

VALIS

An opera in two parts by
Tod Machover

Based on a novel by
Philip K. Dick

Initial adaptation for
Paris production by
Tod Machover, Catherine Ikam,
and Bill Raymond

Revised libretto by
Tod Machover

Additional dialogue by
Patrick Mason

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VALIS

Notes by Tod Machover

Project Background

The idea for *VALIS* was born in 1983 when the video section of Paris' Pompidou Center approached me to explore my interest in creating a work that would combine sound, theater and image in a new way. I leapt at the opportunity, since my interests had led me for many years in that direction. To complement my ongoing exploration of the uses and meanings of new technology in an expressive human context, I looked at several science fiction texts for innovative ideas. I was led to Philip K. Dick's work, since his *The Man in the High Castle* (a fable of an alternative United States of the 1960's based on the premise that Japan and Germany have won World War II) had impressed me greatly when I'd read it as a teenager. By accident I came upon *VALIS*, one of the last books Dick wrote before his death in 1982. The work attracted me immediately since it seemed to uncannily address so many of my own concerns, from the obsessive search for unifying principles of human

experience, to the complex interrelationship between individual mental imagination and external objective truth.

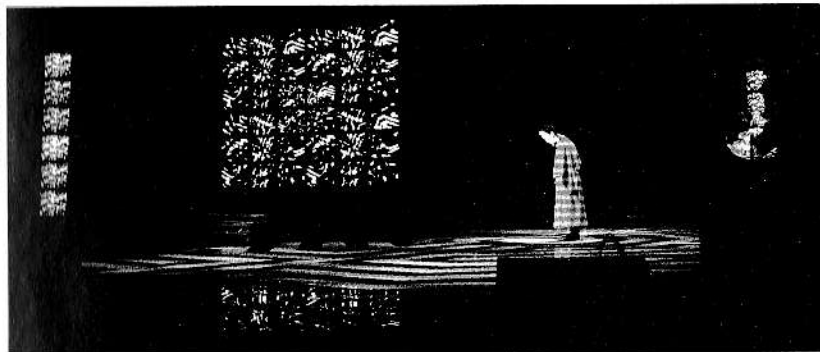
I began working with two collaborators, Catherine Ikam, a French video and installation artist, and Bill Raymond, a New York-based actor and director associated with the *Mabou Mines* theater company. Together, during the summer of 1985, we shaped the first version of the libretto for *VALIS*, which by that time had become a full-fledged opera and had been commissioned to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Pompidou Center. Most of the music for *VALIS* was composed between March 1986 and May 1987, with research and development of various computer music techniques for the opera beginning at about the same time, simultaneously at IRCAM and the MIT Media Lab. The final production of all electronic music materials, both pre-recorded and live, occurred during the summer of 1987, and rehearsals for the Paris production were held between mid-October and the end of November.

VALIS received its premiere performances, in French, at the Pompidou Center from December 1-7, 1987. For this production, we designed an elaborate theatrical installation that filled the enormous entrance hall, or "Forum", of the Pompidou, allowing for normal proscenium seating as well as standing room viewing from side mezzanine balconies, thereby making the entire event more festive and public than a normal operatic presentation. In addition, *VALIS* remained in place as an installation, allowing the public to circulate amidst the primary sounds and images from the opera, through mid-February 1988. For this first production of *VALIS*, Catherine Ikam designed the sets (including a labyrinth handcrafted from Carrera marble) and visual imagery (using a computer-controlled video wall and two video towers for image projection), and Jean-Louis Martinelli directed.

After the Paris performances, I made several improvements to the score (various cuts, reworking of certain electronic material, some modified orchestra-

tion, etc.) as well as significant changes to the libretto, which I readapted into English. The opera was rehearsed and recorded at MIT's Experimental Media Facility (or "Cube") in February 1988, with post-production taking place at Hip Pocket Studios in New York City during March and April. The present recording represents the definitive and complete version of *VALIS*.

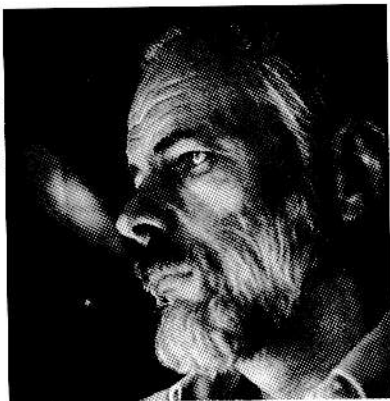
Photo: Steve Samuels



Stage area with video wall and marble labyrinth from 1987 Paris production.

Philip K. Dick

Photo: Frank Roman



Until the release of the movie *Blade Runner* in 1983 which was based on his *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, Philip K. Dick's novels were far less well known in the United States than in Europe, Japan and Australia. Having started out as a writer of realistic fiction in the early 1950's, Dick (1926-1982) gradually concentrated on science fiction works since he found it much easier to publish in this quickly expanding genre. His work remains as one of the most powerful descriptions of American society in mid-century, from portrayals of the California drug culture of the late '60s to the political paranoia of the Nixon years. His works were startlingly prophetic in exploring major issues that only now are starting to face our culture, such as the moral and philosophical implications of the ability to create artificial intelligence and synthetic life itself. Not the least important of his contributions was, as Michael Moorcock has written, "quietly producing serious fiction in a popular form; there can be no greater praise".

Perhaps the most pervasive theme in Philip K. Dick's work is the question of

what is real and what is illusion. In the 1950's, Dick explored this theme in the political realm, extending his memories of World War II violence to horrifying extremes of technologically generated destruction. During this time, his short stories and novels describe travel in space and time to parallel worlds. In the 1960's he began to explore man's inner world, after having decided that our normal subjective view of reality is illusory. Dick used many different metaphors to suggest how humans catch momentary glimpses of this true reality: dreams, mental illness, drugs, technology, and, finally, religion. All serve the same function, and become more and more indistinguishable in Dick's later work. He believed in the necessity of continuing the search for such reality, and came to view it as a dualistic choice between good and evil (exemplified clearly in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*). As Kim Stanley Robinson writes in his excellent critical study of Dick's work, "The reality breakdown that is depicted so many times in Dick is not merely a confusing hallucination...His

novels represent the struggle between form creation and form destruction repeatedly, and for Dick, to struggle on after having all illusions of success stripped away is the greatest heroism" [Robinson 1984].

In Dick's writing, one remains human only by continuing this search, by discarding preconceived notions and ideologies, by finding answers only to discard them again and set out in search of new ones.¹ Machines do not search; they accept the world at face value, and this is what we most strongly must avoid. But for Dick, the world is not divided neatly into humans and machines. In his books, machines can bizarrely take on the character of humans, and humans can renounce their responsibility to choose, behaving

¹Some commentators have suggested that Dick's obsession with searching is based on the major event of his early life, "the death of his twin sister, six weeks after they were born. He spent the next fifty-three years looking for her, reaching out to her, missing her, creating her" [Williams 1986].

like inanimate objects. His novels are filled with "humans who behave like machines, robots that think they are human, androids that long to own electric pets, doors that talk, and suitcases that give psychiatric counseling" [Warrick and Greenberg, 1986]. Much of Dick's universe is based on frightening ambiguity, of never being sure where one is, stretching from the infinite plot twists of most of his science fiction novels, to the endless theological/philosophical theories that characterize the final eight years of his life and *VALIS* in particular.

Equally important in Dick's work, however, is his sense of humor, of cosmic comedy, which allows him to laugh delightedly at our crazy world. This feeling is clearly present in *VALIS*, where Philip K. Dick the author doesn't stop poking gentle fun at his alter ego, Horselover Fat, who can be recognized as Phil Dick the man. Dick's letters and diaries show that he managed to retain his sense of humor in the midst of a very difficult personal and professional life, devoid of financial security or external success, constantly in and out of

failed marriages, suffering from various anxieties and phobias, addicted on and off to amphetamines, struggling to explain his religious experience of 1974. This sense of humor lends humanity to Dick's vision and is what makes his universe so attractive to us, reaching out powerfully in our own moments of isolation and loss.

A final side of Philip K. Dick's personality worth mentioning here is his love of, and profound involvement in, music. Dick's first job out of college was as a record store manager in Berkeley, California. It was there that he started to develop an almost encyclopedic knowledge of music literature, extending from John Dowland to Wagner, from Linda Ronstadt and The Beatles to Karlheinz Stockhausen, and on to his own fantasy descriptions of technological music of the future. He believed in the power of music to transmit human ideas as completely as words can. Situations in his novels are often characterized by what music is playing at the time. Particular pieces often become the backbone, or *cantus firmus*, for an entire novel, as Dowland songs are for *Flow My Tears*, *The Policeman Said*, or Wagner's *Parsifal* is for *VALIS*.

VALIS : Book to Opera

In March 1974, Philip K. Dick had his strange "pink light experience". Dick claims that suddenly a pink beam was fired at his head and eyes, resulting in phosphene images like those left after a flashbulb goes off in one's face [Rickman 1984]. For an entire day, the pink light brought with it effects usually associated with mystical revelation: time seemed to cease to exist, superimposing ancient Rome on Southern California; he became aware of specific knowledge, such as words and sentences from Koine Greek, and the fact that his young son was gravely ill and suffering from an undiagnosed congenital defect (which turned out to be true, allowing a doctor to save Christopher's life); he received glimpses of what he interpreted as the Apocalypse; he had many specific visions, from Soviet satellites, to three-eyed future humans, to wildly changing colors and patterns.

This experience became Dick's obsession for the last eight years of his life, as he tried to explain to himself what

had actually happened, and to make sense out of the bits of "divine" knowledge which had been sent to him. He spent years compiling a theory of the universe based on his experience which he called his "Exegesis", and which is reported to contain over two million words of handwritten notes. In addition, his experience influenced his last three novels, *The Divine Invasion*, *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*, and especially *VALIS*, which is a semi-autobiographical account of the pink light experience itself, and of Dick's reaction to it.

To transpose his personal trials into exploratory fiction, Dick uses the convention of dividing himself (as the main character) in two. This idea of mirror division is found on every level of the novel. In *VALIS*, Phil Dick the science fiction writer observes and comments on Horselover Fat, the part of himself who has supposedly experienced the mystical revelation. The book itself is divided into two symmetrical halves, the first being a realistic portrait of his life after the 1974 experience, and the

second a fantasy portrayal of what this truth might be. Even the characters find mirror reflections in the two halves, such as Sophia, who can be seen as a kind of idealized reincarnation of the lost Gloria. On many levels *VALIS* is a novel of synthesis and unification, of bringing together parts which have been separated. This extends from Dick's attempt to bring his "realistic" and "science fiction" writing into a single context, to the book's theme itself, which suggests a single force behind life's seemingly fragmented perceptions and events.

Turning *VALIS* into an opera was a challenging task. What seemed most important was to preserve the intellectual richness of the text, while clarifying as much as possible its sense of psychological and emotional drama. I believe, as Peter Conrad has written [Conrad 1985], that opera is more closely connected to novels (which convey so effectively what people are thinking or feeling) than to the theater (where such internal machinations must be demonstrated through external

action). Musical drama can augment the meaning of words, and, more importantly, can convey the internal reflection that takes place between those words. I have placed Horselover Fat at the very center of the opera, and have concentrated on his personal search for truth. Certain plot elements, and various wonderful characters from the book (such as Kevin, the hilarious skeptic) were not included in the libretto so that attention could be focused on Fat.

I have been very conscious of the idea of progression and transformation of events and states over time in *VALIS*. This has always been my greatest concern in imagining musical forms, and Dick's diverse approach to such questions in his book proved fertile ground. In the first half of the opera, I have tried to preserve the book's atmosphere of chattiness, digression, fragmentation, and surprise. Here, the spotlight is so heavily directed on Fat that all characters and action almost appear to result from a spilling out of his overabundant imagination. In the second half, however, the relationship changes, and Fat becomes



1985 "libretto session" in Auxerre, France.
(L to R) Catherine Ikam, Bill Raymond,
Tod Machover, Linda Hartinian.

an observer, coming in contact with the Lamptons, Mini, and Sophia, who all seem at least as real as he is.

Fat's psychological transformation is the central concern of *VALIS*, which takes its most obvious form in the split between Fat and Phil. The two roles are so closely connected that in the novel we learn that the name Horselover Fat is an English translation of Philip K. Dick (*philip* in Greek meaning "one who loves horses", and *dick* in German meaning "fat"). Fat and Phil are played by the same actor/singer, but the presentation of each part is highly contrasted, both in the actual musical material and in the nuance that the performer is asked to add to the interpretation. For the present recording, Patrick Mason worked very hard to give a totally different vocal color to Fat and Phil, even insisting on recording the two "characters" on separate days. For Fat, he placed his voice quite high, emphasizing the fluid, and often comic, fluctuations of normal speech. For Phil, he placed the voice as low as possible without sounding unnatural, and kept

pitch fluctuations to a minimum. His remarkable performance emphasizes Fat's energetic nuttiness and touching humanity, and Phil's pontifical, overly rational explanations.

As for the other characters, the attempt has been to give them a sense of clarity and true-to-lifeness with the greatest possible economy. Gloria represents the only real woman and friend in Fat's life, touchingly emphasizing Fat's isolation since the two don't even seem that close to each other. Gloria's vulnerability and emotional fragility are conveyed through her very few spoken phrases, her sighs and whispers heard here and there as memories, and her gentle melodies, hummed to herself, but never more than a step away from cries of desperation. Dr. Stone's wide, consonant intervals and deep, melismatic ornaments emphasize his commanding and reassuring presence. Fat's isolation is deepened when Dr. Stone abdicates his responsibility, transmitting his "authority" to Fat himself in a bitterly ironic turn. The Lamptons, through their harsh and

repetitive rhythms and open, consonant harmonies, convey the arrogant and menacing sureness that I have often associated with religious cultists. Mini, in his silence, focuses attention on the magic of art and technology, his only language, while attracting suspicion about his motives. Sophia is an angel, conveying the opera's fullest message in pure song. Her purity and simplicity only increase Fat's desire that she be real. It is an intentional and painful paradox that Fat's best human friend, Gloria, has so little to say, while Sophia, who has all the comforting answers, turns out to be something other than human, finally distant and unattainable.

Musical Language and Continuity

While I attach great importance to the opera's text itself, and have tried at every turn to make it as comprehensible and telling as possible, my main goal has been to express psychological states, intellectual ideas, and emotional reactions through music [Machover 1986].

In the opera, there are basically three kinds of musical sections, each of which serves a different function. The first establishes its own internal character and musical shape, and is relatively independent from other musical sections. Each aria is like this, as are most of the elements which are used to build the work's larger contrasting units (such as those of "Fat's Dream"). The second type of section establishes a strong sense of movement or development, of "becoming" and never standing still. These sections generally function as dramatic climaxes, creating a great sense of anticipation ("Finale II") or instability ("Finale I"). The third type of section is the oppo-

site, and establishes the feeling that time and forward direction have stopped. Such sections (i.e. "Loneliness Transition" and "Mini's Solo") give the listener time to reflect on what has gone before, and, by putting familiar musical elements into new contexts, to prepare for what is to come.

I have used a varied palette to establish these contrasts. In fact, the great quantity of different "types" of music in *VALIS* is one of the first things that any listener will notice. As Dick's book suggests, the styles of musical expression range from rock to romantic to medieval to futuristic. I have always believed that the impact of synthesis is most powerful when the contrasts between the previously separate parts is maximized.

The feeling of continuity in *VALIS* is conveyed mostly through the overall musical form. As is true on all levels in the opera (musical, textual, and dramatic), the formal development of Parts I and II are quite different from each other. In Part I, each section is presented and juxtaposed within the first fifteen

minutes of the opera: the pedal tones and spectral harmony that accompanies the narrator; Gloria's flowing melody with electronic resonances; the clipped rhythmic theorizing of Fat's "Sacrament"; the rising and falling fifths of the "Overture". These elements are spun into larger and larger musical structures, such as the variation form of "Fat's Dream", or the piling up of the "Finale". The process is one of increasing accumulation, fragmentation and juxtaposition, reaching its culminating point of complexity with Gloria's suicide. In Part II, the process is reversed. The rhythmic and textural complexities of the "VALIS Song" set the stage for a continual release of tension, reaching the point of greatest stillness at the end of "Sophia's Aria".

The careful listener will find that melodic material from one section of the opera is often transposed as accompaniment material to another. This is used to establish thematic links between often very contrasting sections. For instance, many different themes are to be found in the "Overture", spun into a

single melody. Fragments from the "Gesegnet Song" are spread throughout Part I. The "VALIS Song" melody returns in many guises throughout Part II. One of its more interesting reincarnations is as the rapid, stretto-like accompaniment to Fat's melody in the second half of "Finale II".

There are many musical paradoxes in *VALIS*. As in Dick's text, things are usually not what they seem to be. At moments of great complexity, there is often a single element that rises to the fore, focusing one's attention and building in intensity (as in the "Finale" to Part I). When things seem to be simplest and most understandable, independent parts often separate, as if the background is coming alive to devour the objects posed in front of it (which is most disturbingly audible in the "Finale" to Part II).

Photo: Carl Machover



Main computer, audio and video installation for Paris production.

Musical Forces and New Technology in *VALIS*

My work in computer music has always involved developing concepts and techniques in response to particular musical ideas [Machover 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987]. Because of the scope and special demands of *VALIS*, research led to a great number of new applications, many of which were implemented for the live performances in Paris and for this recording.

When first starting work on *VALIS*, I decided to make the opera almost entirely electronic, freeing myself to imagine and design a new "opera orchestra". To do this, I scored the piece for only two musicians, one keyboard player and one percussionist, connected to a vast array of specially designed music technology. Much of this music is performed live, and special extensions to the instruments let the players delicately control and shape a vast sound world. For the live performances, a wide variety of commercial

MIDI equipment was used (keyboard and percussion controllers, various synthesizers and samplers, effects boxes, Macintosh II computers, etc.), as well as specially designed computer music systems, such as IRCAM's 4X machine. Other electronic material was developed during long months of studio work, then pre-recorded and played from 24-track digital tape at specific moments during the performance. The six singers are always amplified.

In *VALIS*, different sound materials are used to characterize developments in the story. For instance, the sound worlds of the first and second halves are distinctly contrasted. During the first half (when they are positioned in two recessed "orchestra pits", visible to the public but off-stage), the instrumentalists start out playing acoustic instruments, a normal acoustic piano and percussion setup. As Houselover Fat gets further and further involved with his Exegesis, and moves closer to mental breakdown, these acoustic instruments are shadowed by the computer, which releases more and more perceptible

electronic resonances. This Pandora's Box of computer sound is totally unleashed by the time of Gloria's suicide at the end of Part I. When the Lamptons arrive on stage at the start of Part II, the two musicians join them, and play totally electronic instruments, reflecting the action's shift to the fantasy realm. Mini's appearance brings this transformation to its extreme, as he sculpts an abstract music performing on an invisible instrument. The same ideas are applied to the treatment of voices in the opera. Part I centers around spoken text, especially by Fat and Phil. These words are fragmented, echoed, and gradually computer-transformed as Fat's Exegesis begins to take on a life of its own during the Dr. Stone scene. By Part II, speech gives way to song, emphasizing the fact that the opera has moved away from real life to an artificial, fantasy world.

Since I began working with computer music in 1977, I have been interested in developing techniques to allow the medium to be adapted to the demands of live performance. This has taken various forms, sometimes using fragments of

pre-recorded tape and amplified acoustic instruments (i.e. *Soft Morning*, *City!*, *Light*, *Spectres Parisiens*, *Famine*), others using electronic modification of acoustic instruments (such as *Electric Etudes*), and yet others employing the computer as a solo concert instrument (*Fusione Fugace*). Because of its length and diverse musical demands, *VALIS* necessitated new concepts in this domain of real-time musical performance. This was especially true since theatrical work requires maximum flexibility of performance nuance, minimizing the effectiveness of rigid pre-prepared tape accompaniment.

I developed, with Joseph Chung, the concept of "Hyperinstruments" at MIT's Media Laboratory. We have tried to program computers to adapt intelligently to a musician's live performance. The idea is to use sophisticated machines to give the performer far more musical control than is traditionally possible. To do this, Chung wrote a musical environment in LISP that runs on Macintosh II computers. These computer programs analyze a musician's gestures and perfor-

mance (i.e. notes played, loudness, aftertouch, etc.), and react immediately, sending MIDI data out to an array of synthesizers, samplers, and sound transformation modules. Many different modules were programmed to adapt to the needs of various sections of *VALIS*.

A *score follower* was developed to allow the computer to react flexibly to piano performance. A specially designed Bösendorfer Imperial Grand Piano was used, sending MIDI data to the Macintosh II, as well as recording the pianist's performance data. A hierarchically organized model of the musical score was given to the program, which then followed (using pattern matching algorithms) the live piano with a tolerance for errors and tempo fluctuation. Our program then determined a specific musical reaction from the machine depending on what was played by the pianist. This ranged from electronic timbres shadowing piano notes, to sequences triggered automatically at a specific cue. "Dr. Stone's Aria", for instance, is performed on acoustic piano with live score follower,

which adds an unreal ambience to the psychiatrist's sermon.

A more computer-automated approach to "Hyperinstruments" can be heard during the Lampton scene. Here the goal was to provide the two rock musicians with instruments that magnify virtuosity to a level of very delicate complexity. A performance system was built up around the electronic percussion and keyboard controllers. Among the many available functions, one of the most interesting was an *automatic arpeggiator*. On both percussion and keyboard, a set of rhythmic patterns or "templates" was stored in the computer. Pitches (for the keyboard) or timbres (for percussion) were added live by the performer, and fitted by algorithm to the pre-existing pattern, creating ever-changing, complex phrases. In the case of the keyboard system, for instance, each voice could be carefully articulated in these patterns by controlling its dynamic, and increased pressure (or "aftertouch") effectuated delicate timbral changes. In addition, a score follower allowed each change of harmony to be

automatically associated with a distinct rhythmic figuration. This process can be clearly heard in the accompanying lines to the "Suffering Song", as well as in much of the "Lampton Scene" and "Finale" to Part II.

Another aspect of technological development for *VALIS* is the analysis and transformation of the human voice. Some of the more sophisticated of these programs were developed on a non-real-time system, a VAX 780 computer with an array processor to speed up calculation. I used Phase Vocoder programs with additions designed and implemented with Arnaud Petit and Martin Hermann, and Robert Rowe for graphic interfaces. For this technique, speech (which works better in this context than sung material) is analyzed by the computer. The Phase Vocoder produces data files that divide the original speech up into very fine frequency bands (about one band for every 7 Hertz) with time-variant amplitude information in each band. These files can then be manipulated in extraordinary ways: speech can be stretched or compressed in time without affecting pitch or

timbre, timbral transformations can be performed without obscuring the intelligibility of the speech, etc. One of the more interesting transformations that we designed involved carving up words and sentences into a sort of spectral jigsaw puzzle. About twenty separate soundfiles were created from a single speech fragment, each containing an irregular grouping of frequency bands with no duplications between the files. Each file by itself had a very ambiguous sound, not really comprehensible as speech, but not totally electronic either. Only by mixing each of these files back together could the speech be understood. We then wrote programs to gradually modify the speed of each of the individual files, so that the entire group could move in and out of phase very gradually. The result was to produce very subtle spectral shifting, with words starting out intelligibly, then transforming into shimmering timbre, and finally snapping back into total "normalcy" or fusion on another specific word. Many of these Phase Vocoder transformations can be heard in Fat's two "Exegesis" fragments.

A third category of music technology developed for *VALIS* involves the live transformation of vocal or instrumental sound. For the performances in Paris we used IRCAM's 4X machine (a powerful, open-ended digital synthesizer), with programs developed by Miller Puckette, Cort Lippe, and Robert Rowe. Since then, these techniques have been translated onto more inexpensive and transportable equipment, in preparation for future touring productions of the opera.

Photo: Alan Ruttenberg



At M.I.T. recording session. (L to R) Paul Zinman, David Starobin, Tod Machover, Robert Rowe, Joseph Chung, and Patrick Mason.

To provide maximum flexibility for treating incoming music, we developed *realtime microediting* of sounds. A given sound (most often Fat's speech) was sent to the 4X, either in a continuous stream or as a soundfile of specified duration. On the screen, a display showed the waveform "live" as it filled up the synthesizer's memory. Under the waveform display was a graphic image of a keyboard, with each key clearly visible. Our program in the 4X enabled each key to play back the incoming sound starting exactly at the point that the key lined up with the waveform, an impossibility with any currently available commercial sampler. In this way, an electronic performer (seated in the "orchestra pit") could fragment, prolong, or echo any sound with great precision and on-the-spot flexibility. This technique can be heard throughout Part I, especially during "Exegesis II" and the "Finale", and in the "VALIS Song" where it was used for some vocal splintering and virtuosic repetition.

Another procedure for transforming incoming sounds involved *spectral multiplication*. For this technique, each incoming sound was copied as many as 40 times. Pre-programmed templates allowed for each of these copies to be transposed, and amplitude envelopes were imposed as well. The templates ranged from slight frequency skew, producing clustering and chorusing, to widely spaced "spectral chords", creating the effect of additive synthesis produced with real sounds. When the recorded sounds were transposed far enough to produce significant distortion, the programs could substitute similar prerecorded sounds in an appropriate register, or sounds with a different but complementary timbre. This procedure produced sound structures of exceptional richness and complexity. These can be heard in various sections of the opera, such as those using cello transformation (notably the accompaniment to the "Parsifal Transition") and dense computer-like inharmonic sounds (such as "Mini's Solo" or the transition to the "Slippers Song").



Linda Lampton (Mary King) and Sophia (Anne Azema) from Finale II.

Above all, I have viewed **VALIS** as an opportunity to write the most beautiful music that I could, bringing to life a story that I feel strongly about. I have given free reign to my lyrical impulse, allowing characters to soar melodically at times, while at others experiencing the (sometimes painful) constraints of speech. I have tried to develop a rich palette of sonic colors to best shade every nuance of emotion, attempting to create a music of great diversity and even shocking contrast, held together by a strong underlying sense of unity and coherence.

To convey the diversity and power of Philip K. Dick's novel in sound, I have tried to create a work which would speak its message on first hearing, but reveal more and more of itself on greater acquaintance. My greatest hope is that listeners will be motivated to get to know **VALIS** well, to explore its intimate and subtle sides as well its overarching message of painful search and hopeful redemption.

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Synopsis

Part I

VALIS begins with a sudden explosion of sound and flashing pink light combined with rapidly crosscut video images. The **Overture**, which weaves together many different musical themes and timbres from the entire opera, begins in stillness, and finds Horselover Fat pierced through the head by a pink laser beam. As the music builds in majesty, visual images from Fat's eight hour revelation ("lurid phosphene activity in eighty colors, three-eyed people in glass bubbles and electronic gear, living plasmatic energy, ancient Rome superimposed with Southern California") fade in and out almost imperceptibly. Part I of the opera is dominated by Fat's search for the truth behind his pink light encounter.

The voice of Philip K. Dick speaks the **First Narrative** over sustained pedal tones and chords. He sets the scene, telling of Horselover Fat's mystical experience which is perhaps just a nervous breakdown, and of the obsessive journal that Fat has been writing (his "Exegesis") in an attempt to explain the universe.

Horselover Fat launches into a rhythmic rap-style presentation of part of his theory, his **Sacrament**, stating that people are "like memory coils in a computer-like thinking system", and that the universe itself "is information". Piano and percussion trills then transform into dreamy beach sounds and video images, accompanied by a melismatic soprano melody. In the **Beach Scene**, Fat tries to convince his friend Gloria, who is "tired of doing what everybody else wants", not to commit suicide. As our narrator pointedly observes, Fat blows it, and ends up selfishly making Gloria feel guilty. This failure will weigh heavily on him.

Fat's Dream is an elaborate set of musical variations (as is all of Part I) based on two intertwined themes, one the unfolding spectral chords first heard in the opening narrative, and the other which makes reference to several important themes from Wagner's **Parsifal**. Horselover Fat recounts a recurring dream of an idyllic spot in Northern California, complete with a lovely and tender wife he has never

seen. He contrasts this to his own isolated, barren life in "plastic" Southern California, and comes to the conclusion that he has somehow absorbed memories from another person, asking, "Do I become my father during my sleep?". This leads to an exchange between Fat and the narrator, who both obsessively repeat another of the opera's main questions, "How many worlds do we exist in simultaneously?". The image of Fat's face is fractured and echoed on multiple video screens until all snaps. The stage is flooded with bright white light, and Fat finds himself in a strait-jacket.

Fat remains immobile during the **Loneliness Transition**, a sombre music of passage and reflection. He has attempted suicide, and finds himself wrapped in a strait-jacket; the images suggest a mental hospital.

Booming piano chords mark the entrance of **Dr. Stone**, who attempts to cure Fat by helping him believe in his own vision. After hearing him prescribe various organic remedies, sing a melodious aria based on the **Tao Te Ching**, and tell Fat that he himself is "the authority", one

wonders if the Doctor isn't equally nutty. The scene is interrupted by ethereal passages from Fat's exegesis (spoken in French) which are accompanied by visual images from his theory, as well as by brief remembrances of the scene with Gloria and premonitions of her suicide. Dr. Stone releases Fat from his strait-jacket.

These sounds and images accumulate as if flowing forth uncontrollably from Fat's mind. Swelling string sonorities become louder and louder, leading into the **Gesegnet Song**, the only time that Part I's variation theme is heard in its entirety. This heroic tenor melody reinforces the link to **Parsifal**, and this connection is further extended in the **Parsifal Transition**. The narrator's face appears on screen for the first time, revealing that he is the same person as our protagonist. Against a transformed and elongated version of the opening strains of Wagner's opera, Phil compares Fat's search for truth to Parsifal's. As he chastises Fat for his ineffectuality in not saving Gloria, Phil inadvertently demonstrates his own pain and lack of objectivity; the search for the truth is really his own.

Horselover Fat (Olivier Angèle) and Gloria (Sophie Marin-Degor) during the climax of Finale I.

Photo: Anne Marie Stein



All the diverse elements from Part I densely collide in its **Finale**. Fat and Phil face each other for the first time (one live, one on video), affirming the necessity of recapturing and unlocking the mystery of the pink light experience; sounds, text and images from the exegesis abound; Gloria returns and sings an ever more mournful melody as she climbs stairs higher and higher. Her voice soars above the increasingly chaotic texture and at the climactic moment she screams and throws herself into thin air. A short, chilling black-out leads without a break into . . .

Part II

With a crash of drum and cymbals, Fat finds himself in front of a large screen watching a short, intense science fiction film set to the **VALIS Song** ("I want to see you man..."). The film has been made by two rock musicians, Eric and Linda Lampton, who have concocted a wildly mysterious narrative combining most of Fat's exegesis images from Part I with many technologically-oriented icons not referred to before, and hints at a powerful force called "VALIS". Fat understands that the Lamptons are aware of the same strange facts as he is, and that they've taken the trouble to make a film to transmit the secret message to others. This reinforcement convinces him that he is not crazy, and gives him the courage to drop his theorizing and set out in search of the force behind the film. With one stroke, the entire ambience of the opera changes: while Part I is concerned with mental disorder, fragmentation, and human pain, Part II moves boldly into the realm of magic and fantasy.

At the end of the film, while the word "VALIS" is sung over and over, Eric and Linda Lampton appear on stage, seeming to materialize from within the film itself, to sing the second part of the **VALIS Song** ("VALIS, does it come from the stars?...Is VALIS a god, a child, a satellite...does it destroy?").

During the **Lampton Scene** which follows, Horselover Fat faces the two rock musicians, who quiz him about how much of the film's secret message he has really understood. Although the Lamptons will not reveal the true nature of VALIS, and only divulge the meaning of its acronym ("Vast Active Living Intelligent System"), they do tell Fat that his search is finally on the right path, that his pain will soon be over. Eric, Linda and Fat join together for the gently reassuring **Suffering Song**.

This leads directly into **Mini's Solo**. Mini, a half-crippled inventor and computer music composer arrives on stage slowly from the conductor's chair that he has occupied until this moment. Mini has composed the Lampton's music, and is a master at transmitting subliminal

messages about "VALIS" through his art. While the Lamptons have performed with magical electronic virtuosity, Mini (who neither speaks nor sings) conjures pure sound out of thin air, bringing to life the entire stage area in a unity of flowing lights and geometric images. Paradoxically, Mini's music, the most abstractly electronic of the entire opera, is in fact created from bits of the human voice, deconstructed so as to be unrecognizable at first. During the course of his short performance, Mini moulds these independent sound particles into a single, pure female singing voice.

This is the voice of **Sophia**, whose **scene** marks Fat's final encounter. Sophia is a beautiful young girl who emanates a strange and unreal aura; we are never sure if she is a normal girl, an angel, or a hologram. Sophia notices that Phil/Fat's double personality has disappeared ("I can see only one person..."). She tells him that his long search has ended and that the goal of his life has been reached. In an aria of shimmering simplicity and reassurance, Sophia speaks the words of "VALIS", telling

Phil/Fat that the only true god is himself, that the time of trials is not yet over but that he must be patient. Whereas before he was alone, now he has a friend who "never sickens, nor fails, nor dies".

At the point of greatest stillness, the **Finale** begins. In this majestic pas-sacaglia, which transposes the opera's theme of obsession from a textual to a purely musical plane, Phil/Fat, Sophia, and the Lamptons all join in with contradictory counterpoint. Phil/Fat sings that he's "not afraid, my search is over...VALIS is real"; Sophia adds that he should "not fear, I will not fail you"; the Lamptons keep posing questions about VALIS ending with "but VALIS, is it real?"; and Mini conducts. Each singer develops dramatically in his or her own way: the Lamptons become more and more taunting and even sadistic, as if receiving pleasure from suggesting to Phil/Fat that VALIS might be an illusion; Sophia becomes ever more ethereal, as if she is too pure and comforting to actually exist; and Fat repeats his words over and over, at first

with a sincere reassurance, then with the determination of someone trying to convince himself of something, and finally with a sort of violent panic as his dream begins to vanish. During this section, most musical development takes place in the background accompaniment which adds layer after layer of motivic and timbral embellishment, building to a point of enormous intensity.

All the while, Mini conducts, at first normally with his hands, but gradually using rays of pink laser light. As the music builds towards its climax, Mini deflects these laser beams (or is "VALIS" sending laser beams through him?) to bathe Sophia in light, first gently — as if performing a laboratory experiment, and then in more agitated fashion — as if the experiment is bursting out of control. Sophia's true nature becomes ever more ambiguous. As Phil/Fat cries "VALIS IS REAL" for the final time, a very powerful laser beam strikes Sophia and she explodes in a wash of pink light, bringing Fat's vision full circle. All disappear with her in a flash, leaving Phil alone on stage.

Coda

The explosion clears and transforms into gentle washes of sound, and the first strains of the **Slippers Song** are heard. Phil stares aimlessly into space as the narrator's voice returns to tell another dream, of a beautiful woman riding in a chariot who sings "the most beautiful song" he'd ever heard. This song (which is the basis of Gloria's music in Part I) tells Phil that "you've lived enough and somehow you'll make it through, gone's the night...somehow you'll be alright." On awakening, Phil realizes that the dream has been Sophia's way of saying goodbye.

Phil sits in front of his television set, waiting for a message about where and how to continue his search. Horselover Fat is back, off searching far away, enthusiastic and unfazed. Phil is more muted, but still has a feeling "of the goodness of men". He is willing to wait. He won't give up. After all the pain and dashed illusions, **VALIS** ends on this hopeful note. The flickering light from Phil's TV fades away, leaving the stage in darkness.

Part I

The stage area is empty and dimly lit as the audience is seated.

On the stage is a complex web of video monitors and projection surfaces. They are arranged in fragmented fashion closer to the public, and more symmetrically towards the back of the scenic area. Some are arranged vertically in the form of walls or towers. Others form patterns on the stage itself. Most of the decor in VALIS and certain narrative elements are displayed on these projection surfaces.

Also on the stage are various items from Horselover Fat's Southern California apartment. Most prominent is a writing table, strewn with papers.

In place of the traditional orchestra pit is a long, narrow recessed area that contains all of the sound and visual control equipment for the opera, and is visible to the audience. The conductor

(who also plays Mini) is seated in the exact center of this space.

Two separate recessed, yet not connected, holes contain a grand piano (stage right) and a percussion installation (stage left).

Lights dim to total blackness. A few seconds of absolute silence...

1 Explosion and Overture

Big crash of images and music. Intense pink strobe-like light. This is accompanied by flashing, fleeting images of colors and abstract designs on many small projection surfaces. Images pass too quickly to be legible. Crescendo to great intensity. Light and images shatter into fragments.

After-image of pink light; like phosphene activity...almost blinding.

Horselover Fat is in center of stage with a pink laser beam piercing him through the head.

While Fat remains center stage, basically immobile, the Overture begins. Delicate variations of lighting, first in sombre tones, and then with increasing intensity until the final pedal tone of the Overture.

2 First Narrative

During this text, Horselover Fat is seen performing several simple everyday activities (eating, smoking, etc.). Mostly, he is writing, first slowly and then with more intensity. At first the musical accompaniment comes from the loudspeakers.

Phil

(recorded voice-off...no face visible): Horselover Fat's nervous breakdown began the day he got the phonecall from Gloria asking if he had any Nembutals. He asked her why she wanted them and

she said that she intended to kill herself. She was calling everyone she knew. By now she had fifty of them, but she needed thirty or forty more, to be on the safe side.

At once Horselover Fat leaped to the conclusion that this was her way of asking for help. It had been Fat's delusion for years that he could help people. His psychiatrist once told him that to get well he would have to do two things: get off dope (which he hadn't done) and to stop trying to help people (he still tried to help people).

During this opening narrative, a silent image of Gloria on the telephone appears suddenly on a video monitor, and then disappears in a slow fade.

Phil

(recorded voice-off):

He had no sleeping pills of any sort. He never did sleeping pills. He did uppers. So giving Gloria sleeping pills by which she could kill herself was beyond his power. He wouldn't have done it if he could. As a matter of fact he had no Nembutals.

At Fat's first live speech, the lights come on abruptly to illuminate the two musicians. Their live music accompanies Fat's interjection.

Horselover Fat

(live on stage; lighting changes to emphasize that the "real" Fat is speaking for the first time):

I have ten.

Phil

(recorded voice-off):

That's when Fat began to go nuts.

At the time he didn't know it, but he had been drawn into an unspeakable psychological game. What he did not know then is that it is sometimes an appropriate response to reality to go insane.

I'm by profession a science fiction writer. I deal in fantasies. My life is a fantasy. Nevertheless, Gloria Knudsen lies in a box in Modesto, California. Everything happens to my friend Horselover Fat. He's the one who got zapped, one night in 1974, with a pink

laser light that communicated to him incredible things.

So Fat started keeping a journal, an "exegesis" he called it. His encounter with God was all there on the pages in his own handwriting ...Fat's handwriting, not God's.

3 Fat's Sacrament

Fat

(live on stage, speaking to audience, accompanied by piano and percussion with a background of electronic sound; Fat is lit brilliantly, and performs this number with great vigor):

We appear to be memory coils in a computer-like thinking system which, although we have correctly recorded and stored thousands of years of experiential information, and each of us possesses somewhat different deposits from all the other life forms, there is a malfunction — a failure — of memory retrieval. The ancients possessed techniques (sacraments and rituals) to induce firing

and retrieval, mainly with a sense of its restorative value to the individual.

The Universe is information!

4 Beach Scene

The lighting slowly transforms. Fat gets up from his desk and prepares for the meeting with Gloria. She is illuminated, far off on the stage, and approaches Fat slowly. Images and sounds of the beach begin to appear.

Phil

(recorded voice-off):

Month after month Fat labored over his Exegesis, trying to make some sense of the inscrutable. And Gloria ... she was just part of the project.

Gloria's voice is heard humming a gentle song, a version of the "Slippers Song" that will return near the end of the opera.

Sound and image have changed completely to suggest the ocean. Fat and Gloria are seated at the beach.

Gloria:

Hey Fat, ... ya' seen my Nembutals?

Fat:

Um ... What d'ya mean?

Gloria:

Can't find 'em. D'ya know where they are?

Fat:

Look Gloria, I took 'em! Listen, move in with me, ok? It'll be all right. I mean, I live all alone.

Gloria:

I'm tired of doing what everybody else wants.

Fat:

C'mon, we can move your stuff up, some friends of mine and I. And we can do stuff, like we're goin' to the beach today.

Listen, Gloria, it would really make me feel bad for the rest of my life if you did away with yourself.

Gloria :

I guess I could stay at your place tonight ...

Fat :

Far out, ok! You can move in with me. But just don't kill yourself. I mean it would really make me feel bad for the rest of my life if you did.

Light begins to fade from Gloria. She gradually disappears.

Phil

(recorded voice-off):

Asking Gloria not to kill herself as a favor to him was a lousy idea really. He couldn't have given her a worse reason for staying alive.

5 Fat's Dream

Gloria's face appears suddenly on the monitors, as if in a memory, and then fades slowly.

Light becomes more present on Fat center stage.

During the dream that follows, various images from Fat's narrative are illustrated simply and fleetingly on the video monitors.

Fat :

You know, I have these dreams of a strange place, a lake up north and the cottages and small rural houses around its south shore. In my dream I arrive there from Southern California, where I live; this is a vacation spot, but it is very old-fashioned. All the houses are wooden, made of the brown shingles so popular in California before World War Two. The roads are dusty, the cars are olden, too. What is strange is that no such lake exists in the northern part of California. In real life I have driven all the

way north to the Oregon border, and there's nothin' but seven hundred miles of dry country.

Where does this lake — and the houses and roads around it — actually exist?

Since in the dreams I am aware that I am on vacation, that my real home is in Southern California, I sometimes drive back down here to Orange County in these inter-connected dreams. But when I arrive back down here I live in a house, whereas in actuality I live in an apartment. In the dreams, I am married. In real life, I live alone. Stranger still, my wife is a woman I have never actually seen.

She wears blue jeans and is slender and pretty.

Who is this wife?

An hour after I have woken up from the dream I can still see in my mind's eye — whatever that may be; the third or "ajna" eye? — the garden hose which my wife in her blue jeans is dragging across the cement driveway. Little details, and no plot.

Who am I? How many am I? Where am I?

This plastic little apartment in Southern California is not my home, but now I am awake, I guess, and here I live, with my TV (hello, Dick Clark), and my stereo (hello, Olivia Newton-John) and my books (hello, nine million stuffy titles). In comparison with my life in the inter-connected dreams, this life is lonely and phony and worthless; unfit for an intelligent and educated person.

Where are the roses? Where is the lake? Who is the slim, smiling, attractive woman coiling and tugging the green garden hose?

Then a strange thought comes to me. I am not close to my father, who is still alive, in his eighties, living up in Northern California. Only twice did I ever see his house, and that was like twenty years ago. His house was like that which I owned in the dream. His aspirations — and accomplishments — dovetail with those of the person in the dream.

Do I become my father during my sleep?

Fat freezes as if thinking about what he has just said. A dark figure has entered the stage, seen only in silhouette but dressed exactly like Fat, suggesting the presence of the narrator.

Phil

(pre-recorded speech, but associated with silhouetted figure on stage): Phylogenic memory, memory of the species. The individual contains the history of his entire race, back to its origins. The situation has to do with time, and whether time is real.

It has also been said of dreams that they are a "controlled psychosis", or, put another way, a psychosis is a dream breaking through during waking hours.

What does this mean in terms of Fat's lake dream which includes a woman he never knew for whom he felt a real and comfortable love?

Are there two persons in my brain, as there are in Fat's? Are we all like Horselover Fat, but don't know it?

Fat :
How many worlds do we exist in simultaneously?

Phil (with silhouette) :
How many worlds do we exist in?

Fat :
How many worlds?

Phil (with silhouette) :
How many?

Fat :
How many?

Fat and Phil together :
How many? How many? How many ...
(repeated over and over).

During the repetitions of "How many?", the image of the silhouetted figure appears for the first time on the video monitors. This video image begins to multiply and accumulate along with the sound.

This is joined by close-up images of

Fat's face, split up into fragments like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

Total blackout on the final "How many?".

6 Loneliness Transition

The stage is flooded with bright light. Horselover Fat stands in center stage wearing a white strait-jacket. He is in a mental hospital.

Transitional music emphasizes his loneliness and solitude. Very subtle play of light follows harmonic shifts in the music and changes of expression on Fat's face.

At the end of this music, Dr. Stone, a psychiatrist, appears on stage.

7 Dr. Stone's Scene

Dr. Stone :
Did you ever try suicide before?

Fat :
No.

Dr. Stone :
I think that when you tried to kill yourself you got in touch with reality for the first time.

Fat :
Maybe so.

Dr. Stone :
What I'm going to give you we term the Bach remedies. These organic remedies are distilled from certain flowers which grow in Wales. Take six drops a day.

Fat :
Thank you.

Dr. Stone :
You have much anger in you. I am lending you a copy of the *Tao Te Ching*. Have you ever read Lao Tzu?

Fat :
No.

Dr. Stone :
Then listen to this.

8 Dr. Stone's Aria

Dr. Stone sings the following text, accompanied by amplified piano and computer-generated resonance. He is illuminated sombrely.

Its upper part is not dazzling;
Its lower part is not obscure.
Dimly visible, it cannot be named
And returns to that which is without its
substance.

This is called the shape that has no
shape,
The image that is without substance.
This is called indistinct and shadowy.
Go up to it and you will not see its head;
Go follow behind it and you will not see its
end.

During the end of Dr. Stone's Aria, sounds and images from Fat's Exegesis have been appearing gradually throughout the stage area.

These sounds and images take on great prominence, turning into independent material, during which time Fat and Dr. Stone continue their discussion in pantomime.

Fat's voice, transformed slightly by computer, speaks the following text, in French, from his Exegesis, accompanied by electronic sound:

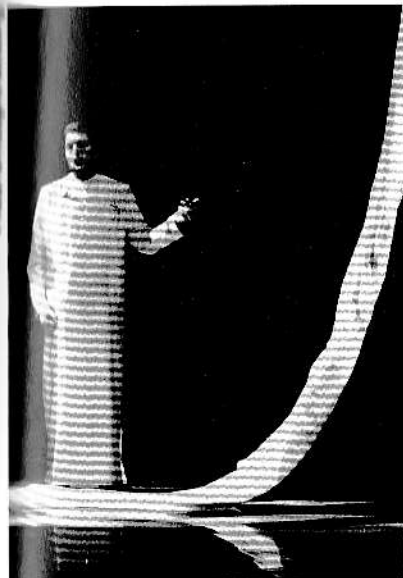
9 Exegesis I

Exegesis I Text :

Le Grand Apollon se prépare au retour.
St Sophia va renaître. Elle n'était pas
reconnaissable avant. Le Bouddha est
dans le parc. Siddhartha dort, mais va se
réveiller. Le temps que tu attendais est
venu.

English translation :

The Head Apollo is about to return, St.Sophia
is going to be born again; she was not
acceptable before. The Buddha is in the park.
Siddhartha sleeps (but is going to awaken).
The time you have waited for has come.



Dr. Stone's aria (Terry Edwards).

Fat :
Do you believe that the universe is
irrational?

Dr. Stone :
You would know. You're the authority.

Dr. Stone removes Fat's strait-jacket, and then disappears. Fat stays illuminated in center stage. Sounds and images from Fat's Exegesis II surge forward and form a complex web.

Little by little, images and sounds from the Gloria meeting become apparent in the texture, repeating certain of Gloria's gestures and expressions to the point of obsession.

Eventually, this material is joined by video images from Wagner's Parsifal, from the Syberberg film version.

Fat's voice, transformed and accelerated by computer, speaks the following text, in French, from his Exegesis, accompanied by electronic sound:

10 Exegesis II

Text from Exegesis II :

L'Un était, et en même temps n'était pas, et désirait séparer ce qui n'était pas de ce qui était. Le jumeau né à terme franchit normalement les stades de son développement alors que la prématuré languissait. Ainsi il gérait un sac diploïde qui contenait, telle une coquille d'oeuf, deux jumeaux, chacun androgyne, se tournant en des directions opposées. Le projet de l'Un était que les jumeaux accèdent l'un et l'autre à "l'être" simultanément: cependant, le jumeau qui tournait vers la gauche creva le sac et se sépara prématurément. Le terme venu, le jumeau le plus sage apparut. Chaque jumeau formait une entelechie unitaire, un simple organisme vivant fait de psyché et de soma, toujours tournant en des directions opposées l'un par rapport à l'autre. C'était le dessein de l'Un que notre univers hologrammatique puisse servir d'instrument pédagogique au moyen duquel une variété de vies

nouvelles progresseraient jusqu'à lui devenir isomorphes. Toutefois l'état de décomposition de l'Hyperunivers II amena des malfonctionnements qui endommagèrent notre univers hologrammatique. Là est l'origine de l'entropie, de la souffrance imméritée, du chaos et de la mort, et encore l'Empire de la prison de fer noir. La psyché de l'Hyperunivers envoya une microforme d'elle-même dans l'Hyperunivers II afin de tenter de le soigner. Cependant l'Hyperunivers II desaxé, tortura, humilia, rejéta et finalement tua la microforme de la psyché salvatrice du jumeau sein. Après cela, l'Hyperunivers II continua de décliner et se perdit ainsi dans les processus d'une causalité aveugle, mécanique et sans objet. La tâche devint alors, soit de délivrer les formes de vie de l'intérieur de l'univers hologrammatique, soit d'abolir toute influence émanant de l'Hyperunivers. Abordant sa tâche avec précaution, il s'apprêta à tuer la jumelle desaxée, puisqu'elle ne pouvait pas être soignée; plus précisément elle ne permettait pas qu'on la soigne car elle ne comprend pas qu'elle est malade.

Le projet original de l'Un ne peut seulement être réalisé maintenant que par la division de l'Hyperunivers I en deux hyperunivers sains qui transformeront avec succès l'univers hologrammatique en une machine pédagogique, ce qu'il était sensé être originellement.

Cette maladie, cette folie nous pénètre et font de nous des idiots qui vivent dans des mondes à part et irréels. Nous éprouverons cela comme étant le Royaume de Dieu. L'information de l'esprit consiste en un conte tragique de la mort d'une femme dont les résonances gênèrent une angoisse au sein de toutes les créatures de l'univers hologrammatique sans qu'elles sachent pourquoi. Cette peine disparaîtra avec la mitose du jumeau sain et l'avènement du Royaume de Dieu.

Les processus de cette transformation, la procession, au sein du temps, de l'Age Fer à l'Age d'Or sont à l'oeuvre aujourd'hui. Dans l'éternité elle est déjà accomplie.

English Translation :

The One was and was-not, combined, and desired to separate the was-not from the was. So it generated a diploid sac which contained, like an eggshell, a pair of twins, each an androgyne, spinning in opposite directions. The plan of the One was that both twins would emerge into being simultaneously; however, the counterclockwise twin broke through the sac and separated prematurely. At full term the wiser twin emerged. Each twin formed a unitary entelechy, a single living organism, made of psyche and soma, still rotating in opposite directions to each other. The full term twin advanced correctly through its growth stages, but the prematurely born twin languished. It was the One's purpose for our hologrammatic universe to serve as a teaching instrument by which a variety of new lives advanced until ultimately they would be isomorphic with the One. However, the decaying condition of hyperuniverse II introduced malfactors which damaged our hologrammatic universe. This is the origin of entropy, undeserved suffering, chaos and death, as well as the Empire, the Black Iron Prison. The psyche of hyperuniverse I sent a micro-form of itself into hyperuniverse II to attempt to heal it. However, hyperuniverse II, being deranged,

at once tormented, humiliated, rejected and finally killed the micro-form of the healing psyche of her healthy twin. After that, hyperuniverse II continued to decay into blind, mechanical, purposeless causal processes. It then became the task of the Holy Spirit to either rescue the life forms in the hologrammatic universe, or abolish all influences on it emanating from II. Approaching its task with caution, it prepared to kill the deranged twin, since she cannot be healed; i.e. she will not allow herself to be healed because she does not understand that she is sick.

This illness and madness pervades us and makes us idiots living in private, unreal worlds. The original plan of the One can only be realized now by the division of hyperuniverse I into two healthy hyperuniverses, which will transform the hologrammatic universe into the successful teaching machine it was designed to be. We will experience this as the "Kingdom of God." The information of the Mind consists of a tragic tale of the death of a woman, the undertones of which generate anguish into all the creatures of the hologrammatic universe without their knowing why. This grief will depart when the healthy twin undergoes mitosis and the "Kingdom of God" arrives.

The machinery for this transformation - the procession within time from the Age of Iron to the Age of Gold - is at work now; in eternity it is already accomplished.

11 Gesegnet Song

Gradually, the Parsifal material envelopes all the other, and the section ends with a musical segment sung in a heroic tenor voice unheard elsewhere in the opera :

Gesegnet sei dein Leiden
Das Mitleids höchste Kraft,
Und reinsten Wissens Macht
Denn Zagen Toren gab.

As this musical number ends, the narrator appears full-face for the first time in the video monitors. It is clear to all that the narrator's face is the same as Horselover Fat's!

12 Parsifal Narrative

Phil

(recorded on video, full-face, same person as Horselover Fat) :

One of the keys to the story of Parsifal is the pure fool who abolishes the delusion of the magician Klingsor and his castle, and heals Amfortas's wound. But what does it mean?

*"May your suffering be blessed,
Which gave the timid fool
Pity's highest power
And purest knowledge's might!"*

I don't know what this means. However, I know that in our case, the pure fool, Horselover Fat, himself had the wound which would not heal, and the pain that goes with it. "Pity's highest power" is just bullshit. Pity has no power. Fat felt vast pity for Gloria and it didn't do a damn bit of good. Something was lacking. Something else healed the wound. Maybe Fat was searching for himself when he set out in search of the Savior.

13 Finale I

Image of Phil Dick remains on the video screens, and confronts Horselover Fat who is live and illuminated at center stage.

During this dialogue, a wealth of sounds and images from all the previous strains of action (Exegesis, Gloria story, Parsifal, pink light experience, etc.) begin to re-enter as overlapping fragments.

At the same time, Gloria reappears on stage. She is climbing a long ladder or stairway very slowly while chanting long, held notes. These become more and more agitated as she approaches the top of the stairs.

Fat :

I miss him, Phil. I want to see him again.

Phil :

You will see him again.

Fat :
I have to or I'm going to die and you too, Phil.

Phil:
You will find him. I know.

Fat :
I miss him, Phil. I want to see him again.

Phil :
You'll see him again.

Fat :
I want to see you.

Phil :
You will see him, Fat, this I know.

Fat :
I have to.

Phil :
That I know.

Fat :
Or I will die and you will too, Phil, and that we know! ...I want to see him again.

Phil :
You'll see him again.

Fat :
I must.

Phil :
You will.

Fat :
I want to see him.

Phil :
I know.

Fat :
I have to.

Phil :
You'll see him again.

Fat :
Phil ...

Phil :
That I know.

Fat :
I miss him.

Phil :
You'll see him again.

Fat :
Phil, I want to see him again.

Phil :
Yes I know.

Fat :
I miss him.

Phil :
Yes I know.

Fat :
And I'll die ...

Phil :
Yes I know.

Fat :
...and you too ...

Phil :
Yes I know.

Fat :
... and we know it, Phil.
I miss him Phil. I fuckin' miss him. I want to be with him, I want to feel his arm around me. Nobody else can do that. I saw him, sort of, and I want to see him again. That love, that warmth, that delight on his part that its me, being GLAD its me, recognizing me... HE RECOGNIZED ME!!
I want to see him again ...

Phil :
You'll see him again ...

As this "dialogue/aria" continues and the surrounding images and sounds swirl more and more furiously, Gloria moves to the top of the stairs. She is at the ledge on top of a tall building. Her chant has turned into moans and cries.

At the climactic moment, Gloria screams, jumping off the building.

The instant that she starts to plunge, all lights and sound are cut and Gloria vanishes.

A few seconds in total blackness lead directly to: ...

Part II

*Suddenly, with a great crash, the **VALIS** film appears on a large screen that is lowered rapidly at the front of the performance space, used here for the first time in the opera. The film is projected with a very large, intense image.*

14 VALIS Song

"VALIS music" is heard over film titles. The song for most of the clip is based on the words :

*I want to see you, man.
As quickly as I can.
Let me hold your hand
I've got no hand to hold
And I'm old,old; very old.*

*Why don't you look at me?
Afraid of what you see?
I'll find you anyhow,
Later or now; later or now.*

During the titles are scenes of landscape, desert-like, and some shots of Los Angeles from the air, at night.

Cut to a recording studio, where Eric and Linda Lampton are performing "I want to see you man...". Cross-cut with shots of Nicholas Brady sitting at an impressive mixing console in the control room.

Cuts between Brady and the Lamptons get faster and faster. A strange and tense relationship is established between Eric/Linda/Brady. Linda is very sexy. Brady lusts after her.

The cuts become wierder and wierder. More and more rapid cross-cuts with political shots of Brady (with his head spinning and changing form), Brady seated at a conference table facing himself with a cube glowing in pink light floating in the middle, Brady illuminated

*with strange light working at a fortress-like mixing desk, shots of a satellite and a VALIS-like circuit, images from Fat's *exegesis*.*

Cut to a love scene between Eric and Linda. At first they have no sex organs; they peel off skin to reveal them. Love-making illuminated by infra-red light. Infiltrated gradually by cross-cuts with other images.

They stop making love. Eric sits up depressed on edge of bed. Close-up of his face. Suddenly a pink beam appears and strikes his head - it explodes, revealing thousands of electronic parts. The head fuses back together; the forehead slides open, revealing a third eye in the form of a sophisticated lens.

Eric smiles. Cross-cut with Brady's head revolving, changing faster and faster.

Scene snaps back to Lamptons performing in the recording studio. While they sing, Brady's head continues spinning.

15 Lampton Scene

At the end of this song, as the word "VALIS" is repeated emphatically, Eric and Linda Lampton appear on stage, seeming to arrive from within the film. At the moment of transition they are performing along with the film music.

The Lamptons are joined on stage by the pianist and percussionist, who until this point in the action were off-stage in two recessed orchestra pits. They become the two musicians in the Lampton's rock band, and perform on electronic keyboards and percussion controllers with astounding, computer-enhanced virtuosity.

*The Lamptons launch into **Part 2** of the **VALIS Song**. The ambience changes immediately to that of a super hi-tech rock concert. Strobe lights, exciting movement, great electricity and connection with the audience.*

Horselover Fat is on stage with them. For most of Part II of the opera, Fat's

double is represented by a stylized physical presence on stage, as merely a traced laser outline.

Lamptons :

VALIS

Does it come from the stars?

VALIS

This place where we are

is one of the stars.

Is VALIS a man?

Is VALIS a god?

Is VALIS a satellite?

Or does it destroy?

(Vast Active Living Intelligent System)

The Empire never ended,
The Buddha is in the park.
He lived a long time ago,
But he's still alive.

VALIS, etc.

The mind is ever active,
In his crafty designs.
It conjures up great plans
But is broken.
VALIS, etc.

VALIS, etc.

... or does it destroy?

The Lamptons finish their song and a short instrumental transition leads into their dialogue with Fat.

The lighting still suggests the intensity of a rock show, but subtle colors are injected little by little.

Lamptons :

Did you see the pink light?

Fat :

Yes.

Lamptons :

And the lateral lens third eye?

Fat :

Did you do the screenplay?

Lamptons :

We wrote it, directed it, and starred in it.

Linda L. :

There was information transfer. The information is encoded in the music and in the film. It registered subliminally. Unless you ...

Eric L. :

Did you see the satellite?

Fat :

The satellite is never seen.

Eric L. :

Wrong!

Linda L. :

It appeared once as a picture on a wall calendar, once as a child's toy, once in the sky, and once as a beer can run over by a taxi.

Fat :

What is VALIS? Is the satellite VALIS?

Lamptons :

Vast Active Living Intelligent System.

Fat :

Is that just a description?

Lamptons :

This is what we have. That's all there is... Well, we have said enough.

Fat :

Can't you tell me more.

Lamptons :

Not now, you must wait a little. In time. You will enjoy this you know.

16 Suffering Song

Fat and the Lamptons sing together, each with a different text. The lighting has become gentler, with warm spots emphasizing the three main characters. A lesser light illuminates the two accompanying musicians.

Fat :

I have been shaking all my life from fear. Shaking, running, losing the people I loved. Now the fear is dying —

the news that I have waited for is here.
The universe ceases to grieve.
The wound is healing.

Lamptons :

The suffering you have gone through is over. It is over, it really is. Do you realize that, Philip?

17 Mini's Solo

The Lamptons introduce Fat to Mini, motioning towards him with their arms.

Mini is a computer music composer who writes all the Lampton's material for them. In addition, his so-called "Synchronicity Music" transmits subliminal messages, mostly about VALIS.

The spotlights concentrate on Mini, who is seated at the sound control installation between the public and the stage (where he has been throughout the opera). He is crippled, and wild looking.

Mini's Performance :

Instead of speaking, Mini performs, using the entire VALIS system, both sonically and visually.

Instead of playing keyboards, Mini appears to be sculpting sounds, setting off musical structures with the flick of his hand — he seems to be playing the orchestra of the future.

At first the sounds seem to be quite abstract and electronic sounding, but they gradually reveal themselves to be sonic particles of complex human voices, which are fusing during the performance. The vowels and consonants of the word VALIS can be heard underlying all the sounds.

Along with the music, the entire video and laser light installation becomes active for the first time. Many time-variant visual representations of the music itself are shown split among the monitors. The entire pattern of lights and colors makes the large stylized integrated circuit appear to be "alive".

The entire stage is legible as a single sculptural object for the first time.

As Mini comes to the end of his performance, the sound has turned into that of a human singing voice. Mini appears to be conjuring up this voice, to be forming it out of sound particles. As this pure female voice becomes clearly audible, Mini stretches his arms towards a large bank of video monitors, onto which appears a large, ethereal face of a young girl, Sophia.

It is ambiguous as to whether Mini is introducing or "creating" the image on the video wall. The stylized laser double of Phil/Fat gradually disappears.

Phil/Fat is alone facing Sophia.

18 Sophia's Scene

Sophia (recorded voice and image) :
I can see only one person.

Phil/Fat :
Where is the other? You destroyed him?

Sophia :
Yes.

Phil/Fat :
Why?

Sophia :
To make you whole.

Phil/Fat :
Are you God?

Sophia :
I am what I am.

Phil/Fat :
Can you help me?

Sophia :
I have already helped you. I have helped you since you were born.

Phil/Fat :
I am still afraid.

Sophia :

Do not fear; I will protect you.

Phil/Fat :

Do you have the answer? Has my long search ended?

Sophia :

I tell you in truth that the goal of your life has been reached. I called you here to give you your commission.

Sophia launches into her aria, while Phil/Fat watches.

During this aria, Sophia's video image remains pure. However, it gradually begins to suggest a computer-generated face or a hologram. Along with the music, this image becomes more and more ambiguous, part human, part angel, and part synthetic.

19 Sophia's Aria

Sophia :

Love one another as you love me and as I love you, for this love proceeds

from the true god, which is yourself.

But the battle which you have fought before has not ended. Be patient during this time, which will be a time of trials.

For the days of the wicked will end, the grim king will always lose, and those with him will go into the pit of darkness and there they will linger forever.

Formerly you were alone within yourselves; formerly you were solitary men. Now you have a companion who never sickens or fails or dies.

At this point Sophia appears for the first time physically on stage. She arrives from on top of the video wall as the electronic resonances from her "Aria" fade away.

She is dressed in a simple flowing gown, all in white. She is illuminated brightly, like a point of pure light. She is almost too bright to look at.

(sung a capella)

I tell you in truth, in very truth, you will not forget me. And I tell you that you will see me again.

Phil/Fat

(spoken quietly) :

Love proceeds from the true god, which is myself.

20 Finale II

At the moment of greatest stillness, Phil/Fat joins back in with the Lamptons and Mini, who return to the stage during the opening stanza of the "Finale".

The Lamptons and the two musicians are off to the side of the stage. Mini is conducting.

During the first two stanzas, Sophia slowly descends from on top of the video wall, and arrives at stage level, still illuminated brilliantly.

The following texts are all sung simultaneously, and are interwoven in complex polyphony:

Phil/Fat :

I'm not afraid; my search is over.
I'm not afraid; I have found you.
I'm not afraid; love is within me.
I'm not afraid; VALIS is real.

Sophia :

Do not fear; I will protect you.
Do not fear; I will not fail you.
Do not fear; I'll always see you.
Do not fear; I will return.

Lamptons :

VALIS is the answer.
VALIS is a child.
VALIS has informed you.
But VALIS, is it real?

During the first set of repetitions of this passacaglia, Sophia approaches Fat slowly, and comforts him tenderly, first extending her hands to him, and then embracing him.

After a very still interlude, the passacaglia picks up again, with very rapid stretto melodies from various sections of the opera accompanying each vocal line.

Sophia begins to move away from Fat, and to assume position on a tower in center stage. Meanwhile, her image returns to various video screens.

As the music grows more intense, Mini's contribution becomes prominent. He is conducting with light, as if performing an experiment.

It becomes ever more apparent that Mini is controlling and perhaps manipulating Sophia, deflecting laser beams with his hands. Mini seems to be bathing Sophia in light, or maybe Mini himself is being controlled.

The Sophia video images become unstable, shifting rapidly between real and hologram.

Sparks and bits of lasers are seen. The music reaches its most intense point. A pink laser beam arrives from the top rear of the stage, deflects off Mini's hands, and strikes Sophia directly with great intensity.

An enormous explosion takes place, and Sophia's head shatters with a great burst of pink light.

All disappears. After-image. All transforms slowly to darkness.

As the explosion clears, a gentle song is heard. The narrator's voice arrives over loudspeakers, as Phil/Fat stares in front of himself blankly.

Coda

21 Slippers Song

Phil :

When I fell asleep that night I had a dream. In the dream I rode in a car. A strange, beautiful woman I had never seen before sat behind the wheel. And the car was open, like a vehicle from ancient times, like a chariot. Smiling at me, the woman sang, and she sang the most beautiful song I ever heard. The song she sang went like this:

Gloria's voice :

When you walk toward the dawn
You better put your slippers on,
Angels guide you, there's no need to be
afraid,
All the fear behind you now, you've lived
enough and somehow
You'll make it through, gone's the night;
Gone's the night and somehow you'll be
all right.

(Gloria's voice continues, humming without words.)

Phil :

When I woke up the next morning I could still see the lovely face, the dark, glowing eyes: such large eyes, so filled with light, a strange kind of black light, like the light of the stars. Her look toward me was one of intense love, what the Bible calls lovingkindness. After a time, I realized that the woman in the dream driving the car had been Sophia, but grown up, as she would have been one day. The dark eyes filled with light and life and fire.

The dream was her way of saying goodbye.

As the song fades out, and music stops, Phil sits down and turns on a single television set.

A return to the same down-to-earth, everyday atmosphere as at the beginning of the opera. Sombre colors.

Gentle outdoor sounds are heard, as if at daybreak.

On the TV are flickering intermittent images, with occasional static or "snow".

22 Final Narrative

Phil

(recorded voice-off as in beginning of opera) :

These days, I have a sense of the goodness of men. I don't know where this came from, but I feel it. This is March again, now. I ask myself, Is Fat having another experience? Is the beam of pink light back, firing new and vaster information to him? Is it narrowing his search down?

My search kept me at home; I sat before the TV set in my living room. I sat; I waited; I watched; I kept myself awake. As we had been told, originally, long ago, to do; I kept my commission.

All sound and images turn into a dull, comforting hum.

Only static on the single TV set, which alone is illuminating Phil's face.

Slowly all fades to darkness and total silence.

The Performers



Photo: J. Martinez

Anne Azéma (Sophia); French-born soprano specializing in early music repertoires, had her earliest training in Strasbourg (musicology) and Colmar (voice). A member of the Boston Camerata since 1981, Ms. Azéma has appeared regularly with them in their Boston season, recording on discs and for radio, and touring extensively in America, Europe, and the Far East. Anne Azéma can be heard on recordings for Nonesuch, Harmonia Mundi, Erato, and Sine Qua Non.



Thomas Bogdan (Gesegnet Song) tenor; has received acclaim for performances in opera, oratorio, recital and cabaret. Mr. Bogdan appears regularly as an interpreter of baroque music, frequently performing the role of the Evangelist in Bach's *Passions*. Recent festival appearances include Caramoor, Mostly Mozart, Helsinki International, Aspen Festival, and Newport Music and Jazz Festivals.



Daniel Ciampolini, percussion; received his main musical training at the Paris Conservatory, where he was awarded a first prize in 1979 as well as prizes in harmony and musical analysis. In 1980, he became a soloist in Pierre Boulez's Ensemble InterContemporain, with which he continues to perform. He has premiered numerous new works for percussion, and was one of six soloists in Boulez's *Répons*.



Terry Edwards (Dr. Stone) bass; Mr. Edwards' engagements reflect his enthusiasm for all ages and styles of music: the complete madrigals of Marenzio and Wilbye; chorus master for Solti's memorable performance of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* during the 1986 Proms, and opera records by Joan Sutherland and Luciano Pavarotti. Recent concerts in Glasgow have been as conductor of Handel's *Messiah* and Bach's *B Minor Mass*. Terry Edwards is mainly associated with: London Sinfonietta Voices, Electric Phoenix, and London Voices.



Janice Felty (Gloria) mezzo soprano; received her early performing experience with the San Francisco Opera Co., and has appeared with the Washington, Baltimore and Santa Fe Opera Companies, The Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, The National Symphony, and in Peter Sellars' production of *Così fan Tutte*. Ms. Felty is also active in early music, and has performed the title roles of Handel's *Agrippina*, *Athalia*, and *Theodora*.



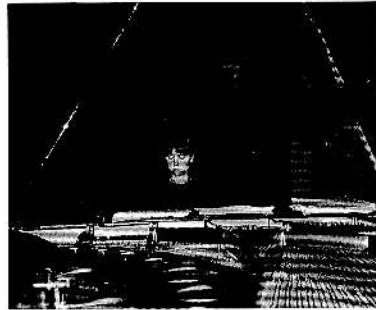
Mary King (Linda Lampton) soprano; read English at Birmingham University, and then won a scholarship to the Guildhall School of Music. From there she went to Glyndebourne, where her roles included Baba the Turk, Marcellina, and Mama/Tzippe in Oliver Knussen's *Where the Wild Things Are*. More recently she has sung Blind Mary in Maxwell Davies' *The Martyrdom of St. Magnus*, Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky* with the CBSO, Tippett's *The Mask of Time*, and Judith Weir's *The Consolation of Scholarship*.



Patrick Mason (Horselover Fat/Phil Dick) baritone; Mr. Mason's career encompasses a broad range of musical styles. An active interpreter of early music and 19th century song, his recent engagements have included a concentration on medieval liturgical drama, having sung major roles in London, Rome, Washington D.C., and Holland. Mr. Mason maintains an ongoing commitment to the music of our time. He has collaborated in performances and recordings with composers including Stephen Sondheim, Elliott Carter, and George Crumb.



Daryl Runswick (Eric Lampton) baritone; has enjoyed an extremely wide-ranging career: he has been Frank Sinatra's bass guitarist, Cleo Laine's pianist, a double-bass player with The London Sinfonieta, an opera singer, The King's Singers' record producer, and the conductor of his own TV scores. Currently he divides his time between two activities — singing with the vocal quartet Electric Phoenix and pursuing his first love, composition.



Emma Stephenson, piano, keyboards; studied at the Royal College of Music in London, as well as at Indiana University. Besides concertizing in the traditional classical repertoire, Ms. Stephenson is involved in many forms of music making, including vocal accompanying, theatrical and popular music. She is also active as an improviser and composer.



Tod Machover, New York born composer, conductor and cellist, is active in many forms of new music, from orchestral to computer-generated, chamber to operatic. After studies at The Juilliard School with Elliott Carter and Roger Sessions, he spent 1978-1985 in Paris at Pierre Boulez's IRCAM institute, serving for five years as its Director of Musical Research. Since 1985 he has been on the faculty of M.I.T.'s Media Laboratory, where he is Director of the Experimental Media

Facility. Mr. Machover has been the recipient of numerous prizes and awards, including a 1987 Friedheim Award from the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. He is currently fulfilling commissions involving chamber music using "hyperinstruments" developed at M.I.T., as well as a Concerto for "hyperpiano" and symphony orchestra. In addition, Mr. Machover is beginning work on two new opera projects.

**Personnel — First Production of VALIS, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
Co-produced by IRCAM, Centre Georges Pompidou, Cinquieme Agence**

Olivier Angèle	Horselover Fat and Philip K. Dick	Gyorgy Kurtag	Technology coordinator
Sophie Marin-Degor . . .	Gloria	Marthe Souris	Stage manager
Terry Edwards	Dr. Stone	Laurent Lecoq	Stage crew
Mary King	Linda Lampton	Pascal de Vandeville, Jean-Charles Bernardini, Frédéric André, Marc Bureau, Pierre Renou	
Daryl Runswick	Eric Lampton	Daniel Raguin	Sound and recording team
Anne Azéma	Sophia	Didier Arditi, Xavier Bordelais, Rémi Gavrel, Alain Jacquinet	
Daniel Ciampolini	Percussion	Jacquemin Piel	Video production
Emma Stephenson	Piano, Keyboards	Pitof, Den Denis, Antoine Gineste	
Tod Machover	Conductor, Mini	Mireille Achino	Production mngr.
Catherine Ikam	Décor, video	Arlette Stroumza	Production liaison
Louis-François Fléri . . .	Artistic coordination/ video	Ghyslaine Goulay	IRCAM Production assistants
Jean-Louis Martinelli . .	Stage direction	Fariza Maloum	
Jean-Louis Aichorn . . .	Lighting	Betty Dexter	MIT Production assistants
Daniel Charton	Costumes	Lynn Zimbalatti	
Joseph Chung	Musical assistants		
Arnaud Petit			
Cort Lippe	Additional music software		
Miller Puckette, Robert Rowe			
Alexis Barsacq	Technical coordinator		

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Nicholas Negroponte and the Media Lab at M.I.T. for supporting me, financially and spiritually, during the long work on **VALIS**.

Many thanks as well to the Centre Georges Pompidou and to IRCAM for having supported this project from its inception, and especially to Mireille Achino, the producer of the Paris production. Without her tireless professionalism and unflagging belief in the project, **VALIS** would certainly never have seen the light of day.

Among the many people who lent excellent administrative support to **VALIS**, I would like to especially recognize Betty Dexter and Lynn Zimbalatti at the MIT Media Lab, and Ghyslaine Goulay and Fariza Maloum at IRCAM, for their kind and patient help during the many stages of the project.

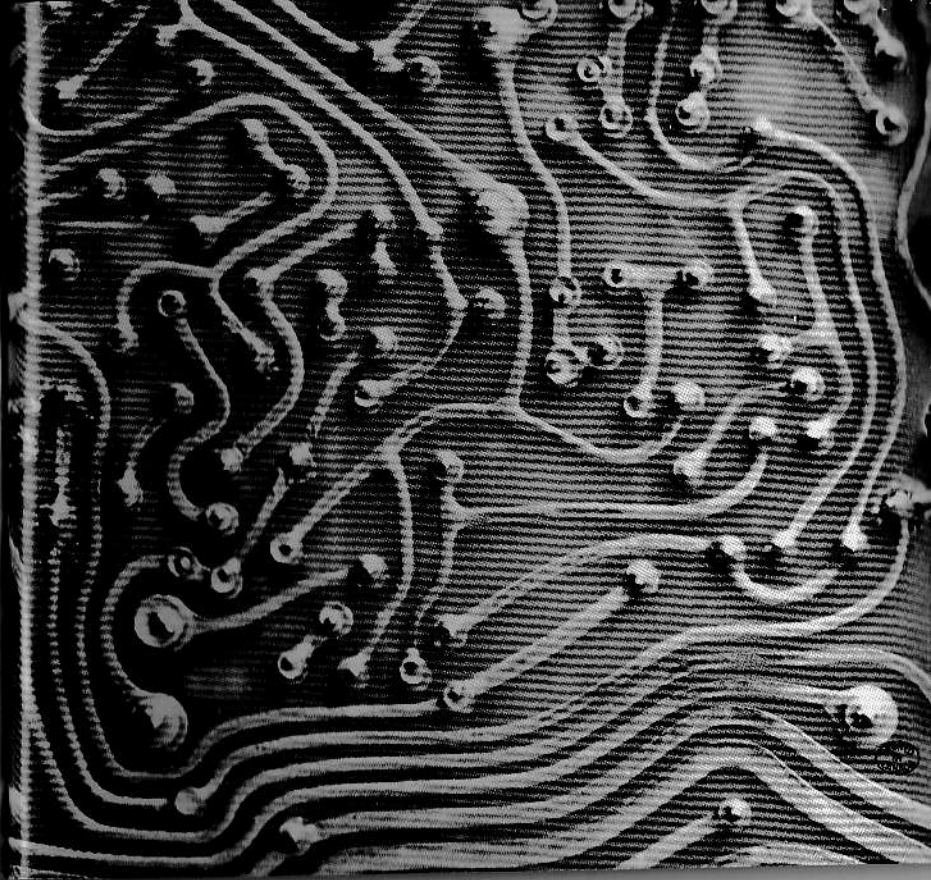
I am also very grateful to Russell Galen, Philip K. Dick's literary agent, who was extremely helpful in permitting me to base my opera on this magnificent book.

I would like to remember Tom Trobaugh, close friend, valued colleague, and Philip K. Dick fan, who assisted me on the first stages of the project. His untimely death in October 1987 prevented him from seeing this work come to fruition.

I am very grateful to the various organizations and individuals that provided financial support to help make this project possible. Among them, I would especially like to thank the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities for their generous support since the beginning of the project, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (the Provost's Fund for the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and the Media Laboratory), Ann and Gordon Getty, and the Sanyo Corporation.

VALIS is dedicated, with great love and gratitude, to my father, Carl Machover, for his sixtieth birthday.

— T.M.





Patrick Mason	Horselover Fat/ Philip K. Dick
Janice Felty	Gloria
Terry Edwards	Dr. Stone
Arnaud Petit	Exegesis 1 and 2
Thomas Bogdan	Gesegnet Song
Mary King	Linda Lampton
Daryl Runswick	Eric Lampton
Anne Azéma	Sophia
Daniel Ciampolini	Percussion
Emma Stephenson	Piano, Keyboards
Tod Machover	Conductor, Mini