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of Aesthetics

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THE PHILOSOPHER



FRANZ K

**Edited by
Sonia Kamińska and Barry Smith**

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From the Editors

How Many Kafka's Are There?

Almost 100 years have passed since Kafka's death and yet there is so much we do not know about one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century. Everyone has their own Kafka, be it the sad and dark author of *The Trial*, or the frenzied author of *Amerika*—also known as *The Man who Disappeared*; be it the shy boy afraid of his father or the womanizer with an exceptional sense of humor. There is something about his writings that makes him susceptible to so many varying interpretations, and thus he remains both thoroughly well-known, and enigmatic. Even Kafka's own identity was an enigma for himself. In his *Diaries*, he wrote: "I am nothing but literature and can and want to be nothing else" (Kafka 1910–1923).

The aim of this volume is to present Kafka not as a writer, or not only as a writer, but as a philosopher. However, even after narrowing the scope of our interest down, there will still be several Kafka's on the table left. Some philosophical themes will immediately come to mind: the so-called Brentano School in Prague, his affiliation to the Louvre Circle, Kafka and existentialist philosophy, Kafka and vegetarianism, Kafka's prediction of totalitarian regimes, his Jewish heritage and therefore Jewish philosophical thought, his love of Nietzsche and Meister Eckhart and—last but not least, since he was such an exceptional writer—his aesthetics.

Kafka was as protean as was his city: "Franz Kafka was born inside a vortex called Prague. A city where three human groups had acted side by side for centuries, yet divided by difference in language, customs, and culture. The situation in the kingdom of Bohemia was Kafkaesque long before Kafka drew upon it to create a new form of a fantasy tale, thereby giving rise to one of the adjectives that was to describe the twentieth century" (Insua 2002, 17).

The six papers that have made their way into this volume perfectly illustrate the multiple —yet somehow coherent—faces of Kafka. However, before we move on to these papers, we would like to present what we see as Kafka's *Brentanian* philosophical background.¹

Kafka's Philosophical Background

Max Brod—Kafka's best friend and posthumous (and self-appointed) editor—was of the opinion that Kafka was not interested in philosophy at all. How then should we explain their philosophical discussions about beauty² (among other things)? Brod claimed that Kafka “was thinking in pictures” and this viewpoint was the basis for his opinion that his friend was not inspired by any philosophical movement, and especially not by the Prague Brentanists, who gathered regularly in the Café Louvre, Brod and Kafka being part of this circle. In our opinion—the fact that Kafka was a “picture-thinker” may serve as proof that he was indeed inspired by philosophy and chiefly by Brentano's theory of perception and consciousness. Pictures (images) formed the core of this theory (a theory which stems from Aristotle), and are a necessary condition of perceiving and thinking. Brod claims that Kafka could not have been a Brentanist, since he was inspired by Arthur Schopenhauer, the latter supposedly being a figure despised by the Prague circle of Brentanists. Brod himself was indeed very much indebted to Schopenhauer, and so perhaps wanted to see this same inspiration in his friend as well. But we do not think that Kafka would have been worried by contradicting inspirations. Brentano's thought was one of the most influential philosophical currents of that time, after all, and not only in Prague.³

In the year 1902 Kafka went to Anton Marty's lecture *Grundfragen der deskriptiven Psychologie* and in the winter semester of 1904/1905 to *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*. At that time his interests and tastes were very different from the later purism of his prose, as Reiner Stach points out in his biography: *Kafka: Die Jahre der Entscheidungen*. This, we believe, explains why he had a leaning towards a type of philosophy which he later found repulsive and devoid of anything truly moving. Brentano's descriptive psychology was so influential not least thanks to Christian von Ehrenfels

¹ Below, we will be using fragments from: Kamińska 2017, 98–117; 2015, 35–50.

² Brod's two-part from the weekly *Die Gegenwart (The Present)* from February 1906 and Kafka's unpublished critical reply edited by Brod years later: *Ungedrucktes von Franz Kafka (Zeit Online, Kultur)*.

³ For more see: Kamińska 2015, 35–50; Smith 1994; 1997, 83–104.

and Anton Marty, who established and sustained Brentanism in Prague, and although both Brod and Kafka had mixed feelings about it, they went to the meetings organized by Berta Fanta and Ida Freund, first at Fanta's home (from 1902), then in the Café Louvre (from 1904). Brod left the circle after he had published (in 1905) two caricatures of Brentanists in the very same *Die Gegenwart* in which he published his above-mentioned discussion of beauty. And in leaving, Kafka followed his friend. The essays in question were called *Warum singt der Vogel?* (Why does the bird sing?) and *Zwillingspaar von Seelen* (Twin Souls). The first was supposed to depict the sterile discussions at Marty's home, which Brod attended (and Kafka did not) where everybody seemed to want only to flatter Marty and no one aimed at finding the truth. The *Twin Souls* novella presents an adherent of Brentanism named *Flachkopf* (Flat Head). This was enough for Emil Utitz and Hugo Bergmann to ask Brod to leave the circle. We are telling this story in such detail, because we find it possible that Brod was in fact driven by *ressentiment* towards the Brentanists when he claimed that Kafka had nothing in common with them. Many say that Brod was very partial and possessive when it came to Kafka. He is often criticized as an editor of Kafka for being "distanzlos" (W. Benjamin), or in other words for "not leaving the reader alone with Kafka" (L. Hardt).⁴

In his book *K*, Roberto Calasso (2006) argues that Ockham's razor was Kafka's favorite tool. He writes that Kafka always picked only the necessary objects from the surrounding world and referred to them precisely and literally. This is how, according to Calasso, Kafka should be read: literally. All we get from Kafka are images of objects meticulously selected. (We would not, however, call him a nominalist or a reist; the pictures suggest rather a type of conceptualism.)

All this "picture-thinking" may have its origin in the moving pictures Kafka adored. "Moving pictures" is of course another name for "cinema" where Kafka loved to spend his time as a child (see Wagenbach 2002). Moving pictures are also the pictures we perceive in real life or imagine, all of them being played out before our mind's eye and—according to Kafka—all of them being equally important and credible (a truly Brentanian intuition of inner perception). Kafka's prose, then, whether it was conscious or not—contains multiple philosophical themes, and many of them are illustrated by the authors of this volume.

⁴ For more see: Kamińska 2017, 98–117.

Authors and Papers

Charlene Elsby, in her paper *Gregor Samsa's Spots of Indeterminacy: Kafka as Phenomenologist*, presents a view of Kafka against this Brentanian backdrop through the spectacles of Roman Ingarden, an indirect student of Brentano via Edmund Husserl. Elsby uses Ingarden's ontology of the literary work of art to read and explain Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and thereby offers an Ingardenian analysis of Gregor Samsa.

Katarzyna Szafranowska, in her paper *The Machinic Metaphor in Kafkaian Animal Stories*, takes us from *Metamorphosis* to the *Metaphormosis*, which challenges the famous reading of Kafka by Deleuze and Guattari and claims that there *are* metaphors in Kafka, only they are broken and dysfunctional.

Brentanism is not of course the only philosophical current associated with Kafka. As was mentioned before, there are strong links between Kafka and the so-called philosophy of existence. Our volume contains two papers covering these issues. **Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh** reads Kafka through the lens of Erich Fromm in his *"How Can One Take Delight in the World Unless One Flees to it for Refuge?": The Fear of Freedom in Erich Fromm and Franz Kafka*. Her paper argues that "the loosening of traditional social structures leads some individuals to seek out restrictions, for example in order to counteract the feelings of being alone". This is reminiscent of Franz Kafka's words "A cage went in search of a bird" (*Blue Octavo Notebooks*). **Markus Kohl**, in *Kafka on the Loss of Purpose and the Illusion of Freedom*, claims that freedom is deceptive. How can one make meaningful choices if the teleological dimension is gone? Kohl thus presents a radicalized reading of Søren Kierkegaard.

Both of these papers are—broadly speaking—in the current of existentialist/personalist thought. However, **Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh** addresses a further issue, namely the human condition in modern democracies. This is also tackled by **Matthew Wester** who—in *Before Adolf Eichmann: A Kafkaian Analysis of the 'Banality of Evil'*—proposes an application of Kafka's *The Trial* to Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Wester supplements "our understanding of the 'banality of evil' by demonstrating that Arendt also meant it to describe a factual social arrangement characterized by a form of false consciousness."

And—last but not least—**Ido Lewit's** essay *"He Couldn't Tell the Difference between The Merry Widow and Tristan and Isolde": Kafka's Anti-Wagnerian Philosophy of Music*, which asserts that sounds cannot be

divorced from their corporeal and visual aspects. With this Lewit brings our collection full circle, echoing once again Brod's "picture thesis" and Wagenbach's "cinema thesis" as channels through which to read Kafka's thoughts.

Sonia Kamińska, Barry Smith

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Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh*

“How Can One Take Delight in the World Unless One Flees to It for Refuge?”: The Fear of Freedom in Erich Fromm and Franz Kafka

Abstract

Erich Fromm points to a tendency whereby the numerous freedoms gained by the citizens of modern democracies have been accompanied by widespread feelings of loneliness and disconnection. The loosening of traditional social structures leads some individuals to seek out restrictions, for example in order to counteract the feelings of being alone. This essay uses Fromm’s thesis as a lens through which to examine two of Franz Kafka’s novels in which the protagonists exemplify the “fear of freedom” proposed by Fromm. Society in these novels is perceived as a prison cell in which one must comply with social regulations, but also a fortress to which one can retreat from the chaos of the outside world, albeit at the cost of one’s psychological health.

Keywords

Franz Kafka, Erich Fromm, Freedom, Individual

In Book VII of *The Republic*, Plato suggests that society has much in common with a prison, its members forced to sacrifice their individuality and submit to rigid rules in order to ensure social stability. Using an image that uncannily foresees the modern world’s enthrallment by the screens of the media, he describes society as a vast subterranean cave, whose inhabitants: “lie from childhood, their legs and necks in chains, so that they stay where they are and look only in front of them, as the chain prevents them from turning

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their heads round" (1932, 235). The inhabitants are forced to subscribe to the only reality available to them, the shadows cast on the wall in front of their eyes. Plato does not report of any dissatisfaction among the inhabitants, emphasizing on the contrary their ability to make the best of the meagre resources available to them by offering prizes for those best able to identify the shadows as they pass (1932, 237). Problems only arise when one of their number, having been freed and allowed to sample the delights of the real world on the surface, is forced to make a choice between a life of freedom and possible loneliness above and one of bondage, but also of security and companionship, below (1932, 238).

Erich Fromm, in his book *Escape from Freedom*¹ (1941), traces the evolution of the individual from the strictures of earlier societies to the apparent freedom of the modern world and discovers, like Plato's protagonist, that this development has been a very mixed blessing. The main characteristic of medieval societies, he notes, was the absence of any concept of individual freedom. Life was predetermined by one's status in the social order and all aspects of life, personal, economic and social, were structured by rules and obligations (Fromm 1942, 34). Repressive though this was, the distinct and unquestioned social roles held by members of the community, whose identities were synonymous with their occupations, gave their lives a sense of meaning and stability which left no place for the doubt and insecurity which characterizes the modern world: "The social order was conceived as a natural order, and being a definite part of it gave man a feeling of security and of belonging" (1942, 34). The modern worker, by contrast, is beset by what Fromm calls the "paradox of freedom", the fact that freedom from "the economic and political bonds of pre-individualistic society" also simultaneously "liberated" individuals from the ties that gave them their identities (1942, 52). Individuals may now be free to choose their own destinies but they have lost their sense of being integral to their communities and thus find themselves alone.

The dilemma mooted by Fromm is succinctly echoed by Franz Kafka in his aphorism "My Prison-Cell, My Fortress" (1991, 111), which comments both on the restrictions to individual freedom caused by the presence in society of repressive mechanisms such as bureaucracy and the judiciary, while simultaneously acknowledging that these restrictions provide the individual with a sense of his place in society and that their absence can precipitate a feeling of panic. Society, according to this formulation, is both

¹ *Escape from Freedom* was published under the title *The Fear of Freedom* in the UK in 1942. All references are to this edition of the book.

a prison cell in which one must comply with social regulations, but also a fortress to which one can retreat from the chaos of the outside world. This essay will discuss Kafka's attempts to explore what Fromm has defined as the paradox of 20th century life, that the numerous freedoms gained by individuals have left them feeling lonely and disconnected from the surrounding society. Instead of revelling in the loosening of traditional religious and familial bonds, Kafka's characters surround themselves with restrictions and rules in order not to feel so alone. Josef K., the protagonist of *The Trial* (1925) submits to an arrest, trial and eventual execution on unspecified charges and by a court whose authority is never verified; while K., his counterpart in *The Castle* (1926), allows himself to become embroiled in the machinations of an invisible bureaucracy whose control over his destiny is both intangible and absolute. Although these characters experience immense physical and mental oppression, the novels suggest that they are themselves complicit in creating many of these sources of persecution. Like the inhabitants of Plato's cave, the uncertainties of a life of freedom is more terrifying a prospect for Kafka's protagonists than a life of bondage and so they seek out sources of repression to which they can submit.

The central aim of Fromm's book is to interrogate how freedom, as it pertains to twentieth-century society, can be defined and explained. His central argument is that the escape from the strictures of medieval society have not, as might be expected, led to the celebration of individual agency, what he defines as "positive" freedom and is found when the individual can express "his intellectual, emotional and sensuous potentialities" (1942, x). Instead, although freedom has made the individual independent, it has also increased feelings of isolation, anxiety and powerlessness. Fromm's concern throughout his book is to define what freedom means in the healthy psychological growth of the person. A number of questions he poses are particularly central to the concerns of this essay and will be used to structure the analysis of Kafka's protagonists:

Is freedom only the absence of external pressure or is it also the *presence* of something—and if so, of what? Can freedom become a burden, too heavy for man to bear, something he tries to escape from? Is there not also, perhaps, besides an inmate desire for freedom, an instinctive wish for submission? Is submission always to an overt authority, or is there also submission to internalized authorities, such as duty or conscience, to inner compulsions or to anonymous authorities like public opinion? Is there a hidden satisfaction in submitting and what is its essence? (1942, 3–4)

An important element in Fromm's analysis of the individual's response to freedom is that it relates not only to the obvious example of a totalitarian regime, in which individuals are either persuaded or coerced to give up their individual freedoms in the name of communal strength or enrichment, but more interestingly to freedom as it pertains to the functioning of democracy. In other words, even in societies defined as free, individuals go to often extreme lengths to give up this freedom in order to submit to the kind of control and regulation more often associated with repressive regimes: "Aloneness, fear, and bewilderment remain; people cannot stand it for ever [...]. The principle social avenues of escape in our time are the submission to a leader, as has happened in Fascist countries, and the compulsive conforming as is prevalent in our own democracy" (1942, 115–116). This is a significant observation in the context of Kafka's novels, where the protagonists are themselves culpable of seeking out and entangling themselves within repressive bureaucracies, seemingly desperate to sacrifice their individual freedom for a life of conformity and obedience.

Fromm equates freedom with the attainment of individuality, a state which marks the progression from the medieval to the modern world. Freedom did not really exist as a concept in medieval society, he explains, because everyone was tied to their role in the social order. Nor was this structure perceived as repressive because the: "social order was conceived as a natural order, and being a definite part of it gave man a feeling of security and of belonging" (1942, 34). The process of what he calls "individuation" only begins when the individual moves on from the pre-modern "state of oneness with the natural world," and experiences the freedom to make choices, a freedom that is ironically the source of much of the anxiety characterizing the contemporary dread of finding oneself "completely alone and isolated" (1942, 15). There are, he suggests, two ways of overcoming this isolation. One is to embrace individuality in its positive sense of engaging with the surrounding world on one's own terms: "unite [...] with the world in the kind of spontaneity of love and productive work" (1942, 78). Another more negative solution is to seek to regain a sense of security through immersion into a new submission, such as religion, or "the development of a frantic activity and a striving to do *something*" (1942, 78). The latter, he suggests, is what Capitalism claims to offer the worker, although its real impact is its: "subordination of the individual as a means to economic ends" (1942, 96). Fromm, in fact, is critical of the role of both the Reformation and Capitalism for imbuing individuals with the knowledge of their insignificance, the former through its focus on a higher plane of being at the expense

of the present, the latter through its privileging of economic success: "This readiness for submission of one's self to extrahuman ends was actually prepared by Protestantism, although nothing was further from Luther's or Calvin's mind than the approval of such supremacy of economic activities. But in their theological teaching they had laid the ground for this development by breaking man's spiritual backbone, his feeling of dignity and pride, by teaching him that activity had no further aims outside of himself [...] Once man was ready to become nothing but the means for the glory of a God who represented neither justice nor love, he was sufficiently prepared to accept the role of a servant to the economic machine—and eventually a 'Führer'" (1942, 95–96).

Although both of Kafka's protagonists initially regard their jobs as the source of the status and social security noted by Fromm, it becomes clear over the course of the novels that their jobs provide them only with the illusion of security and that their identities are eroded rather than enriched by their contact with the institutions that employ them. Josef K. initially bemoans the fact that his arrest happened at home rather than at work where he is certain that the authority conferred upon him as "the junior manager of a large Bank" (Kafka 1996, 32) would have protected him from prosecution; while K. invests much of his sense of identity in his role: "I am the Land Surveyor whom the Count is expecting" (1996, 278). However, both protagonists learn to their cost that the perceived status and security they attribute to their roles as employees is illusory at best. Josef K. finds himself surrounded in the Bank by the same shadowy figures he sees in the Court, while K. learns that his journey to the village has been in vain: "You've been taken on as a Land Surveyor, as you say, but, unfortunately, we have no need of a Land Surveyor" (1996, 309). In fact the more time and energy the protagonists devote to their pursuit of the authorities they wish to serve, the less stable their own identities become until eventually they lose any sense of agency or autonomy, descending to: "an unofficial, totally unrecognized, troubled and alien existence" (1996, 308).

That the workplace functions as a source of alienation rather than enrichment is attributed by Marxist critics to the systematic destruction under Capitalism of the links that unified workers together in the past. Karl Mark argues that the success of Capitalism is predicated on its determined sundering of the links between workers and the natural world. Workers now work to fulfill the external demands of industry, rather than to satisfy their own innate needs, a condition that leaves them enslaved and ultimately alienated: "External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-

sacrifice, of mortification [...] it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another [...] it is the loss of his self" (1844, chpt. XXII). Friedrich Engels cites the lack of interaction between workers and the "dissolution of mankind into monads" (2010, 48) as central to Capitalism's success as it effectively isolates workers from each other thus making them easy to control. The regulatory function of the workplace is best exemplified by the bureaucracy, whose very *raison d'être* appears to be ensnare its subjects with its endlessly generating regulations. Roman Karst proclaims that the: "chains of tormented mankind are made of red tape" (1975, 80); while Baron de Grimm goes so far as to declare that: "bureaucracy [...] (is) not appointed to benefit the public interest, indeed the public interest appears to have been established so that offices might exist" (de Grimm in Albrow 1970, 16).

Kafka's novels similarly indict a bureaucratic system whose primary function is to entrap rather than serve the citizens unfortunate enough to be under its control. This is perhaps best illustrated in *The Castle*, where K. discovers that his arrival in the village in the role of Land Surveyor is due to an administrative error. The problem is that having issued the directive to employ a Land Surveyor, the cancellation of the contract requires communication back and forth between various departments, the resulting deluge of paperwork ensuring that the bureaucratic system becomes completely overwhelmed. The Superintendent's search for K.'s original contract is indicative both of the ludicrous volume of correspondence his case has generated and the lack of care with which it is treated: "The cabinet was crammed full of papers. When it was opened two large packages of papers rolled out, tied in round bundles, as one usually binds firewood" (Kafka 1996, 310). As K. himself remarks, the scene would be comical except that the papers crammed carelessly into the cupboard govern the fates of the people whose lives they document: "it gives me an insight into the ludicrous bungling which [...] may decide the life of a human being" (1996, 311). Josef K. reaches a similar conclusion when trying to ascertain exactly what charges are being brought against him, only to be told that the Law never makes such information available to the defence: "the legal records of his case, and above all the actual charge-sheets, were inaccessible to the accused and his counsel, consequently one did not know in general, or at least did not know with any precision, what charges to meet in the first plea" (1996, 69).

Both *The Trial* and *The Castle* can be read as critiques of totalitarianism. However, what is most intriguing about Kafka's portrait of such regimes and their ludicrously rigid rules is the degree to which the victims themselves

comply with and even seek out their authority. This echoes Fromm's suggestion that individuals in democratic societies are just as likely to search for ways to assuage feelings of isolation by voluntarily subjecting themselves to repressive regulatory systems. Reflecting on the reasons people support totalitarian regimes even when it is obvious that such regimes are not in their best interests, Fromm suggests that we all possess: "beside an innate desire for freedom, an instinctive wish for submission", and that for many people: "freedom becomes a burden, too heavy for man to bear, something he tries to escape from" (1942, 4). Fromm's comments are reflected in Kafka's novels, in which both protagonists reject opportunities they are given to escape from the sources of their persecution, expressing a sense of satisfaction, maybe even relief, to find themselves subject to the scrutiny of a higher authority. K. acknowledges that he could live a "pampered" life if he was happy to fully submit to the control of the Castle (1996, 308), and in fact *The Castle* is cited by Fromm as a particularly insightful account of the theme of "the powerlessness of man" (1942, 15). Josef K. similarly admits to feeling "a certain inexplicable satisfaction" (1996, 75) that his arrest is now widely known among his family and friends. Ingeborg Henel suggests that it is possible that the trial in which Josef K. is embroiled is entirely in his own imagination, offering as evidence that when he arrives for his Court appearance and asks for the home of a fictitious joiner named Lanz, his nonsensical inquiry is correctly interpreted and he is ushered into the Courtroom (Henel in Rolleston 1976, 47). Henel's suspicion is certainly hinted at early on in the novel when Josef K. declares: "It is only a trial if I recognize it as such" (1996, 33). Erich Heller points out that one of Josef K.'s warders is called Franz, the author's name thus split between accuser and accused. The schizophrenia suggested by this "laceration" is reflective of the interrelationship between the Law and its subjects throughout the novel: "at every point it reflects the patient's contempt for the persecuting powers and, at the same time, his eagerness inwardly to bow to their authority" (Heller 1974, 98).

This motif of a divided self illuminates a key question in relation to Kafka's protagonists, namely why they are so eager, even determined, to escape from the relative freedom that defines their everyday lives into the torturous machinations of the institutions whose authority they seek out. The most common consensus among critics is that the protagonists manifest an innate sense of guilt that drives them to seek absolution from the very sources of their repression. In his book *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Sigmund Freud explains that one of the most vital tasks of any civilization is to find a way to persuade individuals to limit their personal desires for the good of

social stability. The natural aggression of an individual must be checked so that it does not come into conflict with the needs of the state. Freud suggests that this aggression is rendered harmless by turning it inwards, against the ego, where in the form of the super-ego it now functions as the conscience (1994, 51). Most unfortunately for the individual, because the agent of repression is now watching from within the mind itself, all differences between committing a crime and merely thinking about it disappear as even thoughts cannot be hidden from the super-ego: “Civilization therefore obtains mastery over the dangerous love of aggression in individuals by enfeebling and disarming it and setting up an institution within their minds to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city” (1994, 52).

Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1977) offers a useful visualization of this internalization of repression, as it outlines the evolution of the penal institution from a dungeon-like enclosure established on the edges of society to a more subtle disciplinary mechanism, which: “improves the exercise of power by making it lighter, more rapid, more effective—a design of subtle coercion for a society to come” (1977, 209). Foucault’s argument that punishment becomes the most hidden part of the penal process, leaving the “domain of more or less everyday perception” in order to enter “that of abstract consciousness” (1977, 9), is reminiscent of Freud’s theory that external discipline has become internalized in the form of the super-ego. A similarly claustrophobic and repressive atmosphere of permanent scrutiny pervades many of Kafka’s novels, inevitably reducing the observee to a state of blind submission. Commenting on *The Trial*, Heller declares that there cannot be another novel “as thoroughly pervaded by the sense of nightmare and paranoia,” composed as it is of: “a plethora of scenes [...] involving faces across the street, looking with intense curiosity into Josef K.’s room; ears, real or imagined, pressed against doors; figures suddenly discovered standing and watching in the shadow of gateways; eyes peering through keyholes” (Heller 1974, 97). The start of Josef K.’s nightmare unfolds with the incursion into the private space of his bedroom by the warders, who further intrude on his personal space as if to reinforce the lack of autonomy that will characterize his life from this point onwards: “the belly of the second warder [...] kept butting against him” (Kafka 1996, 14). His ordeal is further heightened by the surveillance of his neighbours, who unashamedly gather to witness his discomfort: “Through the open window he had another glimpse of the old woman, who with truly senile inquisitiveness had moved along to the window exactly opposite, in order to see all that could be seen” (1996, 14). This intrusiveness is also evident in *The Castle*, where K. must contend not

only with the curiosity of the villagers: "Hardly had K. shown his face when the peasants got up and gathered around him" (1996, 290); but he must also exist in full view of the "maniacal glitter" of the windows of the castle tower (1996, 281) and the "downward-pressing gaze" of its main official, Klamm (1996, 341).

This description of the mysterious Castle closely resembles the internal repression of the superego suggested by Freud, deriving its absolute control over its inhabitants in spite—or perhaps because—of its intangibility. The citizens of the village are ever-aware of its brooding presence, but can never clearly see it: "The Castle hill was hidden, veiled in mist and darkness" (Kafka 1996, 278), so that the source of its power can neither be fully understood nor challenged. In this way, it resembles the legal process in *The Trial*, as the closer Josef K. examines the system, the more fleeting, ephemeral and, crucially, impenetrable it appears. Indeed, the effective disappearance of those who operate the penal process further increases its efficiency for, as Josef K. finds out to his cost in *The Trial*, it is impossible to fight against a system one cannot identify. The more abstract and less corporal the prison becomes, the less likelihood there is of effecting a successful escape. It is surely far more possible to flee a cell of bricks and bars than to break through the indefinable barriers with which Kafka's protagonists find themselves surrounded. This leads to the mental paralysis noted in one of Kafka's aphorisms "He:" "The prisoner was actually free, he could take part in everything, nothing that went on outside escaped him, he could even have left the cage, after all the bars stood yards apart, he was not even imprisoned" (Kafka 1991, 105). The paralysis noted here is not because the prisoner wishes to be incarcerated but rather because he longs to have his presence acknowledged by the authorities, an act that will then affirm his place in the world.

There are many examples within Kafka's novels which mirror the scene described in the aphorism. Towards the end of *The Trial*, as he is about to leave the Cathedral, Josef K. has a moment of realization that it is in his power to determine whether or not to continue engaging with the process of his trial:

For the moment he was still free, he could continue on his way and vanish through one of the small, dark, wooden doors that faced him at no great distance. It would simply indicate that he had not understood the call, or that he had understood it and did not care. But if he were to turn around he would be caught, for that would amount to an admission that he had understood it very well, that he was really the person addressed, and that he was ready to obey (Kafka 1996, 118).

The priest does not call Josef K.'s name again, so there is no coercion involved in his decision to turn around and stay in the Cathedral. Reflecting on why, like Josef K., we are so quick to respond to the call of authorities and thus become the subjects of their ideology, Althusser suggests that "guilt feelings" and those who "have something on their consciences" (2004, 56) are at least partly to blame. This is an interesting idea in relation to Josef K. who is reprimanded by the priest for seeking to blame external authorities for his predicament rather than examining his own conscience: "The Court makes no claims upon you. It receives you when you come and it relinquishes you when you go" (Kafka 1996, 124).

The alacrity with which both Josef K. and K. attempt to enter into a relationship with their repressors corresponds with what Foucault pinpoints as the key to the power of such systems of control, the fact that the constraining forces have in a sense: "passed over to the other side—to the side of its surface of application" (1977, 202). In other words, it is the repressed who takes the role of repressor upon itself: "he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjugation" (1977, 202). This comment echoes Freud's argument that the external authorities function by erecting a garrison for themselves in the mind, in the form of the superego, thus ensuring the ultimate adherence to their regulations. The resulting tension between the ego and super-ego creates "what we call the sense of guilt," and furthermore: "manifests itself as the need for punishment" (Freud 1994, 51). One of the few unambiguous statements in *The Trial* is articulated by the arresting warder about the role of the Law: "Our officials [...] never go hunting for crime in the populace, but, as the Law decrees, are drawn towards the guilty" (Kafka 1996, 15). Thus Josef K. must be guilty, for if he were not, he would not have been pursued by the Law.

Fromm agrees that we are often blind to the true source of the restrictions imposed on our lives, our fascination with "the growth of freedom from powers *outside* ourselves" causing us to underestimate: "the fact of *inner* restraints, compulsions and fears, which tend to undermine the meaning of the victories freedom has won against his traditional enemies" (1942, 91). He goes so far as to insist that: "the rulership of conscience can be even harsher than that of external authorities," for the simple reason that: "the individual believes its orders to be his own: how can he rebel against himself?" (1942, 144). However, Fromm is less interested in the suggestion that individuals have an innate sense of guilt that drives them towards repression at the hands of higher authorities, than he is in exploring the underlying

fear of isolation that he insists is what drives individuals to try to escape from freedom. A key element in the surrender of one's freedom is the sacrifice of one's individuality and subsequent assimilation into a communal identity, a condition achieved through what he calls "mechanisms of escape." The first of these, "authoritarianism," involves giving up one's own independence in order to: "fuse one's self with somebody or something outside oneself in order to acquire the strength which the individual self is lacking" (1942, 122). Authoritarianism is predicated on the conviction that life is controlled by external forces and that the only possible happiness lies in complete submission to these forces. Sadomasochism is one particularly effective means of achieving this abrogation of freedom, as it aims to destroy the individual self completely and with it "all its shortcomings, conflicts, risks, doubts, and unbearable aloneness" (1942, 132). Fromm offers the example of a man trapped in a burning building who chooses to wait to be rescued rather than saving himself as an example of this desire to be noticed by the authorities even at a catastrophic cost to one's life.

Even without going so far as to claim that the trial is entirely imagined by Josef K., the significant role he plays in turning it into an overwhelming burden is undeniable. Apart from his initial appearance before the Court of Inquiry, he initiates all further contact with the Court himself. He takes it upon himself to return to the Court the following week, indeed is alarmed and disappointed when no summons arrives for him: "During the next week, K. waited day after day for a new summons, he would not believe that his refusal to be interrogated had been taken literally" (Kafka 1996, 37). At times, it appears that it is only when Josef K. arrives looking for the Court that it is hastily convened: "an attraction existed between the Law and guilt, from which it should really follow that the Interrogation Chamber must lie in the particular flight of stairs which K. happened to choose" (1996, 30). The "perverse pride" he takes in being singled out for judgement is apparent, as Walter H. Sokel explains, in the chapter in which he visits Titorelli, the Court painter. He rejects Titorelli's suggestions of compromise, such as "ostensible acquittal" and "indefinite postponement" (both of which would allow him to continue with his life, albeit under the constant shadow of the Court), insisting instead on seeking a "definite acquittal" despite Titorelli warning him that he has never encountered even one such verdict (1996, 89). His insistence on being heard by the "highest Judges," according to Sokel, is important because it: "amounts to a full recognition of their supreme authority over him and, beyond that, implies his wish to be accepted and approved by them" (Sokel in Rolleston 1976, 59). This determi-

nation to absolve oneself from personal responsibility through subjugation to a governing structure is exactly how Fromm explains the escape from freedom into authoritarianism.

Another example of this “dependency” is the individual whose every decision is made with a view to pleasing an external force. It makes no difference if this external force is real or imagined, only that individuals live their lives in its shadow. Fromm suggests that “automaton conformity” is one common manifestation of this dependency, the individual ceding individuality in favour of the comfortable invisibility that results from complete assimilation:

[...] the individual ceases to be himself; he adopts entirely the kind of personality offered to him by cultural patterns; and he therefore becomes exactly as all others are and as they expect him to be [...]. The person who gives up his individual self and becomes an automaton, identical with millions of other automatons around him, need not feel alone and anxious any more. But the price he pays, however, is high: it is the loss of his self (Fromm 1942, 160).

This embrace of conformity is in evidence in *The Castle*, in which K., who having arrived in the village to fulfil his duties as a Land Surveyor, never ceases in his attempts to receive official confirmation of his position. His mission, as Heller points out, is: “to penetrate to the very centre of authority and wring from it a kind of ultra-final evidence of his claim” (1971, 217). K’s dilemma exemplifies what Karst describes as “the paradox of *The Castle*”: the fact that K. fights against the administration—but only to ally himself with it (1975, 81). His ultimate aim in overcoming the intransigence of the Castle is to settle in the village and become fully united with its inhabitants: “I’m going to marry her and become a member of the Community” (Kafka 1996, 386). It is interesting to note that Fromm cites this perceived role of love as an example of the sadomasochism that sees the individual consciously undermine the self: “Love is based on equality and freedom. If it is based on subordination and loss of integrity of one partner, it is masochistic dependence, regardless of how the relationship is rationalized” (1942, 137). In brief, what K. really wants is to belong completely to the community of the Castle—and for the Castle to acknowledge this so that he can outsource any responsibility for his own actions. This reading of the novel is reminiscent of one of the key questions Fromm poses about freedom in the modern world, namely whether freedom is: “only the absence of external pressure or is it also the *presence* of something—and if so, of what?” (1942, 3–4). It is clear that neither of Kafka’s protagonists possesses the resources or the determi-

nation to grasp their freedom in the positive sense defined by an active engagement with the surrounding world, choosing instead to evade opportunities for such engagement by focusing on eliminating their individuality through a variety of sadomasochistic behaviours. Underlying this choice, according to Fromm, is a wish to regain the unity with the natural world that was lost when individuality became a guiding principle of modern life.

Fromm reads the Eden myth as depicting the moment in which "the original harmony between man and nature is broken" (1942, 28). By defying the direct order of God, humanity took its first steps towards individuality. The myth emphasizes the suffering resulting from this first act of freedom: "The newly won freedom appears as a curse; he is free *from* the sweet bondage of paradise, but he is not free *to* govern himself, to realize his individuality [...]. 'Freedom from' is not identical with positive freedom, with 'freedom to'" (1942, 28). In other words, gaining freedom from an authoritarian regime will not result in fulfillment or happiness unless the individual actively seeks to utilize this freedom in a positive way. Kafka reflects this theme most clearly in his parable "Paradise," which reflects on the Fall from Paradise and the consequences of a life thus lived in eternal separation from the unity once enjoyed in heaven. He challenges traditional readings that locate original human sin in the moment the Tree of Knowledge was tasted, suggesting on the contrary that real sin comes from not using the knowledge gained in this moment, a knowledge after all that puts people on par with God: "We are sinful not merely because we have eaten of the tree of Knowledge, but also because we have not yet eaten of the tree of Life" (1975, 29). Being cast out of Paradise deepened our understanding of goodness precisely because it also opened our eyes to the presence of evil: "Since the Fall we have been essentially equal in our capacity to recognize good and evil" (1975, 31). The problem is that recognizing the right path and choosing to follow it are two very different things, with people lacking the strength necessary to do the right thing. Faced with the threat the difficult path poses, the individual surrounds itself with reasons not to act: "man is filled with fear; he prefers to annul his knowledge of good and evil [...]. It was for this purpose that our rationalizations were created. The whole world is full of them, indeed the whole visible world is perhaps nothing more than the rationalization of a man who wants to find peace for a moment" (1975, 33).

In the light of Kafka's parable, Josef K.'s dogged pursuit of his case becomes not an act of heroism but rather an attempt to avoid facing up to his shortcomings by distracting himself with paperwork. Robertson suggests that Josef K.'s trial could be interpreted as a literal expression of "moral law"

and that the primary concern of the Court is thus with the “moral accountability” of the individual: that is to say, the ability not only to distinguish between good and evil, which has been instinctual since the Fall, but the determination to live one’s life accordingly. Because such a life is “suicidally difficult,” people opt out and try to obscure their knowledge of good and evil by devising “motivations” or excuses for their actions (Robertson 1985, 103). Josef K.’s bid to avoid addressing his own agency through a concentration on the workings of the Court means, according to Robertson’s evaluation, that far from being victimized he is shown to be “morally at fault” (1985, 98).

Josef K.’s final opportunity to take control of his fate comes when he encounters the prison chaplain in the Cathedral and hears “The Legend of the Doorkeeper.” This parable—which relates the story of a man “from the country” seeking admittance to the Law who, having been refused entry by the Doorkeeper, sits by the side of the door for many years only to learn when he is dying that the door was only meant for him alone—is regarded by many critics as the key to the text as a whole. The function of the parable is to demonstrate to Josef K. that he has made an error in privileging the perceived role of the Law above his own responsibility. Like the man from the country, he is in danger of wasting his whole life trying to get the Court to acknowledge him and thus confer his existence with meaning. A similar warning is in fact reiterated throughout the novel by various Court officials who try to convince Josef K. to occupy himself less with the external authorities and concentrate instead on his own role in the proceedings: “I can at least give you a piece of advice; think less about us and of what is going to happen to you, think more about yourself instead” (Kafka 1996, 18).

It is significant that Josef K. misinterprets, perhaps wilfully, the central message of the parable, insisting that the door-keeper is at fault for failing to inform the man from the country that he is the only possible entrant through the door: “the door-keeper deluded the man” (1996, 121). On the contrary, as the priest tries to show him, the deluded figure is the door-keeper who fails to realize that his sole purpose is to serve the man from the country: “although he is in the service of the Law, his service is confined to this one entrance; that is to say, he serves only this man for whom alone the entrance is intended” (1996, 123). Although the doorkeeper enjoys the stability and status that comes from his connection to the Law, this comes at the cost of his own freedom. He is after all confined to that one position at the door, allowed neither to “strike out into the country” nor to “enter into the interior of the Law” (1996, 123). Frustrating though it is for the man from the coun-

try to be refused admittance through the door, he can at any point leave: "Now the man from the country is really free, he can go where he likes [...]. When he sits down on the stool by the side of the door and stays there for the rest of his life, he does it of his own free will; in the story there is no mention of any compulsion" (1996, 123). Of course, as Henel points out, being free also entails assuming full responsibility for one's actions: "In the legend and the novel, the free man and the unfree official confront one another, and in both cases the man would like to shrug off his responsibility onto the official" (Henel in Rolleston 1976, 46). In a conversation with Gustav Janouch, Kafka suggests that one source of human unhappiness is that we have subordinated our natural instinct to seek "a free natural life" to our determination to shackle ourselves together in the name of security: "Safe in the shelter of the herd, they march through the streets of the city, to their work, to their feeding troughs, to their pleasures [...]. Men are afraid of freedom and responsibility. So they prefer to hide behind the prison bars which they build around themselves" (Janouch 1985, 23). This statement confirms the central thesis of this essay: that the propensity among Kafka's characters is to give up the freedom they have to sample the delights of the world in favour of the "security" of a prison cell.

In Aphorism #25, Kafka asks: "How can one take delight in the world unless one flees to it for refuge?" (1991, 83). This question could be articulated by a large number of his characters, intent as they are on escaping from the chaos of the world by submitting to some form of (usually self-generated) control and discipline, a situation which results in the blurring of distinctions between imprisonment and security. In spite of the attempts his characters make to return to the safety of past bondage, however, the blissful ignorance they seek is not attainable for as Kafka explains: "the expulsion from Paradise is final, and life in this world irrevocable" (1975, 29). We are now aware of our imprisonment, unlike the inhabitants of Plato's cave. This awareness, combined with an obsessive desire to know the truth, has caused the walls of the cave to be covered with mirrors which, owing to their curved surfaces, distort what they reflect: "Now the prisoner sees lurid pictures, definite shapes, clearly recognizable faces, an inexhaustible wealth of detail. His gaze is fixed no longer on empty shades, but on a full reflection of ideal reality. Face to face with images of truth, he is yet doubly agonized by their hopeless distortion" (Heller 1971, 200). The hopeless distortion of the mirrored walls makes the quest for knowledge doubly agonizing, a fact reflected in K.'s futile search for a solid contact with the Castle: "You haven't once until now come into real contact with our authorities. All those authorities of

yours have been illusory, but owing to your ignorance of the circumstances you take them to be real” (Kafka 1996, 316). K.’s plight can be effectively summarized by Fromm’s maxim that “freedom from” the bondage of complete ignorance is not identical to the positive “freedom to” govern oneself and realize one’s individuality (1942, 28). Freedom cannot merely be the absence of external, or indeed internal, pressure but must also be the presence of something—the strength to assert our individuality, the courage to stand up and walk out of the cave (1942, 4). This, Fromm believes, can only come about when a “positive freedom” is achieved: a society in which the growth and happiness of the individual are the principal aims; the individual is not subordinated to or manipulated by any power outside himself; and, finally, in which his conscience and ideals are not the internalization of external demands but are his, and his alone (1942, 233). None of the characters examined in this essay seem willing or able to rise to the challenge of defining their own destinies. On the contrary, as Kafka suggests, they are paralyzed by both their fear and inability to imagine any alternative to the limited lives they lead. In his aphorism “He,” Kafka summarizes the dilemma of the individual who hates the fact that he is a prisoner and yet lacks the courage to seek an alternative: “if he is actually asked what he actually wants, he cannot reply, for—this is one of his strongest arguments—he has no conception of freedom” (1991, 105).

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Charlene Elsby*

Gregor Samsa's Spots of Indeterminacy: Kafka as Phenomenologist

Abstract

Kafka's presentation of Gregor Samsa in *Metamorphosis* is explicable using Ingarden's ontology of the literary work of art. The common heritage of Kafka's and Ingarden's theoretical commitments (Franz Brentano) might explain the conceptual parallel. More importantly, an Ingardenian analysis of Gregor Samsa demonstrates that (1) Kafka is at least implicitly aware of some of the central tenets of later phenomenology and uses them to literary advantage; and (2) Ingarden's ontology of the literary work of art works particularly well in the case of Kafka's novel, which provides an example of some of the analysis' more obscure aspects (in particular, Ingarden's concept of spots of indeterminacy).

Keywords

Phenomenology, Ingarden, Ontology, Schematized Aspects, Indeterminacy

Chronology precludes, of course, the idea that Franz Kafka could ever have come to know Ingarden's theory of the ontology of the literary work of art by reading it; Kafka died four years before Ingarden started writing *The Literary Work of Art*. Nevertheless, the work of the literary master seems to exhibit the nuances of Ingarden's ontology. Kafka's presentation of Gregor Samsa in *Metamorphosis* not only serves as an example of Ingarden's theory in general (providing support to the idea that Ingarden's analysis is correct), it embodies the potential for the manipulation of that ontology that Ingarden anticipates in his analyses. That is to say, despite the obvious anachronism, Kafka

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seems to take Ingarden's ontology as an assumption and then aim, in addition, to *play* with the ontology, demonstrating the potential of the literary work of art to present a world analogous to the real, except insofar as in the world Kafka has realized in *Metamorphosis*, there exists a large and grotesque beetle-like monster with a human consciousness who's quite concerned about missing his train.

There is a common ancestor to the theoretical commitments of both Kafka and Ingarden that may lead us to wonder whether Kafka's theoretical commitments were, in fact, as similar to Ingarden's as they seem (as we might expect because of similar philosophical heritage), or if Ingarden was aware of the work of Kafka and intended that his analysis be inclusive enough as to provide an explanation of Kafka's alternative realism (though Ingarden nowhere refers to Kafka in *The Literary Work of Art*). Barry Smith has already done significant work on Kafka's adoption of Brentano's conception of inner sense (an Aristotelian notion from *De Anima* III.2 which finds its way, after Brentano, into the foundations of phenomenology as explored by Husserl and subsequently Ingarden) (Smith 1997).¹ With this historical knowledge, we might proclaim that the theoretical commitments of Kafka and those of Ingarden have notable similarities because of their common heritages—the Brentano connection.

I take this as given and propose to extend the analysis of parallels between the work of Kafka and the foundational concepts of phenomenology.² Not only does Gregor Samsa exemplify the Brentanian concept of inner consciousness; upon further development of the ontology developed by early

¹ Barry Smith makes the connection between the Brentanian concept of inner consciousness and Kafka's narrative style, noting that, "such variant modes of experience, and the peculiar plasticity of the world which is their correlate, form a constantly recurring theme in Kafka's writings." Smith argues that Kafka's knowledge of Brentano contributes, for instance, to how we access the inner monologue of Gregor Samsa (Smith 1997). Smith credits Klaus Wagenbach with being the first to point out the Brentanian influence on Kafka's literary work.

² I am not the only one to apply Ingarden's theoretical work on the literary work of art to specific literary works of art to which Ingarden did not himself refer. These applications demonstrate that Ingarden did not need to cherry pick examples; his analysis applies to all literary works of art. (Ingarden's definition for what qualifies as a work of art is minimal. A work of art must have represented objects; this is why the analysis applies so broadly.) See the analyses in Jeff Mitscherling's *Roman Ingarden's Ontology and Aesthetics* of James Joyce's *The Dead* and Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*. Mitscherling's analysis, like mine, "serves to verify further Ingarden's conception of the literary work of art" (Mitscherling 1997, 152).

phenomenology, Gregor also comes to exemplify and extend our concept of the intentional object in the literary work of art, the acts of consciousness through which we access that object, and the malleability of the presented world in comparison to the material one, made possible by the quasi-judgments we form of the intentional object, its spots of indeterminacy, and its schematized aspects. (Schematized aspects will be variously indeterminate. For example, if an author says someone has "an average face," the fact that the face has a nose is determinate; whether the nose is a snub nose is indeterminate, depending on whether we interpret the average nose to be snub or not.) Such connections, while they can find historical explanations, are interesting not only because of their history, but because we can find in Kafka an exemplar of Ingarden's ontology of the work of art, which speaks to its accuracy. That is to say, I locate a common Brentanian model in Kafka's literary work and in Ingarden's analysis of literary works. Kafka's literary work provides an example of Ingarden's analysis, which reinforces the strength of that analysis, while Ingarden provides an ontological analysis applicable to Kafka's literary work, which reinforces the idea that there are philosophical concepts at work in Kafka's literature.

Spots of Indeterminacy in Gregor Samsa's Physical Form

The phenomenology Ingarden inherits from Husserl posits "the intentional object" to be the object, content, or material of an act of consciousness.³ The intentional object is that to which consciousness is directed, while the form of consciousness is the way in which consciousness is attending to that object. In Ingarden's ontology, objects represented in literary works are intentional objects. (They are the objects of consciousness of the author, who "realizes" them in the literary work of art, at which point they become possi-

³ The definition of an "intentional object" is adapted from Brentano's definition of a mental phenomenon, which is defined according to its reference to a content. The content is what I refer to here as the "intentional object." Brentano specifies, in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*: "Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgment something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on" (Brentano, 1973, 88).

ble objects of consciousness for the reader. Represented objects within literary works include the characters, settings, events—any part or aspect of the fictional world of the literary work.) But a representation is never a complete representation, and therefore intentional objects have “schematized aspects”—aspects of the object that aren’t specified by the author, but are nevertheless posited to exist. We might think of the schematized aspects of intentional objects as analogous to the unfulfilled aspects of a spatiotemporal object; but whereas it is possible to turn a real object around to see its back side, we can’t turn an object represented in literature around to see what’s there. Thus, these schematized aspects allow for spots of indeterminacy—things we don’t know about them and perhaps can’t know.⁴ Gregor Samsa is an intentional object whose spots of indeterminacy allow for various interpretations of what exactly he *is*, and he serves as an example of the limitations that exist on the possible interpretations of a literary work of art. It is possible to imagine Gregor Samsa as any one of several types of beetle or possibly a cockroach. The word Kafka uses is *Ungeziefer*, or “vermin;” it is not specific enough to connote an insect (*Insekt*) or even a bug (*Wanze*).⁵ It is possible to imagine Gregor retaining some of his human characteristics, as he in fact does with respect to his size and the complexity of his consciousness. At one point, for instance, Gregor imagines how he would one day tell his sister all about how he would have paid for her to attend the conservatory, if only he hadn’t undergone his metamorphosis. Gregor imagines how he would kiss his sister on the neck:

After this declaration his sister would burst into tears of emotion, and Gregor would raise himself up to her shoulder and kiss her on the neck which, ever since she started going out to work, she kept bare, without a ribbon or collar (Kafka 1972, 49).

⁴ Ingarden explains “spots of indeterminacy” in section 38 of *The Literary Work of Art*. He explains, “If, e.g., a story begins with the sentence: ‘An old man was sitting at a table,’ etc., it is clear that the represented ‘table’ is indeed a ‘table’ and not, for example, a ‘chair;’ but whether it is made of wood or iron, is four-legged or three-legged, etc. is left quite unsaid and therefore—this being a purely intentional object—not *determined*. The material of its composition is altogether unqualified, although it must be some material. Thus, in the given object, its qualification is *totally absent*: there is an ‘empty’ spot here, a ‘spot of indeterminacy’” (Ingarden, 1973, 249).

⁵ Thanks to the anonymous reviewer who reports that Kafka and his friends would refer to the *Metamorphosis* as the *Wanzesache* or “bug-piece.” “Bug” is still a general enough term to allow for the indeterminacy I locate in Kafka’s characterization of Gregor. What kind of bug or vermin he is, is a spot of indeterminacy, in Ingarden’s sense.

There are, of course, various ways that we could interpret this. We could choose to believe that Gregor is, in fact, some kind of definite beetle with two rows of wiggling little legs and lips capable of kissing.⁶ We could alternatively imagine that Kafka means to indicate that Gregor himself maintains an incorrect notion of his capabilities. (This option seems unlikely, as by this point in the book Gregor has come to be able to manipulate his metamorphosed body with relative ease; it therefore seems as if his new body would be factored into his imaginations of possible future acts.) Or we might choose to skip over it entirely, as the addition of this possibility doesn't necessarily alter our conception of Gregor all that much. But if we have read our Ingarden, we will read it as a contradiction introduced by the author in order to create chaos in the consciousness of the readers, who will find themselves unable to reconcile Gregor's vermin form with the action of kissing his sister's neck, yet nevertheless do so.⁷ This is accomplished, according to Ingarden's analysis, during the reader's "concretization" of the intentional object (the literary work of art itself and whatever objects are represented in it).⁸ The author puts forth some potentialities (the limits according to which we might interpret what Gregor is), and then the reader concretizes Gregor as some kind of vermin, despite the fact that the information we have to go on to enact the concretization is contradictory—and Ingarden makes note of this possibility.

"How willing we are to accept the artist's magic!" says Stanley Corngold in the introduction to the 1972 Bantam edition of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. (Kafka 1972, xl, footnote 6) In order to even begin questioning the possibility of Gregor placing a kiss on the neck of his sister (made possible here, not by specifying that he has lips, but by specifying she does not wear a ribbon or collar), we must assume from the beginning that it is possible that a man

⁶ As my reviewer points out, I am the one making the assumption that something capable of kissing definitely has lips. This is left indeterminate by the text, which only specifies Gregor's intention to kiss his sister. I introduce what I believe to be a general assumption—that kissing things have lips.

⁷ Ingarden says, "It may happen that the duality of the state of affairs does not split the identity of the represented object but rather attributes to it, as it were, two different properties, though in such a way that neither of them definitively pertains to the object but, instead, both simultaneously claim to pertain to it; consequently, neither of them is capable of fully entering with it into the primary unity of existence. From this there stems a certain tension in the object, a state in which equilibrium is destroyed" (Ingarden 1973, 254).

⁸ An intentional object within the literary work of art is "concretized" when it becomes an object of consciousness for the reader.

should become some kind of massive vermin while retaining human consciousness, despite the fact that we should know very well that the physical form he has taken *should* preclude the possibility of the complex nervous system Gregor would require to be so spiteful towards the lodgers mistreating his family.⁹ We are willing to accept, however, the idea that Gregor's hiding under the couch while his sister cleans is not due to any fear of light (as we might expect) but due to the fact that he is a particularly polite beetle-cockroach-man-monster. We accept the artist's magic using various forms of consciousness. On the one hand, we refer to the extensive body of knowledge we've acquired of the actual world in order to fill in the unfulfilled (schematized) aspects of the represented objects (to conceive of the object in its entirety, despite that it isn't presented that way). On the other hand, our consciousness of a giant but polite manbug *extends* the possible objects of consciousness for us, in ways made possible by the literary work of art. Ingarden describes how such consciousness becomes possible, while Kafka makes it happen.

Those aspects of the literary work of art through which its represented objectivities come to be represented determine these spots of indeterminacy. The fulfilled aspects of a represented object in a work of art are represented through various meaning units, which for Ingarden are apparent at every level of linguistic combination. The word, the sentence, the paragraph, and the chapter, in so far as they signify, are not just phonetic material but units of meaning within Ingarden's analysis. Even at the level of a single word, the use of it indicates to the reader one possible set of determinable indeterminacies, the fulfillment of which we assume would take the same form as a fulfillment in the non-literary realm. Ingarden uses the example of a rose:

As what, then, does the object 'this rose' appear in our state of affairs? As a 'red rose'? Or as a 'rose' with all its properties and features, with the exception of this single element of redness? Or, finally, in a third sense, yet to be determined? As we shall see, it appears in all three ways; and the fact that it 'does' so is especially characteristic of

⁹ "The character of dogged literalism of Kafka's writings seems therefore to be a device to catch the reader off his guard when the expectations of a natural or reasonable order in the external world which it arouses are upset. Kafka's depictions of bare reality are never superfluous, never introduced for merely ornamental purposes. But nor, either, does he take great pains to achieve any particular social or psychological realism in his descriptions, especially in regard to his subsidiary protagonists. The depiction of external reality serves rather the predominant end of allowing some particular aspect of oblique consciousness to show forth" (Smith 1997).

the formal structure of the state of affairs. If we begin for the moment with the last, the third mode, it is clear that one can speak of 'this rose' in the sense that one has only the rose 'itself,' so to speak, in mind, i.e., as a carrier of various properties, a carrier that is already qualitatively determined, according to the nature of the object, as 'rose,' but with no regard for the qualitative determinations of these properties (Ingarden 1973, 136–137).¹⁰

At the mere mention of a rose, we have already determined the qualities we might expect it to have. A rose is colored, either bloomed or still budded; it remains attached to its stem, or it does not; it is part of a bouquet, or it is still in the garden; but in every case of a rose there are limitations to its possible conception.¹¹ Still, it is true that the author of the literary work of art might choose to challenge these limitations to interpretation. The author might describe for us a rose that grows directly from the earth without the intermediary of a bush. The author might describe this very rose as the largest rose you have ever seen, and the reddest as well. Or the author might choose to defy the reader's expectations for some literary purpose, using the rose as a portent of things to come, by describing its scent not as sweet but as carrying with it the sour and lingering smells of death.

And we'll buy it. The reader will accept all of these various characterizations of the rose, even if there is no real world equivalent for the exact kind of rose the author describes, just because the author has said nothing beyond the *possible* fulfillment of the rose's unfulfilled aspects. Kafka takes it as an assumption that we will accept as true, within the world of *Metamorphosis*, that Gregor Samsa has awakened one day to find himself crusty on the outside, the helpless master of an innumerable number of wiggling little legs, set in two rows all of a sudden on his abdomen, and Kafka expects us as well to understand that, because of this situation, Gregor won't be able to continue his work as a traveling salesman—because that would be out of the

¹⁰ Jeff Mitscherling explains, "The word meaning of a determinate name, when used in a particular situation is an *actualization* of a *part* of the *ideal sense* (*des idealen Sinnes*) contained in the concept that 'corresponds' to the intentional object. It is this actualization, as determined in the word sound, that creates (*ausmacht*) the material and formal content of the meaning. Thus each 'ideal concept' has a number of word meanings for the same object. That part of the ideal sense which is to be actualized constitutes the *potential stock* of the meaning" (1997, 133–134).

¹¹ As we continue to read, the possible meanings of the individual word narrow; more of its content is specified. Cf. Luzewy: "That is, the potential stock of meanings gets winnowed as we read the text. This reduction of the ideal meanings identified with the concept is precisely the process of the word's meaning being actualized" (2016, 84).

question. Simultaneously, we recognize that Gregor Samsa has altered form to an extent that, while he maintains human consciousness and the human condition of wanting to be able to communicate and also to provide meaningful support to his family (emotional and financial), it is impossible for him to do so, because vermin of his sort don't work in traveling sales.

In short, the author of the literary work of art in some way dictates to us which features of the literary reality are going to prove malleable and which are not. We are probably all familiar with other works of art, which do contain worlds where it is possible for all species of creature to get and hold gainful employment. *But not here*, says Kafka.

While Stanley Corngold argues that, because of the way Kafka has chosen to represent Gregor Samsa, the only possible interpretation is a psychological one, where Kafka is not writing a story but a literary autobiography, this seems too simplistic. Corngold's statement that the proper real-world object on which we might base our conception of Gregor Samsa is the writer himself minimizes Kafka's bending of the very notion of literary form. Arguing against the idea that Gregor Samsa is any kind of beetle, Corngold proposes that Gregor is just a representation of Kafka's inner reflections on the nature of the author:

Hence, the apparent realism with which Kafka describes the vermin should not conjure for the reader an insect of some definite kind. [...] Sometimes he behaves like a low sort of human being, a 'louse'; but at other times he is an airy, flighty kind of creature. In the end he is sheerly not-this, not-that—a paradox, a creature not even of dust. He is a sign of that unnatural being in Kafka—the writer (Kafka 1972, xix).

But with Ingarden's conception of the aesthetic object and its indeterminacies, I argue that a better interpretation requires that no definite real-world object be sought at all, as an analogue or anything else. The indefiniteness of Gregor's form is itself clear, and while our immediate tendency is to *try* to figure out the exact object in the universe that Kafka meant for us to intuit as we read *Metamorphosis*, we should recognize in ourselves this immediate tendency, and also that Kafka meant for us to make this attempt, that he meant for it to fail, and that this indicates that he was at least implicitly aware of how the reader's consciousness of an intentional object depends on the limits of possible interpretations provided by the groundwork of knowledge we access through and ground in the real world—and he's messing with us.

In *The Literary Work of Art*, Ingarden explains the capacity of the author to mess with us in just such a particular fashion, and he argues that this particular form of messing with us is, for some literary works, what makes them what they are. That is to say, if at any point Kafka had told us, as readers, that Gregor Samsa had become a dung beetle, the story would have been ruined. Ingarden says:

The presence of such an 'opalescent' purely intentional sentence correlate is of particular importance for grasping the essence of the literary work. For the moment it should only be noted that there is a special type of literary work of art whose basic character and peculiar charm lie in the ambiguities it contains. They are *calculated* for the full enjoyment of the aesthetic characters that are based on 'iridescence' and 'opal-escence,' and they would lose their peculiar charm if one were to 'improve' them by removing the ambiguity (as frequently happens in *bad* translations) (Ingarden 1973, 144).

Ingarden here refers to no work of literature in particular, but it is easy to see how *Metamorphosis* might fit this characterization. The creature which Gregor has become has an essential nature revealed to us through his experience of his new form. We see how he learns to manipulate his new body mass proportions in order to first get himself off of the bed, we struggle along with him attempting to turn the key in its hole in order to explain to his superior why he has not made the train this morning, and we develop for ourselves an idea of how it might be possible that an apple should become lodged in his backside (upperside) for such an extended amount of time that the wound along with Gregor collects dust, as our sense of resentment for his neglect at the hands of his ever more spiteful family grows. Were Kafka at any point to say, "Gregor is a beetle now," instead of, "His back seemed to be hard; nothing was likely to happen to it when it fell on the carpet" (Kafka 1972, 8), the story would lose its peculiar charm.

The difference is (as Smith 1997 elaborates) an awareness of the distinction between the intentional objects accessible to inner consciousness and the intentional objects accessible to consciousness through an intersubjective community. To identify Gregor's form as anything in particular is to apply learned concepts, universal terms that negate the differences between members of a class, and which are meant to eliminate ambiguities in our concept of a thing. Because something is a rose, we know that it has a color and a size and is an organic entity formed mostly of carbon. But to specify what Gregor is, on the other hand, would ruin him, for he is a magical brown vermin whose internal struggle regarding the furniture arrangement we

empathize with, despite our never having had to *actually* consider moving any furniture whatever to suit the best interests of a many-legged man beetle (cockroach). (On the one hand, his sister could arrange the furniture in such a way as to suit his new patterns of movements, determined by his physical form, but on the other hand, she might choose to leave them just as they are, because to adapt to his new circumstances is to lend permanence to the new form of being when Gregor [and we readers] still want it to be possible for him to wake up one day, human and just fine.)

The Schematized Aspects of Gregor Samsa

The spots of indeterminacy, which are made apparent in the words, sentences, paragraphs and the work as a whole (meaning units of every level of complexity), make it possible for us to interpret Gregor Samsa's physical form with some amount of freedom. Through these spots of indeterminacy, the theory that Franz Kafka had a particular vermin in mind when he envisioned Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis becomes just as likely as the interpretation that Kafka meant for the text to express the existential anguish of the author (i.e., some kind of metaphorical version of the author himself, one with many more legs). Ingarden hints at the possibility for such malleability when he examines the meaning units comprising a work of art, but the force of his theory really only becomes apparent when he analyzes the literary work of art's schematized aspects.

Beyond the physical foundation of the work, which provides the grounding of the work's existence in material reality (the physical paper on which the text is printed, or the graphic marks on the sheets of paper), there is, in addition, its meaning, or that which is expressed through the particular words used, the arrangements in which the author places them, and the more complex meaning units of which we come to be aware through a reading of the text that takes place over time. Words, and likewise the complex arrangements in which we place them, all have an "intentional directional factor," pointing to some element of the universe and which we generally characterize as "meaning" something.¹² Wherever something means, it has

¹² Ingarden demonstrates the capacity of various linguistic complexes to "mean" using several hilarious examples. As one example, Ingarden tells the story of Mr. X, who kills two children with his terrible driving. The point of the example is to illustrate to us the conscious processes going on which lead us to interpret the story in such a way that the children are dead, even though and *because* the terms are placed where they are within a larger meaning complex: "Mr. X doesn't know the first thing about driving. Moreover,

an intentional directional factor, and because of the very nature of the relation we call "meaning," there is always some variability in what is meant. That is to say, the sign never signifies what it signifies *completely* (what a sign signifies exceeds the sign itself). Ingarden notes this already in his exposition of the meaning unit stratum of the literary work of art:

Finally, it must be stressed that the variability of the intentional directional factor of a name is closely connected with the appearance of 'variables' in its material content. In fact, the directional factor is always variable if, in this content, any 'variable' is present which belongs to the determination of the individual constitutive nature of the object, provided that, at the same time, an individuating property is not determined in the material content through a special operation in compound names. This is always the case when an intentional object is conceived as if by a 'schema,' through a doubly dependent moment of its nature, so that the qualification of the variability of the directional factor that we gave above (pp. 65f) is equivalent to the one we have just now indicated (Ingarden 1973, 69).

That things are presented schematically is by no means unique to the literary work of art. The concept of schematized aspects in the literary work of art builds upon the more general notion of fulfilled and unfulfilled aspects, with which Husserl deals extensively.¹³ In the spatiotemporal world, unfulfilled aspects are those which are not immediately given to sensible intuition. For example, in an instance of vision, what is actually seen are the fulfilled aspects of an object, whereas what is unfulfilled are those which are not. It is always the case that at any one moment I see only one side of any wall, but it is never the case that because I do not see the other side, I assume it is not there. It is there, but it is "unfulfilled." This is a necessary result of the

he's clumsy and very irresponsible. Yesterday he took two acquaintances in his car, drove out to Y, and on the way ran over two children. Both are dead. An idiot like that can cause so much misfortune.' Only the determinate order of the sentences causes the expression 'an idiot like that' to refer to Mr. X and the word 'both' to designate the two dead children and not the two acquaintances of Mr. X. If we were to change the order of the sentences, their meaning would be altered and the connection between them would disappear or at least be deformed to such an extent that we would hardly be aware that any connection was present" (Ingarden 1973, 152).

¹³ Cf. Husserl's discussion in section 44 of *Ideas*, where he states: "Of necessity a physical thing can be given only 'one-sidedly;' and that signifies, not just incompletely or imperfectly in some sense or other, but precisely what presentation by adumbrations prescribes. A physical thing is necessarily given in mere 'modes of appearance' in which necessarily a *core of 'what is actually presented'* is apprehended as being surrounded by a horizon of 'co-giveness,' which is not givenness proper, and of more or less vague *indeterminateness*" (1982, 94).

mode of consciousness with which we are aware of spatiotemporal things. Because I access them through perception, and because perception is perspectival, it is never the case that all of the aspects of a spatiotemporal object are completely fulfilled in my consciousness of it, i.e., in its presentation as an intentional object. If I see the top of the table, I cannot at the same time see its bottom, and if I crouch underneath to see what is written on its bottom, I can no longer see its top.

In the case of the literary work of art, some of its aspects are always schematized. The world of the literary work of art is constituted in such a way that this is a necessary result. Whereas the spatiotemporal world is constituted of spatiotemporal objects, the world of the literary work of art is constituted of meaning units of various complexity whose determinations are always incomplete for, try as we might, it is impossible to represent the entirety of reality in words.¹⁴ And while we might try to specify as far as possible the nature of the object we try to represent, we find it instead more convenient to allow the human consciousness reading a text to fulfill those unfulfilled aspects for us, as is the human wont. We apply the habits of fulfilling unfulfilled aspects that we acquire in the real world to the fictional universe of the literary work of art, and then we are not in any way shocked by the fact that the author does not specify the color of this or that rose. We just assume that *it does have a color* and move on, in anticipation of whatever it is that Gregor will do next to delight us. This fulfilling of unfulfilled aspects of a work of art constitutes, for Ingarden, an independent stratum of its existence and, as Mitscherling emphasizes, defines for us the manner in which the work of art's represented objectivities (like Gregor Samsa) are *concretized*:

When consciousness attends to (or 'intends') a particular object, it is usually the case that only some of the 'aspects' of that object are presented immediately to consciousness, and these aspects are said to be fulfilled or unfulfilled. For example, when we look at a table from above, the table presents us with aspect of 'table-top' and 'table-bottom,' and the former is fulfilled while the latter remains unfulfilled [...] A similar situation obtains in the literary work of art, but here the reader is often forced to fulfill for herself many of those aspects that are presented by the author as unfulfilled, and

¹⁴ "Namely, one and the same intentional object can be represented or exhibited in various combinations of properties, states, etc., depending on which manifold represents it. The object is shown here from another side—as it were, in another perspective—and, figuratively speaking, in other perspectival foreshortenings, since, in the various manifolds of properties of an object, one and the same property seems capable of taking on a different role and importance in its total essence" (Ingarden 1973, 198).

she does so with regard to those aspects that are presented more fully, i.e., as fulfilled. The latter provide the reader with a direction to follow in her conscious activity of fulfilling these unfulfilled aspects, which are said to have been 'schematized.' This intentional activity of fulfillment of schematized aspects is a central component of the general activity of 'concretization'. As no character, for example, can ever be exhaustively presented by an author—no character, that is to say can ever be portrayed fully and completely determined—the manner in which this concretization is to proceed can only be schematically determined by a literary work of art through its stratum of schematized aspects (Mitscherling 2010, 143–144, footnote 10).¹⁵

Kafka, as philosopher, must be aware of such a thing as schematized aspects (and by "aware" here, I mean competently manipulates for literary effect). That is to say, Kafka is competently manipulating the indeterminacy of an object's schematized aspects; not only is he purposefully schematizing aspects of Gregor Samsa and his life, but he is taking advantage of the ambiguity introduced by these schematizations. We still do not know, for instance, the character of Gregor's voice after the metamorphosis, whether he was ever able to make his intentions known, as he seems to think he has in the beginning of the book, or whether he was always incapable of expressing himself through vocalizations.¹⁶ Unless the author deigns to fill us in,

¹⁵ Ingarden has an example: "Thus, when the author of a novel 'transports' us from place *A* to place *B* without showing us the entire distance between *A* and *B*, the intervening space between *A* and *B* is not positively determined and represented but again is only corepresented, by virtue of the impossibility of spatial discontinuity" (Ingarden 1973, 223–224). That is to say, because we conceive of space as continuous in general, when a spot of indeterminacy is left in the text, we fill it in with what we know.

¹⁶ Kafka writes, near the beginning of the story: "Gregor was shocked to hear his own voice answering, unmistakably his own voice, true, but in which, as if from below, an insistent distressed chirping intruded, which left the clarity of his words intact only for a moment really, before so badly garbling them as they carried that no one could be sure if he had heard right. Gregor had wanted to answer in detail and to explain everything, but, given the circumstances, confined himself to saying, 'Yes, yes, thanks, Mother, I'm just getting up.' The wooden door must have prevented the change in Gregor's voice from being noticed outside, because his mother was satisfied with his explanation and shuffled off" (1972, 5). Later, he provides us with another character's reaction to Gregor's voice: "'That was the voice of an animal,' said the manager, in a tone conspicuously soft compared with the mother's yelling" (1972, 13). Later again, Gregor expresses himself through hissing "[...] and Gregor hissed loudly with rage because it did not occur to any of them to close the door and spare him such a scene and a row" (1972, 44). My reading of this is informed by Aristotle's distinction between words and the vocalizations of animals. In the *History of Animals* 535a29–b2 Aristotle suggests that what is required for language is that an animal have lips and a tongue; here "language" is translated from *διάλεκτός*. In *De Interpretatione* at 16a27–9, Aristotle specifies that, "Even inarticulate noises (of beasts, for instance) do indeed reveal something, yet none of them is a name."

these aspects remain schematized and very possibly indeterminate. While it is possible to imagine a represented desk as any colour I want to imagine it to be, it *isn't* any colour in the world of the literary work, unless the author specifies its colour.

Brentano's concept of oblique consciousness can help to explain our consciousness of the schematized aspects of the literary work of art (Brentano 1973, appendix). For Brentano, the object of a perception is what is perceived—a sound, for instance. Through the sound, we are obliquely conscious of an object that sounds (despite the fact that technically speaking, we do not *hear* objects, we hear sounds; the sound is a sign of an object). Just as the hearing of a sound is immediately apparent to inner consciousness and obliquely refers to some external object making that sound, so what the reader is conscious of during the reading of a literary work of art are its complex meaning structures. We are (obliquely) conscious of its represented objectivities and their schematized aspects. Just as the blue of a wall signifies to us the existence of a wall (what is given in perception refers to what is given obliquely), so does Gregor's having an apple embedded in his flesh indicate that his flesh *is of the type* in which an apple could remain embedded for more than a month.¹⁷ In other words, the same thing that allows for our perception of something to be deceptive is what allows for our reading of something to have spots of indeterminacy, or multiple interpretive potentialities.¹⁸

These spots of indeterminacy are never immediately apparent, but must either be assumed or taken by inference to exist just from the fact that there are aspects to the represented objects of a literary work of art that are never made explicit. Nevertheless, the literary work of art always presents a uni-

¹⁷ "Gregor's serious wound, from which he suffered for over a month—the apple remained imbedded in his flesh as a visible souvenir since no one dared to remove it—seemed to have reminded even his father that Gregor was a member of the family, in spite of his present pathetic and repulsive shape, who could not be treated as an enemy; that, on the contrary, it was the commandment of family duty to swallow their disgust and endure him, endure him and nothing more" (Kafka 1972, 40).

¹⁸ Barry Smith says, accurately, of Brentano: "Brentano's thesis of the primacy of inner perception, now, is a claim to the effect that it is the inner life, the inner perception of psychical phenomena, which can alone yield certain knowledge. The only objects of which we can have an absolutely secure apprehension are, as he conceives it, the acts and states of our own consciousness. Of these alone can we assert with an absolutely evident knowledge that they are in reality as they appear in consciousness. A consequence of this is that our outer perceptions, that is, our experiences of physical phenomena, *may always be deceptive*" (1997, 8 of the online version of this paper).

fied world where things that are not specified are assumed to exist, indeterminate but in principle knowable. Just as we never assume that *there is no bottom* to the table, we also never assume that the represented universe *ends* at some definite point, along with its representation. At no point do I assume that just because all of the action in this novel takes place within an apartment, that outside the apartment is nothing but void. I just assume there's something out there. In general, the schematized aspects of a literary work of art are indeterminate, but nevertheless always there. As Ingarden relates,

As we have seen, purely intentional correlates of connected sentences can enter into manifold relationships and interrelations. And since among the sentence correlates there are also states of affairs which occur in the ontic range of one and the same object, as well as states in which events and interconnections between individual objects are represented, the represented objects also do not lie isolated and alien alongside one another but, thanks to the manifold ontic connections, unite into a uniform ontic sphere. In doing so they always constitute—quite remarkably—a segment of a still largely undetermined world, which is, however, established in accord with its ontic type and the type of its essence, that is, a segment whose boundaries are sharply drawn. It is always as if a beam of light were illuminating part of a region, the remainder of which disappears in an indeterminate cloud but is still there in its indeterminacy (Ingarden 1973, 218).

What's more, whatever exists in the schematized aspects is not only assumed as a possible intentional object for consciousness, it's conceived of with the *habitus* of reality that Ingarden describes. We know that Gregor Samsa has really metamorphosed into some kind of giant brown vermin; it is not an imagined state of affairs, or a dream, or another alternative mode of reality which *too* might be represented in the literary work.¹⁹ It is not the case that Gregor has awakened a man with a distinct feeling that he *might* be a slimy creature with many small legs. We are aware that *it has happened*.²⁰

Where the analogy between our consciousness of space-time and our awareness of the objectivities of a literary work of art breaks down is with respect to their determination. Whereas the spatiotemporal object is completely determined (it is never the case that the table has no bottom, irre-

¹⁹ See Ingarden 1973, 220–222. Ingarden says, “This is seen quite distinctly if within the represented world there is a contrasting of ‘real’ objectivities with objects that have only been ‘dreamed’ by a represented person. In this instance we see not only that ontic characters are distinctly present in the represented world but also that the world that is ‘dreamt’ here is not truly but only quasi-dreamt” (1973, 222).

²⁰ See Peter McCormick's analysis of literary truths (1989).

spective of whether we know about it or not), the literary work of art might represent something that is *actually* indeterminate. That is to say, it is not something whose incompleteness is due to our lack of awareness of its unfulfilled aspects; it actually is indeterminate. This is a potentiality afforded to the author because of the alternate means of presentation of objectivities. To use words and complexes of words to represent, as opposed to perception, introduces a potentiality into the representation that perception does not have—the potentiality to introduce *actually indeterminate* entities. Franz Kafka takes advantage of this to present to us Gregor Samsa. As Ingarden says, “In principle, there can be literary works which do not trouble themselves at all with staying within the bounds of a particular type of object; but precisely because of this, they can make a particular aesthetic impression by representing a world that is actually impossible or one that is full of contradictions, going beyond the limits established by the regional essence of reality. We are then dealing with a grotesque dance of impossibilities” (Ingarden 1973, 253).

Conclusion

I argue that Gregor Samsa is not intended by Kafka as any determinate sort of monster, but as the indeterminate form of monster whose literary merit rests on its ambiguity. The presentation of such a creature is explicable through an application of the theory and terminology of Roman Ingarden, whose work on the ontology of the literary work of art shares a common ancestor with Kafka’s theoretical commitments (the Brentano connection). In particular, the possibility of ambiguity introduced through the spots of indeterminacy apparent in the meaning units of a literary work of art introduce aspects that are schematized, i.e., unfulfilled, which are there to be filled in by the reader in the work’s concretization. This concretization, however, is stymied by Kafka’s refusal to present Gregor as a member of any known species. Just as it is possible to convince someone that just on the other side of darkness lies a monster whose form is so terrifying it cannot be imagined, so Kafka takes advantage of the schematized aspects of the literary work of art in order to represent a creature whose essence demands indeterminacy. Such a presentation requires at least an implicit awareness of theory. Thus, Kafka is a philosopher and, at heart, a phenomenologist.

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Katarzyna Szafranowska*

***Metaphormosis:*
The Machinic Metaphor
in Kafkian Animal Stories**

Abstract

In my paper, I discuss the Deleuzian reading of Franz Kafka. I argue that Deleuze perceives Kafka's works through the prism of his own criticism of metaphor and that in this case one cannot dismiss the use of metaphorical language as Deleuze and Guattari attempt to do in *Kafka. Toward A Minor Literature*. Analyzing the narration of Kafkian animal stories, I claim that metaphors do appear in Kafka's works but they are broken, dysfunctional metaphors: more a metaphormosis than a metaphor itself.

Keywords

Gilles Deleuze, Franz Kafka, Metaphor, Short Stories, Metamorphosis

It is not an exaggeration to suggest that we are dealing with some kind of Kafkian conundrum, for his writings have not ceased to trouble scholars and readers since the publication of the first edition of *Der Prozess* in 1925. The notion of “a permanent *déjà vu*” (Adorno 1997, 245) still seems apt as the nature of the peculiarity of Franz Kafka's prose and strangeness of his narrative world constantly escape unambiguous interpretation. Kafka's narrative world has been already described as “uncanny” (Masschelein 2011, 63), a world of a premythical character (Benjamin 2007, 117), or a “de-ranged cosmos” (Adorno 1997, 249); while his narrative strategy has been

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defined, amongst others, as “the intimacy of distress” (Blanchot 1989, 83), an ambush staged with each written word (Bataille 1987, 5), a paradoxical act of constant self-accusation (Agamben 2011, 20–36) and a “diabolical pact” (Deleuze, Guattari 2008, 29). Still, what seems the most problematic is the use and function of metaphor in his prose. Is it the case that Kafka completely destroys metaphor (Benjamin 2007, 111–140) or detaches it from any reference to achieve utter incomprehensibility (Sokel 2002, 82–101)? Or is it perhaps that Kafkian prose plainly escapes categories such as metaphor and proper meaning (Sussmann 2002, 123–148)?

The problem of metaphor (and its disruption) seems even more intriguing in Kafkian animal stories. Animals are certainly one of the main themes of the short stories Kafka wrote, although it is possible to distinguish different animal figures in Kafka’s works—figures which are either voiceless or anthropomorphized—and I claim that Kafka tries to go beyond the metaphor of animality in the sense that the animal is no longer a mere point of reference but a constantly present undertone, an underlying possibility of transformation. The aim of Kafkian linguistic strategy is to create a continuum of beings and disturb the distinction between the animal and the human, i.e. an animalized human and a humanized animal. I argue that Kafka achieves this effect by the means of metaphor, which is often used as a broken trope: a metaphor that is deterritorialized—to recall Gilles Deleuze’s notion—and inevitably leads to metamorphosis. Kafkian literature proposes a flight or a mirage of a flight from the human-animal categorization. It offers a smooth transition between what is distant and close, what is strange and familiar. The hypothesis is that Kafkian metaphor exceeds metaphor itself; it is a possibility of becoming, derived from the potentiality of language.

Franz Kafka and Gilles Deleuze both seem to have a problem with pure metaphor, metaphor based on resemblance and treated like an analogy. I bring up Deleuze’s view on metaphor and metamorphosis in order to prove that one cannot radically dismiss the use of metaphorical language in Kafka’s case as Deleuze and Guattari attempt to do in *Kafka. Toward A Minor Literature*. I will begin my deliberation on the animal metaphor in Kafkian prose with a presentation of the Deleuzian critique of metaphor. Subsequently, I will propose the notion of the machinic metaphor and analyze its role in Kafka’s animal stories in order to prove that metaphors do appear in Kafka’s works but that they are broken, dysfunctional metaphors: more like *metaphormosis* rather than a metaphor itself.

Metaphor and Metamorphosis: the Deleuzian Stance

As I have already suggested, Deleuze regards metaphor as primarily disadvantageous and oppressive. This hostility toward metaphor has at least three possible explanations: the first one derives from a critique of the very idea of representation; the second one is a consequence of Deleuze's emphasis on the performative character of language; and the third one is the result of his theory of "metaphysics in motion" (Deleuze 1994, 8).

The first argument of Deleuze's criticism of metaphor, namely his objection against representation, is linked to his ontological stance. The author of *Difference and Repetition* claims that representation favors the actual and compromises the virtual aspect of reality. Thus, Deleuze severely castigates representation and contrasts it with the creation of concepts. For Deleuze and his collaborator in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Félix Guattari, "the plane of consistency is the abolition of all metaphor" (Deleuze, Guattari 1987, 69). According to Deleuze and Guattari, everything is enfolded by the plane of immanence, everything is already given within a flat plane of immanent life which continually reconfigures its elements. In this very process the authors of *A Thousand Plateaus* see the source of unlimited creation and the possibility of a real change. Conversely, the notions that transcend the sphere of life and bodies hamper the creative process by introducing a hierarchy—"micro-Oedipuses, microformations of power, microfascisms" (Deleuze, Guattari 1987, 205)—and thus petrifying the existing configuration. What results from the introduction of the concept of the plane of immanence is a rebuttal of all transcendent notions, including representation and metaphor in its indirect form.

Deleuze rejects the concept of literary representation criticizing it for being the repetition of the same, a reproduction of the tyranny of the given. What interests him is literature that refutes mimetic representation for the sake of its own autonomous power of creation. Only when words cease to represent objects and instead become objects themselves, only then are they prone to transformations and modifications. However, the binary opposition of the Saussurean linguistic system with a particular emphasis on the oppressiveness of the signifier makes language immune to variations. Deleuze and Guattari describe the signifier as holding tyrannical power *via* the transcendental distance of the signifier that imposes its own law on every process of meaning. Contrarily to the unrestricted and unpredictable work of the broken literary machine, the despotic signifier—a sign that is

deterritorialized in a letter and must be read and read again—imposes a necessity of univocal meaning, a terror of renewed interpretation. Thus, the authors of *A Thousand Plateaus* return to the pre-Saussurean conception of territorial sign. They resist the Saussurean claim that the domain of objects is alienated from the domain of language—and that our language does not reach the sphere of bodies, and what follows, the sphere of life. With the critique of metaphor in which it is treated as a trope that requires interpretation and thus imposes upon language the tyranny of the signifier, Deleuze repudiates the dominance of the Saussurean signifying regime (Deleuze 1987, 14).

The second reason for Deleuze's objection against metaphor is his conception of language, which is inspired by Austin's theory of the performative function of utterances. On its basis, a direct link between language and reality is created, and since the illocutionary force of words enables them to freely reconfigure reality, each enunciation starts bearing a revolutionary potential. Drawing from Austin's theory, Deleuze proposes intervention instead of accurate representation. He opts for experimentation and construction, which is particularly noticeable in the creative aspect of Deleuzian philosophy. Conversely, metaphor as a form of analogy based on representation fiercely resists creation. According to Deleuze, metaphor derives from the imaginary entity of resemblance that statically links two concepts together in a presupposed and imposed relationship. In this sense, metaphor defies metamorphosis.¹ Metaphor stabilizes the linguistic system by retaining the distance between two elements, while metamorphosis completely disrupts this relationship, indicating the hidden potentiality of change. Each thing could become anything else, for metamorphosis operates within the rhizomatic structure. Metamorphosis disrupts structural hierarchy, while metaphor delineates ideally parallel planes, implying similarities but also the inadequacy of comparisons² (Deleuze, Guattari 2008, 41).

¹ Yet, in his early work, *Proust and Signs*, Deleuze does not sharply contrast metaphor with metamorphosis, when he states that "metaphor is essentially metamorphosis" (Deleuze 2000, 48).

² The example that quite clearly shows the difference between a metaphor and metamorphosis can be found in the 1919 Kafkaian story. Kafka's machinery from "In the Penal Colony" functions at the same time as a judge and an executioner when it inscribes verdicts on the bodies of convicts. Thus, the said machinery abolishes the distance between the content of the sentence and its expression. It is not the sentence's meaning that seems to matter in this case but the very act of execution, the undeniable change that the machine introduces to the current state of affairs. "In the Penal Colony" is perhaps the most vivid example of Kafkaian fascination with the domain of law which treats words not as a means of description of the reality (metaphorically) but as an instrument of its trans-

The third reason is directly related to the Deleuzian inclination toward “intellectually mobile concepts” (Deleuze 1995, 122).³ It derives from the philosophical attempt (shared by Nietzsche and Kierkegaard) “to put metaphysics in motion” (Deleuze 1994, 8). Mobile concepts are more suitable for expressing a Deleuzian world of events, as Deleuze conceptualizes reality in terms of the modulation of material fluxes. The domain of liberated and chaotic creation is a domain of pure life, which is “a complex relation between differential velocities” (Deleuze 1988, 123), an unstrained play of creative and destructive forces. The Deleuzian vitalistic conception of reality is naturally linked to the notion of becoming, which is understood as a dynamic motion, a flux of life, a passage from one sensation to another, from one quality to another, increasing or decreasing in power (Deleuze 2001, 27). Hence, the fundamental aim of philosophy is to investigate the dynamics of changing forms: metamorphosis, transmutation, transformation and change. The reason why Deleuze fiercely criticizes representation acknowledging its failure, is that thought is unable to capture such phenomena when oppressed by the tyranny of representation. For the authors of *A Thousand Plateaus*, representation and imitation always bear a mark of territoriality, while deterritorialization draws a line of becoming (Deleuze, Guattari 2008, 14). Deterritorialization results in being constantly elsewhere, following an abstractive line of flight. The movement of deterritorialization leads beyond the rigors of actual form. It introduces limitless motion into a structure, putting it into a permanent state of disequilibrium, making it pulsate, vibrate and whirl.

Machinic Metaphor and Machine-people

Still, it seems possible to think and construct a different concept of metaphor: related to metamorphosis rather than analogy, not based on representation but mobile, machinic and deterritorialized. Before I examine the potentialities of deterritorialized metaphor that could apply to Kafka’s writing, let me begin with a concept intimately linked to deterritorialization, namely the concept of the machine (with a particular emphasis on the literary machine).

formation (metamorphically). In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* Deleuze and Guattari use this story to further emphasize the immanent character of the creative process in which the author is not a typist or even the machine’s mechanic but rather “the living material with which it deals” (Deleuze, Guattari 2008, 56).

³ The notion of “mobility of philosophical concepts” is interestingly developed further by Paul Patton (2010).

While introducing the concept of the literary machine, Deleuze focuses on the very act of the production of signs. When literature is examined from the viewpoint of its machinery, the question changes and the problem reformulates. Instead of wondering “what does it mean?” one asks, “how does it function?”. The machines of writing are treated as an experiment on actuality, an apparatus capable of producing deterritorialization, a disruption in the order of reality. The machine launches a deterritorializing movement of a territorial assemblage. The “line of flight”, namely the process of a machine entering into movement, leads to a new territory (Deleuze, Guattari 1987, 510–514). A machine is being defined exactly by what it escapes, by a line of flight followed by material fluxes in a perpetual variation.

An intrinsic trait for a Deleuzian machine is its being broken, deteriorated. It produces an imbalance, a distortion, or, more precisely, a deterritorialization. Not only is a machine an element of destabilization in a structure, but it also proposes a radically different form of organization. An open system constructed by machines has permanent imbalance for a governing principle. “The line of escape is part of the machine,” claim the authors of *Kafka* (Deleuze, Guattari 2008, 7). And dysfunction is its critical element. Machines break and interrupt, they work through malfunctioning. The fundamental characteristic of a working machine is constant variation; the opening of the space of pure functioning, the productive character of machines. It is no longer a reproduction based on an imitation, the mark of territoriality, but a process of creative production based on the movement of deterritorialization resulting in being constantly elsewhere, escaping on a line of flight.

The aforementioned concept of metaphor that I want to propose is that of machinic metaphor understood as a broken trope that undergoes a process of deterritorialization. What would define this kind of corrupted metaphor is its line of escape. The deterritorialized metaphor no longer refers to the stable structures of meaning, but escapes territoriality and hence the domain of the signifier. It is not purely representational but creative: it enters the path of the becoming-metamorphosis and thus bears a revolutionary potential, experimenting with words and matter.

What I would suggest then is to try and read Kafka’s writing through the work of machinic, deterritorialized⁴ metaphors, which blur the distinction between literal and metaphorical meaning, between metaphor and

⁴ For Henry Sussman (2010, 238–239), the author of *Metamorphosis* is “the poet and prophet of deterritorialization”. Sussman engages in the analysis of the concept of deterritorialization in relation to Kafka’s works, although he understands the term broadly. What seems to mainly interest Sussman is the socio-political aspect of Kafkian works.

metamorphosis. In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari forcefully assert that metaphors are absent in Kafka's works, since Kafka replaces metaphors with metamorphoses:

There is no longer any proper sense or figurative sense, but only a distribution of states that is part of the range of the word. The thing and other things are no longer anything but intensities overrun by deterritorialized sound or words that are following their line of escape (Deleuze, Guattari 2008, 22).

Deleuze seems to perceive Kafka through the prism of his own criticism of metaphor. According to the author of *The Logic of Sense*, Kafka adopts the strategy of dismantling metaphor in order to dispose of designation and thus escape the oppressive force of the signifier. New "distribution of states", a transformation of reality and metamorphosis, become possible without figurative meaning and signification. With metamorphosis, understood by Deleuze as a line of flight, Kafka introduces into his narrative both dynamics and deterritorialization, which converts meaning into intensities.

At the heart of this paper is a particular mode of metamorphosis, namely human-animal metamorphoses, "the becoming-human of the animal and the becoming-animal of the human", as Deleuze and Guattari describe it in *Kafka* (Deleuze, Guattari 2008, 35). It is a variation on the deterritorialization of the human and the reterritorialization of the animal. Metamorphosis comprises and conceptually deforms the human-animal relationship, introducing it into a sphere of vibration and modulation: the animal becomes human and the human becomes an animal. What plays a key role here is that the animal is not a metaphor, it is a metamorphosis, a line of escape, and:

[a] writer isn't a writer-man; he is a machine-man, and an experimental man (who thereby ceases to be a man in order to become an ape or a beetle, or a dog, or a mouse, a becoming-animal, a becoming-inhuman, since it is actually through voice and through sound and through a style that one becomes an animal, and certainly through the force of sobriety) (Deleuze, Guattari 2008, 7).

For Deleuze, writing has a fundamentally machinic character. As a result of becoming a writing-machine, a writer puts their literary works in motion. In this framework it is not surprising that the works of Kafka, who is a "bachelor machine," are highly privileged by Deleuze and Guattari. The writing-machine is a force behind metamorphosis, a force of transformation and becoming, a line of escape. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, its authors state that "writing is a becoming, writing is traversed by strange becomings that are not becomings-writer, but becomings-rat, becomings-insect, becomings-wolf" (Deleuze, Guattari 1987, 265). And writing as the becoming-animal leads to the figure of the Kafka-a-vampire.

Deleuze and Guattari call the author of *The Castle* “Dracula the vegetarian, the hunger artist” (Deleuze, Guattari 2008, 29). They observe that there is “a vampirism in the letters, a vampirism that is specifically epistolary” (Deleuze, Guattari 2008, 29), as Kafkian letters are sent almost compulsively to friends, lovers and acquaintances. It provokes the authors of *Kafka* to compare the flux of letters with the flux of blood and the necessity to write with the necessity to live. The vampiric element in Kafka’s letters forms an intriguing example of the tight connection between life and literary creation. It becomes even more intriguing when one notices that the figure of the vampire, that they so eagerly recall, is not a figure that represents life but death; the infinity of death. Thus, they argue, Kafka the writer becomes Kafka the vampire—the missing link between life and death, between animals and humans. The vampiric author operates with a language of non-discernibility, of constant and necessary transformation from animality into humanity.

Becoming-kavka

The unanswered question concerning Kafka and all his animal stories is as follows: why the metamorphosis of a human becoming an animal and an animal becoming a human is so easy that almost unnoticeable? I claim that the transition between the human and animal is only possible by the power of the machinic metaphor—neither metaphor nor metamorphosis—which blurs the difference between metaphoric and literal meaning. Since the machinic metaphor rejects the power of the signifier, following the animal line of flight, metaphor as analogy ceases to exist. Machinic metaphor, then, is an experimental and mobile concept; an element of potentiality and change, which introduces dynamics into the text through the movement of becoming: becoming-animal and becoming-human.

Let me now concentrate on the mode in which the machinic metaphor functions in Kafkian animal stories. The animal theme returns in Kafka’s short stories so frequently that Deleuze describes this figure of becoming-animal as one of Kafka’s several lines of flight. An animal in Kafka’s stories may only be seen as a metaphor but all Kafkian metaphors eventually become literality and all what is literal still appears to escape unambiguity.⁵

⁵ In my understanding of literality, I follow Deleuze and Guattari in their remark from *A Thousand Plateaus* in which they equate speaking literally with “living literally,” referring to life in its various aspects: molar and molecular, political and biological (Deleuze, Guattari 1987, 201).

Kafka's characters, both human and animal, avoid classification. More than a human being or an animal, they resemble all those non-existent beings that Kafkian stories are full of: Odradek, Kittenlamb or a man cut out from yellow tissue paper, all in-betweens. There seems to be an inner relation between all elements of Kafka's world. A human being can become an animal, and an animal can become a lawyer—everything is connected by the possibility of an unlimited process of the metaphor's creation. The mere fact of having a name results in a special form of existence: being always open to *metaphormosis*, becoming animal, becoming other.

Yet, the enunciation that enables the occurrence of metaphor is disturbed. Kafka notes in his *Diaries* that “[e]very word, twisted in the hands of spirits [...] becomes a spear turned against a speaker” (Kafka 1976, 423). The author, like the animal characters, is almost voiceless. For both, Deleuze and Kafka, writing is a struggle for a new mode of enunciation. Kafka seems to constantly transform into an animal, a *kavka*—Czech for “jackdaw”—as if his name was a form of vocation to animality. “A screeching of jackdaws is always in our ears”, writes Kafka in ‘An Old Manuscript’ (2005, 416). Jackdaw and bird metaphors frequently appear in his writings (e.g. Kafka 2006, 32) suggesting the considerable importance of this particular animal figure. This homonymous resemblance between his family name and the name of a little grey-black bird launches the process of becoming-*kavka*.

Kafka emphasizes a certain similarity between himself and an animal, an uncanny resemblance to a bird, a cockroach or a crossbreed. There are at least a few intriguing animal figures of Kafka: Kafka the city sparrow (Kafka 1954, 54); Kafka the whimpering cat (Kafka 1976, 237), wordless but not voiceless; and Kafka the fox, conscious of his flesh cut open:

I lay on the ground by a wall, writing in pain, trying to burrow into the damp earth. The huntsman stood beside me and lightly pressed one foot into the small of my back. “A splendid beast,” he said to the beater, who was cutting open my collar and coat in order to feel my flesh. Already tired of me and eager for fresh action, the hounds were running senselessly against the wall, the coach came and bound hand and foot, I was flung in beside the gentleman, over the back seat, so that my head and arms hung down outside the carriage. The journey passed swiftly and smoothly; perishing of thirst, with open mouth, I breathed in the high-whirling dust, and now and then felt the gentleman's delighted touch on my calves (Kafka 1954, 109).

What seems highly intriguing in this passage from *The Blue Octavo Notebooks* is that it links animality with writing, and writing with pain. Kafka becomes a slain fox here; there is no “as a fox,” when in order to write—

to unfold the narration—the writer is cut open by the cold blaze of a knife.⁶ “Writing in pain” culminates in being cleaved: the knife is a necessary element of this process and so is the flesh. The becoming-animal, becoming-fox, has creative potential and launches the literary machine. A writer remains an assemblage of tool and material: the machine and the body from *In the Penal Colony* or the knife and the animal flesh from *The Blue Octavo Notebook*. The animal is castigated inside of Kafka to the same extent as Kafka himself is an animal within.

The possibility of metamorphosis—for a human to turn into an animal and for an animal to become a human—seems to be crucial for understanding almost all of Kafka’s animal stories. Each of the Kafkian metamorphoses occur as the result of the use of metaphor, which eventually go beyond figurative language and blur the distinction between what is metaphorical and what is proper. The choice of certain metaphors seems to be necessarily significant as, in Kafka’s case, each metaphor enters the domain of literalness and introduces a new configuration of relations. Anything can easily become anything else. Metaphor veils and unveils the distance between humans and animals, the animal understood as the other but the other within me, close and distant at the same time. As in ‘An Old Manuscript,’ a short story by Kafka, where “nomads from the North” are described as the absolute foreigners deprived of language and thus they rather resemble animals than human beings (Kafka 2005, 416).

Yet the Kafkian animal is not mute. It is a being that exists within language but in the sphere of indiscernibility. The muteness of animals only appears as a form of resistance to communication, as for example, in the case of Odradek, which although being able to conduct a conversation often “stays mute for a long time, as wooden as his appearance” (Kafka 2005, 428). Animal language is a language of “mute traces,” that is a language without any words; a sound that escapes interpretation, highly ambiguous as the incomprehensible, even meaningless screeching of jackdaws, or the uncanny laughter of Odradek. The absence of language—or rather the deprivation of language—is a condition of both, the animal and Kafka. And this similarity places him closer to a chimera, a heterogenous being, which belongs neither to humans nor animals.

⁶ Kafka is fascinated with knife and spears, cutting and stabbing, frequently mentioning it in the context of literary creation (Kafka 1976, 70, 101, 221, 342).

Ambiguity

The universe of Kafka's zoology contains both existing and imaginary creatures. And perhaps, the most interesting of them all are those which do not exist: a cat-lamb from Kafka's 'Crossbreed' or Odradek from 'The Cares of Family Man.' Voiceless or almost voiceless, yet completely understandable in their longing for non-existence. Kafka's menagerie consists of animal-human or human-animal figures and other in-betweens. In 'Crossbreed' the narrator and Kittenlamb forms one mechanism, that is neither entirely animal nor human. What is important in the case of Kittenlamb is confusion, an intermixture of two elements, which results in it being neither (Kafka 2005, 426). Another interesting example is Hunter Gracchus, a character stuck between life and death, and what is even more intriguing someone, who eventually transforms into a butterfly. Others include a horse which becomes a lawyer, an investigating dog, an "old dung beetle," a singing mice. Kafka seems to be concerned mostly with chimeras, the heterogeneous multiplicity of the living, as is for instance with said Kittenlamb: more than one animal in one body; or Gregor Samsa: more than one being in one body. Ambiguity remains a crucial trait of Kafkaian prose.

The problem of the ambiguity of both meanings and beings appears particularly in Kafka's early work 'Description of a Struggle,' where he explores the conundrums of the name-thing relationship. The dissonance between a thing and a name is the main thread of this story. One of its characters, Supplicant, cries: "Thank God, moon, you are no longer moon, but perhaps it's negligent of me to go on calling you so-called moon, moon. Why do your spirits fall when I call you 'forgotten paper lantern of a strange color?'" (Kafka 2005, 41). Names seem to scamper and fail to reach their aim. The characters strive to impose random names on things they encounter, struggling with resistant lingual matter. And not only the characters but also the narrator notices the perversion of the name-thing relationship, the deteriorated mechanism of language. When narration stutters: "But no, it isn't like that", and eventually fails, the whole story is put in question (Kafka 2005, 46).

Another passage from 'Description of a Struggle,' which concerns a distortion of language and the resistance of non-lingual reality, calls it "a sea-sickness on land, a kind of leprosy": an incurable disease of writers (Kafka 2005, 33). Paradoxically, it is the sickness of language that stimulates writing. The very same linguistic dysfunction, which distorts the name-thing relation, launches the writing-machine and begins the process of deterritorialization. A word deterritorializes itself in another word.

The acquaintance from 'Description of a Struggle' is a character cut out from yellow tissue paper, rusting in the wind. The narrator of the story points out to him: "The entire length of you is cut out of tissue paper, yellow tissue paper, like a silhouette, and when you walk one ought to hear you rustle" (Kafka 2005, 37). Without a name, he seems more like a *homunculus* or a kind of semi-existing being, than a human being. He transforms into a horse later in the story, though he still remains an ambiguous creature, neither human nor animal, neither substantial nor unreal. There is no literalness in this metamorphosis, there is no "like" or "as", either. The narration, dealing with a crisis of its own matter, defers the final decision: the acquaintance becomes a companion-horse in the very moment, in which the other character decides to mount him, and he stops being a horse when is no longer needed. The metaphor retracts itself; the metamorphosis reverses its result. Deterritorialized metaphor introduces an oscillating movement into the narration, the movement to and fro, back and forth.

The Kafkian Machinic Metaphor

In Kafka's world, there is a continuity between an animal and a human being. The transition between humans and animals occurs by the power of language, and particularly, by the machinic metaphor. Kafka's metaphor is a flight from metaphor; it is a deterritorialized metaphor, a metaphor rich in potential; a metaphor that directly transforms itself into metamorphosis. Becoming-animal, a form of *metaphormosis*, marks the Kafkian line of flight. The machinic metaphor works by comprising three kinds of elements: becoming, dislocation, and motion.

The first one is becoming. I have already mentioned the process of Kafka's own "becoming-*kavka*". It seems that in his works there is frequently no clear distinction between the human and the animal. In such a way the process of becoming is intimately connected to ambiguity. The animal exists within the human, so that one morning one could effortlessly wake up as "a gigantic insect" or observe the becoming-dogs of children (Kafka 1976, 280–287). It is a constantly present undertone, similarly to Gregor Samsa's voice which has a "horrible twittering squeak behind it like a undertone" (Kafka 2005, 91). Whether an animal is an undertone of a human or a disguise, in either case this ambiguity is not resolved but in fact enhanced. I return to the Kafkian 'Description of a Struggle' once more for an interesting passage on Parisian dandies:

it might happen that two carriages stop on a crowded boulevard of a distinguished neighborhood. Serious-looking menservants open the doors. Eight elegant Siberian wolfhounds come prancing out and jump barking across the boulevard. And it's said that they are young Parisian dandies in disguise (Kafka 2005, 43).

Is it possible to decide who is alighting the carriage? Could one be certain whether it is a pack of dogs or group of Parisians? Their disguise helps to blur the distinction between one and another, provoking certain perplexity and eventually indecisiveness on the phenomenon of humans becoming dogs or dogs becoming humans.

I will proceed to the second element. Kafka frequently engages in telling a story of dislocation, of men and animals disconnected from any territory. He himself is deprived of a community, or of a pack, like the dog from 'Investigation of a Dog,' or the heroine of 'Josephine the Singer'. The phenomenon of dislocation seems to be intimately linked to animal characters, as in 'The Old Manuscript,' in which the disturbance of space is the effect of the arrival of nomads. Nomads begin the process of deterritorialization of the old structures of the capitol. And thus, an animal metaphor leads to a metamorphosis, into a complete transformation of space that is no longer neither organized nor controlled, when "a horseman and his horse are lying side by side, both of them gnawing at the same joint, one at either end" (Kafka 2005, 417). Space is of utmost importance to Kafka's writing and it seems that the author of 'The Burrow' perceives literature as a particular form of architecture. This could be seen in his prose and spotted in his remarks concerning the process of writing; when, for example, he operates with the notion of "cellar of the structure" while speaking of certain literary themes (Kafka 1976, 150). Writing then is an endeavor similar to constructing an architectural edifice. The building material is faulty, however, and the whole construction sways in the wind (Kafka 2005, 333). The Kafkian predilection for defective architecture and dislocation remains one of the peculiarities of his writing. He engages in the stories of corridors, mazes and burrows. What seems to interest him the most is this moment of maladjustment of movement and space, a certain dissonance between those two aspects and its various combinations: for instance, when movement and space diverge from each other and it is impossible for A. to meet B. in H. (Kafka 2005, 429-430).

Motion consists the third element of the machinic metaphor. Kafkian stories are full of motion expressed by their narration, whether it is the swing in 'Children on a Country Road,' the trapeze and the shaky architecture in 'First Sorrow', or the chaotic movements of mouse folk from

'Josephine the Singer.' In 'The Giant Mole,' the eponymous animal, though absent, becomes a hidden mechanism that stirs the narration, putting the story into motion. An animal, a *kavka* for example, remains a creative force behind the writing, and as Deleuze and Guattari note in *What Is Philosophy?:* "art is continually haunted by the animal. Kafka's art is the most profound meditation on the territory and the house, the burrow" (Deleuze, Guattari 1994, 184). The authors of *Kafka* assert that "to become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape in all its positivity" (Deleuze, Guattari 2008,13). The animal is linked to territoriality and immediately launches the process of deterritorialization. The animal is a movement, even if still; it is a multiplicity, even if alone. The metaphor results exactly from this motion, this transposition (*meta-pherein*).⁷

The fourth element is multiplicity and particularly an animal as multiplicity, whether it is a dog pack in 'Investigation of a Dog' and 'Jackals and Arabs,' or the faceless crowd of prematurely old children and childish grown-ups in 'Josephine' (Kafka 2005, 368–369). In his writings, Kafka favors multiplicities, doublings, variations and possibilities. What remains the key category of Kafkian prose is "a mishap," which causes the terrible state of Hunter Gracchus, the transformation of Gregor Samsa and numerous other unfortunate events. This constant variation and multiplication remains a mode of continuous metamorphosis in Kafka's narrative world.⁸ Kafka follows the path of animal escape with his fondness of potential and possibilities, his obsession with variants and doublings: the two acquaintances from 'Description of Struggle,' the dual nature of Kittenlamb, Gregor Samsa the "giant insect" as a variation on Gregor Samsa the salesman, and Franz Kafka himself, who is at once Amsel, the Jewish son of Hermann Kafka and *kavka*, the bird, always in flight.

Kafka is a chronicler of dislocation and transposition. He is a writer of error, mistake and mishap, erroneous placement, mis-diagnosis and misconception. Kafka is a writer of misguided, deterritorialized movement; a writer of cages, corridors and burrows, and, most of all, of escapes. To some extent, his writing resembles Odradek, who is made thoroughly from "old broken-off bits of thread, knotted and tangled together, of the most varied sorts and colors" (Kafka 2005, 428). And though "the whole thing

⁷ That is why metaphor itself precedes the very concept of metaphor (See: Derrida 1974, 18).

⁸ Hence, it is rather the opposite to what Sussman observes, when he writes that "Kafkian metamorphosis, then, in its widest sense, pursues the transmogrification of circumstance, life, existence, futurity, and necessity in and out of writing" (Sussmann 2002, 138).

looks senseless enough, but in its own way [it's] perfectly finished. In any case, closer scrutiny is impossible, since Odradek is extraordinarily nimble and can never be laid hold of' (Kafka 2005, 428). Kafkian writing is similarly rhizomatic, multiplex and mobile — the work of machinic metaphoric creation.

The proposition to look at Kafkian animal stories through the prism of machinic metaphors rather than mere metamorphoses seems to have a few advantages. Firstly, this proposition saves the concept of metaphor with the claim that Kafka indeed uses metaphors but as broken tropes. By deploying such a strategy, he challenges literary language and introduces subtleties into the relationship between language and reality. When closely analyzed, the Kafkian world reveals itself as neither a world of parallel planes between words and bodies nor an entirely flat world in which words simply amount to bodily configurations. The introduction of the machinic metaphor, the third option after metaphor and metamorphosis, underlines the plasticity of the word-thing relation. It excludes transcendence but preserves the difference between words and bodies, stretching or shrinking the distance between them. Secondly, contrarily to metamorphosis which seems to imply that it has a beginning and an end, machinic metaphor, when once launched, acts ceaselessly. Thirdly, the concept of the machinic metaphor enables thinking about literature in an immanent manner which does not reduce it to the interpretative process and thus frees creation from the hegemony of meaning. The emphasis on broken tropes opens literature up to unexpectedness and stresses its potential to launch a process of change within the realm of language as well as within reality itself. Moreover, the immanent approach to Kafkian animal stories underlines the multiplicity and density of connections between the animal and the human. In this rhizomatic structure each change has its effect on the whole. The symbiotic existence of the human-animal community heavily influences the possibility of artistic creation. The author of "The Metamorphosis" constantly disturbs the distinction between the animal and the human, aiming at the sphere of unambiguity; it is in his becoming-*kavka* that Kafka fully exercises the creative power of language.

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Markus Kohl*

Kafka on the Loss of Purpose and the Illusion of Freedom

Abstract

I argue that Kafka's writings express the idea that our sense of freedom is deceptive. It is deceptive because we cannot discern any proper purpose or destination that would allow us to make truly meaningful choices. Kafka's thought here relates to the existentialist view of Kierkegaard, but it radicalizes that view by depriving it of its teleological dimension.

Keywords

Franz Kafka, Søren Kierkegaard, Freedom, Meaning

Introduction

This paper discusses Kafka's treatment of human purpose and freedom. My main thesis is that, even though one can find in Kafka a quasi-existentialist emphasis on our freedom to shape our own destiny via self-conscious reflection, a further recurring theme in his writing is that we cannot discern any finality or purpose that would render our free choices meaningful. As a result, our sense that we are genuinely free is an illusion. Likewise, our capacity for self-conscious reflection is not something that privileges us over the animal condition. Rather, Kafka portrays this capacity as a burden of which modern individuals seek to relieve themselves with distractions that help eclipse their loss of orientation and their resulting sense of self-disgust and suffering. In section 1, I consider Kafka's remarks concerning our loss of a true purpose. In section 2, I trace some of the implications of that loss for our (lack of true) freedom.

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As a philosophical foil for my discussion of Kafka, I will frequently refer to the views of “the first existentialist” Kierkegaard.¹ This is fitting because Kafka’s later aphorisms are influenced by his reading of Kierkegaard, and because it is (as I shall argue) illuminating to contrast Kafka’s view that our freedom and self-consciousness lacks a meaningful direction with Kierkegaard’s religious teleology. However, I must emphasize right away that a detailed consideration of Kierkegaard’s philosophy in its own right or of the relation between Kafka and Kierkegaard is impossible in such a short essay.² Consequently, I will consider only some basic key ideas in Kierkegaard insofar as they relate to Kafka’s philosophical thoughts.

I

Kafka is not a philosopher in the narrow sense of that term: he does not argue that some conclusion follows logically from certain premises, and he does not construct a system of abstract principles. But some of Kafka’s writings fit into one traditional philosophical genre, namely the genre of aphorisms whose practitioners include Pascal and Nietzsche. Max Brod published some of these aphorisms in 1931 under the title, “Reflections on Sin, Suffering, Hope and the True Path” (Stach 2014, 255).³ In these reflections Kafka is grappling with fundamental ethical and religious issues, no doubt under the influence of recent catastrophic events in his personal life.⁴ He told Brod that in these aphorisms he tries to gain clarity concerning “the last things” (“Über die letzten Dinge klar werden”) (Stach 2014, 252). One source of influence on these reflections is Kierkegaard, whose writings Kafka had studied around the time when he wrote most of his aphorisms.⁵ I want to suggest some ways in which Kafka’s reflections take up and transform Kierkegaardian themes.

Here I want to begin by considering a central Kierkegaardian idea. Kierkegaard argues that despair is the universal condition of mankind. He does not share the “customary” view according to which despair is a self-

¹ For this label, see Kaufmann 1972.

² For an extensive treatment of this relation, see Nakazama 2016.

³ Brod’s selection is reprinted in Kafka 2004c, 228–248 (this is the text I have consulted).

⁴ The majority of Kafka’s aphorisms can be dated to late 1917, when Kafka recoiled from the final break-up with Felice Bauer and from being diagnosed with tuberculosis. See Stach 2014, 240–242, 251–268.

⁵ See Stach 2014, 252, 256, 259–262; and see Nakazama 2016 for extensive discussion.

transparent mental state, a kind of mental pain of which one is necessarily aware whenever one is in that state. Rather, for Kierkegaard the qualitatively lowest kind of despair is one where we are altogether ignorant of being in despair because we keep ourselves busy with petty trivialities and secular tasks so that we can conveniently ignore questions about the overall meaning or purpose of our existence, especially in relation to our finitude.⁶ We fill up the small chamber of consciousness with impersonal routines and tasks so that our attention is constantly diverted from the crippling suffering that we harbor inside.⁷

Kafka echoes a related sentiment when he writes: "Life is a continuous distraction, which does not even allow for consciousness of what it distracts from" (2004d, 160). This aphorism captures why the distraction that we call our way of living is so uncompromisingly effective: it is a mechanism designed to numb the very consciousness of what it distracts from. By not allowing us to grasp what it seeks to conceal from us, the distractive mechanism guarantees its uninterrupted self-perpetuation. The aphorism seems to entail that Kafka himself cannot grasp what it is that life distracts from: the general truth expressed in the aphorism applies to Kafka's particular life as well, and thus Kafka, just like the rest of us, is systematically precluded from recognizing what our life is supposed to conceal from us. Since the distraction is *continuous*, every thought that we think (even the one expressed by the aphorism) is part of the distractive mechanism; thus, it is strictly impossible for us to get behind the distractive device and to grasp what it is meant to hide. If this the right way of reading the aphorism, then it contains a radicalization of the view held by Kierkegaard: for on that view, it is crucial that careful, honest self-reflection carried out "in good faith" *does* have a positive teleology, since it allows us to grasp our true purpose.⁸ By a 'true purpose' (that grounds a 'positive teleology'), I understand a purpose that gives our life a fundamental meaning and direction: it does so by justifying our suffering and (on this basis) allowing us to affirm ourselves and our lived experience on the whole, including our sense of finitude, without any need to suppress unwelcome memories, feelings, or truths (e.g. that our earthly life leads inevitably towards our death). What is essential to the consciousness of having found and realized (or being on the way towards

⁶ See Kierkegaard 1983b, 22–29, 33–35, 39–42, 42–47.

⁷ Similarly, Nietzsche diagnoses that in modern society the device of "mechanical activity," "the blessing of work," is used to divert our conscious attention away from our suffering. See Nietzsche 1993, 382–384. Kafka was an enthusiastic reader of Nietzsche too (Alt 2005, 92–94), but discussing this connection is beyond the scope of this essay.

⁸ See, for instance, Kierkegaard 1983b, 47–49.

realizing) a true purpose is the (honest, true) conviction that we are achieving (or are on the way towards achieving) something good that makes our strivings, sacrifices, pains, losses and finitude truly worthwhile. For Kierkegaard, our true purpose is, ultimately, to overcome despair (and self-alienation) by finding salvation in Christian revelation: conscious self-reflection has the definite goal of allowing us to enter into a (proper) relationship with God. By contrast, Kafka's aphorism suggests that self-reflection cannot bring us any closer to grasping our purpose (whatever that would be)—rather, it is a distractive device that only further prevents us from coming to true consciousness (whatever that would involve).

I suggest that this reveals a general pattern in Kafka's reflections: they take on board certain aspects of a Kierkegaardian view but radicalize that view by depriving it of its teleological, purposeful component. In support of this suggestion, I first want to consider Kafka's two *Mauerassel* (common woodlouse) reflections (Kafka 2004d, 160). In the first of these, a guardian is addressed with questions pertaining to his purpose ("What are you guarding? Who appointed you?") that receive no answer; the reflection concludes that the guardian is "richer than" the woodlouse watching under an old stone only in one respect: insofar as he feels self-disgust. In the following aphorism, it is said that if one were to make oneself (qua human) comprehensible to the common woodlouse by teaching it the question about the purpose of its laboring ("die Frage nach dem Zweck ihres Arbeitens"), this would be enough to extirpate their people ("das Volk der Mauerasseln"). These two reflections imply that while our reflective grasp of the question, 'what purpose are we pursuing in our endeavors?' is indeed (as Kierkegaard insists) what sets us apart from animals such as the woodlouse, this is not (as for Kierkegaard) a positive characteristic that affords us the opportunity to discover our true (for Kierkegaard, religious) destiny. Rather, it is a mere source of self-disgust. The privilege of the unreflective animal condition, the secret to its flourishing, is that it is driven by instinct and not plagued by the need to ponder a true purpose.

Here one may wonder: are we at all capable of pursuing, and thus responsible for failing to pursue, a true purpose (that gives our lives what I called a positive teleology)? Kafka is characteristically vague about this issue. He gives us an intriguing but indeterminate clue in a reflection where a speaker addresses someone (perhaps themselves) in an apparently encouraging manner: you have this task, you have precisely as many powers as are necessary for executing this task, you have a sufficient amount of free time, and you have the requisite good will (Kafka 2004d, 145–146). Then the speaker asks: "Where is the obstacle for the succeeding of the immense

task?" And the answer is: "Do not spend time looking for the obstacle, perhaps there is none." The nature of this "task" is not explained any further, but elsewhere Kafka elucidates "my task," "the most original task," which "has certainly been set already oftentimes" through the imperative *to create ground* ("Boden... schaffen"). The duty to create ground is not based on a need to catch up on missed opportunities (Kafka mentions family life, friendship, marriage, job, literature)—rather, one must create a ground so that *nothing has been missed* ("damit ich nichts versäumt habe") (Kafka 2004c, 215). Perhaps we can conceive this "ground" as a firm, foundational sense of what I called a true purpose: a conception of meaning which allows us to affirm our life in an uncompromising, cohesive manner that leaves no room for regret or the thought of missed opportunities, since everything, including our suffering and our seeming losses, makes sense (i.e. has a point and meaning) in the context of the whole (a point that vaguely calls to mind Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence).

In a related reflection, Kafka (2004c, 218) says that every human being faces two questions of faith ("Glaubensfragen"): one regarding the faithworthiness ("Glaubenswürdigkeit") of this life, the other regarding the faithworthiness of this life's destination ("Ziel"). Kafka remarks that every human being gives an immediate and firm affirmative answer to both questions, but he adds that the immediacy and firmness of the response make it uncertain whether the questions have been properly understood. Kafka obviously thinks that these questions are *not* properly understood by those who immediately and unreflectively take—perhaps under the influence of various 'distractions'—their life and its destination to be 'faithworthy:' he states that one must, first of all, work through towards one's own 'basic yes,' *Grund-Ja* ("Jedenfalls muß man sich nun zu diesem seinem eigenen Grund-Ja erst durcharbeiten"), and he intimates that we are a long way away from completing this task, before the reflection breaks off ("...denn noch weit..."). If one could, without self-deception, distraction or suppression, give an affirmative answer to the questions of whether one's life and its destination are worthy of faith, then one would be able to "create a ground" for oneself. Standing on this ground would enable one to affirm one's life as a whole in a fundamental, all-inclusive, all-redeeming sense through an uncompromising *Grund-Ja*.

Let us bracket, for the moment, further questions concerning the precise nature of "the immense task" and the "Grund-Ja" that would crown its completion. I want to consider another important aspect of Kafka's view. This aspect comes up in the above mentioned reflection which ends with the admonition that in the pursuit of one's immense task one should not look

for an obstacle where “perhaps” there is none. This reflection suggests that there is no tangible outside force that prevents individuals from pursuing their destination or from succeeding in their task. It seems as if it is entirely up to us to proceed with our task, and if we fail to do so this is entirely our own responsibility—a point that is central to Kierkegaard (1983b, 14–17). The most famous expression of this point in Kafka is the gatekeeper parable that Kafka incorporated into *The Trial* (2004a, 211–212). One crucial aspect of that inexhaustible parable is that although the gatekeeper denies the man from the country permission to enter the law, he does not strictly prevent the man from entering by exercising any kind of physical force. The gatekeeper even, mockingly, tempts the man from the country to enter the law, but not without stressing that he (the gatekeeper) is *powerful* and that there are larger and larger obstacles that await the man from the country if he enters, namely, more and more powerful gatekeepers. That is enough to deter the man from the country from entering the law: he instead “decides that it would be better to wait until he gets permission to go inside.” He waits in vain until the day he dies, when he learns that this entry to the law was destined only for him.

Now, one central difference between the gatekeeper parable and the abovementioned reflection (where one is admonished not to look for obstacles when perhaps there are none) seems to be that the latter has an encouraging, optimistic tone, which the gatekeeper parable decidedly lacks: it gives the impression that although the man from the country is in a sense free to enter the law, he is nevertheless bound (or perhaps binds himself) not to proceed. But there is reason to be suspicious about whether we can take the seemingly encouraging tone of the above reflection at face value. After all, the reflection begins by saying that it *sometimes seems as if* you have as many powers as are needed for executing your task (“Manchmal scheint es so:...”), and it ends by saying that *perhaps* there is no obstacle (“vielleicht is keines da”). Moreover, the very fact that the speaker raises the question of where the obstacle lies implies that their interlocutor (perhaps, their own self) is already looking for an obstacle rather than proceeding with their task (much like the man from the country); and the speaker’s designation of the task as an *immense* one suggests a very low likelihood of success.

The issue of whether our destination lies within our reach is also raised in the following remarkable aphorism: “There is only a [or “one”: *ein*] destination [*Ziel*], no path. What we call path is hesitation.” This may seem like a paradigmatic case of the paradoxical anti-logic that is often called

'kafkaesque.' If there is a destination, how can there be no path? However, it is also possible that Kafka intends no paradox here at all. Sure, all of our ordinary, mundane destinations or goals require a determinate path or means. But suppose that when Kafka writes, "Es gibt nur ein Ziel," he means that there is only *one* destination: in that case, he would be referring to a rather special type of end or purpose, which truly deserves the title of a final, ultimate destination. This would correspond to Kafka's notion that his aphorisms seek clarity concerning *the last things*. Perhaps all the other things that we call our goals in ordinary life are only "distractions" from that one destination or from our *true* purpose, so that we are not really pursuing *any genuine* destination that would yield a sense of completion or finality, of having arrived and needing to go no further, of having created the "ground" that allows us to affirm our life as a whole through a "Grund-Ja." It seems hard to believe that we are taking any path towards *such* a destination in our daily routines, for those routines characteristically involve the experience of reaching a certain goal (e.g. getting a fancier job in a hipper location) only to find out that we are immediately beset with a new desire for something else (e.g. getting an *even fancier* job, or moving back to the peaceful countryside). Kafka was familiar with this experience, which is made clear by a brilliant fragment where an officer at the magistrate recounts all the advantages that come with this post: little work, high salary, high standing everywhere, etc. The officer states that if he vividly imagined the situation of an officer at the magistrate, then he would inevitably have to envy that person; but he concludes that as someone who now actually *is* an officer at the magistrate he would, if he could, give all these advantages including the high standing to the bureau cat for eating (Kafka 2004c, 113–114).

If that is an accurate description of the human situation, then it looks as if all of our so-called destinations are only paths that are part of a longer path which does not really lead anywhere, which lacks the kind of finality that would bring a satisfying completion or a true purposiveness to the whole enterprise. We busy ourselves by rushing from one path to another, just so that we can avoid considering where these paths are ultimately supposed to lead. This mindset could well be interpreted as a systematic *hesitation* to consider our final destination. So, what we call paths towards our goals is really just a euphemism for our systematic hesitation to focus on what might be our one final destination properly speaking. It is worth noting that the aphorism clearly states that there *is* such a destination ("Es gibt nur ein Ziel"), even if there is no path for reaching it. It also implies that we are re-

sponsible for not pursuing that destination, since we are too much caught up in the hesitation game of exploring paths and goals that are mere distractions. However, Kafka never specifies or clarifies what this destination is supposed to be. Echoing what I suggested above, this may be because the fatal logic of his analysis of our modern predicament applies to Kafka himself: thus, if this analysis is accurate, then it follows that Kafka himself is also caught up too much in the hesitation or distraction game to grasp or pursue his (one, true) destination.

In another reflection Kafka compares our situation, viewed from a standpoint stained by our finite earthly position (“mit dem irdisch befleckten Auge gesehen”), to railroad travelers who have crashed in a long tunnel (2004d, 163). We cannot see the light indicating the beginning of the tunnel anymore. We may catch a tiny glance of a light seemingly indicating the end of the tunnel, but our glance must constantly search for that light, constantly loses track of it, and is not even certain of where the beginning and the end of the tunnel lies. Due to confusion or oversensitivity of our senses, there are monsters surrounding us, as well as a kaleidoscopic play that is experienced as either charming or tiring, depending on the mood and the wounds of the individual person. If we interpret the light indicating the end of the tunnel as a metaphor for our one real destination or true purpose, then this reflection emphasizes that while such a purpose does exist it is in a deep sense irrelevant to us since our handle on where this destination lies is so elusive and confused that we have no way (no *path*) of getting there; instead, we keep ourselves busy with charming, tiring distractions that fill the narrow chamber of our consciousness and divert our attention from the wounds and suffering that we have incurred, as well as from our failure to catch a lasting glance of a final destination that might redeem these wounds and losses.

Also relevant to these themes is a fragment that consists of a dialogue between two persons (call them A and B). A first addresses B by declaring that “it” is not a desolate wall, but rather, the sweetest life pressed together, raisin against raisin. B says they don’t believe it. A asks them to taste it. B says that their disbelief prevents them from raising their hand. A offers to put a raisin into their mouth. B says their disbelief prevents them from tasting it. A now has had enough and declares, “Sink, then!” (“Dann versinke!”), which B takes as confirmation that one *must* sink when faced with the desolateness of this wall (Kafka 2004d, 155). There are obviously different (not necessarily incompatible) ways of interpreting this dialogue, but one interpretation which is congenial to my overall line of reading focuses on the inter-

play between: (1) the seeming objective availability of an opportunity to attain relief from our suffering and to truly affirm our lived experience (as an experience of “the sweetest life”); (2) the seeming subjective incapability of seizing this opportunity. While it seems clear to A, and perhaps to the reader, that the experience of “sweetest life” is readily available to B, from B’s own lived perspective the opposite is equally obvious: for what it would take for B to share A’s experience of the sweetest life is to *believe in* that sweetest life, whereas B believes only in the desolate wall. It seems that they could only start believing in the sweetest life if they could taste it, but in order to taste it they would need the strength to believe in it first. There is, from B’s own perspective, no way out of this vicious circle. It may seem clear to A who has already tasted the sweetest life that B has all the freedom in the world to avoid sinking in view of the desolate wall, so that B is solely responsible for sinking. However, since B’s entire subjective life experience involves no taste of sweetest life but only the view of the desolate wall, sinking in that view and being unable to experience life’s sweetness seems inevitable to B.

Let me now summarize the main themes that I have expounded in this section. In the reflections I have examined, the emphasis on the opportunity to achieve a true purpose and a positive, life-affirming teleology (in the senses sketched above) is characteristically coupled with an emphasis on the subjective conviction that this opportunity is beyond our reach because we lack the means (the “path”) to seize it. Although the responsibility for not seizing that opportunity lies with the individual who is (or so it seems) free to pursue it (at least there is no obvious *obstacle* preventing them from pursuing it), for the individual themselves whose entire life experience enforces the conviction that this opportunity is beyond their reach; the failure to seize it seems inevitable. The conviction that we cannot achieve a true, life-redeeming purpose manifests itself in the failure to clearly discern what this purpose would amount to. Our sense that we do not ever catch more than a fleeting, confused glimpse of our final destination in turn gives rise to a sense of self-disgust over our situation as a creature who is stuck with a question of purposiveness that it fails to answer. Our only way to escape that painful sense of inadequacy is to fill our life with a kaleidoscopic play of charming, exhausting “distractions” that fill the narrow chamber of our consciousness.

One crucial similarity between the way in which Kafka and Kierkegaard arrive at their respective diagnosis of our human situation is that both present that diagnosis not as an impersonal conclusion that follows logically from a set of premises, but as the upshot of their deeply, irreducibly personal

experience. The crucial difference is that Kafka's experience involves the subjective conviction that we are incapable of, or have rendered ourselves incapable of, discerning or seizing the kind of final destination that is required for Kierkegaard's idea of a *teleological* suspension of the ethical. For Kierkegaard, our radical break with prevailing social norms is fully, if only subjectively, justified because it is required for the meaningful pursuit of our true individual purpose (1983a, 54–81). For Kierkegaard, a proper suspension of "the ethical" (the secular norms of human society) is not arbitrary because in such a suspension the ethical is subordinated under a higher telos, namely, the finite individual's uncompromising relation to the divine. Thus, Abraham's isolation and alienation from his human peers is compensated by the fact that he, as the "Knight of Faith," achieves an existentially decisive commitment to God. By contrast, Kafka has lost track of what his final destiny or true purpose (which might justify his suspension of prevalent social norms, such as the expectation to marry and raise a family) is supposed to be. This is, at least in part, due to his disbelief in the possibility of religious salvation: "I have not been led into life by the albeit heavily sinking hand of Christendom, like Kierkegaard..." (Kafka 2004c, 215).

As I have repeatedly stressed, Kafka does not specify in any detail how he conceives of our "one" true destination. He speaks of an "immense task" to "create ground" and to affirm our life as a whole through a fundamental, all-inclusive "Grund-Ja," but he never gives any concrete content to these intriguing but generic ideas. It is not clear whether the true destination is one and the same for every human being or (as seems suggested by his phrase that every human being must work towards *its own* basic self-affirmation, "zu *seinem eigenen* Grund-Ja") peculiar to each individual. Likewise, it is not clear whether for Kafka the one true destination must have, as in Kierkegaard, some other-worldly, religious dimension. These (and similar) unclarities are, in part, due to the abovementioned fact that Kafka is not a philosopher in the traditional sense who lays out his ideas with great precision or who traces the systematic implications of his ideas. But furthermore, I believe—though I cannot argue this point here in any detail—that Kafka also felt that nothing very specific, clear or systematic *can* be said with regard to our questions concerning "the final things." The reflections I have analyzed in this section suggest that it would be inaccurate to say that for Kafka our lives *have no* positive telos or that we *lack* a true purpose—it rather seems (though this may amount to much the same thing) that we have lost our capacity for discerning this purpose, that we are hopelessly stuck in our way of working towards a *Grund-Ja*. Since this diagnosis also

applies to Kafka, he cannot specify the true purpose with the kind of clarity that he would possess only if he did already grasp his *Grund-Ja*. It may be—though I am not sure about this—that Kafka thinks that some kind of positive religious faith would be needed to arrive at this *Grund-Ja*, and that our modern malaise is our inability to find such faith. The kind of faith or religious teleology would not need to be specifically Christian: in the abovementioned reflection where Kafka traces his failure to “create ground” to the fact that he has not “been led into life by the albeit heavily sinking hand of Christendom,” he adds that he likewise failed to catch the last tail of the flapping-away Jewish prayer coat.

Perhaps Kafka thinks that what we would need to create a meaningful ground for ourselves is not some specific religious doctrine, but some positive way of overcoming our sense of finitude (other than through merely suppressing that sense or distracting ourselves from it). He says that human beings cannot live without a lasting trust (“dauerndes Vertrauen”) that there is something indestructible inside of them. He adds that the faith in a personal God (which for Kierkegaard is our only proper way of integrating our finitude with our sense of the infinite) is but one way of expressing that both this indestructible element and our trust in it remain permanently concealed from us (Kafka 2004c, 236). This suggests that faith in a personal God *cannot* create a lasting trust in our infinitude (where such trust is, perhaps, in turn a condition for creating ground and articulating a *Grund-Ja*)—rather, such faith is but another distraction, another way of losing our grip on our true purpose. But it is unclear whether the inadequate religious faith Kafka mentions here is *any religious faith as such* or merely the pseudo-faith of those who came so late that they failed to latch onto the flapping-away prayer coat (and who flatter themselves with mere delusions of faith, as Kierkegaard’s pseudo-Christians). Likewise, it is unclear what precisely Kafka has in mind when refers to ‘something indestructible’ inside us: some kind of afterlife? Some metaphysical substance? Or just some potential to create something of lasting value, e.g. through art (a possibility I shall consider in the conclusion)? These and similar questions would need to be answered to get a clearer sense of Kafka’s positive conception of teleology. I cannot pursue this issue here any further, but I suspect that the vagueness and indeterminacy of Kafka’s positive teleology might well be intentional or (better) inevitable since they reflect an existential predicament: namely, a crippling loss of focus, clarity, and even proper words. If the true purpose Kafka envisages through the vague ideas of creating ground and working towards a *Grund-Ja* does point something indestructible beyond this life and this

world, then there can be (for the modern individual) no adequate way of putting this purpose into words, for our language is, as Kafka stresses, entirely unsuited for clearly articulating what lies beyond the sensible world (Kafka 2004c, 237).

II

In the previous section, I have argued that Kafka gives expression to our modern loss of a true purpose (or, what may amount to the same, to our modern failure to grasp such a purpose). In this section, I want to connect this issue to Kafka's conception of human freedom.

There is one striking reflection where Kafka deals, in his own characteristic way, with the idea that we have freedom of will. This reflection is so difficult that I cannot analyze it in any greater detail here, but I can present the gist of it: The reflection begins with the assertion that human beings have free will, and even in three respects. However, the first of these respects sounds more like a denial: we were once free when we wanted this life, but now we cannot reverse the direction that our life has taken, since we are no longer the same persons as those who once wanted that direction. The second respect in which we are free is that we can choose the pace (*Gangart*) and the path of this life—though if our freedom to choose how to proceed attaches to a past personality which is no longer our own, then it is not clear in what sense our pace and path is currently up to who we now are. The third respect in which we are free is very difficult to make out; it seems to revolve around the idea that we have the capacity *to let us come to ourselves* (“...sich...zu sich kommen zu lassen”) by walking a path that we can choose but (here is yet another restraint) that is also a maze (“labyrinthisch”) which spans every single aspect of our life. The reflection concludes by noting that these three respects in which we have free will really amount to one single respect, in a way that leaves no room for any will at all, neither a free nor an unfree will. So, while we initially seem to possess free will, on closer reflection the very idea of a will that would allow us to truly determine who we are and want to be in our life turns out to be elusive—at least from the lived perspective of someone pacing through the maze of life, trying to let them come to themselves and to retrieve the personality of the person who once freely chose this particular way of living. By contrast, for Kierkegaard our human freedom can, if exercised properly, lead us out of the maze of our secular distractions towards our proper “destination:” namely, towards the grace of God who offers us salvation, thereby letting us “come to ourselves” and realize our true purpose.

Although Kafka is by no means clear about it, I propose that we can fruitfully understand his notion that having a free will would involve 'letting us come to ourselves' in terms of the ideas that I sketched in the preceding section. The lack of free will (or of any will at all) is here portrayed as a pacing through the maze of life in search of a personality and direction that, though once chosen by us, is no longer truly our own. This clearly echoes the idea that we face an "immense task" to "create ground" which would allow us to articulate an honest (non-deceptive) "Grund-Ja"—namely, to affirm our live and our lived experiences as a cohesive, meaningful whole (rather than as a confusing maze of endless distractions), by finding that our constant strives including the massive suffering they occasion lead to (or constitute) something truly worthwhile. The inability to create such a ground and to find our true purpose mirrors our failure to come to ourselves and to live according to our own free will (Kafka 2004c, 212–213).⁹

I want to confirm the link between the loss of a true purpose and the loss of free will by considering some of Kafka's fictional writings. Since my space is limited, I want to focus on one story in particular which, I believe, nicely illustrates these themes: the *Report for an Academy* (Kafka 2002, 322–337; compare 2004a, 234–245).

The protagonist in this story is an ape called Red Peter. After his capturing, he has miraculously become almost-human: he can speak and reason in ways that strike us as familiar. Red Peter is giving a report to an Academy which is curious about his process of humanification. In his description of this process, Red Peter says that the first imperative he recognized was to abandon his past existence as a free ape ("free ape as I was") and to submit himself to the human yoke. During that process, "the strong wind that blew after me out of my past began to slacken; today it is only a gentle puff of air that plays around my heels" (Kafka 2002, 322). He concludes that our life as apes in our distant past is about as far removed from us as his past existence as a free ape is removed from his current humanified way of living. This is not to deny that we or he sometimes feel an inkling of that long-gone distant past: "Yet everyone on earth feels a tickling at the heels; the small chimpanzee and the great Achilles alike" Kafka 2002, 323).

⁹ I should note that Kafka never considers the precise meaning of 'free will,' e.g. whether freedom is or is not compatible with determinism. It may be that Kafka automatically assumed an incompatibilist notion, since that is the only notion at issue in his intellectual influences (e.g. Kierkegaard is an uncompromising anti-determinist). It may also be that Kafka judged these issues to be of secondary importance: what really matters is not whether we are free *from* this or that but, rather, whether we can articulate a sense of what our freedom is *for*.

(Perhaps that gentle tick around his heels was precisely what killed Achilles.) Red Peter further explains that his opportunity to return to this distant past as a free ape decreased further and further in proportion to the increase in his humanity: in his spatial metaphor, the opportunity was first a gigantic archway which shrunk and shrunk, grew narrower and narrower, until all that is left was a tiny little hole (through which the gentle puff is creeping).

Here we must notice the tight connection between the sense of freedom Red Peter had in his apish, pre-humanized way of life and the experience of a “strong wind” that he then enjoyed. It seems plausible to construe this wind as some kind of motive force, something that propels the one experiencing it to move forward by providing a sense of direction: the strong wind that “blows after” a subject thereby indicates *where* to go, and this indication is grasped by the subject through its feeling of the strong wind’s impact. Given this correlation between feeling the moving force of the strong wind and a sense of freedom, we can expect that if the strong wind slackens to a gentle puff, i.e. if the strong motive force and sense of direction wanes until it is barely noticeable, there must be a corresponding loss of the sense of freedom. This expectation will be confirmed by the contents of Red Peter’s humanized reflective self-awareness.

Red Peter states his motive for humanizing himself when he was stuck in a cage:

For the first time in my life I could see no way out; at least no direct way out; directly in front of me was the locker, board fitted close to board [...] Until then I had had so many ways out of everything, and now I had none. I was pinned down [...] I had no way out, but I had to devise one, for without it I could not live (Kafka 2002, 325–326).

And he tells us precisely what he means by *a way out* (*Ausweg*) in contrast to *freedom*:

I fear that perhaps you do not quite understand what I mean by ‘way out.’ I use the expression in its fullest and most popular sense—I deliberately do not use the word ‘freedom.’ I do not mean the spacious feeling of freedom on all sides. As an ape, perhaps, I knew that, and I have met men who yearn for it. But for my part I desired such freedom neither then nor now. In passing: may I say that all too often men are betrayed by the word freedom. And as freedom is counted among the most sublime feelings, so the corresponding deception can be also sublime. [...] No, freedom was not what I wanted. Only a way out; right or left, or in any direction; I made no other demand; even should the way out prove to be an illusion; the demand was a small one, the disappointment could be no bigger. To get out somewhere, to get out! (Kafka 2002, 326–327)

Here we can see the significance of Red Peter's initial self-characterization that he lived as a free ape. Kafka's prose rarely uses important words casually: when Red Peter referred to his past existence as a free ape, he was already anticipating a decisive contrast with his later humanized self. Red Peter explains that the feeling of freedom that he may have had as an ape is lost and cannot be retrieved in his humanified existence, just like the strong wind that once blew from his free past has slackened into the gentle puff around his heel. The sense of freedom is a "most sublime" illusion that human flatter themselves with. The ape who has a however distant memory of true, genuine freedom knows that such freedom is not to be found within a human way of living. All that remains for humans, and for the humanified ape, is *a way out* rather than freedom. If true freedom, as opposed to a way out, requires the experience of a strong wind qua motive force that allows for unhesitating progress in the wind's direction, then the human loss of feeling this wind—its slackening into a barely noticeable gentle puff around the heel, a mere intimation of what has been lost and cannot be retrieved—must go along with a loss of true freedom. This is precisely Red Peter's experience of what is involved in becoming human, in coming to (self-)consciousness.

Red Peter further explains why he did not seek to escape from his cage (on the ship where he was held after his initial capture) even though he believed that "it must have been possible" since "for an ape it must always be possible" (Kafka 2002, 328). He could have bitten through the lock of his cage, but when he thought about pursuing that route all that he could see were potential risks such as: being "caught again and put in a worse cage;" or, being killed by the other animals like the pythons: or, in the unlikely case where he would actually succeed to sneak out to the deck to leap overboard, drowning in the sea. "Desperate remedies. I did not calculate in this human way, but under the influence of my surroundings I acted as if I had been calculating" (ibidem).

Thus, under the influence of his human surroundings, Red Peter starts doing what Kafka's protagonists, like the man from the country in the gatekeeper parable, characteristically do: they calculate risks and outcomes, and thereby they persuade themselves that trying to escape from an untenable situation faces too many obstacles and is thus only a sign of desperation that has a very low likelihood of succeeding. Even supposing one succeeds on the initial path, one will have to enter another path where one shall run into another obstacle. Even supposing that one can overcome that further obstacle, the next obstacle waiting on the ensuing path is surely going to be in-

surmountable. So, one concludes, better not risk escaping the cages that hold us. It is better to arrange oneself with these cages and to look for something other than an ultimate escape: namely, for *a way out* that makes life moderately tolerable. This sad compromise is reflected in the looks of the men on the ship whom Red Peter watched day in, day out from his cage: “No, these men in themselves had no great attraction for me. Had I been devoted to the aforementioned idea of freedom; I should certainly have preferred the deep sea to the way out that suggested itself in the sad looks of these men” (Kafka 2002, 328–329). Floating in the deep sea is one of the risks or obstacles that, in Red Peter’s calculation, would eventually arise if he should try the escape route. Here he declares that this escape route, away from the influence of humanity, is the only route that would have led to freedom, even if that had also meant drowning in the deep sea. By contrast, what lies in the way of humanity is not an *escape*, not *freedom*, but only the *way out* that suggested itself to Red Peter in the sad looks of his human capturers. These sad looks in contrast with the instinctive, unreflective apish freedom can be compared to the self-disgust that alone makes the human guardian “richer” than the instinct-driven and blissfully unreflective woodlouse.

This exemplifies Kafka’s denial that the acquisition of a reflective self-consciousness affords us (as it does in Kierkegaard) a human privilege, a freedom to discover and realize true meaning and purpose. Red Peter’s report suggests that our reflective self-consciousness *submerges* our sense of freedom, because it forces us to conceive of our existence as fraught with endless risks, problems, and obstacles, so that we become first and foremost a doubting, hesitating creature who uses its heightened powers of consciousness to calculate ways of avoiding rather than facing its basic challenge (its “immense task”). Our reflective “way out” is to acquiesce to our prisons, where these include, centrally, the social expectations, norms and sanctions that seek to confine us within the bounds of what everyone does and feels. For Red Peter, this means conforming to the way of life he witnesses in his capturers, including their sad looks. Consequently, as self-conscious calculators we live with a diminished sense of opportunity and fulfillment, with an accordingly diminished sense of freedom—even though we may fool ourselves with the sublime illusion that we are truly free.

Red Peter’s induction into human society, through his first utterance of human language, occurs after he gets drunk on a bottle of schnapps. Consuming the schnapps signals his final victory over his apish nature, for as long as he was still in the grip of this nature he found the smell and the prospect of drinking schnapps so disgusting that he could not bring

himself to do it. Overcoming this disgust and drinking schnapps is thus his entrance ticket into human society. Red Peter stresses that he found no delight in imitating human beings by getting drunk; the only thing that led him to do so was the need for *a way out*. Thus, getting drunk or achieving states of consciousness that are analogous to being drunk is here regarded as the distinctively human manner of finding a way out. Towards the end Red Peter summarizes his fate as follows: "As I look back over my development and survey what I have achieved so far, I do not complain, but I am not complacent either. With my hands in my trouser pockets, my bottle of wine on the table, I half lie and half sit in my rocking chair and gaze out of the window..." (Kafka 2002, 332). That image, we can assume, is the ultimate illustration of what it means to take *the human way out*. Red Peter says that his effort towards humanification "has helped me out of my cage and opened a special way out for me, the way of humanity. There is an excellent German idiom: *sich in die Büsche schlagen* [roughly: secretly getting away by hiding in the bushes], that is what I have done [...] There was nothing else for me to do, provided always that freedom was not to be my choice" (ibidem).

So, summarizing Red Peter's stance, we get a central contrast or divide. On the one side of the divide, we have his former apish nature, a genuine non-deceptive sense of freedom, a strong wind blowing behind the apish way of living, propelling it to move forward without any *hesitation*. Then, there is imprisonment, exposure to the human way which lies at the other side of the divide. What humanity offers is not freedom, not the strong wind that properly directs the unhesitatingly forward-moving apish way of living, but only a way out where one feels, with sad eyes, at most a slackened gentle puff and tickle at the heel. What Red Peter portrays as distinctively human is, first of all, calculation, rationality, consciousness, the so-called higher intellectual faculties which make us think about risks and obstacles that lie in the way of proper escape or freedom from the social cages that confine us, and which persuade us that such an escape is too desperate and risky so that we should seek more a modest goal: the way out. The distinctively human way out is achieved through *distractions*: distractions such as getting drunk on schnapps (for the working-class men on the ship) or (in the more refined existence of humanified Red Peter) getting drunk on red wine, sitting in a rocking chair and idly gazing out of the window.

The *Report for an Academy* illustrates some of the key philosophical motives that Kafka also engages with in his (later) reflections or aphorisms. For instance, the *Report* is focused on the idea that a human way of life characteristically involves a strong sense of *hesitation* to approach our one true

destination, given the manifold obstacles and risks that we are prone to see or that we suspect would arise once we tried out such an approach. The *Report* further highlights the idea that in order to avoid questions about our true destiny or purpose we have become adept at filling our life with (“charming or tiring”) *distractions* that designate our *way out*. According to the *Report’s* protagonist, our human sense of freedom is based on an illusion, a “most sublime deception”: if such freedom once existed, it belongs to a distant past long gone. This point also comes up in the reflection which I considered at the beginning of this section, where Kafka seems to suggest that while we once had the freedom to choose our own path of life, we are now lost in a confusing maze without a genuine will of our own since we are no longer the persons that we were when we chose our path. The *Report’s* notion that true freedom can perhaps be ascribed to animals like the ape before his capturing, which are not plagued by the human mode of calculating risks and finding obstacles, is reminiscent of the point that Kafka makes in the ‘common woodlouse reflections’: the bliss of the woodlouse consists in its ignorance of questions regarding the purpose of its laboring, whereas for us the awareness of such questions is a mere source of self-disgust. That is why such awareness has to be dimmed or extinguished via “distractions” like schnapps or red wine or the idle gaze from the rocking chair. Finally, the *Report* depicts the ambiguities that figure centrally in Kafka’s reflections: e.g. the clash between (on the one hand) the idea that nothing prevents us from seizing the opportunity to escape our cages and (on the other hand) the subjective conviction, emanating from our lived experience and our resulting emotionally charged perspective on the world, that a true escape seems too desperate to yield a genuine option for us (because we will be captured again, or will be eaten by pythons, or...).

In all this, the *Report* can be seen as illustrating Kafka’s tendency to deprive the honorific ideas of freedom and self-consciousness (as he encountered them in Kierkegaard) of their dignity and their teleological dimension.¹⁰ When his protagonist Red Peter contemplates “the way of humanity,”

¹⁰ A question that I cannot address within the confines of this short essay concerns the question of how and when this tendency developed in Kafka. To be clear, my claim is *not* that Kafka’s degradation of freedom and self-consciousness is formed in response to his awareness of Kierkegaard. This degradation is a constant theme already in his early and middle fiction, whereas the serious study of Kierkegaard that influenced his philosophical aphorisms (which I considered in section 1) begins, arguably, only around 1917. It is therefore probably more appropriate to conjecture that his encounter with Kierkegaard deepened his treatment of themes that he had long been preoccupied with.

he arrives at wholly unflattering conclusions: Red Peter faintly remembers “the spacious feeling of freedom on all sides” as a relic of his animal past and diagnoses that, by contrast, “men are betrayed by the word freedom.” To engage in self-conscious reflection is to “calculate in the human way” where this involves enumerating obstacles and persuading ourselves that our attempts to truly escape the cages that hold us are only “desperate remedies” so that we must rather compromise and seek the human “way out” instead of true freedom. Thus, to the extent that we do consider ourselves as free, this is only a “sublime deception,” and while our reflective human nature indeed does set us apart from the animal condition, this is more like a curse than a blessing for us: for it burdens us with doubts and hesitations and self-imposed obstacles that are unknown to the instinctively driven, forward-moving animal. Hence, the humanized Red Peter can only bemoan the loss of the freedom that he once enjoyed in his pre-reflective animal state (“free ape as I was”).

I want to confirm these points by considering a remarkable passage from *The Castle* (Kafka 2004b, 133). Some brief contextualization must suffice. The passage occurs after the protagonist, K., has made a failed attempt to meet someone he believes to be a powerful castle official, Klamm. K. has been able to advance into a courtyard where Klamm’s carriage was waiting for Klamm, even though he has been told that this is forbidden territory for him. In that regard, K. is remarkably more dashing than, say, the man from the country. But K.’s dashing victory is empty because Klamm simply does not show up. While he is waiting in the courtyard,

[...] it seemed to K. as if [...] he was more of a free agent than ever. He could wait here, in a place usually forbidden to him, as long as he liked, and he also felt as if he had won that freedom with more effort than most people could manage to make, and no one could touch him or drive him away, why, they hardly had a right even to address him. But at the same time—and this feeling was at least as strong—he felt as if there were nothing more meaningless and more desperate than this freedom, this waiting, this invulnerability (Kafka 2004b, 132–133).

A full interpretation of this episode would need to consider (among other things) K.’s backstory, motives, and development.¹¹ But for the purposes of this essay, it is perhaps sufficient to stress the ambiguity between the idea that in a way K. is free to do anything and to go anywhere he likes, and the

¹¹ For my take on these issues, see Kohl 2006.

idea that his sense of freedom is in a deep sense merely an illusion: the only freedom that K. can ascribe to himself is a *meaningless, desperate* one because it consists entirely in waiting for someone who is not coming, in waiting for something that does not happen. That is not the genuine kind of unreflective freedom that Red Peter traces to his distant animal past, nor the freedom that Kafka says (in the reflection considered at the end of section 1) we “once” possessed to choose the life we now lead. At least part of the reason why K. has a mere pseudo-freedom, a “sublime” illusion of freedom, is that his sense of freedom is entirely detached from any proper sense of meaning or purpose that would allow K. to articulate, if only to himself, what he is really waiting or hoping for in the courtyard: what his freedom is *for*.

Conclusion

I have suggested that one can extract from Kafka’s aphorisms (or reflections) and fictional writings philosophical ideas concerning (the loss of) purpose and freedom in human life, ideas which relate to, but also transform (and radicalize), the account one finds in Kierkegaard. I want to conclude by considering two important questions about the kind of view I have attributed to Kafka here.

First, one might wonder whether *aesthetic* activity and purposes might not yield a viable candidate, in Kafka’s view, for shaping our sense of a true purpose, for articulating one’s own “Grund-Ja,” and (thereby) for giving a proper meaning and direction to our human freedom. Kafka’s (evolving) self-conception as an artist is a complex topic that I cannot adequately consider here. However, it seems clear that in the end, Kafka does not conceive his authorship as a meaningful exercise of human freedom that brings him closer to a true purpose where that would involve a fundamental affirmation of his life as a whole. This is strongly suggested by his pessimistic portrayal of artist types such as the Trapeze Artist, Josefine the Singer, or the Hunger Artist: as Stach remarks, “life passes over” these figures as precarious, superfluous and dangerous curiosities (Stach 2014, 509). When Kafka reflects (in a 1922 letter to Brod) on his role as an author, he does not portray this role as a source of meaning or self-fulfillment, and he does not portray his art as flowing from his own free will. Rather, he characterizes his experiences of creative outbursts—characteristically in the middle of sleepless, fearful nights—as involving a “dark power” that works *against* his will and that

destroys his vitality, so that “the final word in such nights is always: I could live and do not live.”¹² Kafka’s modern artistic self-image is not the self-confident awareness of a person whose “immense task” allows him to “create ground:” instead, it is an awareness of living “above a weak or not at all existent ground.”¹³ The complexity of the artistic task is too immense for our fragile human powers. Kafka does not seem to doubt his artistic talent so much as the vital powers that he would need to put this talent to proper use. “I possess a strong hammer, but I cannot use it because its shaft is glowing” (Kafka 2004d, 171). The attempt to truthfully portray the labyrinthic maze of human existence eventually leads to artistic failure that Kafka saw exemplified in his inability to complete any of his major novels, and that no doubt (partly) motivated his instruction that Brod must destroy all his remnant writings. If Kafka really conceived his writing as “a form of prayer” (ibidem), then the prayers remained unanswered, perhaps unheard, certainly unfulfilled. It is not clear to me whether, at the end of day, Kafka thought of his art as more than just another “distraction” and, if so, as one that is better or worse than other distractions like schnapps.

There is a second issue I briefly want to comment on. As I noted, both Kierkegaard and Kafka present their philosophical ideas as deeply personal reflections arising from their life experience. This invites the question of why we should think that these reflections portray a universal truth rather than some purely idiosyncratic stance. I need to limit myself to just one concluding remark here. Kierkegaard’s dictum that truth is subjective concerns the inevitably personal, engaged manner in which one can arrive at truths that existentially matter to us—he does not mean to deny that these truths have a truly universal import that addresses our shared human situation. Likewise, if Kafka’s ideas capture something about the typical situation of the modern individual—or at least of the sort of individuals who enter the stage too late for faith, too early for *creating their own ground* and for arriving at their own *Grund-Ja*—then these ideas have universal import as well. This is so despite the fact that these ideas can be grasped only from the personal experience of individuals who catch themselves perpetually hesitating, looking for obstacles when “perhaps” there are none, and who finally resign themselves to a lifestyle with their hands in their trouser pockets, their bottle of wine on the table, half lying and half sitting in their rocking

¹² Here I am drawing on Stach’s citation of a late (1922) letter to Brod (Stach 2014, 510–511).

¹³ Again I am drawing on Stach’s citation of Kafka’s 1922 letter to Brod (2014, 510).

chair, gazing out of the window or at their smartphone or TV screen: their consciousness consumed by charming, tiring distractions that help eclipse their sense of self-disgust and suffering.¹⁴

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¹⁴ Translations of Kafka's writings are my own except for the *Report for an Academy*, where I have used the translation of Tania and James Stern. For helpful discussion, I am grateful to Stephanie Basakis. For helpful written comments, I am grateful to the referees of this journal.

Matthew Wester*

Before Adolf Eichmann: A Kafkian Analysis of the ‘Banality Of Evil’¹

Abstract

Arendt’s account of Adolf Eichmann as acting only out of banal intentions remains controversial. I supplement our understanding of the “banality of evil” by demonstrating that Arendt also meant it to describe a factual social arrangement characterized by a form of false consciousness. I apply an original interpretation of Kafka’s *The Trial* to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and I show that Eichmann’s trial was “before” him in the same way as the Kafkian man from the country is “before” the Law.

Keywords

Arendt, Kafka, Banality of Evil, Eichmann, Crimes against Humanity

Introduction

Ever since Hannah Arendt published *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (henceforth, *EJ*) in the early 1960s, almost every aspect of her analysis and critique of Adolf Eichmann’s trial has been scrutinized, which has been mostly directed at the accuracy of Arendt’s description of Adolf Eichmann as embodying “the banality of evil.” Arendt’s account of Eichmann as a facilitator of state-sponsored genocide acting only out of commonplace (*viz.* banal) intentions still

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generates controversy.² In this essay, I will revisit some central aspects of Arendt's analysis of Adolf Eichmann and his trial. My goal is to uncover and discuss some important themes that have been underappreciated or neglected by readers both sympathetic and unsympathetic to Arendt.

Debate about the banality of evil has been a debate about the accuracy of Arendt's account of Adolf Eichmann, and rightly so, for she used the term to describe what she perceived to be Eichmann's lack of criminal intentions. I do, however, think that Arendt also intended to describe more than just facts about Eichmann's subjectivity. I believe that in addition to describing certain interior states of Eichmann (i.e. non-criminal intentions and motivations), Arendt hoped to draw attention to a complex (and dangerous) social situation that arose between Eichmann and those whose task it was to bring him to justice. In what follows, I will describe in detail this complex social situation and connect it to Arendt's larger discussion of the "dark times" of late modernity.

In order to bring these underappreciated elements of the banality of evil into view, I develop an original interpretation of Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, particularly the parable "Before the Law." First, I will demonstrate that to be 'before' the Law involves much more than simply waiting before a doorway; it is to be a part of a complex situation that I argue involves a form of false consciousness. Then, I apply my interpretation of "Before the Law" to Arendt's *EJ*. I argue that the actors at Eichmann's trial were 'before' him (Eichmann) in a similar way as was a man from the country is 'before' the Law. In both works we find individuals in situations or settings whose dynamic forces are not properly understood. The banality of evil, I argue, designates not simply a lack of criminal intent, but unwitting invitations to misinterpretation that this lack produces.

I: "Before the Law"

One of the central features of *The Trial* is the *mise en abyme* it contains, the parable "Before the Law." "Before the Law" is supposed to recast the encounter of Kafka's protagonist (Josef K.) with 'the court' in terms of an encounter of a 'man from the country' with 'the Law.' Here, I shall only be concerned with the text of the parable, as opposed to the entire narrative trajectory of *The Trial*. Prior to telling Josef K. the parable, the priest (who is

² The two most critical studies of Arendt's analysis of Eichmann's trial are those of David Cesarani and Bettina Stangneth. See Cesarani 2006 and Stangneth 2014.

also an official of 'the court') states that the parable serves a specific purpose: to alert Josef K. to the fact that he is "deceiving [himself] about the court [...]" (Kafka 1998, 215). According to Ingeborg Henel, "Kafka's text is at this point completely unambiguous [...] the purpose of the legend is thus to show Josef K. his error concerning the court and its representatives" (Henel 1976, 43). K. is supposed to interpret the parable such that his self-deception becomes clear to him by locating an analogous form of self-deception in the man from the country. In *The Trial*, self-deception and understanding 'the Law' are intertwined. In this sense, interpreting "Before the Law" is about self-knowledge.³ Stanley Corngold has described this dimension of the parable by noting that "[K.] is inculcated by his very impatience to find himself innocent; it prevents him from taking on the question: What, apart from my need to find myself innocent, is the authority of the court that has arrested me?" (Corngold 1988, 238).

Josef K. is supposed to see how the man from the country deceives himself about the Law. Doing so, in turn, requires that he read the parable's narrative trajectory as being (unwittingly) driven by the man from the country, despite the fact that it may be easier to conclude that he is being manipulated by the Law and its representatives.

(a) "Before the Law" and Self-Deception

The context in which "Before the Law" appears in *The Trial* is crucial to understanding its purpose. Rolf Goebel notes that the parable is "constructed around questions of legitimacy, power, and deceit that arise from the man's desire to enter the Law" (Goebel 2002, 56). Upon his arrival, a doorkeeper informs the man that going through the doorway is possible, but not at the present moment. The man decides to wait; he is not invited or directed to do so, yet he also fails/refuses to own the decision as their own. At the conclusion of the parable, the man, currently dying, learns that the doorway before which he has lived "was meant solely for [him]" (Kafka 1998, 217). The fact that the doorkeeper closes the gate only when the man from the country dies suggests that the doorway stands open only insofar as the man waits for permission to enter. From this, I infer that entrance

³ My emphasis on knowledge and on the *knowability* of the court is not ubiquitous amongst commentators on Kafka's work. Louis Begley writes that the purpose of the parable is to reveal the, "that the ways of the Court [...] and the Law itself cannot be penetrated by the human mind, and do not concern themselves with human notions of justice" (See Begley 2008, 193).

is not possible—at least not in the way the man understands it. The Law, it seems, stands open only insofar as someone willingly waits for entrance. Whatever the larger purpose or significance of the doorway is, it does not serve the usual function of a doorway (*viz.* to facilitate or to prevent entrance). The fact that the man from the country waits in front of the door for the remainder of his life is due to unexamined (but not necessarily unreasonable) assumptions that he has made about the nature of the doorway.

The nature of the Law becomes clearer if we pay close attention to the two ways that it presents itself in “Before the Law.” For the majority of the parable, the Law is characterized by its seeming to invite entry by way of an open door. At the end, the Law appears to the man in a different fashion. As he dies, the Law is characterized by the door shutting at the moment when there is no longer anyone awaiting entrance. “Before the Law” suggests that it is not (and never was) possible for the man to pass through the doorway. He learns something useful (*viz.* that admittance is not a *real* possibility) only when he cannot put this knowledge to productive use (*viz.* as he is dying). Thus, a lot hangs on the assumptions that he makes on the basis of the appearance of the Law as an open door. When we take a careful look at these assumptions, the nature of his self-deception becomes clearer.

Because the parable is supposed to describe the man’s self-deception, I believe we must assume the man from the country is not coerced into living and dying before the Law. The fundamental reasons for his doing so are unrecognized assumptions he makes about the Law as it initially appears to him. His fundamental mistake is to assume that the Law is positive. Perhaps the man believes that the Law is a structure that is capable of giving his life meaning and that the prospect of a favorable judgment is worth waiting for. However, the man is mistaken. In Henel’s words, “[the Law] does not lead to a universal, generally valid law, comprehensible by reason and accessible to any rational person of good will” (Henel 1976, 48). I agree with Henel that the Law is not positive, but its incomprehensibility does not follow from this fact.

K. is supposed to use the parable in order to come to know something about the court. What he learns about the court, in turn, is supposed to show him how he has been deceiving himself about his trial. Interpreting the parable requires that he (and any reader of *The Trial*) discover the characteristics of the Law about which the man from the country deceives himself. To be sure, Josef K. fails to perform this interpretive task; but his inability

or unwillingness to do so does not mean that the Law is incomprehensible. We must do what Josef K. cannot: closely examine what the man assumes about the Law and come to see how these assumptions inform his actions such that these actions (and inactions) amount to self-deception.

First, the man believes that the Law makes a universal claim on all people. The man does not realize that the Law is meant only for him until the doorkeeper so informs him at the end of the parable. The precise nature of this claim is unknown to him because he is positioned 'outside' the doorway. The man believes that he is simultaneously before the Law *and* excluded from it. In virtue of this claim and because he takes it seriously, the man from the country decides to wait in order to learn more about 'the Law.' He makes his home in a liminal space, in the vicinity of the Law but not at its center.

Second, because the man understands the Law to be making a universal claim, he believes that the Law possesses determinate content. If he could only gain admittance, the man thinks, he could determine the precise nature of its claim. His belief that the Law possesses determinate content also necessitates his belief that its content *ought* to be universally accessible. In his mind, the Law must be universally accessible because he believes it is universally applicable.

These two assumptions are founded upon a more basic, third assumption: that there is a difference between access to the Law and waiting for access to the Law. At bottom, the reason why he is willing to spend all of his possessions (and his life) in an attempt to gain access to the Law is because he believes that there is something different (and desirable) on the other side. The man from the country assumes that there is a meaningful difference between being on one side of the entrance and being on the other side. Put another way, the man from the country thinks that the 'interior' concealed by the entrance is qualitatively distinct from its outward appearance.

(b) 'The Law' as Mere Appearance

The textual evidence that supports my claim that the self-deception of the man from the country is closely related to the assumptions he makes about the Law is that 'admittance' to the Law is mentioned only by the man from the country. The doorkeeper never mentions admittance nor directly suggests it as a real possibility. To be sure, the doorkeeper understands what the man means by admittance when he asks to go through the doorway—

he replies, "it is possible, but not now" (Kafka 1998, 215). The notion of admittance to the Law enters into the parable through the mouth of the man from the country. And, as we shall see, that the doorkeeper's opaque response that neither confirms nor denies the reality of admittance is consistent with the unique nature of the Law.

Yet, doesn't the doorkeeper's evasive answer deceive the man from the country into thinking that there is such a thing as admittance to the Law? Without ever presenting himself as such to the man, the doorkeeper becomes a *trustworthy* representative of 'the Law' in the man's eyes. The man from the country trusts what the doorkeeper tells him and follows his instructions without question, despite the fact that he has no evidence of the doorkeeper's trustworthiness. The dependence of the man on the doorkeeper is such that "he forgets the other doorkeepers and this first one seems to him the only obstacle to his admittance to the Law" (Kafka 1998, 216). Yet, like the priest in relation to Josef K., the doorkeeper "wants nothing from [the man]" (Kafka 1998, 224). The doorkeeper's purpose is not to facilitate (or prevent) the man's access to 'the Law' just as the purpose of the priest is not to help (or harm) Josef K. in his doomed struggle with 'the court.' Indeed, it was Josef K.'s own Manichean outlook on his trial—determined, he thought, by officials that were either for him or against him—that prompted the priest to announce K.'s self-deception.

If we bracket the man's beliefs and assumptions, we see that the sole function of the Law is to ensnare the man from the country and to keep him waiting. Its open entrance serves to elicit certain assumptions about its nature that lead the man to *freely choose* to wait. As soon as the man can no longer wait for admittance, the doorkeeper closes the entrance. I believe that Kafka structured the Law such that its defining feature is its capacity to weaponize those who come before it against themselves. Once the man from the country makes key assumptions about the nature of the Law, no coercion or deception is needed to make him spend his life waiting for entrance.

If the function of the Law is to keep individuals suspended before it, then there is no reason to think terms such as 'exclusion/inclusion' or 'exterior/interior' necessarily apply to the Law in any traditional sense. The Law could function in its capacity to suspend individuals before it as long as it is able to elicit the assumption that there is something like admittance. In actual fact, there are two 'Laws' at work in the parable. There is the real 'Law' and there is another 'Law.' The first corresponds to the actual nature of 'the Law' and the second corresponds to what the man assumes about

‘the Law.’ He surreptitiously infers the second ‘Law’ from the appearance of the first. To be sure, the man would insist that there is only one ‘Law’ (the second); he is unaware of the fact that he is supplying ‘the Law’ with the content that leads him to wait before it. The manner in which the Law initially *appears* seems to me to be key to its capacity to elicit the assumptions that lead the man to choose to wait before it in perpetuity. I will call this characteristic of the Law its *mere appearance*. The Law is an appearance to which a deeper, more meaningful reality need not necessarily correspond; it could very well be the case that on the other side of the entrance is simply another stool and another doorman.

Yet, the fact that the man from the country makes a number of seemingly reasonable assumptions about the Law that are unfortunately misguided does not imply self-deception. His willingness, however, to spend his entire life before the Law, waiting for admittance, implies something like a compulsive unwillingness to question these assumptions. Insofar as he doesn’t question these assumptions, he deceives himself. This raises the following question: what explains the man from the country’s total reliance on his initial assessment of the Law? The judgment of the man is bound (perhaps willingly so) to traditional concepts and categories. Upon encountering the Law, he quickly applied orthodox categories of legality and legitimacy to the Law and remained trenchant in his initial assessment of it. Presumably, he assumed that the Law is a positive law because he was unable or unwilling to consider any other sort of law.

Although the man from the country bases his assessment of the Law on the way that it appears to him (*viz.* as an open doorway), his decision to wait for admission is guided by what he assumes the doorway conceals. In the context of the parable, the centrality of appearance with reference to the Law is a negative measurement—the Law must *not* be evaluated according to any deeper reality or content, implying the primacy of appearance to its proper evaluation.

II: Before Adolf Eichmann

Now, I turn to similar themes that are present, but underappreciated, in *EJ*. My discussion of *EJ* will not be comprehensive. *EJ* is complex and difficult to understand. Seyla Benhabib has pointed out that one of the reasons for this difficulty is because “there are at least three sociohistorical narratives in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, each of which could have been the topic of several

volumes [...]” (Benhabib 2000, 68). According to Benhabib, these are: the story of Eichmann’s trial; the story of the Jewish councils; and finally, “[Arendt’s] attempt to come to grips with the behavior of so-called ‘ordinary German citizens’ during the Nazi regime and the Holocaust” (Benhabib 2000, 68). Here, I am primarily concerned with what Benhabib identifies as the third sociohistorical narrative embedded in *EJ*: her analysis of Adolf Eichmann as embodying the banality of evil.

First, I demonstrate that appearance is important to the adequate legal judgment of Eichmann in the same way that appearance was important to the adequate assessment of the Law. By ‘adequate,’ I mean an assessment that does not amount to what Kafka called “self-deception.” We shall see that (in Arendt’s view) an adequate assessment of Adolf Eichmann is equivalent to an assessment that is not surreptitiously guided by what his manner of appearance is assumed to conceal. I believe that a similar concept of appearance is central to the evaluation of the Law and to the evaluation of Adolf Eichmann in roughly the same way.

Then, I turn to the topic of traditional concepts. In my analysis of *The Trial*, I emphasize that traditional notions of law are not helpful to the person. In fact, such notions are harmful. I will show that Arendt believed traditional juridical concepts (such as guilt implying criminal intent) were harmful in roughly the same way. She worried that such concepts were assumed (problematically) by those whose job it was to pronounce judgment on Eichmann. The material I present in these two sub-sections will demonstrate that those whose task it was to legally judge Eichmann were ‘before’ him in the same way as the man from the country was ‘before’ the Law.

(a) *Eichmann and Appearance*

One of the most important components of Arendt’s analysis of Eichmann is her insistence on his shallowness. She associated Eichmann’s ‘shallowness’ with “something entirely negative: it was not stupidity but a curious, quite authentic inability to think” (Arendt 2003, 159). Eichmann’s shallowness—literally the fact that he lacked a deeper level of juridically relevant intent or motivation—meant that he needed to be judged in a new way. Arendt believed because Eichmann lacked criminal intent, he could not be convicted in the same way as could many others who had committed similar crimes.

Let us revisit some of Arendt’s most controversial claims about Eichmann.

Arendt emphasized evidence that suggested Eichmann did not fit the psychological profile of a mass murderer. There have been numerous studies suggesting that Arendt's confidence in this evidence was misplaced and that Arendt was duped by Eichmann.⁴ I shall not engage with these arguments in any detail here, as my purpose is not to argue that Arendt was correct (or incorrect) in her analysis of Eichmann.

Arendt used the term 'banal' to describe the motivations and intentions for his actions as a member of the SS. In the words of Richard Bernstein, "[Arendt] came to the conclusion that [Eichmann] committed monstrous deeds without being motivated by monstrous evil intentions" (Bernstein 2002, 218). After witnessing Eichmann at his trial, she became convinced Eichmann did not facilitate state-sponsored genocide out of ideological indoctrination or antisemitism. He had no particular desire or personal drive that made him enjoy his duties, yet he carried them out nonetheless. She worried that those around her (particularly the prosecution) had already made up their minds about Eichmann, assuming that his manner of appearance in court was a charade intended to conceal a very different interior. Arendt was wary of making an inferential leap from the enormity of Eichmann's crimes to a corresponding set of criminal motivations.

In *EJ*, Arendt operated according to a 'two-Eichmann' theory. By 'two-Eichmann' theory I mean that Arendt believed that there was the 'real Eichmann' and there was the Eichmann that the prosecution presented to the court. According to Arendt, these two Eichmann's were distinct. The two Eichmann's correspond to the two versions of 'the Law' that I presented in the first section of this paper. Like 'the Law,' the real Eichmann is an appearance to which a deeper, more meaningful reality does not correspond. Elements of his trial of which Arendt was critical inferred the existence of another dimension to Eichmann's subjectivity based on the seeming absurdity of the way the real Eichmann appeared in court.

Eichmann's banality did not imply that Arendt believed that the banality of evil captured the workings of the entire apparatus of genocide developed by the Nazis. The 'banality' in the banality of evil did not describe the crime of state-sponsored genocide, but rather some of the criminals that helped to facilitate it (Eichmann). As Dana Villa has put it, "[the Holocaust] could hardly have worked as well as it did had not countless normal [individuals] seen it as their obligation to fight their inclinations and perform their specific duties as long as the law of the land required it" (Villa 2017, 60).

⁴ See Cesarani 2006 and Stangneth 2014.

Arendt's belief in Eichmann's banality is what motivated her to avoid the prosecution's assumption at the trial that Eichmann had committed his crimes out of anti-Semitism or ideological indoctrination and that his clumsy manner in court was an attempt to conceal these criminal facets of his personality.

Arendt's analysis of Eichmann as thoughtless made his manner of appearance the most important factor in understanding him. Because Eichmann lacked any deeper substratum of motivations beneath those with which he appeared in court, Arendt thought that it was of tantamount importance that he be judged according to his manner of appearance. In discussing *The Trial*, I emphasized the importance of appearance to the assessment of 'the Law.' Appearance was important to evaluating the Law just because the Law lacked any further content or depth. Eichmann's appearance takes on a similar importance in *EJ*. Because Arendt was convinced that Adolf Eichmann lacked criminal intent, it was of the utmost importance to take seriously his ridiculous appearance and not to assume occasional lies and discrepancies in his testimony were the familiar attempts of a traditional criminal to deceive.

Arendt's diagnosis of Eichmann does not suggest that he lacked an inner life, just one that was legally relevant to judging him. Daniel Conway has helpfully clarified this, writing that "For Arendt, the question of the *real* Eichmann, the actor behind the masks, the schemer behind the schemes, was simply a non-starter" (Conway 2017, 80). Banal evildoers (like Eichmann), are able to do what they do out of everyday motives, and their doing so, Arendt worried, challenged Western jurisprudence with its reliance on criminal guilt being dependent upon determining criminal intent. Arendt's exhortation to take Eichmann's appearance seriously was a warning that Eichmann lacked further depth of any juridical significance. Like 'the Law' in "Before the Law," Arendt's Eichmann is *mere appearance*. When we consider *EJ* alongside *The Trial*, Arendt's insistence on the primacy of appearance to the judgment of Eichmann is a warning about the unique danger that attends the banality of evil. Arendt believed that the prosecution at Eichmann's trial was seizing on occasional lies and factual discrepancies in Eichmann's testimony in order to support a decision that they had already made about who Eichmann was—that he was a dedicated, indoctrinated, and highly manipulative totalitarian agent.

Arendt did not dispute that Eichmann lied; she disputed that his lies were intended to hide or obscure his true, ideologically rigid intentions. Many of Arendt's critics argue that Arendt was duped by Eichmann. Stangneth states

that Arendt “fell into his trap: Eichmann-in-Jerusalem was little more than a mask” (Stangneth 2014, xxiii). I believe that the language of trickery or duping is inappropriate, recapitulating the very error that Arendt took herself to be pointing out. For, in Arendt’s view Eichmann did not dupe or trick those who took it upon themselves to bring him to justice. Or, if he had done so, he was not immune to or in control of the charade. Arendt believed that Eichmann’s guilt needed to be grounded in a satisfactory understanding of what sort of criminal Eichmann actually was. In Arendt’s view, understanding Eichmann meant considering that his manner of appearance in court was not an attempt to conceal anything.

Just as the man from the country was not duped by ‘the Law’ or the door-keeper, Eichmann did not dupe those who sought to bring him to justice. As a result, Arendt believed, the court in Jerusalem failed to comprehend the individual whose task it was to judge. The verdict the court rendered was correct, but insufficiently grounded in a comprehensive knowledge of the criminal. In other words, Eichmann was guilty but the manner of his guilt was not accurately reflected in the verdict rendered by the court. Eichmann’s importance lay in his mediocrity. Thanks to the bureaucratic/totalitarian framework in which he worked, Eichmann had facilitated state-sponsored genocide in the absence of any intent that could be described as criminal. One of Arendt’s greatest worries in *EJ* was that the trial failed to grasp the fact that a new type of criminal had taken the stage because of its insistence that the new criminal was not new at all.

(b) Eichmann and Precedent

Let us recall that my interpretation of *The Trial* demonstrated two things about the Law: (i) the importance of appearance in assessing its meaning/significance, and (ii) the danger of traditional concepts and categories. The reliance of the man from the country on the notion of positive law was what led them to willingly wait before a doorway through which they could never enter. I argued that his inability or unwillingness to assess the doorway in the absence of the traditional notions to which he appears bound is the self-deception that the parable describes.

In order to complete my analysis, I will demonstrate that the traditional juridical resources available to the court in Jerusalem were (in Arendt’s view) unhelpful. The only traditional juridical resource that I want to discuss is that of criminal guilt implying criminal intent. By unhelpful I simply mean that Arendt believed that the idea of criminal guilt requiring a prior deter-

mination of criminal intent was misleading in Eichmann's case because Eichmann facilitated genocide in the absence of criminal intentions. The assumption that Eichmann's guilt necessitated the presence of criminal intentions and motivations would, in Arendt's view, lead the trial away from an adequate understanding of him. As we shall see, Arendt hoped that the court in Jerusalem would defy juridical concepts such as guilt implying criminal intent.

Arendt believed the most important task of Eichmann's trial was to "prosecute and to defend, to judge and to punish Adolf Eichmann" (Arendt 2006, 273). However, she also thought that the trial had another purpose: to establish a valid precedent for unprecedented crimes. The foremost crime amongst these new crimes was the crime against humanity. Arendt believed that the trial succeeded in its first task, but she also noted that "this last of the Successor trials will no more, and perhaps even less than its predecessors, serve as a valid precedent for future trials of such crimes" (Arendt 2006, 272). While Eichmann's trial succeeded in judging him, the manner in which it passed its judgment was such that posterity was denied a valid precedent for future criminals like him.

Arendt's analysis of crimes against humanity in *EJ* has long been the subject of scholarly literature. There is a tendency to minimize the importance and accuracy of Arendt's thesis concerning the banality of evil. Benhabib downplays the importance of the banality of evil, writing, "Arendt's contribution to moral and legal thought in this century will certainly not be the category of the 'banality of evil' [...] the category that is closest to the nerve of her political thought as a whole [...] is that of "crimes against humanity" (Benhabib 2000, 76). Yet, Arendt understood the task of adequately understanding the new 'crimes against humanity' as inextricable from the task of adequately understanding Eichmann. Arendt did not believe that crimes against humanity were possible without the assistance of banal individuals such as Eichmann.

Arendt recognized that the success of state sponsored genocide required the complicity of everyday individuals. Thus, the banality of evil and crimes against humanity are two sides of the same coin. Recall that in Kafka's "Before the Law," 'the Law' was able to rely on ordinary individuals (such as the doorkeeper). The doorkeeper did not need any privileged knowledge or familiarity with 'the Law' in order to be an effective agent in its service. There is also no evidence that the doorkeeper's interaction with the man from the country was motivated by malicious intent. The bureaucratic structure of the Nazi state provided an ideal framework for individuals such as

Eichmann to be effective agents without requiring any authentic commitment or ideological indoctrination. In this sense, we might say that Eichmann resembles both 'the Law' and the doorkeeper, who patrols the liminal space outside of 'the Law' without (necessarily) possessing any privileged information about it. Arendt thought that an adequate understanding of crimes against humanity required an adequate understanding of the banality of evil. Thus, it is unwise to minimize the importance of one at the expense of the other—an adequate understanding of Arendt's analysis of crimes against humanity must be grounded in an adequate understanding of her notion of the banality of evil, and vice versa.

Arendt described the secondary task of Eichmann's trial as involving three interrelated things: "the problem of impaired justice in the court of the victors; a valid definition of the 'crime against humanity'; and a clear recognition of the new criminal who commits this crime" (Arendt 2006, 274). In Arendt's view the task of defining the concept of crimes against humanity was bound up with the fact that its appearance was precipitated by a new type of criminal. Arendt took her analysis of crimes against humanity to be inseparable from her notion of the banality of evil. Here, I shall only focus on the banality of evil.⁵ I will examine what Arendt meant when she characterized Eichmann as a 'new criminal.' My purpose is to discuss Eichmann's unprecedentedness. Arendt's analysis suggests that Eichmann's banality elicited the prosecution and, to a lesser extent, the judges to turn him into an ordinary criminal.

Arendt was worried by what she perceived to be vigorous attempts to force Eichmann to fit into traditional legal categories that (in Arendt's view) did not apply to him. Arendt thought that the commitment of genocide by Eichmann in the absence of criminal intent needed to be frankly acknowledged, and judgment needed to be rendered in the absence of the determination of criminal intent. Instead, the prosecution tried to prove that Eichmann was a traditional criminal by insisting that many of his actions implied criminal intent. Arendt was very critical of such attempts, particularly in her discussion of the rejection of Eichmann's appeal (Arendt 2006, 249). According to Arendt, Eichmann's significance did not just lie in the fact that his crimes were new, but also in that his appearance in Jerusalem was such that his testimony and defense elicited what she considered to be a form of juridical denial.

⁵ I am indebted to Seyla Benhabib, whose scholarship on Arendt's analysis of crimes against humanity allows me to focus on the banality of evil in this chapter. See Benhabib 2003, 184–185 as well as Benhabib 2009, 331–350.

I think it will be helpful to return to a couple of points from my analysis of *The Trial*. I argued that the Law was not just unprecedented in the sense that it was not positive. The unprecedentedness of the Law went hand in hand with its ability to elicit the assumption that it was not unprecedented. One of the most important reasons for this, I argued, was that Kafka structured 'the Law' so that its appearance invited such assumptions about its meaning and significance. These aspects of *The Trial* are helpful in understanding some unappreciated dimensions of Arendt's analysis of Adolf Eichmann. For Arendt, his bumbling and underwhelming appearance in Jerusalem were not only characteristics that needed to be taken seriously; these very same characteristics were also the means by which he (unwittingly) elicited the use of legal categories that not only did not apply to him, but the use of which resulted directly in the trial's failure to generate a valid precedent.

It is important to connect Eichmann's curious ability to cause the prosecution to avoid understanding him to Arendt's larger concerns in *EJ*. Arendt believed that Eichmann required "clear recognition." "Clear recognition" entailed the fact that Eichmann committed crimes against humanity without criminal intentions. Hence, Arendt believed that Eichmann's guilt could and should not be measured by proving that he had criminal intentions. One of the central problems that the Eichmann trial was poised to confront was that of how to judge an individual guilty of crimes against humanity in a way that was not grounded in the presence of criminal intent to do so. In order to accomplish this, however, those who were to bring Eichmann to justice would need to have taken seriously what Arendt called his banality.

Conclusion

Once we recognize the structural similarities between the situations described in "Before the Law" and *EJ*, a number of salient features of the banality of evil emerge more clearly. First, the banality of evil should be understood as a form of what I have called *mere appearance* in the first section of this essay. That is, banal evil is an appearance that does not possess a deeper, more significant reality. In her famous rejoinder to Gershom Scholem, Arendt wrote that banal evil "can overgrow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface [...] because thought tries to reach some depth, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. That is its 'banality'" (Arendt 2007, 471). In this passage, Arendt clearly states that her notion of banal evil was tailored explicitly to describe the fact that banal evil lacked further depth.

It is my view that the banality of evil describes more than Eichmann's shallowness. My analysis of "Before the Law" described a complex relationship between the man from the country and the Law, and not just the fact that a person waited before a doorway. Similarly, I believe that Arendt used the phrase 'banality of evil' to describe a complex social situation that she perceived in real time at Eichmann's trial. The banality of evil names a complex social situation, wherein non-criminal motives in the service of crimes against humanity invite onlookers and interpreters to attribute criminal intent where none can be found. The banality of evil both licenses and hides from view the new type of criminal who is responsible for crimes against humanity.

I take the banality of evil to describe a kind or species of false consciousness on the part of those who insist that motives must be proportional to the effects (or consequences) that are produced. The banality of evil names a "factual" social arrangement or system that includes the banal motives of the perpetrator, the reflexive attribution of criminal intent by those keen to address the evil that is produced, the ongoing invisibility or unavailability of the criminal themselves, the consequent failure to acknowledge the emergence of this new type of criminal, and perhaps the redirection of righteous outrage toward the messenger in question (Hannah Arendt herself).

Finally, I would like to end this essay with a final remark on my interpretation of *The Trial*. I have read *The Trial* and *EJ* in conjunction with one another according to an interpretation of the former that I developed in the first section of this essay. One of the central arguments I have presented is that the two works are sufficiently similar so as to mutually clarify one another. One major point of divergence between them is that at no time in the parable does a figure emerge whose job it is to disrupt the dynamic relationship between the man from the country and the Law. There was nobody in "Before the Law" who could assist the man from the country in coming to know the extent of his own role in being ensnared before the Law. Such an onlooker would, perhaps, attempt to make the man aware of the way he was framing the Law surreptitiously as positive law as well as the dangers of such a frame.

Such a figure would, of course, correspond to Hannah Arendt. In writing *EJ*, I believe that she saw herself as providing just such a critical intervention into a dangerous relationship that she perceived taking place at Eichmann's trial. In writing *EJ*, Arendt took herself to be diagnosing and describing an epistemic situation in which we are largely powerless to identify and address the emergence of a new type of criminal. One of the most important

critical functions of her analysis in *EJ* is her attempt to draw attention to the fact that the court was surreptitiously framing Eichmann in a certain way. Arendt's critical intervention not only attempts a factual description of Eichmann, it also attempts to show how totalitarian/bureaucratic regimes have rendered the framing of criminal guilt by way of criminal intent irrelevant. And finally, Arendt's *EJ* attempts to warn us of the dangers of becoming too reliant upon past ways of framing issues such as criminal guilt.

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Ido Lewit*

“He Couldn’t Tell the Difference between *The Merry Widow* and *Tristan and Isolde*”: Kafka’s Anti-Wagnerian Philosophy of Music

Abstract

This essay exposes an anti-Wagnerian philosophy of music in Franz Kafka’s “Researches of a Dog” and “The Silence of the Sirens.” Themes of music, sound, and silence are overwhelmingly powerful in these stories and cannot be divorced from corporeal and visual aspects. These aspects are articulated in the selected texts in a manner that stands in stark opposition to Richard Wagner’s philosophy of music as presented in the composer’s seminal 1870 “Beethoven” essay.

Keywords

Richard Wagner, Franz Kafka, Philosophy of Music, Transcendence, Acousmatic Sound, Silence

Max Brod, Franz Kafka’s close friend and literary executor, recalls in his biography of the author that Kafka once said that “he couldn’t tell the difference between *The Merry Widow* and *Tristan and Isolde*” (1995, 115). Brod evokes this memory in order to exemplify Kafka’s supposed lack of musicality. Indeed, for a German-speaking intellectual such as Kafka, not being able to differentiate Franz Lehár’s light operetta from Richard Wagner’s solemn, monumental music-drama would not simply be an example of unmusicality, but a symptom of cultural autism. While Brod’s recollection is

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the only documented reference by Kafka to Wagner or his works,¹ it does not necessarily follow that Kafka was unaware of Wagner's views of music and its effects. Indeed, Nicola Gess remarks that "[i]n the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the effects of music on its listeners were widely discussed, a discussion of which Kafka was aware" (2007, 276), and that speculations on the transformative power of music, with key contributions by Nietzsche and Wagner, were "in the air" (2007, 277). Moreover, Kafka's friend Franz Werfel was heavily invested in the discussion over Wagner's music and its Productions in Prague's Neues Deutsches Theater (Kreuzer 2010, 148–150). One can assume then that Kafka's supposed inability to discern between *The Merry Widow* and *Tristan and Isolde* should not be taken at face value but rather, as Will Self suggests, a playful irony by which "Kafka manages in a single aside to undermine the entire airy and castelated edifice of late German romanticism" (2016). Self's reading of Brod's note speaks to the concern of the following essay, namely, to present Kafka's philosophy of music as a direct response to that of Wagner.

Music Deterritorialized

Kafka thought of himself as unmusical. In a letter to his lover Milena Jesenská from June 14, 1920 he discloses: "Do you realize that I am completely unmusical, with a completeness that in my experience does not exist anywhere else at all?" (Kafka 1990, 49). A diary entry from Jan 3, 1912 might shed light on the origins of Kafka's view of himself as unmusical:

When it became clear in my organism that writing was the most productive direction for my being to take, everything rushed in that direction and left empty all those abilities which were directed toward the joys of sex, eating, drinking, philosophical reflection and above all music. I atrophied in all these directions (Kafka 1976, 163).

Even if these statements are taken literally, Kafka's supposed unmusicality did not forestall him from engaging with music as well as with "philosophical reflection" on music in his literary output. Yet Kafka's treatment of music is certainly unusual; it is extremely rare to encounter common musical objects in his oeuvre; in most cases where music appears in his writings it is associ-

¹ The only other possible reference to Wagner in Kafka's work is the character Brunelda in *Amerika*, whose name implies the mythic figure of Brünnhilde, who became a central character in Wagner's cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The fact that in Kafka's novel Brunelda is a former singer further implies Wagner's famous work.

ated with the incomprehensible and almost always resides outside the boundaries of the layman understanding of what music is. According to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Kafka was not interested in an organized form of music, but rather in "a pure and intense sonorous material [...] a deterritorialized musical sound, a cry that escapes signification, composition, song, words—sonority that ruptures in order to break away from a chain that is still all too signifying" (1986, 6).

An example of such deterritorialized form of music is found in the story "Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse People," where the narrator presents Josephine the mouse-diva as such a phenomenal singer that "[a]nyone who has not heard her does not know the power of song. There is no one who is not carried away by her singing;" but soon after the narrator adds that "Josephine's song as such does not represent anything extraordinary," and even wonders whether it is song at all: "[i]sn't it perhaps just squeaking? [...]. All of us squeak, but of course no one dreams of passing it off as art" (Kafka 2007, 94–95). By blurring the boundaries between song and squeak in the powerful performance of a diva with "nothing of a voice" (Kafka 2007, 100), the story challenges the common conception of music. "Josephine" is not the only deconstructive treatment of music in Kafka; another example is the "concert" in "Description of a Struggle":

'Please turn out the light, I can only play in the dark.' I straightened myself. At that moment two gentlemen seized the bench and, whistling a song and rocking me to and fro, carried me far away from the piano to the dining table. Everyone watched with approval and the girl said: 'You see, madame, he played quite well. I knew he would. And you were so worried.' I understood and thanked her with a bow, which I carried out well (Kafka 1983, 39).

If we expand our scope of Kafka's treatment of music to include noise as such (as "Josephine" prompts us to do) as well as silence, or at least the failed execution of sound (as the above scene from "Description of a Struggle" prompts us), we encounter further sonorous phenomena that are difficult, if not impossible, to decode. The sound emanating from the telephone in *The Castle* is a fitting example:

A humming, such as K. had never before heard on the telephone, emerged from the receiver. It was as if the murmur of countless childish voices—not that it was really a murmur, it was more like the singing of voices, very very far away—as if that sound were forming, unlikely as that might be, into a single high, strong voice, striking the ear as if trying to penetrate further than into the mere human sense of hearing (Kafka 2009, 21).

Another undefinable sound-object is the one which torments the mole-like creature of “The Burrow,” whose pride is in an elaborate system of tunnels that he himself constructed, and that serves as his home and shelter. One day he hears a sound whose definition and source he cannot locate. The ontology of the sound is unclear: its description, as Kata Gellen (2016, 111) observes, varies between hissing, scratching, scuttling and scraping; moreover, it is “exactly the same noise everywhere” (Kafka 2007, 177) so its source seems to be both nowhere and everywhere. The narrator embarks on a paranoid attempt to explain the noise and unveil its source—but to no avail.

The tormenting effect of the sound in “The Burrow” stems from it being, as Gellen points out, “a sign whose signifier consists of a series of related but non-identical acoustic effects” (2016, 111). Like Josephine’s song and the telephone in *The Castle*, the sound in “The Burrow” is an acoustic sign that does not communicate a decodable message.

Music Transcendence

Richard Wagner wrote extensively on music. It is far beyond the scope of this essay to present an exhaustive account of Wagner’s philosophy of music, which itself underwent various phases and alterations throughout the development of Wagner’s intellectual and creative output. The conception presented here, which I wish to contrast with Kafka’s, represents Wagner’s later philosophy of music as presented in his seminal 1870 essay “Beethoven,” written in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the latter composer’s birth.

In “Beethoven,” Wagner provides an elaborate discussion which advocates a unique status that music holds within the arts. In the essay, Wagner rehearses the aesthetic theory of philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer as presented in Schopenhauer’s 1818/1819 book *The World as Will and Representation*. Deviating from Western philosophy’s tendency to define humans as rational animals, Schopenhauer proposes that humans do not essentially rationalize; the essentially desire. Hence a central concept in Schopenhauer’s philosophy is the will, which designates every human’s innermost essence—the will to live and to satisfy desires. The immense influence of Kant’s transcendental idealism on the philosophy of Schopenhauer accounts for the latter’s conviction that the will is at one and the same time the essence of every human being and the essence of the universe. According to Schopenhauer, the will is manifested in the world through concepts, or Ideas

(in the Platonic sense). These Ideas are the "objectification of the will" (Schopenhauer 1969, 257), its embodiment in phenomena. The aim of the fine arts is to stimulate the knowledge of these Ideas. The arts therefore "objectify the will only indirectly" (*ibidem*), they must use some sort of translation to deliver an indirect notion of the will to a perceiver. Music is different from all other art forms since it does not deal with objects. While other arts depend to a degree on concrete material phenomena, music is independent of the phenomenal world, and since for Schopenhauer the phenomenal world is the "appearance of the Ideas in plurality," music "passes over the Ideas" (*ibidem*) that mediate the will and the arts, and access the will directly:

[M]usic expresses in an exceedingly universal language, in a homogeneous material, that is, in mere tones, and with the greatest distinctness and truth, the inner being, the in-itself, of the world, which we think of under the concept of will, according to its most distinct manifestation (Schopenhauer 1969, 264).

This worldless and conceptless notion of music motivates Wagner's insistent dichotomy between the visual and the nonvisual. For Wagner (again, after Schopenhauer), human consciousness has two sides, the consciousness of one's own self, which is the will; and that of other things, which is chiefly "a *visual* knowledge of the outer world, the apprehension of objects" (Wagner 1966a, 67, italics in source). Hence, since the will is anti-thetic to the visual it can only be purely expressed by a nonvisual art form. The visual spectacle itself never transmits to our consciousness the Idea in a whole and pure manner. To the sight of the spectacle Wagner quotes Faust's cry "A spectacle superb! But still, alas! a spectacle. Where seize I thee, o Nature infinite?" and continues:

This cry is answered in the most positive manner by *Music*. Here the world outside us speaks to us in terms intelligible beyond compare, since its sounding message to our ear is of the selfsame nature as the cry sent forth to it from the depth of our own inner heart (Wagner 1966a, 70-71, italics in source).

Wagner ties music's ability to communicate deep universal essences with its power over listeners, incomparable to the effects of other art forms. In its purest form, music has a hypnotic power, it leaves the listener somnambulantly spellbound, so that even with eyes wide open they no longer see. Music's wordlessness is so powerful that when it delivers "its sounding message to our ear" it actually annuls the effect of anything visual and worldly:

Our eyesight is paralyzed to such a degree by the effect of music upon us, that with eyes wide open we no longer intensively see. [...] while listening to any tone-piece that really touches us, [...] the most hideous and distracting things are passing before our eye, [...] the mechanical movement of the band, the whole peculiar working apparatus of an orchestral production (Wagner 1966a, 74–75).

The link that Wagner cultivates between music's transcendence, its ability to communicate deep universal essences, and its total divorce from and undermining of worldly and visual materiality is central to the present discussion. As the following section illustrates, it is precisely these aspects which are subverted in Kafka's representations of music.

Kafka's Anti-Wagnerian Philosophy of Music

I am not the first to suggest an opposition between Kafka and Wagner. Nicola Gess' (2007) analysis of "Josephine" confronts Kafka's story with Wagner on the basis of music's relation to nation and *Volk*. In her illuminating analysis, Gess demonstrates how the story subverts a political ideology that constructs "a folkish identity by way of artistic performances and by way of a leader who fancies himself a great artist and his state one gigantic 'total work of art'" (2007, 288). In a similar trajectory, Colin Benert (2009) reads Kafka's "Josephine" as an intertextual parody of Wagner's aesthetic ideology and the German dream of a musical community. Both Gess and Benert thus focus on the political aspects of Wagner and Kafka and limit their discussion to "Josephine." My focus is somewhat different, not only because I relate to other texts, but mostly because my concern is not the political, but rather the metaphysical aspects of Wagner's and Kafka's conceptions of music. The following analysis of two texts by Kafka—the longer short story "Researches of a Dog" and the miniature short story "The Silence of the Sirens"—exposes an inversion of Wagner's philosophy of music in two interlaced trajectories: music's relation to, and communicability of, a universal truth on the one hand, and the hierarchical relations between the sonic and the visual on the other. While my discussion revolves only around these two works by Kafka, the ultimate aim of this essay is to propose the anti-Wagnerian perspective as a key to a new understanding of music in Kafka's work in general.

We have seen that, for Wagner, music's objectless and contentless nature provides unmediated access to the Schopenhauerian will, and is thus key to its ability to communicate essences of self and universe. Music's effect on the listener is such that it renders visual faculties ineffective, to the extent that

individuals become indifferent to "the most hideous and distracting things [that] are passing before our eye" (Wagner 1966a, 74–75). For the Wagner of "Beethoven," the visual is inferior to the audible to such an extent that it becomes ineffective.

Kafka's view on the relations between the visual and the audible with regard to music is far different: Max Brod recalls giving up dragging his friend to concerts upon realizing that Kafka's "reactions to them were of a purely visual character" (1995, 116). In a diary entry dated December 13, 1911, Kafka writes of accompanying Brod to a concert, complementing his impressions of the concert—which featured Brahms' *Tragic Overture*—with a pen-portrait of three clerics in the audience, whom he also describes in writing. Kafka's diary entry reinforces Brod's observation regarding the former's visual relationship to music. Prior to the description of the clerics, Kafka notes that music "only now and then has an effect on me, and how seldom it is a musical one. The natural effect of music on me is to circumscribe me with a wall, and its only constant influence on me is that, confined in this way, I am different from what I am when I am free" (1976, 137). Kafka's diary entry ties together several notions regarding "music's effect" that are relevant to the discussion at hand: the sound of music does not have a "purely musical" effect but rather a visual one; the attention of this visual effect is directed not at the source of music production but at the listening audience; when music does have a "natural effect" it is one of psychological and existential distress, characterized by confinement, limited freedom, and isolation. These issues stand in sharp contradiction both to Wagner's prioritizations of the audible over the visual and his conception of music's ability to deliver universal transcendence to the individual. As we shall see, the gathering of these anti-Wagnerian features is far from being confined to Kafka's diary entry; it in fact governs Kafka's conception of music in the stories "Researches of a Dog" and "The Silence of the Sirens."

Written in 1922 and published posthumously, "Researches of a Dog" features a dog-narrator reflecting on his life. The first part of the story, which will be in focus here, concentrates on the experience and aftermath of a particular formative incident from the dog's youth—an encounter with "seven great musical virtuosi" (Kafka 2007, 134). One day in his early life the dog recalls "something admittedly extraordinary" that "made a strong, original, indelible, formative impression on me" (*ibidem*): as he was running through darkness he suddenly saw a brilliant light and "out of some darkness, producing a terrible clamor the likes of which I had never heard before, seven dogs stepped into the light" (*ibidem*). What happened next was the following performance:

They did not speak, they did not sing, in general they held their tongue with almost a certain doggedness, but they conjured forth music out of that empty space. Everything was music. The way they raised and set down their feet, certain turns of their heads, their running and their resting, the attitudes they assumed towards one another, the combinations they formed with one another [...] (ibidem).

In her study of the story, June Leavitt proposes that the dogs' creation of music without instruments indicates that Kafka's story seeks to represent a "transcendental mode" (2011, 149). Leavitt notes that the narrator's choice of the verb "conjure" (*zaubern*), rather than "play" or "make," which would suggest physical sound, denotes "an invocation of supernatural powers" and "presents the music of the dogs as a supersensible phenomenon" (ibidem). Leavitt reads the unusual musical event within the context of mysticism and esoteric knowledge, but the seeming sourcelessness of the music in the passage may just as well relate to another kind of transcendence, namely Wagner's—that of music as an art that "arise[s] this immediate consciousness of the oneness of our inner essence with that of the outer world" and "transports us to the highest ecstasy of consciousness of our infinitude" (Wagner 1966a, 71, 77). Indeed, as Theodor Adorno detects, it is the elimination of the cause of music (the "occultation of production" or *Phantasmagoria* in Adorno's terms) which functions as "the formal law governing the works of Richard Wagner" (2009, 74) and which fulfills the Wagnerian ideal of music.

As Brian Kane remarks, within the Schopenhauerian paradigm only pure relations between tones can express "the endless longing and striving of the will," and therefore "music's instrumental causes have no place in this order. Causality is sloughed off in the transformation effected by aesthetic contemplation" (2014, 100). This notion leads to Wagner's famous concealment of the orchestra in his Bayreuth Festspielhaus, namely, to control what the eye sees by means of architectural techne: "[I]deal works of music may make this evil [i.e. the mechanical production of music] imperceptible at last, through our eyesight being neutralized, as it were, by the rap subversion of the whole sensorium" (Wagner 1966b, 333). Kane recalls that musicologist Carl Dahlhaus addressed "the 19th-century fascination with the 'invisible orchestra,'" and that, according to Dahlhaus, "Wagner's practice in Bayreuth [...] reproduces the 'prevailing doctrine of nineteenth-century music—the idea of 'absolute music', divorced from purpose and causes,'" a doctrine that led to the need to conceal "the mundane origins of transcendental music" (Kane 2014, 105). As we shall soon see, it is exactly this separation of the mundane from the transcendental that Kafka problematizes.

It is, however, not only the "occultation of production" that links Kafka's "Researches of a Dog" to Wagner; it is additionally the effect that music with no visible source has on the listener. We recall that, for Wagner, music creates a hypnotic subversion of vision as it "dews our brain as if by magic, and robs it of the power of seeing" (Wagner 1966a, 75). In a similar fashion, Kafka presents the effect of the conjured music upon the dog-narrator as extremely powerful and undermining the worldly and visible:

[T]he music gradually took over, practically seized hold of you, swept you away from these real little dogs, and quite against your will, resisting with all your might, howling as if pain were being inflicted, you could attend to nothing but this music that came from all sides, from the heights, from the depths, from everywhere, pulling the listener into its midst, pouring over him (Kafka 2007, 135).

Taken together, the seemingly source-less music and its incredible effect on the listener constitute Wagner's musical ideal with regard to the mechanics of production and phenomenological effects. But while these aspects seem to be taken straight from the Wagner cookbook, there is a crucial difference. For Wagner, music's "stupendous powers" are related to its ability to make known "the inner essence of all things." Through music, he writes, "the world outside us speaks to us in terms intelligible beyond compare" (Wagner 1966a, 78, 80). In other words, for Wagner music is a medium that links transcendence and self, it delivers a universal message of truth directly to the consciousness of the individual; in this regard, Kafka's story could not be more remote.

What exactly does the music conjured by the dogs communicate? What does their entire performance mean? These questions occupy and disturb the narrator, who admits that it is "incomprehensible to me" (Kafka 2007, 135). The narrator tries to approach the group and ask the questions that bother him, but just as he does that he is met by "a clear, vigorous, continuous note, arriving unchanged literally from a great distance" (Kafka 2007, 137). This note is "perhaps the true melody in the midst of the clamor" (*ibidem*)—it may be carrying the answer to his questions, but even if the dogs heard his inquiries and replied with this "true melody" he "could not distinguish the answer from the music" (*ibidem*), and the entire phenomena remained completely inexplicable, or as John Hargraves puts it: "The narrator cannot decide finally whether this is music or noise; music in the sense that it contains some truth he wants to know but cannot, and noise in the sense that it is the summation of many truths, each interfering with and canceling out the other" (2007, 323).

Contrasting Wagner's conception of a music in which "the world outside us speaks to us in terms intelligible beyond compare," Kafka's story contends that even if music contains some truth, this truth remains inaccessible, and its message incommunicable. Moreover, the further we read the story the more it becomes clear that the nature of the music experienced by the protagonist is far from the common model for an ideal work of art. Looking back at the experience, the narrator admits that "[i]n itself it was nothing extraordinary" and that "in the course of a long life you will encounter many things that would be even more astonishing if taken out of the context and seen through the eyes of a child." At a certain point he cannot actually tell whether what he heard was "terrible or sublime music" (Kafka 2007, 133, 137). This inability to distinguish between the terrible and the sublime, echoing Kafka's remark on *The Marry Widow* and *Tristan and Isolde*, radically conflicts with Wagner's claim that music—and certainly music with such a strong effect—"can once and for all be judged by nothing but the category of the *sublime*" (Wagner 1966a, 77, italics in source).

An additional charge against Wagnerian music-philosophy is revealed in the story when we consider that the "astonishing" musical dogs are nothing other than performing circus dogs, which the narrator happen to witness. As noted by some readers of the story such as Gellen (2016), the narration of "Researches of a Dog" is limited to the perception of the dog protagonist, a perception that filters out humans and their agency and thus leaves the protagonist unaware of any human related context such as the circus, the dog's human trainer and the source of musical accompaniment. This interpretation of the story demystifies the peculiar behavior of the performing dogs; for example, it is noted that while the dog-musicians stand upright "whenever they obeyed their better instincts for a moment and lowered their front legs, they were literally horrified, as if it were a mistake [...] and once again they raised their legs, and their eyes seemed to be asking forgiveness" (Kafka 2007, 136). When this picture is complemented with a punishing circus trainer the scene immediately makes sense.

Understood as generic circus music along with its associated crude materiality, the sweeping music "conjured" by the virtuosi becomes anything but "worldless" transcendence, and its "beguiling" effect turns parodic. The powerful overwhelming effect of music in Kafka's story is produced by a kind of music that cannot be further removed from Wagner's ideal. This is not only because circus music is taken as mundane entertainment and Wagner's ideal strives to the highest imaginable form of art, but also due to the nature of the relationship between spectacle and audible in Kafka's story.

Degrading works such as the operas of Giacomo Meyerbeer as venturing mere effects and thus as inauthentic, fake, and manipulative (Gess 2007, 281), Wagner saw operas whose emotional effect had no authentic cause as a "stamp of an absolutely empty piece of music" that "never got beyond a mere prismatic toying with the effect of its first entry, and consequently kept us bound to the relations presented by music's outermost side to the world of vision" (Wagner 1966a, 78). In Kafka's story, conversely, it is precisely such toying with effects of sound and vision which has no authentic cause behind it, that moves the narrator so deeply.²

Hence "Researches of a Dog" presents music whose mechanics of production and phenomenological effects are taken straight from the tradition of Wagner's philosophy of music, but whose abilities to communicate universal ideals as well as its "quality" and "authenticity" stand in complete opposition to this tradition. Seen against the backdrop of Wagnerian music ideals, the story is understood as a sharp counterblow to this tradition and its metaphysical and epistemological implications.

On December 7, 1916 Kafka wrote in *The Blue Octavo Notebooks* the following fragment: "Heaven is dumb, echoing only to the dumb"³ (Kafka 1991, 29). While the fragment provokes theological and existential readings, I wish to focus on its uncommon take on silence, according to which the absence of sound (being dumb) does not necessarily entail absence of action (echo). This is of course no novelty; actions can produce silence, by either preventing the emission of sound or preventing it from being heard. What distinguishes these kinds of actions from silence in Kafka's sky-fragment is that in the latter the action which creates silence remains essentially unseen.

Two months before writing the sky-fragment, Kafka had engaged with silence in a short story posthumously published under the title "The Silence of the Sirens." The story revisits Odysseus' encounter with the sirens from the Homeric epos. In Kafka's version, when approaching the sirens Odysseus stuffs wax into his ears to block the deadly song from being heard, but expecting this the sirens utilize "an even more terrible weapon than their song – namely, their silence." (Kafka 2007, 128) While one might escape their singing, no one can endure the hubris which follows the thought of

² A similar point is made by Gess in discussing "Josephine": "[Kafka's story] shows that 'poor' music in fact does what 'good' music was supposed to do [...] it turns out that the theatricality and make-believe stand at the heart of the power at work in the performance situation" (2007, 283).

³ The fragment has no title. In what follows it shall be referred to as "the sky-fragment."

overcoming them by one's own powers. And so when Odysseus passes by the sirens he does not "hear their silence;" he sees "the turning of their necks, their deep breathing, their tearful eyes, their half-opened mouths" and believes that "their arias resound, unheard, around him" (ibidem).

Both the sky-fragment and "The Silence of the Sirens" deal with the perplexing issue of *c a u s e d s i l e n c e*. While in the sky-fragment the absence of sound does not entail the absence of cause, "The Silence of the Sirens" displays a situation in which the cause of silence is misplaced—the "listener" believes the cause is the addressee (Odysseus) while in fact it stems from the source (the sirens). The possibility that silence might have undetected cause has a disturbing potential: how can one tell whether the silence one "hears" is caused by one action, by another, or rather by nothing at all?

In order to dive deeper into these questions, a discussion of the relations between sound and source is required. Acoustic phenomena always imply two objects, namely a sound that is heard, and a source which usually is visible, or at least can become visible. Sound itself is "insufficient for establishing reference back to the source" (Kane 2014, 135). To establish a sound's source, one must synchronize sonorous input with visual input of the source emanating it, but of course there are cases where one does not see the source of the sound one hears, cases known as *a c o u s m a t i c*.⁴ As long as the source is not manifested, any acoustic expression entails a dimension of uncertainty with regard to its source. Consequently, as Kane points out (2014, 148), since sound objects are never autonomous, acousmatic sounds carry an inherent disturbing feature. Kane also introduces the term *a c o u s m a t i c i t y*, by which he designates "the degree to which the sound's source can be ascertained" (ibidem). The term allows differentiation between simple revealing of sound-source such as the unveiling of a curtain, and more complicated, perhaps empirically impossible cases, such as the one faced by Kafka's researching dog and perplexed burrower. However, since every sound essentially has a source, acousmaticity by definition cannot reach degree zero.

Matters are different however when it comes to silence. If acousmatic sound is sound whose source is not perceived, then let us use the term *a c o u s m a t i c s i l e n c e* to designate situations where one normally expect sound but encounters silence whose source is not perceived. Just as with acousmatic sound, once encountered with acousmatic silence the tendency is to try and locate the cause of silence, but since unlike sound, silence

⁴ Sound theorist Pierre Schaeffer defines acousmatic sound as "sound that one hears without seeing what causes it" (Kane 2014, 3).

can be uncaused, the degree of silence-acousmaticity can be zero. We can derive the following rule: as long as the source of silence is undetected it is impossible to ascertain whether it is caused or uncaused.

While Kafka's sky-fragment presents the epistemological problem in which acousmatic silence is entangled (i.e. it is impossible to ascertain whether it is caused or uncaused), "The Silence of the Sirens" complicates this problem by problematizing the relations between sound and vision. These relations, as discussed above, occupied Wagner as well. In fact, Wagner's discourse of the power of music as depriving vision from the hypnotic, spellbound listener evokes the mythical source of Kafka's short story: Homer's sirens constitute the archetype of Wagner's attribution of music—their song is heard before they are seen, it clearly has hypnotic powers, and these powers render powerless their victims' vision (at least in the derivative sense of vision as "direction" and "rational").⁵ Since Wagner's musical transcendence cannot be easily implemented in a visual medium like opera, where "the physical presence of singing bodies onstage would make blindsight unacceptable," he confronts the necessary visibility of opera by controlling what the eye sees through the use of architectural *techne*, i.e. concealing the mechanism of the orchestra (Kane 2014, 115). In other words, for music to fulfill its Wagnerian potential it must be acousmatic.

For Wagner, "the mechanical movement of the band" and the "apparatus of an orchestral production" are completely subordinate to the hypnotic power of music. Conversely, in Kafka's story, the hypnotic power resides not in music but precisely in the mechanics of its production (the bodily gestures of the sirens), to the extent that it is at its peak when music is eliminated, when the sirens are silent. Moreover, while Wagner's music culminates with the use of *techne* that conceals the "mechanism for tone production" (Wagner 1966b, 333), in Kafka's story, in direct opposition, the power of silence reaches peak with the use of *techne* (wax) to conceal the mechanism of silence production. Thus, in "The Silence of the Sirens," not only is music deprived of its independent unworldly status and rendered subordinate to sight, it is also its absolute negation—silence—which takes precedence as the most powerful sonic phenomenon. In its employment of silence, "The Silence of the Sirens" challenges music's ability to communicate tran-

⁵ *Odyssey* Book XII: "To the Sirens first shalt thou come, who bewitch all men, whosoever shall come to them. Whoso draws nigh them unwittingly and hears the sound of the Sirens' voice, never doth he see wife or babes stand by him on his return, nor have they joy at his coming; but the Sirens enchant him with their clear song" (Homer 1909, 170).

scendence. In order to communicate transcendence, music must signify, it must convey the “essences obscured by the power of sight” (Wagner 1966a, 74). In Kafka’s story what the “power of sight” obscures is nothing other than the absence of song; Kafka responds to Wagner’s music’s universal communication with the obliteration of signification, carried out by his doubly muted sirens.

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