**DOYLE — Zebrapedia**

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**Zebrapedia: Collective Explication of Philip K. Dick’s *Exegesis***

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Philip K. Dick’s *Exegesis* is possibly the largest archive of unreleased and unpublished material written by any major 20th-century author. At over 8,000 pages, this massive, mostly handwritten text by America’s ‘homegrown Borges’, is arguably Dick’s magnum opus, yet it remains largely unexplored. In its daily entries, diagrams, and sketches, Dick documents his eight-year attempt to fathom what he called ‘2-3-74’, a postmodern visionary experience of the entire universe ‘transformed into information’. Dick’s experiences in February and March 1974 with what he variously called VALIS, Firebright, Sophia, and Zebra sent him on a classic visionary quest through the esoteric literatures and sciences of the planet as he focused his polymath sensibility, wide-ranging erudition, and Zen-like humor on a cosmic whodunnit: Who—or what—was VALIS? Dick pursued this problem for the rest of his life, and the *Exegesis* stands as a unique record, not only of a profound spiritual quest, but of the writer at work: reflective, self-questioning, and as always, prodigiously inventive.

**Zebrapedia**

Having secured a digital copy of the *Exegesis*, researchers at the Pennsylvania State University developed a portal to serve as a focal point for the ongoing transcription, annotation, analysis, discussion, editing, and exploration of the text:http://zebrapedia.psu.edu/. In essence, the project’s primary goals are to provide an opening for and elucidate the terra incognita of Philip K. Dick’s *Exegesis*, using collaborative scholarship and networking tools to explore this mammoth digital text. While part of the *Exegesis* has already been published as a print edition (Dick, 2011), this project presents the complete manuscript—the first time that the thousands of notes, letters, and explorations contained within have been made publicly available. The manuscript offers a pandemonium of ideas, so much so that, as project lead, Richard Doyle, notes, ‘When you begin reading the “Exegesis”, you undertake a quest with no shortcuts or cheat codes’ (Platt, 2011). Founded on Ben Brumfield’s free and open-source FromThePage transcription software, we hope to use this project to draw upon the collective knowledge and expertise of Dick scholars so that we might classify and elucidate the mass of metaphysical, comical, and theosophical musings contained throughout. Publicly accessible but still under development, a selection of the project’s features worth highlighting at this particular juncture are workset overviews, as well as category and automatic subject indexing, that allow users to easily view every instance of a particular subject as it is mentioned in the text.

**Future Directions**

Our intention is to use digital humanities to present the current iteration of the project, as well as gather feedback on future directions. In particular, we are currently exploring the potential for conducting a series of analyses using computational methods, but first feel that we need to refine our group-sourcing strategy, to align with practices adopted by digital humanities projects availing of similar technologies and platforms. Collaborating with international colleagues, our intention is to conduct focus groups that will inform future development of the FromThePage platform. To this end, we will be early adopters of the system’s forthcoming major upgrade, which supports, in addition to an upgrade to the Ruby on Rails framework,

1. TEI-XML export.

2. Parallel translation in addition to transcription (funded by Fordham University’s Center for Medieval Studies).

3. OCR correction emphasizing OCR-to-TEI conversion.

4. CSV export of subject occurrences for network analysis (driven by the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology).

5. UTF-8 support (driven by Universidad de Buenos Aires).

The new release will also include features under active development, like Omeka integration, improvements to the full-text search, and an overhaul of the user interface. Pennsylvania State University is currently investigating digital editions (both of the annotated and scholarly variety) in the context of educational platforms like FromThePage and rich text archives like Philip K. Dick’s *Exegesis* in its incarnation as Zebrapedia. Having implemented new feature-sets, we will host a focus group and conduct a heuristic analysis, allowing us to customise the platform for our intended audience, allowing us to inform improvements to the Zebrapedia and base FromThePage platform in tandem. From here, we will look to implement federated wikis and continue to develop crowdsourced webinars.

**References**

**Dick, P. K.** (2011). *The Exegesis of Philip K. Dick*. Jackson, P. and Lethem, J. (eds). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston.

**Platt, C.** (2011). ‘The Voices in Philip K. Dick’s Head’. *New York Times Sunday Book Review*,http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/18/books/review/the-exegesis-of-philip-k-dick-edited-by-pamela-jackson-jonathan-lethem-and-erik-davis-book-review.html?pagewanted=all&\_r=0.