

INTRODUCTION

Jonathan Lethem

The cluster of scholars, writers and archivists attached to the legacy of Philip K. Dick is a generous, eccentric and humane one, but it can also be defensive, for obvious reasons. (I testify from inside the cluster.) Many of those involved knew Dick personally, or were attached to efforts to legitimate and proslethytize through decades during which his work was largely ignored or dismissed. When Laurence Rickels announced himself out of seemingly nowhere with *I Think I Am*, there were those who arched an eyebrow: how could his claims not depend on our local knowledge? In truth, an alert student might have spotted the relevancy of his writings on Germany and California and the Cold War to Dick scholarship even before Rickels himself was alert to Dick's writings; maybe a few did. For me personally, it was a wake-up call. In applying himself to texts with which I was deeply familiar, but substituting for a genre-studies context his own

erudition in multiple paradigms, Rickels' thinking became essential for taking my long fascination with Dick's writings to the next level. And learning more about Rickels' mind became crucial, too. I'd found a thinker whose encompassing preoccupations, and his unusual methods of disclosure, brought many of my own murkiest intuitions into the light. Or at least they felt like mine once I'd encountered them.

The novel I began writing in Berlin in 2013, provisionally entitled *The Blot*, was founded partly on my reading of Rickels, in particular the (then brand-new) *SPECTRE*, and *The Case of California* (as the Disney Chair I take these things personally). At the same time, Rickels and I enjoyed a growing friendship, "face-to-face" in Berlin, and largely in correspondence thereafter. An early portion of this written exchange was developed for inclusion in a catalogue for the Villa Aurora in Los Angeles, but it grew beyond those bounds to become a creature of its own; for me, a chance to play real-time self-exegetical backgammon with a critic I was honored had turned his attention to my work. The game we played included a double-blind component: Rickels hadn't finished reading my book before he began writing about it because I hadn't finished writing it (hence I couldn't hope to finish reading what he wrote about it until I did finish—nice motivation). It was Rickels who began referring to our entries as "folds," turning this blind operation into a game of Exquisite Corpse. Alfred Hitchcock self-admiringly remarked to Francois Truffaut, speaking of *Vertigo*, that "you could study the design forever"; those words have always stuck in my head as a marriage

of accomplishment and honesty I aspired to identify with. Rickels, in playing "blot" with me, allowed me the privilege of studying the design as it emerged. I am a lucky gambler.

— *Blue Hill, Maine, July 6, 2016*