illustration of this trend toward the virtual is Rick Deckard's epiphany near the end of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

26 Unfortunately, a connection between Dick's dissociation from astrofuturism through the idea of inner space and a postcolonial reading of his fiction (which has a notable amount of black characters) is beyond the scope of this article. But this other passage from *Welcome to the Dreamhouse* might be fruitful as a hint: "While the space project was busy sending white men to the moon, housing projects were undermining the nature of African American life. An article in the September 1969 issue of *Ebony* reminded readers: 'Especially to the nation's black poor, watching on unpaid-for television sets in shacks and slums, the countdowns, the blastoffs, the orbitings and landings had the other-worldly alienness—though not the drama—of a science-fiction movie. From Harlem to Watts, the first moon landing on July of last year was viewed cynically as one small step for "The Man," and probably a giant step in the wrong direction for mankind.'" (Spigel 162)

27 We must nevertheless acknowledge the possibility of more productive and even subversive appropriations of a message by the audience, a subject that is also far beyond the scope of this article.

28 As to the more genre-like *The Divine Invasion* (1981), Robinson says enough: "Following *VALIS* [...] we have two more books, a science fiction novel and a realist novel. We could say [...] that *The Divine Invasion*, the science fiction novel, is the book written by Horselover Fat, while *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*, the realist novel, is the book written by 'Phil Dick'" (111). The most coherent way to make sense of that novel is to assume a significant part of the events as a delusion experienced by the character Herb Asher: "From chapter 13 until the end of the book—and this is an important point when we attempt to understand *The Divine Invasion*—he never leaves the 'ersatz universe' created for him by Emmanuel and Zina. [...] when the novel ends, Herb Asher is still living in

an illusory world" (119). Ultimately, even the birth of Emmanuel may be part of a much wider illusion. *Lies, Inc.* (1984), being a rewrite of *The Unteleported Man*, could almost be categorized as a novel from the previous decade (as much as *Deus Irae* (1976), which took 11 years and a co-author to be finished), apart from the peculiar difference of the reordering of chapters, mostly to suit the narrative to his obsession with the 2–3–74 experience. At the same time, that reordering also allows less confident interpretations of the narrated facts concerning the main character's space trip.

29 Another relevant passage, also from *Polar Inertia*, might be this: "In this final part of the twentieth century [...] the situation is reversed: the famed new *mobility* of public and private transport is giving way to the *immobility* of transmission, to that home inertia which some already call 'cocooning'" (64).

30 To be more precise, there should be a finer distinction between "inner space" and "cyberspace." But in this context, it is enough to separate them from "outer space" and to treat them as slightly different moments of the same trend, as we have seen in the previous section.

31 The reference-value for that speed is 11.2 km/sec, or 6.96 miles/sec, or still Mach 34, although in higher altitudes the value decreases.

32 *Trajet* in French, allowing a wordplay with "trajectory." The concept appears mostly in *La vitesse de la libération*.

33 For an anthropological analysis of the vicarious experience of media events as celebrations see the work of Elihu Katz and Daniel Dayan.

34 Cf. Virilio's mentions of cocooning throughout *Polar Inertia*.

35 It is not always clear if, for Virilio, "tele" and "virtual" are two dimensions or stages of the same reality—the latter being the exacerbation of the first—or two distinct periods. As above, in the note concerning "inner space" and "cyberspace," that is a distinction that needs to be postponed for a wider research.

36 Some of these complex calculations can be seen in the Wikipedia entry on Mesklin at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesklin.

37 It would of course be unfair to point to Philip K. Dick as the only source for the concept of "cyberspace." Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt" (1950) or James Tiptree Jr.'s "The Girl who was Plugged in" (1972) are two among several early illustrations that come to mind.

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