Kafka:
A Blueprint of Desire

by

Lara Pehar

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Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures
University of Toronto

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Abstract

Desire in Kafka has been variously theorized, through the works of Freud, Lacan, Girard, Deleuze, and others. Yet there appears to have been, up to now, no inverse attempt: to extract from within his literature a theoretical model of desire. This dissertation fills this gap in scholarship and reveals Kafka as a great theoretician of desire. Since Kafka never wrote such a theory, my objective becomes to lift its blueprint from within his texts and to formulate an account of desire these works generate. I do so by tracing the author’s incessant experimentation with desire on a handful of key texts between 1912 and 1922. Within these works, desire appears as pure Verkehr, a force that tends towards the subject’s self-realization. His letters, novels and stories, as I demonstrate, entail a series of literary experiments that test the potency of written texts on the one hand and human bodies on the other to be employed as vehicles for desire—as means for this Verkehr towards becoming.
In *Briefe an Felice* and *Der Prozess* Kafka takes up the former, exploring the possibility of liberating the symbolic self from the body through writing, by passing off written documents as a legitimate proxy of one’s identity. Unconvinced by the results, Kafka reverses the hierarchy of writing over corporeality as a mode of self-realization, shifting the site of desire from text to body in attempts to write (*In der Strafkolonie*), read (*Ein Landarzt*), and stage (*Ein Hungerküstler*) bodies as narrative texts. But this counter experiment reaffirms the supposition of duality between the corporeal and the symbolic selves as alternative modes of self-realization, so that desire remains thwarted by the limitations of the chosen medium. It is in his late novel-project, *Das Schloß*, that Kafka successfully dismantles this opposition and arrives at a more nuanced understanding of desire as a free multi-directional force of self-becoming. Kafka’s evolving conceptualization of desire has direct implications for the increasingly open narrative structure of his late writings: As the flow of desire ceases to be determined by the choice of a single vehicle (written texts or human bodies) and by its limitations, so too the *Schloß*-novel escapes the narrow parameters of a linear text and itself becomes multi-directional, culminating in a new literary form: a hypertext.
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My younger sister Lea was born months after the Berlin wall fell and the dissolution of Yugoslavia began, and so grew up in a completely different world than the one into which I was born. In the diaspora that has shaped who we have become, she remains my strongest connection to the many places we once called home. She has been my greatest role model, and I hope that at least at times, I have been hers.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations of Works by Kafka

**BF**  

**E**  

**NS 1**  

**P**  

**T1**  

**T2**  

**T3**  

**Sch**  
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INTRODUCTION

Lifting the Blueprint: Kafka’s Investigations into Desire

Much has been theorized about desire in Kafka’s works: from a transcendental to an immanent desire, and the paradoxical appearance of transcendence within that immanence. Yet in this vast secondary literature, Kafka’s own philosophical investigations into desire remain largely unexplored. This dissertation interjects here and aims to reveal Kafka as a great theoretician of desire. As readers of Kafka’s stories, novel-projects and letters, we are faced with scenes of desire at nearly every turn of the page; his characters encounter it at each new door. Recall the parable Vor dem Gesetz. It tells of a man from the country who seeks admittance to the law and a doorkeeper who prohibits him entry. The man from the country spends his life waiting for the moment when he might be permitted to enter and dies before the law’s illuminated opening—a door that, as he learns in his final moments, existed for him alone and which the doorkeeper then closes. The man’s dissatisfaction with his position before the law, in which the parable places him and the same idiomatic expression places every one of us, is puzzling. But even more curious is why he obeys a law that keeps him from the law—why he accepts the doorkeeper’s prohibition and resists his own never-ending desire. It is evident that the authority of the law and the man’s desire operate in a mutual interplay, each with the power to overthrow the other, so that in the end the reader is left wondering who outfoxed whom: Did the doorkeeper trick the man
from the country into submitting to a law that thwarted his desire and led to his exhaustion and death? Or did the latter’s death and the passing of his desire extinguish the need for the law’s radiantly seductive and yet forbidden entrance? Was it perhaps after all the man from the country who outwitted the doorkeeper and exhausted the law, proving, even if only at the expense of his own life, the possibility of bringing the deferral to an end? The protagonist of *Der Prozess*, Josef K., who shares the countryman’s intense desire for contact with the law, recognizes his own power to single-handedly put the entire justice system out of operation simply by disengaging. He knows that its authority depends on his recognition; its existence on his desire to pursue it: “[Dies sei] überhaupt kein Verfahren...denn es ist ja nur ein Verfahren, wenn ich es als solches anerkenne,” he exclaims, but this insight is of no consequence, and Josef succumbs to the law’s seduction: “aber ich erkenne es also für den Augenblick an” (*P* 51). The legal system whose authority Josef presupposes operates on a tiring postponement of recognition and contact, and it is precisely by granting his recognition that he comes to experience the law as an infinite process of interpretation about his own circumstances, a non-closure of meaning. Yet as the man from the country’s death reminds us, an unlimited postponement is not possible: the pursuit ends either in fruition or ceases all together.

This, of course, is a painful lesson Kafka personally learned not too long before writing the parable. His five-year correspondence with his two-time fiancée, Felice Bauer—perhaps even their entire relationship—is prefaced on the possibility that desire lives not in body, but in language: Much like the judicial system in *Der Prozess*, their union is characterized by the deferral of both immediate, in-person contact and legal recognition—marriage. In place
of proximity and physical affection, Kafka offers Bauer a body of writing. Between 1912 and 1917 he treats her with over five hundred letters, but he spends no more than a total of twenty days with her in Berlin. Time and time again he is at the cusp of travelling to her, but he keeps postponing it. The letters in turn do arrive and in their materiality sensually fake the lover’s own corporeal presence, all the while stubbornly asserting the necessity of its absence. They insist on an opposition between a conventional family life and creative literary activity. In the letters, Kafka posits corporeality and writing as alternative and mutually exclusive modes of self-realization: being a writer is incompatible with being a father, a husband, a family man. Not only the success of the romance but also of the literary endeavour (for the letters are both to Kafka) depends on keeping Bauer at a distance. She must forever remain behind another door.

This peculiar epistolary courtship both promises and thwarts the possibility of a fruitful finality, of the two lovers coming together before the law to enter a binding union. But unlike their romantic relationship which remains childless, the literary one proves immediately fruitful. Two days after writing his first letter to Bauer, Kafka writes Das Urteil, a story to which he would maintain the closest affinity for the rest of his life. When in the end the names of these lovers are united, it is not on a marriage certificate, but in the publication of this story, the success of their epistolary union: “Gestern bekam ich den Korrekturbogen Deiner kleinen Geschichte. Wie schön im Titel sich unsere Namen einander schließen!” (BF 298 [13.-14. 2.1913]). “Für Fräulein Felice B.” reads its subtitle. But Kafka not only dedicates the story to Bauer, he treats it as a shared offspring of their epistolary union, writing to her half a dozen times that this is actually her story. It is the perfect product of an
intensely generative energy. In the final scene the protagonist lets himself fall from a bridge while an almost unending stream of traffic—"ein geradezu unendlicher Verkehr"—is crossing it. The implied sexual undercurrents are difficult to overlook even in the absence of Kafka’s own explanatory commentary: "Weißt du, was der Schußsatz bedeutet? —Ich habe dabei an eine starke Ejakulation gedacht." 

Das Urteil not only ends in orgasm but its genesis too resembles a birth. Kafka reflects in his diary, "Die Geschichte ist wie eine regelrechte Geburt mit Schmutz und Schleim bedeckt aus mir rausgekommen" (T2 125 [11.2.1913]). As Charles Bernheimer remarks, with Das Urteil, "Kafka has mothered a unified, coherent text, and it is this Erotic experience that gives him a feeling of masculine potency." Kafka’s letters to Bauer postpone physical immediacy and temporarily compensate for Kafka’s absent body; they pitch Das Urteil as a shared literary offspring, but they cannot do so indefinitely. Waiting before the letter, like waiting before the law, reaches a point of no return, and so the epistolary relationship must culminate either in marriage or in breakup. Kafka opts for the latter.

The cruelty of the Kafkian justice system is that it operates in a paradox manner: like his Briefe an Felice, it at once attracts and repels; invites and denies entry; promises and precludes Verkehr, both in the primary sense of transit or traffic, and its euphemistic meaning of sexual intercourse. In both the letters and the novel, this vicissitude constitutes an erotic strategy, a game of hide and seek that both entices and exhausts the partaker, making up the basic structure that underlies many of Kafka’s desire scenes: a senseless or incomprehensible prohibition, its unavoidable violation (transgression of some unrecognized law), and a necessary punishment which consists of an inverse transgression of the subject.
And while the sought out entrances to the law and other presumed and desired interiorities always remain out of reach for our heroes (Das Schloß being a case in point), the governing law invades their private and intimate spaces: their homes, their minds, their bodies. The law reinstates itself through a Verkehr with the legal subject that enacts fantasies of penetration and domination. Its terrorizing punishment practices confront the transgressions in the most literal reversal: the guards who stole Josef’s clothes are forced to strip their own for a whipping; the penal colony guard who violated a commandment is violated with an inscription of the imperative he had failed to internalize freely. And the allure of the transgression doubles in the punishment: Although the guards’ pain might not elicit pleasure for them, it certainly gestures as much for others, so that Josef first slams the door shut, horrified by the guard’s scream, and then opens it again as if expecting to witness something pleasurable.

Justice in Kafka is an erotically violent affair. The judicial system itself possesses a sex drive. It is fitting perhaps that the law is written in a pornographic book, legal counsel is sought in bed, while public displays of sexual intercourse are staged in the courtroom. And it must be so, if the law is founded on the premise that guilt is inevitable. For this repeatedly maintained claim to hold true—in order for there to be so many undoubtedly guilty subjects—the law must impose a prohibition that tempts its subject to violate it. For this reason, the law is all encompassing and guilt is non-negotiable. Everyone is a participant in the judicial system; no one has immunity, and the roles of the violators and the enforcers are easily reversed. Thus we find not only Josef’s guards stripping naked before a whipper, but the penal colony’s officer takes the place of the condemned man on the execution bed to
internalize the former’s intended punishment; and the country doctor joins his patient on his deathbed, while the potent groom takes the doctor’s place next to his maid.

There is then desire as Verkehr—as physical traffic and as a self-generative energy—and other forces that block its movement or flow. This is why not only in Vor dem Gesetz but everywhere else in Kafka, doorsills, thresholds, real or figurative points of entry, are loci of desire, and many of his characters share the unfortunate destiny of being caught on the wrong side. And if the entrance is not being guarded by a doorkeeper, then Kafka’s heroes themselves must take on this daunting task and, as does Kafka in Briefe an Felice, make every effort to guard oneself from intrusion. Failure to secure the entry point is always of detrimental consequence: the condemned man in the penal colony is convicted of disrespectful conduct, that is, for sleeping in front of his superior’s door, rather than standing up and saluting every time the clock strikes the hour. The punishment reverses this error by literally forcing inside the man’s body the wording of the imperative he failed to internalize on his own: “Ehre deinen Vorgesetzten!” And because it does not suffice that the subject experiences the law “auf seinem Leib” alone (E 170), the writing process must continue until the onlookers too reach their moment of libidinal enlightenment, a moment Josef might wish for in the junk room. The machine rapes to the point of a collective orgasm. It writes by penetrating, shivering, and ejaculating, promising an erotically satisfying treatment so that the officer himself cannot resist his desire to become one with it. Paradoxically, however, this body-processing, judgment-enforcing machine is not immune to language and disassembles when a judgment is pronounced against it.
The country doctor, too, fails to guard the doors of his private sphere and suffers a similar intrusion of the self as the victims in the penal colony. Frustrated by the lacking means to get to his ill patient, he kicks in the door of his old pig shed, unexpectedly releasing two horses and a groom who offers to transport the doctor to the nearby village. By breaking into the pig shed, the country doctor rediscovers—literally and metaphorically—the Verkehrsmittel he once had and is now missing: his libido, manifested in a newfound desire for the maid Rosa, occurs at precisely the moment when he believes to have attained the necessary means, the horses, to reach his patient. In exchange for this service, the groom demands the doctor’s maid, and although the doctor refuses, by the logic of the story he had committed himself to this devilish contract by climbing into the carriage after the groom bit Rosa in the cheek, announcing the nature of his intensions. While the rediscovery of his sex drive is synonymous with the loss of Rosa, the business transaction nevertheless proves immediately productive, and this in more ways than one. As the doctor is being whisked away with new horsepower, the forced entry manifested in the maid’s bleeding cheek reoccurs. Under the groom’s force, the doctor’s house door “birst und splittert.” The sexual nature of the violence the maid suffers is mirrored in the patient’s wound: deep, deadly, and suggestively located near the hip, it too is ‘Rosa’, flowerlike, and lively like a fertile womb, with “weißen Köpfchen, [die] mit vielen Beinchen ans Licht [kommen]” and attract a singing audience.

As this sampling shows, desire permeates Kafka’s writing and his works not only thematize, but also theorize it. Beneath this thematic level lies a mechanism of desire: this force of self-realization appears at strategic moments when the protagonist believes to discover a path to
realize his goal, often in an otherwise seemingly hopeless situation. But the illusory progress
only masks real shifts—ruptures in the narrative through which elements of Kafka’s fiction
escape its parameters and connect up in a hypertextual fashion with segments of his other
works. Hypertextuality, as I explain in the following pages, has a great explanatory power
both for Kafka’s open narrative structure and the pluralistic conception of desire it reveals.
As such, it warrants a brief detour. Hypertext was coined in 1963 by IT pioneer Ted Nelson
to explain a non-linear and dynamic textuality enabled by computers.12 The contemporary
reader will be familiar with it as the defining structure of the World Wide Web—a “global
hypertext” with millions of users, in which blocks of texts are interconnected with links that
allow readers to determine the order in which to access information.13 Because of its open
structure, a hypertext can be edited, expanded or updated by multiple authors at different
times. The most basic features of hypertext are interconnectivity and responsiveness.14 Thus,
the objective is not completeness, finality, or self-containment, as is commonly the case with
a traditional linear text, but an increasing number of modular units and an expanding
network of connections. The structure of hypertext anticipates changes to come and is open
to accommodate them. Fragmentation thus remains a hypertext’s essential feature; rupture
creates avenues for new connections and meanings to emerge, in contrast to literary
fragments, within which such fragmentation is often associated with the loss of coherence or
meaning. To put it in terms of fictional literature, hypertext is a dynamic way of writing
and reading, one that overcomes the constraints of traditional text.

While hypertext in an innovation of the digital age, its conceptual development is deeply
rooted in traditional literature,15 arguably most of all in modernist fiction like Kafka’s, whose
deviation from a linear narrative anticipates precisely the kind of non-linear writing and reading which have come to characterize hyper-fiction since the 1990s. By the time that engineer Vannevar Bush predicted the operation of what we today know as hypertext, when he wrote, in 1945, that “wholly new forms of encyclopedias will appear, ready made with a mesh of associative trails running through them,” Jorge Luis Borges had already entertained the idea of a hyperfiction in his “The Garden of Forking Paths.” The story tells of a Chinese governor, Ts’ui Pên, whose goals in life were write a populous novel, and to construct a “strictly infinite” labyrinth. In the aftermath of his unexpected murder, no trace of a labyrinth construction could be found and the promised novel consisted of many “chaotic manuscripts,” “an indeterminate heap of contradictory drafts,” fragments which his family “wished to condemn […] to the fire” but his executor nevertheless published—as a book (24-25). It was yet another fragment from a letter that would help his friend solve the mystery. In it, Ts’ui Pên writes, “I leave to the various futures (not to all) my garden of forking paths.” His friend is able to discern that whereas in a labyrinth, forking occurs in space, in the novel, it is “a forking in time,” and thus reveal the “endless” labyrinthical construction to be the hypertext novel itself, one characterized by connectivity of the various narratives and reader responsiveness. Borges’s character of course did not use this term, but his description of Ts’ui Pên’s novel leaves no doubt that this is precisely what both the fictional and the actual authors had in mind. As Ts’ui Pên’s friend explains,

In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of Ts’ui Pên, he chooses—simultaneously—all of them. He creates, in this way, diverse futures, diverse times which themselves also proliferate and fork. Here, then, is the explanation of the novel’s contradictions. Fang, let
us say, has a secret; a stranger calls at his door; Fang resolves to kill him. Naturally, there are several possible outcomes: Fang can kill the intruder, the intruder can kill Fang, they both can escape, they both can die, and so forth. In the work of Ts’ui Pên, all possible outcomes occur; each one is the point of departure for other forking. Sometimes, the paths of this labyrinth converge: for example, you arrive at this house, but in one of the possible pasts you are my enemy, in another, my friend. If you will resign yourself to my incurable pronunciation, we shall read a few pages.

(26)

Borges’s vision of forking paths vividly illustrates the structure of hypertext. A novel in which the reader “creates… diverse futures” is precisely the reading experience hyper-fiction writers seek to bring about. But this kind of literature that lends itself to such a pluralistic reading also deeply resembles Kafka’s narrative structure, which is incredibly open, internally multi-linear, ruptured and interconnected. None of Kafka’s four novel attempts culminate in a conclusive ending; the shorter prose pieces consist of multiple versions or are variations of the same story. Kafka’s Briefe an Felice resemble a novel, while his Brief an den Vater is read as one of his more famous stories. The inherent openness and resulting interconnectedness of these works, I propose, is less a problem of completion than of self-containment. Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande for instance breaks off without any wedding preparations having taken place, but one might argue that it does indeed conclude five years later in Das Urteil with Gregor Samsa realizing Raban’s desire to escape the constraints of the family by staying home in bed in the form of a beetle. The remaining three “novels” are likewise unfinished, but each comprises self-standing stories that function as self-contained wholes independent of the larger project.
In addition to the missing endings, we find an array of labile motifs, as well as the reappearance of characters or character constellations. Not only is there the rather obvious K.-figure who moves from the letters through the three novels, but even the curious doubles double: Josef’s two guards from Der Prozess await K. in Das Schloß as two indistinguishably incapable assistants he struggles to escape. Frieda, a character inspired by Bauer, not only doubles but triples in Das Schloß, once again as the fiancée whom the protagonist does not marry (in Briefe an Felice / Das Urteil / Das Schloß) and then in the embedded mini Freudian tale as Hans Brunswick’s sister. The young law student from Der Prozess is “zum Richter bestellt” in the penal colony, and that “trotz [s]einer Jugend”; finally, Raban who wishes to stay home in bed reappears in the beetle Gregor Samsa, or perhaps it is the travelling salesman whom Raban encounters on the train who prefigures Samsa? The cues, or internal links, that direct the reader from one of Kafka’s texts to another renders his oeuvre not only highly self-referential, but also hypertextual. Consider for instance the whip (“Rute”) used on Josef’s guards in Der Prozess. It is as if it cuts through this narrative and passes from text to text in the recurring fusion of sex and punishment. This “Werkzeug des Geschlechts und der Bestrafung” moves from one door to another, from the Prozess-junk room, to the doorsteps of the penal colony’s superior, before it reappears in the country doctor’s pig shed. The whip (“Reitpeitsche”) with which the condemned man in the penal colony is punished for neglecting his duty (E 171) doubles in the machine’s rod that performs the punishment. As Clayton Koelb correctly observes, this Straf-stange is hardly different from a straffe Stange, an erect rod signifying male sexuality as the penal colony’s officer’s phrase suggests: “[Die Egge] stellt sich von selbst so ein, daß sie nur knapp mit den Spitzen den Körper berührt; ist die Einstellung vollzogen,
strafft sich sofort dieses Stahlseil zu einer Stange (E 173, my emphasis). Moreover, the punishment scene in front of the penal colony superior’s door recalls the one from the Prozess-junk room through its very inviting transgression of a ‘trade rule’ (the man’s failure to salute is as unlikely to be noticed as the guards’ theft of Josef’s clothes) and here too the punishment is a direct reversal of the crime: when the man rebels against the “Straffheit” of the riding whip with which the superior wants to punish him, the machine is brought into play to assert the male domination he had rejected—he is penetrated by a pseudo-sexual machine for refusing his master’s penetration with the whip.

The whip travels from text to text as a marker of the inseparability of the sex and punishment acts and the points of intersection are charged with desire: the penal colony’s officer displays a libidinal attachment to the machine; the country doctor makes the horrifying realization that the need for his newly found libido has just been effaced, marked with the groom’s question: “‘Soll ich anspannen?’” (E 253). The man of course means whether he should harness the horses in a preparation for the trip but taken more literally, “anspannen” means to tense up, to become hard, and so comically suggests a preparation for a different kind of Verkehr. The doctor is well aware that the question operates on this level also, which is why he threatens the groom, when he bites Rosa in the check, with nothing short of a whip: “Willst du die Peitsche?” (E 254). As in Nietzsche’s oft-quoted passage from Zarathustra, the reader first wonders whether the groom is on the giving or on the receiving end of the whip, but this ambiguity is quickly dissolved: the doctor’s threat is empty, while the groom’s “Werkzeug des Geschlechts und der Bestrafung” proves to be unstoppable. His horsepower is sufficient to bring about a Verkehr with Rosa and to
transport the doctor to the patient, while the latter utterly lacks such stamina and can hardly find his way home. These strategic occurrences of desire scenes and the mechanisms of rupture they overlay suggest a conscious experimentation with desire on Kafka’s part, giving rise to my hypothesis that Kafka’s oeuvre might do more that depict desire—that it might indeed generate a theoretical model for understanding it.

Kafka lived and wrote at a time that marks the birth of psychoanalysis, and although his own engagement with the emerging discipline is best described as indirect, a rather voluminous body of literature, particularly in the early decades of scholarship, employs it as a tool for studying his works. The very first psychoanalytic connection to Kafka dates back to 1917 when psychologist Dr. Wilhelm Stekel, in a footnote remark in Onanie und Homosexualität (Die homosexuelle Neurose), compares his homosexual patients’ dreams of transforming into a bug to Kafka’s Die Verwandlung, which likewise “handelt von der Verwandlung eines Menschen in eine Wanze. Die Bedeutung dieses Traumes,” Stekel infers, “ist wohl eine sadistische. (Die Wanzen saugen Blut).” The earliest detailed psychoanalytic account of Kafka’s literature is found in the 1931 study, Franz Kafka’s Inferno: Eine psychologische Deutung seiner Strafphantasie by Hellmuth Kaiser, who takes Kafka’s sadomasochistic phantasies, as documented in the diaries and letters, as evidence of an unresolved Oedipal conflict in the writer’s personal life and within this framework interprets the short stories Ein Bericht für eine Akademie, Die Verwandlung, and In der Strafkolonie as varying constellations of the Freudian father-son conflict, and the fear of castration. For Kaiser, each of the three stories’ “son-figures” is consumed with fantasies of eradicating the father, each fuelled by an Oedipal desire.
Kafka’s supposed incomplete psychosexual development, which is the basis of both Stekel’s (homosexual) and Kaiser’s (Oedipal) interpretations, remained a major reference point for subsequent Freudian readings, which become progressively diagnostic and lead to increasingly medical findings. In 1967, John S. White concludes that the true cause of Kafka’s death is psychological—thus repeating Kafka’s own self-diagnosis: “[S]eine Tuberkulose,” White speculates, is merely “die körperliche Manifestation seines psychosexuell gestörten Gleichgewichtes.” Kafka’s literature consequently emerges as a thanatology, a testament of the death drive’s triumph over the sexual instincts in his personal life, a manifestation of “Eros—nicht besiegt von, sondern im Dienste von Thanatos.”

A decade later, Margarete Mitscherlich-Nielsen draws on Freud’s *Trauer und Melancholie* to diagnose Kafka with depression. Arguing from a similar vantage point as White, she stresses the author’s libidinal attachment to his mother and views his literature as a product of a therapeutic process by which the author strives to overcome her absence. In 1982, Günther Mecke takes this point further, claiming to reveal Kafka’s “offenbares Geheimnis” as his homosexual desires, which the author digests by encoding them in fiction.

Proceeding as a psychoanalyst, Mecke goes on to ‘unlock’ Kafka’s oeuvre through an inductive method of applied decoding [“Angewandte Dechiffrierung”] to reveal the works’ ‘true’ manifestation, namely, “homosexuelle (und lesbische) Pornographie” (*Kafkas offenbares Geheimnis*, 8, 14, 8).

Taking as evidence Kafka’s descriptions of his disturbed eating practices, Manfred Fichter (1987) diagnoses Kafka, posthumously, as an anorexic. Although writing from a medical
standpoint, Fichter essentially regurgitates psychoanalytic readings before his own, citing the
two factors stressed by Mecke and Mitscherlich-Nielsen respectively—“unconscious
homosexual desires and a positive identification with his mother”—which lead to
“disturbances in psychosexual and gender identity development.” By viewing these as
Kafka’s “reaction to his physically strong father whom he feared and despised,” Fichter
repeats Kaiser’s initial reading (376). His emphasis on the role of the father further
anticipates Ramón G. Mendoza’s 1986 *Outside Humanity: A Study of Kafka’s Fiction*
in which he claims to locate, on the basis of semiotic narrative analysis, an “Ur-schema” to
Kafka’s works, a plot structure which consist of “a seeker’s quest for a goal; his efforts to
overcome the resistance placed in his way by an adversary; and the final failure of those
efforts.” Yet what starts out as a text-immanent approach dwindles into nothing short of
“the unresolved, negative, male, Oedipus complex (UNMOC),” leading Mendoza to
reformulate the reoccurring plot structure he observes into “the son’s quest for the father’s
approval and love; constant rejection by the father; guilt and self-hatred as a result of the
paternal rejection.” Moreover, Mendoza speculates that this narrative structure has a
psychological cause, a “projective mechanism on the part of the author, of which he may
not be aware at all” (21).

In these earlier readings, desire in Kafka’s works is understood as narrowly contained in the
author’s own domestic domain: desire for the mother (White, Mitscherlich-Nielsen), for the
father (Fichter, Mendoza), and for the self-same other (Mecke, Stekel). But Kafka’s
biography has played an important role for critics with other research paradigms (even if
these touch on psychoanalysis) for instance to explain the libidinal fixation on writing in
Kafka’s life and letters or more generally the reoccurring conflation of writing and eroticism. The most influential of these remains Elias Canetti’s 1969 Der andere Prozeß: Kafkas Briefe an Felice, which elucidates the instrumental role Kafka’s correspondence to Felice Bauer played in aiding his literary productivity. The couple’s relationship—and especially what Kafka perceived as its trial-like ending—forms, in Canetti’s view, the foundation for the subsequent novel and propels Kafka’s writing even once the engagement is finally dissolved and the letter exchange ceases. While Kafka’s love for Bauer emerges out of the epistolary endeavour, Canetti contends, the textual relationship is to be understood primarily in terms of power.

Clayton Koelb (1985) likewise stresses the political dimension of reading and writing practices in Kafka’s works, specifically in In der Strafkolonie, but his characterization of Kafka’s aggressive writers and passive readers can be extended to Briefe an Felice, thus bringing his general argument in line with Canetti’s. In der Strafkolonie, Koelb maintains, reaffirms “the politics of sexual expression” he observes in Plato and in Freud, namely “the orthodox tradition of male dominance and female passivity, of male penetration and female opening up, of paternal text and maternal matrix.” The formula that expresses the relationship between text and eroticism in Kafka is even simpler for Stanley Corngold (2007): “writing” = “fucking.” He puts it aptly when he writes that “ejaculation and birth are the chief metaphors of Kafka’s early writing” (80), both of which apply to Das Urteil. Kafka remarks to Max Brod that the endless Verkehr in the concluding sentence stands for “a strong ejaculation” [“eine starke Ejakulation”] (79), but its genesis, as Kafka confirms in the above cited diary entry from February 11, 1913 recalls a birth: “die Geschichte ist wie
eine regelrechte Geburt mit Schmutz und Schleim bedeckt aus mir herausgekommen und nur ich habe die Hand, die bis zum Körper dringen kann und Lust dazu hat” (T2 125).

Moreover, Corngold notices the paradox in Kafka’s desire for the story to be born, and his resistance to its birth, citing Kafka’s diary entry from November 1911 on the possibility of writing “ein größeres Ganzes,” a “Geschichte [die sich] niemals endgültig von mir los lösen [könnte]” (T1 177). To extend Corngold’s analogy, Kafka treats his stories as his legitimate offspring, speaking of their genesis as the birth of a child, describing himself as the birthing mother. More importantly, however, as Corngold suggests, driving Kafka’s work are two streams of desire that run in opposing directions: on the one hand, to create literature that is whole and complete, and on the other, to never detach from this offspring, or blood relative (“Blutsverwandter”) to use Kafka’s term—for the literature- birthing-process to never terminate in finality; for his Schriftsteller-sein to never be interrupted.40 It is from this intersection of competing desires that Kafka’s theorizing emerges.

The psychoanalytic tradition has remained a point of return in Kafka studies, although in recent decades scholarly focus has shifted away from Freud’s Oedipus complex and the death drive to the linguistic dimension of subjectivity formation proposed by Lacan.41 Lacan has theorized desire extensively over decades, but perhaps the clearest definition he offers is in a lecture from 1958: “desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of their splitting (Spaltung).”42 Elsewhere that same year, Lacan explains that subject reveals his own “manque à être” by demanding from the Other to complement this lack. It follows, that “the locus of speech, is also the locus of this lack.”43 What this amounts
to is that the object, or objective, of desire is always recognition, and language the means by which subjects attempt to reconcile the impossibility of ever fully achieving it. In his theory of psychopoetics, Charles Bernheimer (1982) posits a relationship between the psychoanalytical and linguistic models, thus drawing on both Freud and Lacan.44 There is on the one hand, the subject’s desire for unity (in psychoanalytic terms with the mother) and his awareness of her lack (the Eros / Thanatos complex). On the other hand, the subject is aware that language cannot generate a substitute for this lack, and his experience of lack is irreconcilable with his perception of the failure of language to generate a substitute. This leads to experiences of alienation, the effects of which Kafka’s literature depicts, in Bernheimer’s view. Avital Ronell (1987) goes further reading Das Schloß strictly based on the Lacanian concept of desire. She argues that in this work, desire is structured through incompleteness, like language itself, so that K.’s erotic drive is wound up with the linguistic quest. Neither the character nor the narrative develop, since K. desires precisely “a lack of fulfilment or completion” and for this reason repeatedly blocks the possibility of a resolution or a conclusive interpretation of events.45 Karoline Krauss (1996) has argued contra Ronell for a positive development in K.’s desire and maintains that K. undergoes a “process of existential maturation” and eventually turns away from a discourse with the castle which offers him little gratification, towards “physical gratification and emotional contentment...aimed at the fulfillment of the present moment.”46 Peter Horn (1997) adds a Lyotardian twist to the Lacanian argument, pointing out that “Kafka’s meaning is hidden not because he was hiding his homosexuality, but because his meaning cannot be spoken without wrenching the hierarchy imposed by the phallic signifier.”47 His broader argument, in direct contradiction to Mecke’s early reading, is that not homosexual but “undefined
desire” characterizes Kafka’s work: “The erotic alienation which Kafka portrays again and again are not simply the problems of the homosexual with heterosexuality: they are the alienation of the individual caught up in sexual images projected against his own” (370).48

Central to many neo-Lacanian readings of Kafka is a refutation of Deleuze and Guattari’s influential 1975 *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, a book with a two-fold objective. The authors begin with Kafka’s minority position as a Czech Jew writing in German and present him as a political author of a minor literature: “that which a minority constructs within a major language” and which is, in contrast to established or major literature, characterized by “the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation.”49 Minor literature like Kafka’s, they contend, is inherently political because rather than presenting the affairs of an individual subject, it expresses a collective investment, speaking about and on behalf of the collective minor community. The second and for the purposes of the present study more important accomplishment of this work is Deleuze and Guattari’s convincing argument that desire is a structuring feature of Kafka’s works. The two are indeed the first to recognize this and to provide an alternative conceptual framework to previously established theological and psychoanalytic models for approaching Kafka’s literature. They do so by denouncing interpretation in favour of experimentation—or by replacing the methodology of psychoanalysis with one of schizoanalysis—a model that presupposes that the libido does not need to be desexualized or sublimated, but that it forms part of the very infrastructure of society.
In Deleuze’s philosophy, reality consists of interconnected machines or machinic assemblages. Desire figures as the productive force driving this mechanism, “a procedure or a process” by which these machinic assemblages operate (ML 8). In this context, Kafka’s corpus is a literary machine that consists of three self-functioning yet interconnected components. Each element has a distinct purpose and makes up one stage in the realization of Kafka’s machine. “Defined by internal criteria, and not by a publishing project,” these are “the letters and the diabolical pact; the stories and the becoming-animal; the novels and the mechanic assemblages” (ML 40). The desire of the letters lies in the duality between the author who keeps his distance and the epistolary persona who travels to his addressees in the letters. Echoing Canetti, Deleuze and Guattari view Kafka’s correspondence with Bauer as a function of literary productivity: The letter exchange gives Kafka not mere inspiration but “a physical force that will enable him to write” and it is for this reason that the letters are “an indispensable gear, a motor part for the literary machine” (ML 29). The stories and novels come to be assembled as an outcome of the letters’ “demands, of their potentials and their insufficiencies” (ML 29). The stories depict becoming-animal—metamorphoses that offer a way out. These remain incomplete when the animal-in-becoming fails to follow the “line of escape” that emerges out of its transformation, reverting to its original Oedipal position (ML 35). The novels, they argue, advance from the stories, bringing together complex social assemblages. Thus, the legal machine of Der Prozess is far more sophisticated than the writing machine in the penal colony: unlike the latter, it neither connects to an Oedipal condition nor is it mechanical in the primary sense. Instead it “realize[s] effects of inhuman violence and desire that are infinitely stronger than those one can obtain with animals or
with isolated mechanisms” (*ML* 39).

The application of the concept of minor literature to Kafka has not been without criticism, especially in North America. As Clayton Koelb points out in one of the earliest reviews of the English translation of the book, “In an important way, the volume is not so much about Kafka as it is about Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of a ‘minor literature,’” a “fertile” notion indeed, but one of which “Kafka is probably not a particularly apt example.”\(^50\) Koelb contends that Kafka’s cultural minority, the premise on which Deleuze and Guattari’s work is based, is greatly exaggerated: Kafka is not, as the two understand him to be, a speaker of a minority dialect; on the contrary, his native language is standard high German. Stanley Corngold echoes these same two objections (the misconception of Kafka’s dialect and the inapplicability of the concept of minority to his works) and further challenges Deleuze and Guattari’s “straightforward political appropriation” of literature, insisting that Kafka’s own conception of minor literature neither allows such a politicization, nor corresponds to Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas.\(^51\) In the context of my project, the shortcoming of this book concerns the uncompromising appropriation Koelb and Corngold criticize, but with respect to desire. *Towards a Minor Literature* purports to unearth Kafka’s model of desire, but in effect, it transfers onto Kafka Deleuze and Guattari’s own well-known desire theory, already detailed in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972).\(^52\)

In this earlier ground-breaking collaboration, Deleuze and Guattari argue against the psychoanalytic conception of desire as lack and, as the title suggests, reject Freud (and substantially revise Lacan);\(^53\) they define desire as a continuous process of production, an immanent force of life that predates any desiring subject or organized identity—
differentiating it from Freud’s conception of *Trieb*, which begins at birth and ceases at death. In short, they criticize psychoanalysis for confusing desire with incest and perceiving it in domestic and relational terms, thus challenging the position that the prohibition of incest (that is, of the mother as one’s object of sexual desire) forms the basis of culture, which Freud put forth in *Totem und Tabu*. Instead of such transcendental, human desire that operates on repression and negation, they insist, this creative force exists before the lack of the other is established. Moreover, they deny the fundamental Lacanian concepts of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real, as well as the method of free association. Because desire is not lack, the authors argue, it is not represented through language. Inversely, language emerges *from* desire, and not, as per Lacan, from lack of the desired object and the subject’s subconscious need to displace and compensate for the absent transcendental signifier. Finally, it is already here that Deleuze and Guattari voice their rejection of the psychoanalytic method of interpretation and propose schizo-analysis as its alternative. Rather than attempting to decode one’s dreams in order to uncover his suppressed desires and the root of the guilty psyche that speaks, schizoanalysis focuses on how the images of the psyche or the ego are assembled from certain privileges and investments.

*Toward a Minor Literature* was the first book to be written after *Anti-Oedipus* and it reads as its sweeping iteration, a case study on the validity of its schizoanalytic project. It seeks to liberate Kafka from the same falsities to which, in the authors’ view, desire succumbs in psychoanalysis: domestication, Oedipalisation, the family triangle, transcendence, and interpretation. Kafka’s literature, being minor, is neither Oedipal nor personal; he is not a bachelor caught up in a family triangle and unable to get married but
rather he operates as a bachelor machine and is thereby plugged into other social machines. Accordingly, Kafka’s short stories “deterritorializ[e] Oedipus into the world instead of reterritorializing everything in Oedipus and the family” (ML 41). To achieve this, they claim, Oedipus must be exaggerated, and this is fulfilled with Kafka’s *Brief an den Vater*, which has the effect of revealing other triangles that operate beneath the surface of and within the family triangle itself, and of outlining paths of escape (ML 14). *Die Verwandlung*, they maintain, is emblematic of this process and its failure, of deterritorialization and re-Oedipalization: Gregor’s transformation into an insect traces a line of flight. It is not correct to say that he escapes his father, but rather that he flees the bureaucratic, commercial and family triangles which his father did not know to escape (ML 13). Yet the deterritorialization process through the becoming-animal U-turns into re-Oedipalization which ends with Gregor being stabbed in the back with an apple, and dying. The escape fails because Gregor refuses to give up the portrait of the woman in fur, thereby causing his sister—who accepted him and who like him, “wanted the schizo incest, an incest of strong connections, incest with the sister in opposition to Oedipal incest, incest that gives evidence of a nonhuman sexuality as in the becoming-animal”—to become jealous and abandon him (ML 15). In contrast to the psychoanalytic project of decoding the symbolic, they insist that productive desiring machines, such as Kafka’s writing machine, “represent nothing, signify nothing, mean nothing, and are exactly what one makes of them, what is made with them, what they make in themselves” (AO 288).

However convincing one might find Deleuze and Guattari’s mapping of *Anti-Oedipus* onto Kafka, this interpretive approach undermines its authors’ very insistence that Kafka’s
literature is “actually only open to experimentation” (ML 3). To experiment with Kafka on desire means to follow his own experimentations to its conclusion. But Deleuze and Guattari, however indirectly, admit that the Kafka book is more about them than him. This methodological concern aside, the application of Anti-Oedipus neglects the very struggle Kafka’s works depict when his characters are confronted with the choice of corporality or language as avenues for self-realization, one at the expense of the other. The position on desire of the late Kafka is closer to Deleuze’s position than that of the early Kafka. Yet to claim that Kafka’s understanding of desire is inherently Deleuzian would leave no room for such a development. And the subject of my work is precisely Kafka’s experimentation with bodies and language which leads to his changing conception of desire. While the authors are right in their conviction that desire in Kafka is not defined by lack and is instead a productive force of life, it is not, as Deleuze and Guattari view it to be, a pre-personal, non-human force of life. On the contrary, Kafka is at all times concerned with desire as a distinctly human experience, a driving force unique to the formation of human subjectivity—even when this entails becoming animal.

The most noteworthy critic of the schizophrenic ‘alternative’ that emerged out of Deleuze and Guattari’s collaborations is neo-Lacanian Slavoj Žižek. In his books Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences (2004), which playfully reverses Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “body without organs,” Žižek attempts to liberate Lacan from Deleuze’s appropriation of his philosophy in Anti-Oedipus, and reads Kafka as an iconic literary example of Lacanian philosophy, anti Anti-Oedipus, so to say. Although Žižek has never written a book specifically about Kafka, one could argue that Kafka has become the
single most important writer for Žižek’s work, one whom he sees as an overlooked inspiration of Lacanian ideas, and whom he continually evokes to illustrate Lacanian concepts, particularly the superego, the Law, and the Real. His reading of Der Prozess (here from 1988) relies on the Lacanian notion of a law which is grounded in the tripartition of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real within desire. Žižek proposes that the legal domain in Der Prozess overflows with enjoyment, causing a short-circuit between the Other of the Law and the Thing, the substance of enjoyment.56 This excess of enjoyment reveals the novel’s universe as that of the superego:

the Other as the Other of the symbolic Law is not only dead, it doesn’t even know that it is dead (like the terrible figure from Freud’s dream). It couldn’t know it insofar as it is totally insensible to the living substance of enjoyment. The superego on the contrary makes the present paradox of a Law which ‘proceeds from the time when the Other wasn’t yet dead. The superego is a surviving remainder’ (Jacques-Alain Miller). The superego-imperative ‘Enjoy!’, the turning round of the dead Law into the obscene figure of superego, implies a disquieting experience: suddenly, we become aware of the fact that what a minute ago appeared to us a dead letter is really alive, breathing, palpitating (119).

In “A Letter Which Did Arrive At Its Destination” (2003) Žižek takes this argument further. He posits “being-a-father as a universal ideal which all empirical fathers endeavour to approach and ultimately fail to do it.” Its function, he infers, is to enable the subject to “symbolically kill’ the father.”57 Paradoxically, this break from the father also makes one like him, as it might be expressed in a man reaching maturity, getting married and raising a family—in becoming a father. Kafka’s evident unwillingness to take on the Name-of-the-Father in this way, Žižek maintains, reveals his failure to escape the libidinal deadlock. Or, to paraphrase this in Freudian terms, it is the son’s inability to ever overcome the Oedipus...
complex. For Žižek, Kafka depicts the father’s message as emitted from the same superego formula as the non-prohibitive law of Der Prozess. The message—“be autonomous”—in its very operation keeps the subject dependent. In Interrogating the Real (2005), Žižek evokes Kafka as a “writer of absence,” whose works’ centers (castle, courts, law, etc.) are filled with emptiness. Here he dismisses Deleuze and Guattari’s immanenst reading, according to which the inaccessibility and vacancy of these centers is in effect something that exists parallel to the productive movement of desire, a surplus. Instead, Žižek insists, these centres are present under the various corrupt authoritative figures Kafka’s characters encounter.

Žižek’s collaborator Mladen Dolar similarly theorizes the voice as a Lacanian object-cause, the unattainable object of desire, reading Josephine and Der Prozess against Deleuze’s interpretation—in A Voice and Nothing More (2006). Like Žižek, Dolar begins by dividing the approaches to Kafka into two camps: transcendence, which maintains that Kafka’s universe is characterized by an unknowable, obscure law, and that this is the source of the protagonists’ unhappiness, and its opposite, which insists by contrast on the pure immanence of the law, which is eternally deferred from one place or person to the next, a force that coincides with desire. Dolar admits that Deleuze’s reading is more useful than the former, but maintains that the dichotomic fashion in which it proceeds (pure immanence in place of complete transcendence) fails to account for “the paradox of the emergence of transcendence at the very heart of immanence...the problem of intersection.”
It was in 1983 that Žižek warned, “C’est une chose étrange que l’absence d’une approche lacanienne de Kafka, qui a été entièrement laissé à l’hermeneutique à l’existentialisme, au deleuzianisme.”60 As far as the English-speaking world is concerned, Žižek’s claim was premature for its time given that the English-language publication of Towards a Minor Literature, which sparked much of the debate in North America, was published only in 1987. As a matter of fact, scholarly tension between Lacanian and Deleuzian takes on Kafka has heightened in more recent times, as scholars have begun rethinking the consequences of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s book on Kafka. These include Petr Kouba and Tomáš Pivoda’s recent edited volume Franz Kafka: Minority Report (2011) which focuses on Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of Kafka and expands the concept of minority beyond their use of it in Towards a Minor Literature to include their conception of it in A Thousand Plateaus (1980).61 A further collection, Philosophy and Kafka, contains numerous contributions on Kafka’s connections to Deleuze, but also to Lacan, including Ronald Bogue’s excellent Deleuzian reading of In der Strafkolonie.62 In the German-speaking world, Stefan Hesper’s Schreiben ohne Text: Die prozessuale Ästhetik von Gilles Deleuze und Félix Guattari (1994) counts among the most prominent of such approaches. In an attempt to reconcile the two positions with respect to Kafka, Shannon Winnubst (2009) has even put forth a reading of Kafka’s works from a controversial (and imagined) perspective of Lacan in the view of Deleuze and Guattari.63

To return to the point at hand: Their diverging conceptions of desire aside, Lacanian and Deleuzian readings of Kafka share a common approach—they subsume fiction to theory, either by deploying it to explain Kafka, or by citing Kafka as an example to illustrate the
validity of the respective theory. As the long-standing and fruitful scholarly debate shows, Kafka’s texts invite both psychoanalytic readings and their supposed “opposite,” and this is not only the case for Der Prozess and Das Schloß. The immense dimensions of linguistic violence in In der Staßkolonie for instance can be related to Lacan’s notion of symbolic vulnerability to language, explaining both the officer’s desire to sustain the machine by means of a verbal explanation, and his death drive when he fails to achieve this. At the same time, the mechanisms by which this desire is transmitted—one in which human agents play only a minor role—can likewise be supported by Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of non-human desire, while the officer’s libidinal attachment to the machine illustrates the stakes of investing in a repressive social system. Similarly, the plot of Ein Landarzt invites a straightforward Freudian reading of repressed sexual desire and the workings of the unconscious, while the story’s non-linear narrative structure agrees with Deleuze and Guattari’s open network of deteritorialization, whereby varying narratives that can be read from the wound disperse out of the domain of their original context. Finally, the hunger artist’s refusal to consume any food whatsoever would to Lacan indicate an adverse reaction to the absence of the other (an audience) and its proper recognition of his particular being (the other’s appreciation for his art). In consuming “nothing” (a symbolic “something”) the hunger artist might be responding to this unfulfilled desire. More simply put, this man’s condition of eternal hungering (here both in the absence of food and in the unfulfilled desire for the absent audience) reflects the structure of psychoanalytic desire. However, his insistence on practicing his art—even in the absence of the desired recognition—would constitute in Deleuze’s terms, a line of flight, particularly so when the hunger artist’s body vanishes altogether.
But the fact that these competing desire theories produce equally insightful and convincing readings only underscores the insufficiency of each in capturing the model of desire that best describes Kafka’s work. And despite a vast secondary literature that applies various desire theories to Kafka’s works, there appears to have been, up to now, no inverse attempt: to extract from within Kafka’s writing a theoretical model of desire. Kafka never theorized desire explicitly; rather, his literature does so implicitly, so that my objective becomes to lift its blueprint from within Kafka’s texts and to formulate an account of desire these works generate.

Kafka begins with a desire for unity—with and within his writings. In a diary entry from November 5, 1911, Kafka writes:

Würde ich einmal ein größeres Ganzes schreiben können wohlgebildet vom Angang bis zum Ende, dann könnte sich auch die Geschichte niemals endgültig von mir lösen und ich dürfte ruhig und mit offenen Augen als Blutsverwandter einer gesunden Geschichte ihre Vorlesung zuhören, so aber läuft jedes Stückchen der Geschichte heimatlos herum und treibt mich in die entgegengesetzte Richtung.

(TI 177)

This desire for completion—for a story that is whole—is negated by a desire for a never-ending process of creation. Der Prozess epitomizes the very deadlock of these competing desires and this tension strikes me as a plausible explanation for the open nature of his writings—Kafka’s so-called inability to bring any of his four novel-projects to a distinct and conclusive ending. Kafka’s explorations into desire are a patchwork project. In the chapters that follow, I attempt to lift the blueprint of Kafka’s model of desire, and trace its
development over a decade long period, beginning with his correspondence with Felice Bauer (1912-1914), through to his final major work, Das Schloß. In chapter 1, “From the Letter to the Law: Narrative as the Site of Desire in Der Prozess,” I propose that Kafka’s Briefe an Felice and Der Prozess constitute two experimental trials that test the possibility of literary or linguistic self-production. In both cases Kafka explores the possibility of liberating the symbolic self from the body through writing. In the letters, he does so by trading proximity, physical intimacy and marriage for a long-distance epistolary philosophical relationship. He postulates that letters—narrative texts, that is—can take the place of bodies in expressing inner desires and communicating stories of the self. But the dissolution of his and Bauer’s engagement two years later proves that the postponement of contact must come to an end. This not only weakens Kafka’s hypothesis about the bodilessness of desire, but the cessation of the letters also threatens to impede his Schriftstellersein. The author wittily escapes this predicament by transferring the task of linguistic self-production onto his protagonist, Josef K, in a work that depicts the potency of language to destroy the very symbolic existence it creates. This fictional text then constitutes the second experimental trial. And Josef’s struggle begins at precisely the point where Kafka’s had ended: by handing over a written document as a legitimate proxy of his identity, and having to face “die Wertlosigkeit von Briefen und allem Geschrieben.” (BF 616 [late Oct. / early Nov. 1914]). Whereas Kafka sends letters to account for his corporeal absence in an attempt to remain free from marriage, Josef, unable to locate a more suitable document, presents his cyclist’s license as a “Legitimationspapier” that documents his innocence, in hopes of escaping the arrest, strangely, an equally intangible confinement. Nevertheless, Josef immediately learns that the law is not open to a textual negotiation. One
of the guards “sah K. mit einem langen wahrscheinlich bedeutungsvollen aber
unverständlichen Blicke an,” while the other explained: “wir sind niedrige Angestellte, die
sich in einem Legitimationspapier kaum auskennen” (P 14).

To the extent that the letters celebrate the potential of language, Der Prozess digests its
limitations as a medium of self-expression, and writing as a form of self-representation. Here
Kafka displaces the site of all desire—sexual and generative—from the epistolary narrative
to narratives about the law. Josef’s quest for the law takes on an erotically seductive
character. It has often been observed that the protagonist desires women for their
connections to the law. My point, however, is that he pursues the law itself in the manner
one would customarily pursue an object of sexual desire, seeking to penetrate it, and in
doing so to generate his own most prized subjectivity: his innocence. But the legal text
betrays his expectations as it sways between impenetrability and vacancy: The books in the
courtroom lack all but the most poorly arranged mundane sexual content that at once invites
and evades any conclusive interpretation, and even if one gets their hands on some texts, as
the accused Huld does, it remains utterly inaccessible even in its presence, refusing to emit
any meaning. Ultimately Josef’s efforts fail not because he learns “daß es unmöglich war, die
[schriftliche] Eingabe jemals fertigzustellen,” (P 134), that is, to produce a
‘Legitimationspapier’ that would substantiate his claim to an innocent identity, but because
he ignores the wisdom the guard bestows upon him and insists on a textual mediation,
approaching the law as text. By insisting on penetrating the text on a quest for a conclusive
reading (about his own circumstances), where there appears to be none—by limiting his

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desire—Josef runs his existence into an interpretive dead-end, an error his successor in Das Schloß shall correct.

The three stories I discuss in chapter 2, “Corporeal Desire: Staging, Reading, and Writing Bodies as Narrative Texts”—taken collectively—can be read as a counter experiment in which Kafka inverts the hierarchy of text over body which he maintains in Briefe an Felice and Der Prozess. In doing so, he also reaffirms the dichotomy of the physical and symbolic selves, which continues to frame his understanding of desire. Across these three stories, Kafka employs bodies to perform as texts that express those desires and self-narratives he once believed his letters could. The site of desire gradually shifts from the text—the letter of the law, that is—to the body, in attempts to write (In der Strafkolonie), read (Ein Landarzt), and stage (Ein Hungerkünstler) bodies as narrative texts that reveal facets of the characters’ symbolic selves. In the first of these, In der Strafkolonie, Kafka contemplates the inverse, and rather perverse, flow of interpretive desire from what we see in Der Prozess: Josef’s fantasy of engaging with the law by penetrating to its core is literalized. Only it is no longer the subject who desires to penetrate the text in an interpretive manner; rather, it is the text itself that transgresses the corporeal limits of the ignorant subject, demanding to be read by him. The resulting body-text fusion is emblematic of the internalization of the law, but even if the message arrives somewhere beyond the body, it does so too late and at a cost too high, as the victim’s enlightenment prefigures his death.

Nevertheless, this horrific ending of In der Strafkolonie provokes the question: does the prisoner’s dying body—through its textual embodiment of his crime, judgment and punishment—function as a narrative text in the way that Kafka’s epistolary narratives could
not perform to replace his physical body? Does it become a ‘Legitimationspapier’ that stands in for the subject’s existence? By posing this question, the story paves the way for a rethinking of the body as a medium of self-production—in narrative terms—in place of the text itself. Otherwise put, In der Strafkolonie advances from the Der Prozess by restructuring desire as not only a literary, but also as a bodily performativity process. This switch, I argue, constitutes a critical point in the development of desire in Kafka’s oeuvre and provokes further experimentation with human bodies as motors of self-narratology.

This same experimental impetus of bodies can be traced in two later stories, Ein Landarzt (1917) and the Ein Hungerkünstler (1922). The two professions named in the stories’ titles suggest opposing attitudes about interpretation (one relying on scientific evidence; the other on subjective perception) as well as about bodies: while one is concerned with solving the mystery that a body naturally presents, the purpose of the other is to produce the appearance of a mystery where there is none. Yet the two stories’ protagonists face a similar predicament: The country doctor must read the signs of his patient’s body to determine a diagnosis, but the patient’s wound emits multiple narratives, so that a conclusive diagnosis becomes impossible. The hunger artist on the other hand, attempts to stage his own body to entice a particular interpretation by its onlookers, but his hungering is not seen as deriving from a meaningful context, so that this body likewise remains unreadable. The consequences are fatal for both: With the wound left undiagnosed, the patient dies while the doctor perishes in a world of self-referential meanings his misreadings produced. Similarly, short of eliciting the desired reading, the hunger artist too dies, not only as a body, but as a text—deprived not only of nourishment, but of a legitimate reading. It is neither textual
evasiveness (as in *Der Prozess*) nor textual overproduction (as in *In der Strafkolonie*) that results in death; however, as in those works, death occurs at the moment an interpretive impasse is reached. This counter-experiment which turns to the capability of bodies to both express desires and to shape one’s subjectivity, yields similarly disconcerting results as the previous one which favoured the symbolic: The transmission of desire, the force of self-determination that is, depends on the correct interpretation of texts and bodies through which Kafka’s characters seek to secure or transform their own identities. Here too, false interpretations of body-texts result in corporeal and narrative death. These experiments thus yield the same results as the previous ones: desire will not be limited to a single form of expression.

As I discuss in chapter 3, “From Bildungsroman to Hypertext in *Das Schloß*,” Kafka’s final major work constitutes both a new form of narrative and realizes a new model for desire. It is here that a K.-figure emerges who successfully collapses the distinction between the physical and linguistic domains of becoming which Kafka assumed in the works I discuss in chapters 1 and 2. Unlike his predecessor in *Der Prozess*, K. secures his own self-proclaimed identity through the subjective production of meanings about others, in place of a quest for objective truths about his own circumstances. In the end, K. surveys not the castle’s physical land, but its narrative landscapes and lives up to the title of Land Surveyor not through the intended linear means—a direct confrontation with the castle, and legitimizing writings from its official Klamm—but by a multitude of physical and most of all narrative detours, that is, through the oral traditions of the village women.
By tracing K.’s interpretive manoeuvres, I reveal Kafka’s novel-fragment as a carefully crafted hypertext—without a clear beginning, without a possible ending, but with proliferating narratives that run in different directions and connect up with others to necessitate pluralistic readings. K. stands outside of the multiplicity of “Schloßgeschichten,” collecting, interpreting and weaving together disparate stories into a literary hypertext, whose plurality and non-linearity of narratives mirrors the very structure of desire: by collapsing the dichotomy between language and bodies, Kafka escapes the impasse of competing desires and mutually exclusive alternatives to becoming a fully formed subject. Walter Benjamin is right in his warning that we never forget the “purity and beauty of failure” that is inherent in the figure of Franz Kafka. But we must also recognize the incredible insights that arise out of that failure.
CHAPTER 1

From the Letter to the Law:
Narrative as the Site of Desire in *Der Prozess*

The protagonist’s quest for identity formation is a reoccurring concern of Kafka’s works. His novels’ heroes, the three K.-men, are uprooted and isolated subjects, whose life stories read, to borrow the author’s own term, as “Beschreibungen eines Kampfes” to solidify, defend, or acquire a social identity. Along the way, they encounter few individualities and an increasing number of functionaries: everyone stands in connection with the courts; everyone belongs to the castle. The formation of an individual subject vanishes from novel to novel, leaving behind a progressively deteriorating personal identity, marked by the gradual disappearance of the protagonist’s name: Between Karl Roßmann roaming America hoping to establish familial ties, and a deeply fragmentary K., whose entire identity consists of a job he is denied, stands Josef K. claiming his innocence and bearing half a name and a functionary identity. Kafka’s stories likewise depict fundamental identity (trans)-formations—the becoming of human, animal, artist. These radical metamorphoses presume not only the duality but also the separability of the corporeal and the symbolic selves: Gregor Samsa escapes the confines of economic and familial exploitation by acquiring a new animal body; ape Rotpeter survives captivity by acquiring a human language. On the other hand, Kafka’s hunger artist disposes of corporeality altogether to master his artistry, while his sirens attempt to capture Odysseus not with the power of their voices but with their alarming
silence. In other words, Kafka’s characters secure their identities—they ‘become’—by
gaining or losing a given voice or a body.

This duality between the physical and the linguistic self is at the root of Kafka’s engagement
with desire, the force of ‘becoming’; the energy directed at self-realization. Kafka’s
conception of subjectivity as we can derive it from *Briefe an Felice* and *Der Prozess*
presupposes a binary and hierarchical division between a corporeal and a linguistic
dimension. Both works depict linguistic processes—the letters of generating, and the novel of
dismantling social identities. In doing so, they champion the linguistic dimension of
subjectivity as the primary mode of self-realization. Moving from corresponding with Bauer
to writing *Der Prozess*, Kafka displaces the site of sexual desire from the letter to the law,
and makes language a rhetorical weapon and the very point of conflict in which the subject
is gradually reduced to nothing more than a body. And when language destroys subjectivity,
the body remains the only viable gateway for desire, a medium for self-narratology—
prompting even Josef to ultimately contemplate his “Pflicht…das Messer…selbst zu fassen
und sich einzubohren” (*P* 241). Otherwise put, whereas the letters celebrate the fruitfulness
of language as a means of realizing and documenting one’s subjectivity, *Der Prozess*
elucidates the violent force inherent in language that disassembles the very same symbolic
existence Kafka had hoped his letters would create.

Experiments to separate and reunite these poles of subjectivity do not begin with the *Letters*
and *Der Prozess* but are present throughout Kafka’s corpus, as early as 1907 with
*Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande*. The fragment depicts one groom’s journey to
the countryside to meet his fiancée. Contemplating his uneasiness at setting off on this journey, Raban conjures up a curious fantasy: to stay in bed in the form of a beetle and send his clothed body to meet his future wife: “Ich brauche nicht einmal selbst auß Land fahren, das ist nicht nötig. Ich schicke meinen angekleideten Körper.” After much hesitation, he catches a train, but upon arrival in the country, he is unable to decide whether to deboard. As Raban’s dreaded confrontation with the wife-to-be becomes imminent and an escape impossible, so too Kafka’s novel attempt reaches an abrupt dead-end. This fragment is oft-cited for prefiguring Die Verwandlung, in which Raban’s wishful fantasy of taking on a beetle body becomes Gregor Samsa’s horrid reality. What remains overlooked is that in this story, the body and speech are presented as two alternative and mutually exclusive modes of becoming: Raban, it seems, can either travel to his fiancé and become a married man, or stay in bed and narrate his story to us. Yet Raban’s imagined splitting of the travelling body and the narrating voice suggests that desire is a multidirectional force that seeks to overcome the constraints of the chosen medium of self-realization: to arrive without departing; to foster intimacy without immediacy; and to enter marriage without sacrificing one’s own autonomy. It is only in his late works, particularly Das Schloß, that Kafka collapses the duality between the corporeal and linguistic dimensions of subjectivity and fully explores the consequences of a multi-directional desire and the multiplicity of narratives it produces, which he posits already here in Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande. But what appeals to Kafka in this moment is the prospect of a proxy that both satisfies the bride and secures the bachelor’s own remoteness.
Five years later, Kafka succeeds at what Raban had only dreamt of: to detach the body from the linguistic self and postpone a real confrontation with his fiancée by sending her a surrogate. The duality, which in *Hochzeitsvorbereitungen* appears in the literal separation of the corporeal from the linguistic self, is nowhere as meticulously thought through as in some seven hundred pages of *Letters to Felice*. Only in contrast to Raban, Kafka satisfies the obligatory contact by sending his fiancée a body of letters, which, much like Raban’s clothed body, perform by being separated from their sender. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, the letters function by “maintain[ing] the duality of [...] a subject of enunciation as the form of expression that writes the letter, and a subject of the statement that is the form of content that the letter is speaking about (even if I speak about me)” (*ML* 30). Through the letters, Kafka releases his linguistic from his corporeal self and, like Raban, “transfers movement onto the subject of the statement,” a movement that is only “apparent” and “unreal” but one that nonetheless “spares the subject of enunciation all need for a real movement” (*ML* 30, 31).

The epistolary project is of great ambition, testing the potency of language as a vehicle for desire, a gateway for the formation of his subjectivity, one which Kafka relentlessly equates with writing. And this strategy is not without a precursor. In the summer of 1912, Kafka is courting a young woman, Margarethe Kirchner. She welcomes their letter exchange but Kafka doubts that her interest in him is genuine: “Bedenke [...] daß diese Zeilen von Anfang bis zu Ende Literatur sind,” he writes to Brod. Yet the supposed insincerity does not put Kafka off; on the contrary, the epistolary gesture entices him, even if the letters’ content is fictitious: “Aber warum schreibt sie dann so, wie ich es wünsche?,” he continues. Kafka
copies Kirchner’s letter in its entirety into his letter to Brod, and even takes the time to replicate her signature. Not Kirchner’s affection, but her fiction—her *Literatur*—allures Kafka and it is with the same kind of fiction that he would indulge in seducing others:

“Wenn es wahr wäre, daß man Mädchen mit der Schrift binden kann!” Having this effect is undoubtedly one of the greatest confirmations for a bachelor who not only self-identifies as a writer but who describes himself as literature-in-being—*Schriftsteller sein*. One month later he meets Felice Bauer and soon embarks on an ambitious project, parcelling off the linguistic from the corporeal self and testing the power of language alone to solidify a symbolic existence.

Not a union with the woman, but one with the writing process is the ultimate desired state, one synonymous with the subject’s symbolic becoming. In Kafka’s and Bauer’s relationship, the act of writing letters replaces the conjugal one; the traffic of letters substitutes for the traffic of bodies—both of travel and intercourse:


In Kafka’s wishful dream, Bauer’s letters—not her body—is the site of sexual desire. Kafka’s own body too remains removed from this erotic encounter, while the mailman’s body
twitches and steams, ejaculating the woman’s letters. As this passage suggests, underpinning Kafka’s *Letters to Felice* is a conception of sexual desire that is devoid of a meaningful corporeal dimension: the human body does not partake in its expression; rather, the body is relevant merely insofar as it enables the production of writing, a mechanic “Muskelspiel das meine Feder vorwärtztreibt” (*BF* 304 [17.-18.2.1913]). Consequently, it is not Bauer’s “Verkehr” with other men, but their literature that stirs up feelings of jealously and possessiveness in Kafka. Thus, he not only declares Arthur Schnitzler, whose play *Professor Bernhardi* Bauer goes to see, “schlechte Literatur… angefüllt mit einer geradezu schwankenden Masse widerlichster Schreiberei” but also describes this literature as an imposition on his and Bauer’s intimate and conjugal space when he asks, however jokingly, “wie schaffe ich nur gleich wieder den Schnitzer fort, der sich zwischen uns legen will?” (*BF* 299 [14.-15.2.1913]). The epistolary narrative constitutes the sole site of desire—both of sexual energy, as well as in the more specific sense in which it figures in Kafka’s writings, as a force of self-actualization, for Kafka personally: *Schriftstellersein*. Deleuze and Guattari could not be more to the point when they say that “to fabricate letters, this [is] not a question of sincerity but one of functioning” (*ML* 29). And the letter writing, constitutes in the first place a stage in a process of self-realization.

As with Margarethe Kirchner’s letter, so too in Kafka’s own, the expression of the letter trumps its message-content and its performative power by far supersedes its sincerity. The true significance of Kafka’s correspondence lies not merely in the suitability of writing as the medium of self-presentation, but in the performative power of language to construct the symbolic existence that this writing communicates. The tragic flaw of the letters is that they
cannot achieve an unlimited postponement of contact, so that two years and hundreds of letter later, Kafka’s “unreal” movement would come to a halt, reaching a point at which the correspondence would have to conclude, be it in marriage or in breakup. This body of letters thus constitutes an experiment and documents its failure: The letters’ achievement lies in enticing and maintaining an intimate relationship, of fulfilling Kafka’s personal desire “Mädchen mit der Schrift [zu] binden”; their doom in failing to guard the spatial distance they travel. July 12th, 1914 marks the day of the couple’s first engagement. Ironically, the catalyst for this is Kafka’s epistolary infidelity—his intimate letters to Bauer’s friend Grete Bloch in which he expresses scepticism about the upcoming marriage, and which Bloch, perhaps out of guilt for her role in their relationship, hands over to Bauer. Kafka famously described the embarrassing encounter at the Hotel *Askanischer Hof*, where Bauer read parts of the intimate letters aloud in the presence of Bloch and Bauer’s sister as “Gerichtshof im Hotel” (*T3* 24 [23.7.1914.]).

Bachelorhood allows Kafka to salvage his life for a literary purpose, even if at the expense of the epistolary project. But in the immediate aftermath of the breakup, he fears that the cessation of the letters threatens to impede on his linguistic self-production and to end a productive literary phase, concluding: “Wenn ich mich nicht in einer Arbeit rette, bin ich verloren” (*T3*, 27 [28.7.1914.]). It is clear that Kafka has in mind nothing short of the creation of worthy literature. And in a matter of mere days after returning from visiting his now-ex-fiancée—a trip Raban never completed—Kafka indulges in the broken promise of the letters and embarks upon writing a novel about an endless process of linguistic self-production. As if to keep his *Schriftstellersein* uninterrupted, Kafka quickly passes the
torch to Josef K.—a protagonist who makes his first appearance in the diaries the very next day, that is, six days after the breakup—to take on the battle of linguistic self-production that Kafka had just lost starting with an attempt to acquire a name—his own name, and the name of the other. Josef responds to the arrest—a verbal statement—with a written one: by presenting his “Legitimationspapier.” Like Kafka, Josef seeks recognition of his documented identity in the form of writing, demanding to see the guard’s own identification papers and the arrest warrant. His struggle thus begins at precisely the point where Kafka’s had ended: by passing off a written document as a legitimate proxy of his identity. Whereas Gregor sends a body, and Kafka after him sends letters to take the very place of his body, Josef presents a certificate as a “Legitimation” of his innocence. However, his offer is turned down; his demand for recognition ignored: One guard “sah K. mit einem langen wahrscheinlich bedeutungsvollen aber unverständlichen Blicke an,” while the other explained: “wir sind niedrige Angestellte, die sich in einem Legitimationspapier kaum auskennen” (P 14). Establishing “die Wertlosigkeit...von allem Geschrieben” which Kafka does at with the breakup, constitutes the very beginning of Josef’s trial.

The supposition that the genesis of Der Prozess is a direct consequence of Kafka’s correspondence with Bauer has motivated many interpretations. While the work had most often been read as addressing the question of guilt, critics in the early decades of Kafka scholarship have repeatedly located the source of that guilt in the couple’s failed relationship. Heinz Politzer (1962) was the first to connect Kafka’s images of punishment to his “seelische Qual” which in his view the dissolution of the engagement only intensified, and which Kafka then transposed into the arrest and execution scenes wrote in its immediate aftermath.
Several years later Elias Canetti (1969) used Kafka’s metaphor of the courts in the final meeting with Bauer (“Gerichtshof im Hotel”) and interpreted various scenes in the novel as having an explicit connection to *Briefe an Felice*. Hartmut Binder (1976) continued this line of interpretation and sought to establish that Kafka’s conflict with Bauer dictates the *Prozess*-project “noch in viel weiterem Maße…als Canetti sie vorraussetzt.”¹¹ For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), who view Kafka’s literary bachelorhood as the actualization of desire *Der Prozess*, and the *Letters* function as two separate components of a larger writing machine, but in agreement with Canetti, they see a special connection between the two works, the letters also functioning as a precursor for the writing of the novel.¹² And although biographically motivated readings have subsided over time, this particular point has persisted. For Peter Beicken (1995), Josef’s “process” is about the inability to love; the novel itself Kafka’s “Auseinandersetzung mit seinem Schuldgefühl, in der Liebe versagt zu haben.”¹³

More text-immanent approaches have stressed the eroticism of Kafka’s judicial apparatus and the critical role women play in its system of power. Willem Emrich (1958) and Walter Sokel (1964) were the first to explore the narrative function and social roles of women in *Der Prozess*. For Emrich, women represent for Josef alternative relations to the law (living outside its domain; living in conflict with it; being enslaved by it).¹⁴ Sokel reads Kafka’s oeuvre as embodying the father-son conflict, and women as weapons in a power struggle in which some father-figure always claims them all for himself.¹⁵ More recently Sokel (2002) argued that the program of the courts in *Der Prozess* is Oedipal, particularly through the figure of the law student Berthold, who represents the antagonist of the Oedipus complex,
tempting the son-figure (Josef) into aggression for the sake of the wife/mother (Laundress), only to then take the woman for himself, forcing Josef to give into the superior position of the Father (courts). Sokel’s Oedipal reading works only indirectly, since the student does not take the woman only for himself but must hand her over to the higher level father-figure, the judge. But as Sokel readily admits, the fact that the courts allow Josef his freedom at all makes the psychoanalytic reading imperfect, as this “seems to contradict this [Oedipal] pattern.”

Charles Bernheimer (1982) has likewise connected the novel to the letters, recognizing that the desire driving the production of the one is the same as that which resulted in the other. He argues Kafka’s insistent request of Bauer that she write out every minute detail of her daily life was an “attempt to translate Felice into writing.” Moreover, Bernheimer realizes that this violence of language is a matter of desire: “The violence is the attempt to drive Felice out of her being-in-the-world into that being-in-writing...What [Kafka] wants, is in fact, very close to what Joseph K., in The Trial, considered to be the impossible task of completing the kind of written plea required in his case.” Isolde Tröndle (1989) similarly stresses Bauer’s victim position when she interprets Kafka’s Letters as the product of competing desires for presence and absence: on the one hand, to establish a closeness to a woman by writing to her, and on the other, to maintain a distance from her in order to have reason to write. She views Kafka’s desire in psychoanalytic terms, namely as corresponding to the Freudian “Fort / Da” game. To put it in terms of Lacan, through this language game the child learns to articulate the mother’s absence. Josef’s relationship to the courts, Tröndle argues, follows the same Fort/Da pattern: a desire to be free from it and to enter it. Hans
Hiebel (2008) similarly reads Josef’s arrest in terms of a child’s separation from the mother-figure, here occupied by Grubach. This separation, initiated by male representatives of the courts, is not a judicial matter but “eine Erfindung, die auf Inneres—aber eben auch auf außere Mächte deutet.”

Several critics have stressed the subjugated position of women as objects of male desire. Chief among them is Elizabeth Boa (1996) who has undertaken a comprehensive study of gender dynamics in Kafka’s works and found that the exchange of women heightens desire, thus explaining why Josef becomes most aroused by the fantasy of sexual victory over other men. The law induces a desire to transgress, and the transgression very often occurs through the domination and exchange of women. More recently, Der Prozess has been read as a text about non-normative forms of pleasure. Anna Katharina Schaffner (2010) argues for the “hermeneutics of sadomasochism,” while Annie Ring (2012), continuing this line of thought, elucidates sadomasochistic desire on the example of tactile experiences, hands and gestures. She reads Josef’s attack on Bürstner as both an expression of a violent sexual desire and a sexualized punishment for her own sexual freedom. Josef’s self-incriminating behavior (i.e. his plan to write a submission that examines all possible guilt) reveals his masochistic motives. As with the dialectics of sadomasochism, the line between agency and victimhood is a blurry one. But it was Žižek (2005) who argued that the law of Der Prozess dictates a more encompassing form of desire, enjoyment, “give[ing] the order, “Jouis!” [“Enjoy!” or “Come!”], and the subject could only reply “J’ouïs” [“I hear”], in which the jouissance would no longer be anything but understood.
Der Prozess is on a very basic level a work about desire—the desire to come into contact with the law, and a law that speaks in the language of desire. As the title reminds us, we have in front of us is a work in progress. This is true both of the protagonist’s quest for a stable subjectivity and the literary narrative about that quest. As I argue below, in the tension between Josef’s desire to establish a singular linear narrative of his identity and the plurality of erotic encounters he hopes will produce it, a hypertextual structure begins to surface, breaking up the law into many erotic tales.

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Prohibition, violation, guilt and other concepts that form an ordinary legal system are accessible only through language. This medium is present at every stage of the legal process—to negotiate and record the law, to indicate a violation, to argue a case, to pronounce a verdict. One might say, language constructs the law. This is true of Kafka’s Prozess, albeit in an entirely different way. Language does not communicate what the law prohibits; rather, it violently performs its validity. It is erotic desire that drives the narrative of the law, and it is only here that contact with law is possible. Already the opening sentence of the novel reports an instance of linguistic violence: “Jemand musste Josef K. verleumdet haben, denn ohne dass er etwas Böses getan hätte, wurde er eines Morgens verhaftet” (P 9). Slander, worlds spoken against Josef, might explain his sudden arrest—an arrest that is itself nothing but a verbal act, made in being stated: “Sie dürfen nicht wegheln. Sie sind ja gefangen,” a guard who unexpectedly appears in Josef’s bedroom proclaims (P 11). This performative declaration remains unaccompanied by physical restraints. Josef is not
handcuffed, detained, or imprisoned and he maintains his freedom of mobility. Disruptions to his daily routine and professional undertaking, as the inspector informs him, are likewise to be kept to a minimum: “Sie sind verhaftet, gewiß, aber das soll Sie nicht hindern Ihnen Beruf zu erfüllen. Sie sollen auch in Ihrer gewöhnlichen Lebensweise nicht gehindert sein” (P 23). Josef suspects the performative nature of this law: “war es eine Komödie, so wollte er mitspielen” (P 13); however, he fails to recognize this specific function of language with respect to the law. His desire to locate the law as narrative and to produce a narrative of his own as a defense against this law clashes with its all-encompassing nature. The law is everywhere: in art, in religion, but it always operates on an erotic level. Everyone belongs to the courts; everyone desires contact with the law, yet it is as though the law itself possesses a sex drive: the courts are attracted by guilt in the population, and accused citizens appear beautiful; hearings take place in bedrooms; the law is apparently written in a pornographic book, and wherever else one seeks the law, one only finds sex: in court houses, in the attic offices, in the lawyer’s study, and most unexpected of all, in the bank’s junk-room.

If, as I argue, Josef’s is a “process” of linguistic self-production—of establishing his own subjectivity in language—then it goes without saying that the law leaves no room for third-party representation. No one is able to speak for Josef without at the same time speaking against him.24 The inspector makes this clear at the onset. Hence, not only is his written “Legitimation” useless, it is also altogether senseless to call a lawyer (P 21), since he, along with everyone else whose assistance Josef seeks, is a functionary of the very institutions against which Josef attempts to defend himself.25 Nevertheless, K. insists on third-party representation to establish a single narrative: his innocence. To do so he exhausts all
possibilities to line up a series of helpers, none of whom knew him before his arrest, and all of whom are erotically invested in the narratives of the law. Most obviously, there are Josef’s women-helpers—Fräulein Bürstner, the laundress, and Leni. The prison chaplain explicitly warns Josef of his misguided approach: “Du suchst zuviel fremde Hilfe…und besonders bei Frauen” (P 223). “Besonders” but not only. And so K. inadvertently lands in the erotic domains of a number of “Vertrauensmänner des Gerichtes” (P 155), or they land in his—the guards and their whipper, the judge and his student, the painter Titorelli. Wherever Josef looks for representation, he finds a new erotic connection, and this connection is rooted in the legal narratives. The very exchange of these stories becomes the site of desire. At times Josef seems to grasp the matter correctly: he not only desires women for their connections to the law—he also pursues the law itself as an object of desire, seeking to penetrate it, and in doing so to regenerate his subjectivity: his innocence. This reaches a humorous highlight in the embedded parable Vor dem Gesetz in which the priest tells Josef a story about a man from the country who spends his life waiting before the gates of the law, seeking and never gaining admission. Josef’s immediate identification with the man from the country elicits a sense of desperation on his part, since this otherwise intellectually inclined banker overlooks the man’s startling literal conception of the legal domain in spatial, rather than conceptual terms, with an interiority he would physically penetrate. His error lies in failing to understand that the law is not located in texts and in insisting to penetrate the text on a quest for a conclusive reading where there is none. And it is here that he runs his existence into an interpretive dead-end: by not allowing his desire to be channeled corporeally instead of merely linguistically. Imagine the comic relief the novel would offer is Josef, instead of seeking out the courts, simply ran away. Or if he realized that the only way to get in touch
with the law is to indulge in the plurality of erotic and narratives his very arrest made possible.

**Fräulein Bürstner**

There is a charge of eroticism in every stage of Josef’s “Prozess.” His first encounter with this mysterious law is in bed; the guards are then seduced by his fine clothes and try to steal them, but the decisive scene of the arrest takes place in the bedroom of a certain Fräulein Bürstner, a woman who is absent at the moment of the arrest, but who is sexualized by the very invocation of her name, (“bürsten” is a vulgar expression for the act of sexual intercourse). In contrast to this, the most noticeable item in her room is her white blouse, hung on the handle of an open window, which through its connotation to chastity and innocence signals, in the view of the uninvited group of men, a sexualized intrusion of the feminine space. Indeed, the male gaze is ever present in this room. While three of Josef’s colleagues from the bank are attentively examining and touching private photographs of her, a neighbour is observing this scene from the opposing window across the street, facing the absent woman’s white blouse, and the many men behind it. With his shirt half open and his chest exposed, he brushes with his fingers his reddish goatee, squeezing and twisting it [“der seinen rötlichen Spitzbart mit den Fingern drückte und drehte” (P 19)]. In his appearance and gestures suggestive of sexual excitement, he prefigures the law student Josef will later meet, who likewise has “einen kurzen schütttern rötlichen Vollbart” which he touches with his finders [“in dem er die Finger fortwährend herumführte” (P 67)] before picking up the Laundress and carrying her away for a rendezvous with the judge.
On the evening following his arrest, Josef spends hours anxiously awaiting the return of Fräulein Bürstner, a flat mate he had hardly noticed before, on the pretense of apologizing for the inspector’s unauthorized use of her bedroom to conduct his inquiry. Landlady Grubach assures him that the room has been tidied up, and when Josef looks for himself, he can see that everything is indeed in its right place. He notices however that the white blouse no longer hangs from the window in the same moment that Grubach begins to questions Bürstner’s “Reinheit” having spotted her with two different men in remote streets. Josef takes great offence to Grubach’s insinuation, and it is clear that his jealous desire for Bürster has been activated by the presence the other men, especially those connected to the law, in her private space. Josef has learned from one of the arresting guards that the courts are “von der Schuld angezogen,” (P 14), but Bürstner, having finally returned, reveals the reciprocity in the relationship between the law and its subjects: the courts too have “eine eigentümliche Anziehungskraft” (P 35). Otherwise put, the law operates by the power of attraction. For this reason, Bürstner is about to join a lawyer’s office as an assistant (which in the world of the courts might as well be synonymous with lover). Josef immediately tries to involve her at all costs: “Sie werden mir dann in meinem Proceß ein wenig helfen können” (P 35). But Bürstner is “übermäßig enttäuscht” to discover that Josef knows nothing of the law, and so shows no interest in him (P 36). The erotic connection with this woman hinges on the exchange of stories about the law. Josef realizes as much and does his best to entertain Bürstner with a reenactment of the morning’s events: he relocates her night stand to set the stage and fully in character begins to imitate the inspector: “Der Aufseher ruft als ob er mich wecken müßte, er schreit geradezu, ich muß leider, wenn ich es Ihnen begreiflich machen
will, auch schreien, es ist übrigens nur mein Name, den er so schreit,” and then proceeds to demonstrate, “Josef K!” (P 37). The unexpected scream frightens Bürstner and attracts the attention of the landlady’s nephew residing next door: “er hört doch alles,” she fears, and asks Josef to leave. But he, visibly sexually aroused by his own self-staging, refuses to go and kissing her on the forehead, proposes an elaborate fantasy plan to account for his disruptive late-night visit, one that involves deceiving Landlady Grubach:

Sie wissen wie mich Frau Grubach, die in dieser Sache doch entscheidet, besonders da der Hauptmann ihr Neffe ist, geradezu verehrt und alles was ich sage unbedingt glaubt... Jeden Ihrer Vorschläge über eine Erklärung für unser Beisammen sein nehme ich an, wenn er nur ein wenig zweckentsprechend ist und verbürgen mich Frau Grubach dazu zu bringen, die Erklärung nicht nur vor der Öffentlichkeit, sondern wirklich und aufrichtig zu glauben. Mich müssen Sie dabei in keiner Weise schonen. Wollen Sie verbreitet haben, daß ich Sie überfallen habe, so wird die Frau Grubach in diesem Sinne unterrichtet werden und wird es glauben, ohne das Vertrauen zu mir zu verlieren, so sehr hängt sie an mir. (P 38)

The scream displaces Josef from the interrogated accused to the interrogating officer, from a subject before the law, to a functionary of the law. And with Bürstner turning into an object of his sexual desires, Josef shifts, in his own account, from the victim of an alleged assault (“Die Herren haben mich zuerst überfallen” [P 21]) to Bürstner’s rescuer against defamation of character which paradoxically involves Bürster falsely accusing Josef of assaulting her (“Wollen Sie verbreitet haben, daß ich Sie überfallen habe...”), which he in end effect does, when he proceeds to kiss her neck “wie ein durstiges Tier mit der Zunge,” before she can finally push him out the door (P 39). The encounter in which Kafka learns about the law all have the same hypertextual form: a meeting with a woman or man, the intrusion of a third
instance, a scream, and in the middle of this, the erotic experience of exchanging narratives about the law. Part of the horror of his experience is that he relives variations of the same encounter, remaining unable to move forward. This very seductive law, as Kafka would have it, has many narrators.

The Laundress

As Josef’s meetings with the Laundress confirm, the concentration of libidinal energy is nowhere as high in the courts. Unlike Bürstner who is merely rumoured to be promiscuous, the Laundress publically lives a plural sex life: at Josef’s first hearing, she and the law student fall to the ground in an act of sex, and with their screams drown out Josef’s otherwise scandalous speech. A week later, Josef is in disbelief about the effects of his words—“dass man seinen Verzicht auf Verhöre wörtlich genommen hatte”—and expecting a second hearing, makes his way to the courthouse, where he once again meets the Laundress, who speaks openly about her intimate relationships with men of the courts: “Mein Mann ist ja Gerichtsdienier,” she tells Josef; “Der [Student] welcher mich damals umarmt hat, verfolgt mich schon seit langem. Ich mag im allgemeinen nicht verlockend sein, für ihn bin ich es aber,” she explains, and finally, she makes it clear “dass sich der Untersuchungsrichter um mich bewirbt” (P 60, 63, 61, 61, 66). Even Josef, whose relationship the courts one might say is a disadvantageous one, appears attractive to her with his “schöne dunkle Augen.”
The very revelation of her embeddedness in the law makes the Laundress, whom Josef earlier assessed with the same distaste as Titorelli’s girl—“sie ist verdorben wie alle hier ringsum” (P 63)—an alluring object of sexual desire. Through her various personal and functionary linkages to other men of the courts, especially the judge, the Laundress becomes alluring to Josef. She understands as much and seductively presents her “seidene Strümpfe” (P 66), which she received from the judge as proof of their intimate relationship. But more than this, the laundress seduces by allowing Josef a quick peek in the judge’s books. The encounter with the law is nothing other than the indulgence in stories, which are both about the law and about sex. This explains why, when landlady Grubach speaks about the law, however vaguely and uninsightfully, Josef cannot keep his hands to himself: “K. vergrub von Zeit zu Zeit eine Hand in die Strümpfe” Grubach sorted on the table (P 28).

The law, as Josef discovers from the Laundress, is a matter of pornographic fiction, entitled *Die Plagen, welche Grete von ihrem Manne Hans zu erleiden hatte*. This mysterious book about desire is not accessible as narrative, but Josef may indulge in touching it as it multiplies into erotic narrative by its very title. It directs away from any content of the law, first to Grimm’s fairy-tale *Hänsel und Gretel*, a story about sibling love, which in Kafka’s *Verwandlung* turns incestuous before Gregor’s sister, likewise called Grete, “must soon be given over to a husband to plague,” and so be forced to enter the same position in the economy of the law as the female subject of this fictional pornography. The subject matter this law deals with is of an intimate kind: familial love turned incestuous, marriage turned perverse, and paradoxically, a washer woman who belongs to virtually every male figure in the courts—including the accused, Josef.
After all this, Josef must admit, “Die Frau verlockte ihn wirklich, er fand trotz alles Nachdenkens keinen haltbaren Grund dafür, warum er der Verlockung nicht nachgeben sollte” (P 67). The sudden temptation, as in the earlier instance with Fräulein Bürstner, can be explained by Josef’s self-generative movement from the opponent of the courts, to its component. His sexual desire for the woman only mimics the desire of every other man in the law. While the laundress referred to the student earlier (“Ich mag im allgemeinen nicht verlockend sein, für ihn bin ich es aber”), Josef’s repetition of the same statement with the addition of wirklich suggests that he has (con)fused the two reference persons. Moreover, it is only from the perspective of the student that Josef would find no reason to resist the temptation—since Josef himself had already explicitly articulated two: “Ich staune... darüber, daß Sie verheiratet sind” (P 61) and more importantly: “Sie gehören zu der Gesellschaft, die ich bekämpfen muß” (P 64). It is precisely in her various personal and functionary linkages to other men of the courts—court usher-husband; judge-lover; student-wooer—that the prospect of a sexual union with the Laundress promises for Josef not only a connection to the law, but the possibility of elevating his social rank:

Es gab vielleicht keine bessere Rache an dem Untersuchungsrichter und seinem Anhang, als daß er ihnen diese Frau entzog und an sich nahm. Es könnte sich dann einmal der Fall ereignen, daß der Untersuchungsrichter nach mühevoller Arbeit an Lügenberichten über K. in später Nacht das Bett der Frau leer fand. Und leer, deshalb, weil sie K. gehörte, weil diese Frau am Fenster, dieser üppige gelenkige warme Körper im dunkeln Kleid aus grobem schwerem Stoff durchaus nur K. gehörte. (P 67-68)
But this triumph, like a union with Bürstner, remains only a fantasy, as the student makes his appearance to embrace, kiss, and carry away the woman away from Josef to the judge. As before, Josef proposes a redundant rescue plan, and when the Laundress rejects him, he must once again scream to capture the woman’s attention: “Und Sie wollen nicht befreit werden” (P 69)? Unable to instigate revenge on the judge and the student in the courtroom, Josef fantasizes about humiliating them in the bedroom, a thought that involves swapping places with the judge by evacuating the bed of his lover, and with the student by placing him in a bed Josef himself frequented:

Und er stellte sich die allerlächerlichste Szene vor, die es z.B. geben würde wenn dieser klägliche Student, dieses aufgeblasene Kind, dieser krumme Bartträger vor Elsas Bett knien und mit gefalteten Händen beten würde. K gefiel diese Vorstellung so, daß er beschloß, wenn sich nur irgendeine Gelegenheit dafür ergeben sollte, den Studenten einmal zu Elsa mitzunehmen. (P 70, my emphasis).

Josef’s fantasized meeting between the Laundress’s lover law student Berthold, and his own lover Elsa never takes place; instead the imagined sexual degradation returns in its judicial form in a different sequence, to which we shall return in a moment.

**Leni**

During a consultation with the lawyer Huld, the caregiver Leni captures Josef’s attention. She immediately makes the sexual nature of her intentions clear, and as we later learn from the lawyer, she is hardly different from the Laundress: “Leni [findet] die meisten
Angeklagten schön…Sie hängt sich an alle, liebt alle, scheint allerdings auch von allen geliebt zu werden” (P 194). The source of this attraction, one can imagine, are the endless nights the accused devote debating with Leni the details of their trials while waiting to see Huld. She takes him to the lawyer’s study, which, in keeping with this bureaucracy’s violent use of language, is equipped with a “gewaltigen Schreibtisch” and a large portrait depicting a judge (P 112). So too here, the erotic encounter between Leni and Josef is synonymous with telling stories about the law. Contemplating the portrait, Josef asks, ‘was für einen Rang hat er?’ ‘Er ist Untersuchungsrichter,’ sagte sie, ergriff K.s Hand, mit der er sie umfaßt hielt, und spielte mit seinen Fingern… ‘Das ist alles Erfindung’ sagte Leni, das Gesicht über K.s Hand gebeugt” (P 113). Leni is eager to involve herself in his affair, and even offers to help him to escape [“zu entschlüpfen’] the trial, which too results in sexual excitement on Josef’s part: “Sie verstehen viel von diesem Gericht und von den Betrügereien, die hier nötig sind’, sagte K. und hob sie, da sie sich allzu stark an ihn drängte, auf seinen Schoß.” In a sex act very similar to the one staged in the courtroom between the student and the Laundress, Leni and Josef fall to the ground; she bites and kisses him and rejoices: “Jetzt gehörst du mir!” before giving him a key to the lawyer’s house (P 114, 116). Unlike the courtroom scene, this one is not intended to be public, but it might as well have been: “[du] suchst nicht einmal einen Vorwand, verheimlichst nichts, nein, bist ganz offen,” the uncle later accuses Josef, fearful that he has damaged his changes at a positive outcome (P 116).

*Der Prozess* comically compares the legal profession with sex work through the figure of Huld, who, like Josef’s waitress/prostitute friend Elsa, accepts clients only “vom Bett aus” (P
Huld’s bed is a site of human degradation by the very same gesture that Elsa’s is one of sexual gratification. It is here that Josef’s fellow accused, Kaufmann Block bows in the manner Josef imagined the student would before Elsa, “als wolle er niederknien,” and eventually “kriech[t]” “auf allen vier.” Block “horchte mit gesenkttem Kopf als übertrete er durch dieses Horchen ein Gebot” (P 201, 202, 204), so that the prayer Josef imagined taking place at Elsa’s bed with the law student, is reconfigured, hypertextually as it were, right here in the lawyer’s bedroom: With Leni sitting on the edge, Block “kniete unter einem kurzem Seitenblick nun knapp beim Bett nieder” and Josef saw “wie er die Hände ihr entgegenhob und bittend aneinander rieb” (P 203, 204). The stretched female body, its bent head, and caressing hands accompany moments of humiliation and sexual degradation over and over: Leni “beugte sich [...] über den Advokat hin,” “strich tief zu seinem Gesicht geneigt über sein langes weißes Haar,” as he refused the accused Block insight into his case, and “der schöne Wuchs ihres Körpers wurde sichtbar als sie sich streckte” (P 204). Likewise the Laundress “fuhr [...] dem Studenten mit der Hand übers Gesicht” (P 69), and he “küßte sie, als sie sich bückte, laut auf den Hals” in what Josef grasped as “die erste zweifellose Niederlage” he suffered from the judicial world (P 68, 70). The loud, thirsty kiss explodes in all directions, redirecting to the Josef-Bürstner constellation, in which she too “stützte” “das Gesicht auf eine Hand” “während die andere Hand langsam die Hüfte strich” at the exact moment when Josef began recounting the humiliation that occurred in her room, and back to Huld’s bed, where Block kneeled and “spitzte die Lippen wie zum Kuß”, “führte [...] den Handkuss aus und wiederholte ihn auf eine Aufforderung Lenis hin noch zweimal” (P 36, 204).
**The junk room trio**

Homoerotic scenes occur from the very beginning with the two guards who take Josef by surprise in bed, have him undress and then steal his clothes. As one of them later admits, “Euere feine Wäsche hat mich verlockt,” (*P* 88). This crime lands them in the junk room, in what presents itself as a particularly apt example of masochistic desire. Yanking open the junk-room door at the bank, Josef walks in on his two guards standing before the whipper about to be punished. Although the punishment is physical, the guards repeatedly seek to impress upon Josef that it is the outcome of his harsh words, and not their questionable actions: “Herr! Wir sollen geprügelt werden, weil Du Dich beim Untersuchungsrichter über uns beklagt hast”; “wir werden nur bestraft, weil Du uns angezeigt hast. Sonst wäre uns nichts geschehen, selbst wenn man erfahren hätte, was wir getan haben”; “Bringt [der Verhaftete] [die Abnahme der Wäsche] dann allerdings öffentlich zur Sprache, dann muß die Strafe erfolgen” (*P* 87, 88, 88). What is more, Josef's complaint has the effect of reverseing the intended roles: “Wir hatten Aussicht, vorwärtszukommen und wären gewiß bald auch Prügler geworden...Und jetzt, Herr, ist alles verloren, unsere Laufbahn beendet...und überdies bekommen wir jetzt diese schrecklich schmerzhaften Prügel” (*P* 88-89). Not only the guards recognize that this corporeal violence was induced through language, the whip-man too fears it too, refusing Josef’s bribe to let the men free. Removing their clothes, the men become acquainted with the law in the manner they had promised Josef: “Sie werden [das Gesetz] zu fühlen bekommen” (*P* 15). The full force of the words the
guard spoke at Josef’s arrest becomes clear. Another monumental scream brings this theatrical punishment-performance to an end:

Da erhob sich der Schrei, den Franz ausstieß, ungeteilt und unveränderlich, er schien nicht von einem Menschen, sondern von einem gemarterten Instrument zu stammen, der ganze Korridor tönte von ihm, das ganze Haus mußte es hören... (P 91)

The appearance of the two approaching attendants causes Josef to abandon the “Gesellschaft in der Rumpelkammer” (P 92). And while the guards’ pain might not elicit pleasure for them, it certainly gestures as much for others, so that Josef first slams the door shut, horrified by the guard’s scream, and then opens it again as if expecting to witness something pleasurable.

**Titorelli**

The most explicit instance of homoerotic desire is the sequence with the painter Titorelli, even if Josef appears utterly ignorant of this. Before Josef can reach the painter’s attic studio, he must make his way past a teenage girl, whose own sexual maturation cannot be overlooked: “Weder ihre Jugend noch ihr Körperfehler hatte verhindern können, daß sie schon ganz verdorben war” (P 148). The reader should not be surprised to learn that she “gehört zum Gericht” (P 158). At the top of the staircase, awaits “ein wahrscheinlich nur mit einem Nachthemd bekleideter Mann” who must first fight off the intruding “Bucklige” Josef just encountered and her two younger companions before welcoming Josef (P 149).
These intruding grimaces [“Fratzen”], Titorelli explains, “haben sich einen Schlüssel zu meiner Tür machen lassen, den sie untereinander verleihen” (P 150). If Leni’s gesture with the key is any indication, the girls might do more in Titorelli’s studio than “sich mit dem Pinsel die Lippen rot färben … und das Zimmer in allen Ecken [zu] verunreinigen” (P 151).

The room is filled with paintings of, among other subjects, judges, and Titorelli quickly confirms what Josef had already learned from Leni: judges are depicted in fictional matters, “das ist alles Erfindung” (P 153). Following some small talk, during which Josef tries to flatter Titorelli by correctly interpreting his paintings, the encounter turns homoerotic. Visibly aroused, Titorelli repeatedly encourages Josef to take his clothes off and to get into bed! First he asks Josef to have a seat on the bed, while taking the only available chair for himself. And when he does,

schieben es der Maler mißzuverstehen, warum K. nur am Bettrand blieb, er bat vielmehr, K. möchte es sich bequem machen und ging, da K. zögerte, selbst hin und drängte ihn tief in die Betten und Polster hinein. Dann kehrte er wieder zu seinem Sessel zurück und stellte endlich die erste sachliche Frage, die K. alles andere vergessen ließ. ‘Sie sind unschuldig?’ (P 156)

This attic studio is a steaming hot masculine space. The young girls try to force their way in [“gegen seinen Willen einzudringen”] but the painter manages to keep them out, insisting “daß ich sie nicht zu mir zu locken suche” and takes every opportunity to get close to Josef, which the latter neither welcomes nor resists: “[Josef] machte auch jetzt kaum eine Bewegung, als sich der Maler zu ihm niederbeugte und ihm, um draußen nicht gehört zu
werden, ins Ohr flüsterte…” (P 151,158). Titorelli makes inconclusive generalizations about the operation of the justice system and even tries to impress upon Josef that it is “der ununterbrochene Verkehr mit den Herren vom Gericht, der mich so beeinflußt” “wie ein Jurist [zu] spreche[n]” (P 159). This “Verkehr” occurs in the following manner:


And Titorelli desires the same kind of “Verkehr” with Josef: he pulls his chair closer to the bed [“hatte seinen Sessel näher zum Bett gezogen”] and presents Josef with the three possible escapes out of his trial, speaking in an intimate tone [“mit gedämpfter Stimme”] (P 160). Having explained to Josef the near impossibility of a “wirklichen Freisprechung,” he introduces the second option, “die scheinbare Freisprechung” but not before he once again urges Josef to remove his jacket: “Wollen Sie aber nicht, ehe wir davon reden, den Rock ausziehen?” (P 163). Sensing Josef’s disappointed, Titorelli is eager to talk some more:

‘Soll ich Ihnen das Wesen der Verschleppung erklären?’ K. nickte. Der Maler hatte sich breit in seinen Sessel zurückgelehnt, das Nachthemd war weit offen, er hatte eine Hand daruntergeschoben, mit der er über die Brust und die Seiten strich. (P 168)

Narrating about the law is evidently an autoerotic experience for Titorelli. In the final moments of their meeting, he suggestively offers Josef the back door: “Benützen Sie doch
lieber diesen Ausgang’, und er zeigte auf die Tür hinter dem Bett.” This is not a very subtle invitation, after all, it is the overtly sexualized girls who have access to the front, while the judge has the key to back. And if this was not suggestive enough, “statt die Tür dort zu öffnen, kroch der Maler unter das Bett” and only after retrieving some more pictures does he finally bend over, and open that back door [“Und er beugte sich endlich über das Bett und sperrte die Tür auf”] (P 171, 172). And to exaggerate the homosexual imagery ad infinitum, Titorelli sends Josef off with some final words of encouragement: “Steigen Sie ohne Scheu auf das Bett…das tut jeder, der hier hereinkommt! (P 172). All contact with the law inadvertently ends in bed.

As these sequences illustrate, Josef’s defense strategy consists of two tactics: he seeks to secure representation by trying to win over for himself Vertrauenspersonen of the institutions which he is trying to oppose, and he attempts to overcome his sense of helplessness by mimicking behaviours of the court officials. In the junk-room, he attempts to bribe the whipper to release the arresting guards; in the courtroom, he purports to present a defense for imaginary legal subject who might have been unjustly treated; he imitates the role of the investigator to Bürstner, and in his eagerness to make the Laundress his lover, Josef mimics not only the judge’s behaviour but also his desires. The more Josef internalized these behaviours, the more secure he feels. In the attic waiting room, he assaults an accused man, and when he begins to scream, Josef proudly concludes, “vielleicht hielt er ihn sogar für einen Richter” (P 77). Similarly he is appalled by the inappropriateness of Block’s dress, questioning whether he genuinely intends on meeting lawyer Huld “Ohne Rock?” (P 176),
no different than the arresting guard who warned him: “Im Hemd wollt Ihr vor dem Aufseher? Er läßt euch durchpügeln” \(P 17\). In his mimicry, Josef begins to feel free:

Er fühlte sich so frei, wie man es sonst nur ist, wenn man in der Fremde mit niedrigen Leuten spricht alles was einen selbst betrifft, bei sich behält, nur gleichmütig von den Interessen der andern redet, sich dadurch vor sich selbst erhöht aber auch nach Belieben fallen lassen kann. \(P 177\)

The accused Block is confined to a “niedrigen, fensterlosen Raum, der von einem schmalen Bett vollständig ausgefüllt war,” where he spends his days and nights “eingesperrt” reading legal documents prepared by his lawyer \(P 205,192\). It is not the client who summons his defense, but the lawyer who call on the accused. This man, briefly released from his “Dienstmädchenzimmer,” is prepared “zu dienen” \(P 192, 201\). In the world of Der Prozess, representation does not liberate the legal subject—it enslaves him. It is not the arrest that robs the accused of his freedom. Rather, it is his merely tolerated [“geduldet”] lawyer who writes unintelligible submissions on his behalf, who imprisons him. Having realized this, Josef ultimately decides to dispense with his lawyer’s representation and takes the task into his own hands, deciding to write his own statement of defense. Everything he had learned this far suggests the impossibility of this approach.\(^{28}\) And soon even Josef begins to understand the enormity of the task ahead: “In Unkenntnis der vorhandenen Anklage,” his presumed guilt involves his entire being, so that “das ganze Leben in den kleinsten Handlungen und Ereignissen in die Erinnerung zurückgebracht, dargestellt und von allen Seiten überprüft werden mußte.” But to account for his entire past would consume what is left of his future: “Wenn er im Büro keine Zeit für sie fand, was sehr wahrscheinlich war,
dann mußte er sie zu Hause in den Nächten machen. Würden auch die Nächte nicht genügen, dann mußte er einen Urlaub nehmen” (P 133).

Linguistic self-representation is not commensurate with life, so that even Josef must admit “daß es unmöglich war die Eingabe jemals fertigzustellen” (P 134). Just as employing third-party representation, a “Fürsprecher,” means to renounce the freedom of self-determination, so too the attempt at self-representation through writing is to renounce life altogether as the writing process, rather than producing a defense actually constitutes the punishment itself. The experience of producing a defense is hardly different from serving a sentence. It requires the cessation of daily life. But ultimately Josef’s efforts fail not because he learns that it is impossible to write a defense, that is, to produce a ‘Legitimationspapier’ that would substantiate his claim to an innocent identity, but because he ignores the wisdom the guard bestows upon him: “Sie werden [das Gesetz] zu fühlen bekommen” (P 14). Over time Josef internalizes the customs and behaviours of the judicial functionaries, but he does not adopt the dominant narrative about the law, namely that it is not accessible as narrative but rather as a force of attraction—one to be experienced not intellectually, but corporeally.

Der Prozess ends in the same way that it began: with the arrival of two guards to Josef’s premises on his birthday. Unlike at the arrest, which Josef takes as a “Komödie” with “lecherliche[n] Ceremonien” (P 13, 17), he has by the end internalized its formalities and “ohne daß ihm der Besuch angekündigt gewesen wäre, saß K. gleichfalls schwarz angezogen in einem Sessel in der Nähe der Tür.” And when the executioners arrive, he is disappointed with their imperfect attire. Their “scheinbar unverrückbaren Cyliderhüten” recall only
second-class performers: “Alte, untergeordnete Schauspieler schickt man um mich” (P 236). And these executioners whom Josef ironically takes for “tenors” never as much as release a sound (P 237). His many questions do not elicit an answer. Josef leaves with the silent tenors, and in the street they lock arms in an unbreakable hold and move as one. “Es war eine Einheit, wie fast nur Lebloses bilden kann” (P 237).

As Kafka’s story, “Das Schweigen der Sirenen” teaches, silence is a weapon more powerful than the voice. The “tenors” in their overt passiveness, and muteness enact the most extreme form of discursive violence. This utter silence marks the end of Josef’s existence. The ensuing execution is only a ritual enactment of the physical death; it merely doubles on the corporeal level his symbolic demise. Instead of allowing himself to indulge in the plurality of erotic narratives about the law, which his very arrest made possible, Josef withers in a discursive prison, unable to linguistically produce or substantiate his being, and dies not as a man, but “wie ein Hund!”, a creature that does not speak (P 241). Like Kafka’s epistolary project, the law renders the subject’s body secondary to language. But when language destroys subjectivity, the body remains the only viable gateway for desire, a medium for self-narratology. Even Josef ultimately contemplates the possibility of channelling his desire corporeally instead of merely linguistically—that it is he who must twist the knife, but in the end, he refuses: “K. wußte jetzt genau, daß es seine Pflicht gewesen ware, das Messer, als es von Hand zu Hand über ihm schwebte, selbst zu fassen und sich einzubohren. Aber er tat es nicht…” (P 241).
CHAPTER 2

Corporal Desire:
Writing, Reading, and Staging Bodies as Narrative Texts in
_In der Strafkolonie, Ein Landarzt and Ein Hungerkünstler_

In October 1914 Kafka takes a two-week vacation to gain momentum on _Der Prozeß_, which had come to a halt after some two hundred pages. While nothing comes of his efforts “den Roman vorwärtszutreiben,” a new story emerges, delivering the long-awaited closure to the torment of the law which _Der Prozeß_ withholds (_T3_, 39 (7.10.1914)).\(^1\) It reads as an alternative, condensed, version of the novel, depicting the workings of desire by which functionary identities are generated, and linguistic violence by which they are dismantled and overturned. _In der Strafkolonie_ tells of a machine that processes a human body into a writing surface for a literary text: the law. This law operates by the same logic as the one in the _Der Prozeß_: the legal subject is in the dark about the charges made against him; the content of the law is unknown to him and legal texts are difficult to come by; and even those who lay their eyes on them remain in the dark, for the scripture is either visually unreadable or its meaning indecipherable. Moreover, the desire to come into contact with the law is rampant, befalling the executing officer, whose entire being is invested in the mechanic production of justice, the audience from earlier times, which exuded a trance-like aura when in physical proximity of the body-spectacle, as well as European explorer, who, despite being
morally disinclined to view capital punishment as humane, nevertheless hopes to witness justice. The “process” which in the novel gets stuck in its early stages is expedited in the story, moving right to the very end: guilt is certain, the verdict and the punishment are simultaneous and immediate.

In der Strafkolonie not only confirms the moral established in Der Prozeß—“Wertlosigkeit von Briefen und allem Geschriebenen” as a mode of self-presentation—it also contemplates the body’s capacity to perform as a narrative text of one’s existence (BF 616 [late October / early November 1914]). That is, precisely when Kafka’s letters fail to function as bodies in communicating stories of the self, and Josef’s written documents fail to substantiate his claim to an identity, Kafka readjusts his hypothesis of duality and begins to employ bodies to perform as narrative texts. Desire—for Kafka a force of self-determination—finds an alternative vehicle in the human body itself. The story thus advances from the novel in restructuring desire as not only a literary but above all a bodily process. This switch, I argue, constitutes a critical point in Kafka’s theory of desire and provokes an experimentation with human bodies as motors of self-narratology in place of the text itself.

Kafka’s incessant interest in the human body as a mode of communication, the experimental impetus behind In der Strafkolonie, is evident in a number of subsequent works, including the 1917 Ein Landarzt, and the 1922 Ein Hungerkünstler. These three stories, taken collectively, can be read as a counter experiment in which Kafka inverts the hierarchy of text over body, which he maintained in Letters to Felice and Der Prozeß, an experiment that
investigates the latter’s expressive and communicatory capacity. The emphasis gradually shifts away from textual- to the possibility of bodily production of self-narratives—to staging and reading human bodies in acts of communication. The legal imperative that is carved into the body of the penal colony prisoner is reduced to the patient’s mysterious wound in Ein Landarzt. The doctor’s task becomes reading the signs of a body that is not marked with an entire sentential scripture, but with a wound which nevertheless tells a life-narrative of its bearer, having accompanied him from birth to death. Physical openings, be they mechanically induced transgressions as in In der Strafkolonie, or natural eruptions of the body, as in Ein Landarzt, disappear entirely in Ein Hungerkünstler five years later, where the body, in its totality, and by the way of its negation, documents and stages the narrative of the self and demands a reading. As the site of desire gradually moves away from the written text to the human body, so too its narratives increasingly gain a corporeal dimension, as the extreme physical transformations—accompanied by the most fundamental bodily sensations: pain, lust, hunger—illustrate. Kafka’s characters write, read, and stage bodies that do not merely reflect their sociocultural conditions, but express those desires and meanings Kafka once believed his letters could.

Writing Bodies: Violent Scripture in In der Sprachkolonie

In ordinary language, the effects of linguistic violence are often described as analogous to painful physical experiences: a slap in the face, a punch in the stomach, a stab in the back. This characterization functions on the level of metaphor, since the violence inherent in
language neither targets nor reaches the body, but the symbolic self, bringing about what Deleuze and Guattari appropriately term “incorporeal transformations.” With In der Strafkolonie, however, Kafka inverts this notion entirely, so that linguistic violence literally produces the physical effect it is metaphorically said to bring about. The evasive formulation of the law that plagues the subjects of the Prozeß-world is metamorphosed into a physical force in Kafka’s penal colony: the law that was violated reasserts itself by violating the body of its transgressor, via a textual formulation.

Linguistic abuse appears in such wide-ranging configurations in this story so that Kafka’s “Strafkolonie” might be best understood as a “Sprachkolonie.” The “eigentümlicher Apparat” which operates by literally transforming a body of flesh into a body of text is its modus operandi. The story begins with the arrival of a European traveller on a tropical island of a French penal colony to witness the execution of a man presumed guilty of “Ungehorsam und Beleidigung des Vorgesetzen” (E 164). The crime at hand is a verbal insult, an offense committed in language. The execution intended to rectify this transgression is likewise linguistic: The speech act that constitutes a crime is countered with an act of writing with a machine that reinstates the ruling law by reproducing it in the transgressor’s body. The law is prescriptive and formulated as a commandment: “Ehre deinen Vorgesetzen!”—expressed as an imperative, it can only exist in language. In other words, the law, its transgression, and the punishment are all linguistic occurrences, simultaneously expressed in one imperative statement. The colony’s judicial process begins where it ought to end—with the affirmation of guilt: “Die Schuld ist immer zweifellos.” This statement is not a conclusion subsequent to a process, but a point of departure: a maxim.
And because guilt is construed not as derivative, but an origin, silence logically follows from it: “[das Urteil] ihm zu verkünden” “wäre nutzlos,” for it would only trigger a defense; and since guilt is established at the onset, this would be entirely redundant (E 161).

Moreover, by refusing to inform the prisoner of his charges, the penal colony’s officer denies him any recognition whatsoever even before a process of justice production, the recognition of guilt or innocence, begins. This silence is yet another manifestation of linguistic violence, and it goes beyond the refusal to name charges or to entertain a defense. Social hierarchy and institutionalized power are expressed in the linguistic differential between the colonizer and the colonized, between the law enforcer and the subject. Linguistic domination in the colony resides in the fact that these inhabitants are subjects to a bureaucracy that operates in a foreign language. The commandments they ought to obey are expressed in a language they do not understand. Because the condemned man does not speak French, in which the officer attempts to present to the explorer the steps of the execution, he remains in the dark about the machine’s significance. Part of the black humour in Kafka’s story lies in the condemned man’s cheerful curiosity about the machine and the complete lack of insight into the relation it bears to him.

Although the officer and the explorer represent two radically different ideologies, they are both in the business of judging: the former is appointed as judge (“zum Richter bestellt”), while the latter passes judgment on the judicial system within which this Richter performs his function (E 171). This meeting ultimately results in the officer’s defense of the execution machine—a stage in the process he himself already established as utterly redundant in the
operation of the penal colony’s judicial system. At the onset, the officer maintains, he “will ... den Apparat zuerst beschreiben und dann erst die Prozedur selbst ausführen lassen” (E 167). In doing so he inadvertently admits that this judgment-writing machine cannot speak for itself, any more than the legal subjects in Der Prozess and requires his representation to ensure a favourable judgment. But the plan goes astray as the explorer increasingly interjects with questions that shift the focus from the mechanic workings of the apparatus to its human subject and the transparency of the legal process: “Wie lautet denn das Urteil?”; “Kennt er sein Urteil?; “Er kennt sein eigenes Urteil nicht?”; “Aber daß er überhaupt verurteilt wurde, das weiß er doch?”; “Dann weiß also der Mann auch jetzt noch nicht, wie seine Verteidigung aufgenommen wurde?”, “Er muß doch Gelegenheit gehabt haben sich zu verteidigen...” (E 169-71).

The interrogation makes it clear that for the explorer, it is not the condemned man, but this legal process—the execution machine, that is on trial. The explorer’s pressing questions cause the officer to neglect carrying out the mechanic “Prozedur,” and to instead engage in one internal to language—an Überzeugungsprozess to secure the machine’s future function, one that is ultimately as unsuccessful as Josef’s own in Der Prozess, and whose failure has the very same implications for the body. From this point on, the story alternates between the officer’s explanation (not demonstration) of this mechanic process, and his attempts to persuade the explorer to defend the machine before the new commander, and keep it from perishing “zugrunde” (E 180). The officer’s treatment of the machine as a human subject (through his insinuation that its demise would be a function of a failure in language) recalls Lacan’s position on the formation of human subjectivity, whose standard
German captures this vividly through the repetition of “zugrunde”: “Von Anfang an ernährt sich das Kind von Worten wie von Brot und geht es an Wörtern zugrunde.” And to prevent this “zugrunde gehen” of his beloved machine, the officer resorts to all means of linguistic persuasion, demanding for it everything his notion of justice denies to people: the possibility of representation, a public defense, and a verdict subsequent to and on the basis of these.

One can infer from the officer’s presentation that the colony’s archaic judicial system advances from that of Der Prozeß by reducing the tireless movement of the modern, “vielköpftig[en]” Beamtenapparat to precise and necessary movements of a ruthlessly efficient machine, recalling Josef K.’s defense lawyer’s words of wisdom, “es ist oft besser in Ketten als frei zu sein” (P 199). It quickly terminates the body’s freedom, and it is through the cessation of movement that the penal colony’s subject encounters the law on his body. No time is wasted on hearings, no chance is granted for an apparent, unreal movement. Each condemned man’s guilt seems to be total and existential, so that the case of the condemned man at hand is in the eyes of the officer “so einfach, wie alle” and bringing him to justice is likewise “sehr einfach” (E 173). “Schuld und Sein sind identisch” and so the punishment can remain undifferentiated. And since each case results in the prisoner’s death, following the same silent treatment, the difference between the cases lies only in the wording in which the violated commandment is formulated. These differences are subtle: “Ein Nichteingeweihter merkt äußerlich keinen Unterschied in den Strafen,” as the officer explains (E 171). By deciphering with his wounds the words “auf seinem Leib” that spell out his sin and judgment, the condemned man achieves an epiphany about his own circumstance, so the officer, in twelve hours. This is something that Josef is promised at the
start of his trial ("Sie werden [das Gesetz] zu fühlen bekommen") and something he does not realize in the twelve months that separate his arrest from the execution (P 15).

The penal colony’s justice system runs on a concentration of libidinal energy, made rather explicit by the very fact that the encounter with the law here too takes place in bed. The writing machine’s allure lies not only in its production of justice, but in the simultaneous evocation of sexual desire. The inherent eroticism of its operation of justice is less than subtle: The bed’s vibration and rapid jerking motions reinforce the implied sexual currents: “Das Bett zittert in winzigen, sehr schnellen Zuckungen gleichzeitig seitlich wie auch auf und ab” (E 168). The machine penetrates its subject’s body in a fashion that mimics the movements of sexual intercourse, while the subject sucks on a “Filzstumpf” visually suggestive of oral sex, until he himself is sufficiently penetrated to reach the much awaited climactic point. The machine elicits sexual energy, so that a condemned man’s physical decoding of the law, which constitutes the production of justice, appears erotically seductive to the onlooker: The vision of the body being penetrated does not repulse the officer; instead, he conjures up getting into bed with the condemned man, as though he were witness to a pornographic theatrical performance rather than an execution. “Ein Anblick der einen verführen könnte, sich mit unter die Egge zu legen!” he exclaims (E 176). And the desire to get into contact with the law takes a radical form perhaps a result of an even greater distance between the subject and this authoritative agency. Whereas in the Der Prozess, the law student indulges in the laundress’s body before handing her over to a judge higher up the ranks, the officer in In der Strafkolonie hardly has any access to his supervisors and does not take part in the sexual affairs with the women.
The extent to which desire for contact with the law has gained a physical dimension becomes clear when we consider how justice-making occurs in the ritual writing of a human body. The execution is akin to a theatrical performance: it is staged with an audience in mind; the machine itself is designed to heighten the onlookers’ sensory perceptions. Its harrow is made of glass, “um es jedem zu ermöglichen, die Ausführung des Urteils zu überprüfen...durch das Glas [zu] sehen, wie sich die Inschrift im Körper vollzieht” (E 173). The acoustics are likewise carefully planned. The process by which the embellishing script is tattooed into the body requires twelve hours, the first six of which are mere physical torment, for the pleasure of the audience. In the old days “tropften die schreibenden Nadeln eine beizende Flüssigkeit aus” “dem Verurteilten ein stärkeres Seufzen auszupressen” (E 181). Justice making was heard loud and clear, so that “[m]anche sahen gar nicht mehr zu, sondern lagen mit geschlossenen Augen im Sand” (E 181). The sights and sounds induced by the machine are so convincing that although no one could ever decipher the beautiful scripture the machine wrote (and thereby grasp conceptually the content of the law), “alle wussten: Jetzt geschieht Gerechtigkeit” (E 181).

The officer is not the only one seduced by this spectacle. He recalls the audience from past times in an orgy-like justice-trance, experiencing the same climax of the “endlich erreichten und schon vergehenden Gerechtigkeit” (E 181). Beginning to internalize the commandment that transgresses his body, the condemned subject “spitzt den Mund, als horche er” recalling Kaufmann Block in Der Prozeß, who likewise “spitzte die Lippen” and “horchte mit gesenktem Kopf als übertrete er durch dieses Horchen ein Gebot” (E 176, P 204). Only whereas Kaufmann Block is subjected to captivity and verbal abuse by a practitioner of the
law—his own representative—the subject of the penal colony experiences the pure and unmediated contact through the materiality of language. The contact with the law reaches its climax with the expression of a transfiguration [Verklärung] on the “gemarterten Gesicht” of the subject (E 181). The machine’s allure becomes perceptible even to the otherwise uninterested European. Despite his insistence on the “zweifellos[e]” Ungerechtigkeit des Verfahrens und die Unmenschlichkeit der Exekution,” upon touching the soft cotton wool covering of the machine’s bed, hand in hand with the officer, as if it were the most seductive texture, and connecting to it together constituted an act of intimacy, this “Reisende[r] war schon ein wenig für den Apparat gewonnen,” and this precisely at the moment when he came into physical contact with the justice making machine (E 178, 168). Unsurprisingly, he finds himself “in großer Verlegenheit” (E 182), and decides not to wage an intervention (Eingriff) into this judicial system, having experienced the same seductive effect: “Die Dinge hier [lagen] allerdings sehr verführerisch” (E 178).

Nevertheless, in the end the explorer pronounces a negative judgment: “Ich bin ein Gegner dieses Verfahrens” (E 188).” The mechanic and linguistic means to justice prove to be inseparable, not only because the execution is simultaneous with text-production, but also because the entire foundation of this penal colony is constructed with words (commandments) so that the officer is entirely right in maintaining, “[e]in flüchtiges, ein bloß unvorsichtiges Wort genügt” to bring the entire system to a total collapse (E 183). Disappointed, the officer must concludes “das Verfahren hat Sie also nicht überzeugt” (E 189). By failing to induce a desired judgment in the explorer through his linguistic Überzeugungsverfahren the officer remains the machine’s “einziger Vertreter” (E 180).
To be sure, the situation is dire and the machine is endangered from the onset. Its proper maintenance requires “Ersatzteile”—mechanic and human parts, both of which are “schwer zu beschaffen” (E 167). The officer’s self-execution, in the absence of a new representation for the machine, constitutes the acquisition of a final set of “Ersatzteile”—he supplies the machine with a last body on which to write, and a final witness to its performance: the explorer. From among the “Handzeichnungen des Kommandanten selbst” he selected one that given his function, would carry a special significance—“Sei gerecht!”—and with it goes on to express his desire for contact with justice in a moment of self-fashioning (E 169, 190).10

Yet paradoxically, at the moment of the officer’s suicide, the machine proceeds to self-destruct. It is as if it succumbs to the judgment of the travelling explorer and rejects the officer’s act of self-sacrifice, to write on the body of the only man who ever desired its penetration: “Die Egge schrieb nicht, sie stach nur, und das Bett wälzte den Körper nicht, sondern hob ihn nur zitternd in die Nadeln hinein” (E 195). The officer dies anticlimactically, without any sign of the promised insight on his face, leaving the explorer unconvinced that justice was served. One can imagine any number of fitting reasons for this act of simultaneous self-destruction.11 For one, the machine and the officer are codependent: it cannot write without someone to operate it, and he has no purpose in a penal colony that has done away with the legal practice whose continued existence he is to ensure. This moment of ultimate self-destruction then, again underscores the impossibility of representation, not only through the officer or even the explorer, but through any kind of accompanying, explanatory, narrative. Moreover, the officer’s self-induced judgment—”sei gerecht”—does not correspond to the specificity of his crime, even if he is also being unjust.
By not securing the old commandant’s life’s work, the officer may be accused of failing to live up to a different imperative—the one he intended the prisoner before him to internalize: “Ehre deinen Vorgesetzen” (E 169). Ultimately, however, this punishment may be an act of poetic justice for subjecting the colony’s legal apparatus to the judgment of the explorer. The imperative “sei gerecht”—“be just,” doubles in the lexically similar “sei gerächt”—“be avenged,” leaving ambiguous its meaning for the officer. In the end, this “Gericht” is not immune to language and succumbs in its entirety to the judgment of one “Fremder... auf unserer Insel” (E180).

Throughout the writing process, the subject of the machine not only comes to identify (with) the script—he becomes materially identical to it—a physical manifestation of the law. Through the fusion of flesh and text, this writing apparatus achieves one more thing that the typewriters in Josef’s “Rechtsstaat” could not: it produces a written document that could be passed off as a proxy for one’s entire existence, one that embodies the subject’s totality—his guilt and its atonement. The textual embodiment of the accused victim’s crime, judgment and punishment turns the body into a narrative of this man’s life and death: a kind of \textit{Legitimationspapier} that stands in for his existence. But exactly this fusion that generates such a legitimizing document prevents its employment as a proxy for one’s symbolic existence, since its genesis is identical to the subject’s corporeal death. No condemned man sends his dressed body to an execution. He goes along, and perishes with it. Despite its brutality, the writing machine seems to satisfy something of a universal desire, a desire in which the body becomes the gateway to self-determination. Even the explorer acknowledges...
this potential in remaining present for the officer’s self-execution, and analyzing his corpse for an indication of the promised transcendence.

Desire in Kafka’s corpus is a force directed at self-fashioning and self-transformation which seeks a gateway through textual and corporeal means. In *Letters to Felice* and *Der Prozeß*, the site of desire is the written text. In *In der Strafkolonie* too, one’s existence is measured in terms of the text he produces. However, there is a perceptible shift in focus away from language towards the human body, from the symbolic to the corporeal dimension of subjectivity. Whereas in *Der Prozeß*, desire is directed at grasping—conceptually—the law’s codification in language, in *In der Strafkolonie*, desire no longer appears as a bodiless force. Desire for contact is not of intellectual but of bodily nature. The case of the colony’s officer makes this clear. Unlike his uninformed subjects who are executed without knowing the charges brought against them, the officer possesses the greatest knowledge of the ruling laws. The legal writings are in his hands alone, and he is the only one who can read the scripture. Yet this man, more than any other, desires to go under the writing machine. What he desires is clearly not an intellectual understanding of the law, but its physical expression—the sensory experience that all of the machine’s victims before him had. It is not the subject who comes before the law demanding admittance, but the legal text itself that penetrates the subject’s body, demanding to be read—corporeally. As if to validate the guard’s prophecy in *Der Prozeß*, the penal colony officer echoes his words about coming to know the law: the prisoner “erfährt es ja auf seinem Leib” (*E* 170). With desire gaining a corporeal dimension, *In der Strafkolonie* breaks from Kafka’s earlier conception
of desire and paves the way for a rethinking of the human body as a medium of self-production—in narrative terms—in place of the text itself.

**Reading Bodies: Self-referential diagnostics in* Ein Landarzt*

Having completed *In der Strafkolonie* in October 1914 and finally abandoned working on the unfinished *Prozeß*-novel some four months later, Kafka’s fear of literary unproductiveness finally catches up with him. The 1915 diaries document the resulting sense of inability, standstill and uselessness: January: “Ende des Schreibens”; “Die alte Unfähigkeit.” February: “Vollständige Stockung. Endlose Quälereien”; “Unfähigkeit in jeder Hinsicht und vollständig.” March: “unfähig eine Zeile zu schreiben.” May: “Aus aller Regelmäßigkeit des Schreibens gekommen”; September: “Vollständiges Nichtstun”; November: “Vollständige Nutzlosigkeit.” It takes two years after the completion of *In der Strafkolonie* before Kafka eases again into some kind of regularity of writing. Between November 1916 and April 1917 he writes over a dozen new stories and overcomes his own “Nichtstun,” but he infects his new character, the title figure and narrator of *Ein Landarzt*, with the same sense of Unfähigkeit. Three years separate the conception of *Ein Landarzt* from *In der Strafkolonie*, yet it seems that Kafka picks up exactly where he left off, with a question that the former story brought to light, namely: How can human bodies be employed to perform as narrative texts? The body processed by the penal colony’s writing apparatus literalizes the internalization of the law. The resulting body-text fusion hints at the possibility of a body that performs as a narrative text. However, even if the message arrives
beyond the body, it does so too late and at a cost too high, as the victim’s enlightenment prefigures his death. Nevertheless, this horrific ending provokes the question: does this dying body (through its textual embodiment of the victim’s crime, judgment and punishment) function as a narrative text in the way that Kafka’s epistolary narratives could not perform to replace his physical body?

In *Ein Landarzt*, the human body becomes the site of desire. The commandment that was once carved into the convict’s back is reduced to a more natural wound, one that nevertheless encapsulates its bearer’s being, and is presented to the world demanding a reading. Moreover, the story explodes with the presence and visibility of human bodies, whose natural contours are repeatedly violated and transgressed, only not merely through linguistic violence, but through the force of other bodies: the doctor threatens the groom with a whip; the groom bites, then rapes the doctor’s maid; the patient suffers a deep wound, reversible only by amputation, and the doctor himself is threatened with murder if he fails to cure it. The ranging manifestations of linguistic violence we see in *In der Strafkolonie* are reduced to only one—verbal threats, which despite their repeated occurrence have far less immediate consequences than wounds brought about by nature or by man.¹³ The groom’s penetration of the maid, and the doctor’s refusal to operate—to penetrate the patient’s body—result in his death.

*In der Strafkolonie* and *Ein Landarzt* resemble each other structurally. Moreover, the layering of previously introduced characters strengthens a sense of continuity. Both stories report the events of one day at a remote location, made even more remote by the extreme
weather conditions (a blazing hot island; a snowy village), the arrival of an outside authority figure to evaluate the situation (explorer; doctor), his subsequent witness to and participation in a ritualistic staging of a body, and his eventual escape from this remote location. Ein Landarzt repeatedly gestures towards In der Strafkolonie in its character constellation and the treatment of the human body. It playfully redirects the reader to the earlier text by fusing the figures of the penal colony’s travelling explorer and officer into the country doctor (who is on the one hand both a traveller and an explorer, and on the other a practitioner of a discipline that requires an invasive treatment of the human body). Moreover, the doctor’s choice of words explicitly recalls the two characters from In der Strafkolonie, who becomes fused in the figure of the doctor.

Struggling to secure a means of transportation to get to his patient in the nearby village, the doctor declares himself—in the opening sentence of the story—“in großer Verlegenheit” (E 253). This story’s opening immediately redirects an attuned reader to the earlier one, recalling the explorer, who also finds himself “in großer Verlegenheit” deciding whether to wage an “Eingriff” into the penal colony’s ruling orders (E 182). The term “Eingriff” denotes both an intervention and a surgical procedure, and so connects the explorer who chooses not to intervene in the execution with the doctor who fails to perform surgery on the patient’s wound. These two figures who practice seemingly opposing professions, one aimed at ending, the other at extending, human life, are brought together under this one term as hesitant agents of change.
In the same manner, the doctor mirrors the penal colony officer: the two share their intention to subject the body before them to a treatment of their discipline (a legal execution; a medical examination); each is distracted from and eventually abandons carrying out what he perceives as his professional duty by more pressing desires for self-determination, desires that lead to the subjection of their own bodies to external powers. Instead of performing in his professional capacity, each man undergoes a bizarre body ritual: the penal colony officer gets undressed and replaces his subject on the machine’s bed, while the country doctor is undressed against his will and placed in bed with his patient. The doctor’s restriction of bodily movement and unease in the patient’s bed gesture back at the officer’s self-sacrificial execution. More importantly, however, the country doctor, like the penal colony officer and the travelling explorer, is in the business of judging. His task is to read the symptoms of the body before him and to make a judgment—to determine a diagnosis. Yet this doctor, whose professional designation warrants the story’s title, is paralyzed, repeatedly wondering “was tue ich”; “was tue ich hier in diesem endlosen Winter!”; “nun bin ich Arzt. Was soll ich tun?” (E 255, 256, 258). Unlike the officer, who finds judging categorically “einfach,” the doctor struggles to the point that he gets lost in a self-referential analysis, in which the rosy wound doubles as the maid Rosa, the patient as the doctor. By varying the locational set-up and the particular judging profession, and at the same time layering over previous characters and recycling constellations of power dynamics, Ein Landarzt occupies a place close to In der Strafkolonie, one might say as a trial in the same series of experiments that test the capacity of the human body as a vehicle for self-narratology, its potential to express narratives of the symbolic self. One feels a mirroring effect when reading Ein Landarzt, which redirects the reader always away from itself. Its figures split internally (wound/maid;
(patient/doctor; groom/doctor, sister/maid, etc.) and the doctor doubles externally, as a fusion of the penal colony officer and explorer. The story runs in all directions, so that an attempt at a conclusive reading only reveals what escapes. This character splitting and merging quite obviously invites psychoanalytic interpretations, but also points to a more subtle development that can be perceived when the story is placed in the context of other Kafka texts, namely the emergence of a more open, multitudinous narrative form, one which, as I argue in Chapter 3, ultimately culminates in hypertextuality. The story is the most explicit experimentation with an open narrative form, before it becomes fully developed in Das Schloß.

The doctor arrives at the village appearing well-composed, observing his surroundings in great detail, as he heads to his patient, whom he believes to be ill:

...als öffne sich unmittelbar vor meinem Hoftor der Hof meines Kranken, bin ich schon dort; ruhig stehen die Pferde; der Schneefall hat aufgehört; Mondlicht ringsum; die Eltern des Kranken eilen aus dem Haus; seine Schwester hinter ihnen; man hebt mich fast aus dem Wagen; dem verwirrten Reden entnehme ich nichts; im Krankenzimmer ist die Luft kaum atembar; der vernachlässigte Herdofen raucht; ich werde das Fenster aufstoßen; zuerst aber will ich den Kranken sehen (E 255, my emphasis).

The four-time appearance of “Kranken,” is indicative of the doctor’s natural assumption that the patient is in fact ill, while Kafka’s use of semicolons to connect an entire twelve independent clauses further suggests that the doctor acquires these impressions at once, breathlessly uttering them at haste, which would indicate clarity of mind in an emergency. Yet despite such keen attention to the detail of his surroundings, the doctor’s observations of
the patient are surprisingly superficial: “Mager, ohne Fieber, nicht kalt, nicht warm, mit leeren Augen.” The boy’s alarming whisper “Doktor, laß mich sterben” does not move the doctor to undertake an examination. Looking in his bag of instruments, he pulls, not a stethoscope, not even a blood pressure gauge, but of all things, a pair of tweezers, which he proofs in the candle light, and then strangely puts away. Contemplating the seemingly god-given horses that transported him, he remembers Rosa—“erst jetzt fällt mir wieder Rosa ein”—and with this thought dismisses the urgency of the situation and his task to save the boy, instead asking himself “wie rette ich sie?” “Rosa” moves from a neuter (“Dienstmädchen,” “es”, “das Mädchen” [E 253, 253, 254]) to a feminine “Sie” with the linguistic and symbolic merger of woman and wound. As the patient comes to mirror the maid, the horses open the windows and stick their heads through, as if to give the doctor some desperately needed fresh air to compose himself and finally observe “den Kranken.” But the doctor seems to interpret their bodily movement as an invitation to depart, immediately concluding: “ich fahre gleich wieder zurück” (E 255).

Having remembered Rosa—and not as a result of any medical findings—this “Kranke” becomes in all subsequent references simply “der Junge.” This switch appears at first to merely convey the doctor’s conviction that the patient is after all not ill. But a number of other terms would have the same effect—der Patient, das Kind, der Bursche, der Knabe—none of which the doctor chooses. The utterance “der Junge” doubles in its meaning as both ‘the boy’ and the related “jung” (young one) and bursts in all directions, like a shattered mirror, reflecting not one, but multiple images, not only of the boy, but also of Rosa. The maid is “jung” like the patient, but unlike him she is not a boy, but has, just now,
transitioned into a woman. What’s more, were it not for the patient’s call, this newly emerged *Frau* would still be a *Jungfrau*, a virgin, but because the doctor, however unwillingly, traded her for two horses to reach his patient, she no longer is. Instead, she too has suffered a bloody wound in the hip area—like the one the doctor is about to discover in the patient—having been violated by the groom.

Wrestling with his duty to care for the patient, and his growing guilt for abandoning Rosa, the doctor finally arrives at something vaguely resembling an examination, albeit still without a stethoscope. He places his head on the chest “des Jungen” and pronounces a judgment that supports his decision to leave, conveying his resentment of the patient: “der Junge ist gesund... und am besten mit einem Stoß aus dem Bett zu treiben.” But as if unsatisfied with his judgment of the unexamined patient, the doctor begins to justify himself, feeling guilty for being about to abandon his patient, in the same way he feels guilty for abandoning Rosa: “Ich bin kein Weltverbesser und lasse ihn liegen. Ich bin vom Bezirk angestellt und tue meine Pflicht bis zum Rand.” If “der Kranke” is “gesund,” then the doctor is free to go, and needs no excuses for not committing to action. If he is no good-doer, then he cannot be doing his duty to the fullest. The “verwirrte Reden” which the doctor previously attributed to the patient’s family now becomes his own. And again, remembering Rosa, he declares to the reader once more: “hier wäre also mein Besuch zu Ende” (*E* 256). But the sight of the concerned father sniffing a glass of rum, the teary-eyed mother biting her lip, and in particular the sister waiving a blood-stained cloth, as if in a farewell-gesture, moves the doctor—and still without having conducted a proper examination—to reconsider and “zuzugeben, dass der Junge doch vielleicht krank ist” (*E* 257).
The doctor fails to examine the patient’s body, but the blood-stained cloth in the hands of a young woman reconnects the patient and the maid. In the hands of the boy’s relative, the blood-stained cloth suggests his illness, yet by the virtue of being held by his young unmarried sister, it also recalls Rosa’s violation and loss of innocence and her maturing reproductive capacity. An objective judgment of the patient’s body, a proper diagnosis, is already here, out of reach for the doctor. And yet it is only under these murky “Umständen” that he return to the patient’s bed. There, the horses neigh, and without further ado, another judgement befalls the patient: “ja, der Junge ist krank” (E 257). The doctor only now sees, “In seiner rechten Seite, in der Hüftegegend hat sich eine handtellergroße Wunde aufgetan.” This afflicts the patient as it does the doctor: “rosa” is his wound too, and its rosy interior is full of life: “Würmer, an Stärke und Länge meinem kleinen Finger gleich, rosig aus eigenem und außerdem blutbespritzt, winden sich im Inneren der Wunde festgehalten, mit weißen Köpfchen, mit vielen Beinchen ans Licht.”

The fusion of Rosa and the wound is clear, but one is left to wonder, does the wound’s manifestation reflect Rosa’s own? Or is the doctor projecting onto the patient the wound he imagines Rosa to have? After all, she too might be filled with worm-like organisms “mit weißen Köpfchen,” that will later emerge to the surface of her wound “blutbespritzt”, organisms whose “Beinchen” will move “ans Licht”—from the mother’s womb into the world. This sight of the boy’s wound evokes at once the sperm-infused vagina of his now-beloved Rosa, which disgusts the doctor, as well as the future labour of the groom’s children, which upsets him. As far as the patient’s wound is concerned, now would be the right time to
pull out those tweezers and to wage an Eingriff but without doing so, the doctor makes his final judgment: “[a]rmer Junge, dir ist nicht zu helfen” (E 257). In a maneuver not very different from the officer’s in the penal colony, this doctor likewise sentences the subject of his responsibility to death: “an dieser Blume in deiner Seite gehst du zugrunde.” The doctor’s utterance too aims in multiple directions. It is at not only directed at the patient but also at himself, conveying his sense or irrecoverable loss of Rosa, and at Rosa referring to her dying in labour. Moreover, the judgment’s motivation remains dubious. Is it a warning? A threat? A prognosis? Finally, the inevitability of “zugrunde gehen” too recalls In der Strafkolonie, in which the judgment is absolutely “zweifellos” and death is likewise inevitable. What is most alarming about the body-text to be read is not so much that the doctor fails to produce a correct diagnosis, but that in the end, we are not even able to discern the wound’s ontological nature. Is it the boy’s or Rosa’s? It is real or imaginary? It is physical or psychic?

It is only by contemplating the life in this wound—its reproductive potential—that the doctor finally becomes productive: “Die Familie ist glücklich, sie sieht mich in Tätigkeit” (E 257). The word of the doctor’s apparent Tätigkeit spreads quickly. Like the judicial treatment of the body in In der Strafkolonie, so the medical in Ein Landarzt attracts an audience. Recalling the tranced witnesses of the execution, zombie-like, seemingly sleepwalking villagers arrive “auf Fußspitzen, mit ausgestreckten Armen balancierend, durch den Mondschein” to witness a ritualistic staging of a human body, (E 257). Needless to say, a child’s birth would be a more fitting context for their arrival than the death of the patient. And the distinction between birth and death, between the maid and the patient continue to
blur. The patient (or Rosa) is “ganz geblendet durch das Leben in seiner Wunde”—a reaction more indicative of a mother being released from labour, and less so of a teenage boy suffering a deadly infection. Just as the penal colony’s officer and explorer have merged in the figure of the doctor, so the doctor’s patient and his loved maid merge is speech, whispering to the doctor, “Willst du mich retten?”

As if the above allusions to In der Strafkolonie were not sufficient, the villagers undress the doctor and place him in bed with his patient, so that the body intended to be on display for this audience and to be subjected to a (medical/legal) treatment, is at the last moment swapped for the body of the one who ought to carry out this procedure (doctor/officer). This moment not only redirects the reader to In der Strafkolonie, but as the door closes and an almost romantic and intimate ambience emerges, it doubles also internally, and the doctor is no longer sure whether he lies in bed next to the patient or next to Rosa: “Wolken treten vor dem Mond; warm liegt das Bettzeug um mich; schattenhaft schwinken die Pferdeköpfe in den Fensterlöchern.” A voice whispers in his ear, “Weisst du, mein Vertrauen zu dir ist sehr gering. Du bist ja auch nur abgeschüttelt, kommst nicht auf eigenen Füssen. Statt zu helfen engst du mir mein Sterbebett ein. Am liebsten kratze ich dir die Augen aus.” Is this the patient speaking? Or is it Rosa? He does not physically come to save her—“auf eigenen Füssen”; rather he is “abgeschüttelt”—shaken off, visiting her in his thoughts, but not in body. She too is consequently “in großer Verlegenheit.” Having been victimized by the groom to whom the doctor left her, however unwillingly, is reason enough to want to scratch his eyes out. The doctor reminds the patient/Rosa of his own difficulty: “Nun bin ich aber Arzt. Was soll ich tun? Glaube mir, es wird mir auch nicht leicht” (E 258). But this

That the voice registers in the doctor’s subconscious as Rosa becomes apparent when it reveals that the wound in question is not a nasty illness that developed, but a beautiful piece of décor that was always there:18 “Mit einer schönen Wunde kam ich auf die Welt; das war meine ganze Ausstattung.” The patient’s wound is reconfigured as Rosa’s virgin vagina, the abuse of which, the doctor fears might have caused her such harm that she might die. When the association to Rosa becomes too vivid, and the doctor’s pain and guilt too intense, he suddenly pulls back to a more comfortable mindset, addressing the patient with a new assessment: “Junger Freund… deine Wunde ist so übel nicht. Im spitzen Winkel mit zwei Hieben der Hacke geschaffen.” It might be too painful to imagine performing an abortion on Rosa, to rid her of the groom’s offspring, thus, the thought of castrating the groom. The patient/Rosa is satisfied with this: “ist es wirklich so oder täuscht du mich im Fieber?” the voice asks. “Es ist wirklich so, nimm das Ehrenwort eines Amtsarztes,” the doctor replies, relying on his institutional position when his performance fails. The doctor senses death might be near, thus the important “hinüber”—to the other side—where the bed-partner should take the doctor’s word of honour.

The multiplicity of images, and the reflecting and deflecting between the patient’s body and Rosa’s make the doctor’s task of judging substantially more difficult than the officer’s in the penal colony. This travelling country doctor is no more equipped to read the wound than the explorer can read the old commander’s texts. What’s more, his failure to penetrate the
wound-as-narrative and to determine a diagnosis is just as fatal. In the absence of a proper reading, the wounded body of the patient withers, much like the over-processed inscribed body of the penal colony prisoner. And like the penal colony officer, the doctor too succumbs to the impatient judgment of another: “Du... kommst nicht auf eingenen Füßen” (E 258). This accusation on the part of the patient hits to the core of the doctor’s problems. Despite losing Rosa to gain the horses—and as the doctor remarks “dieses Ofper ist zu groß” (E 256)—he still cannot move quickly. The Verlegenheit of not being able to get to his patient is repeated in not being able to get back. The doctor’s voyage home ultimately fails because the magnetic horsepower provided by the sexually driven groom suffices only to get him away from Rosa to the patient. Having neither exercised his professional responsibility to help the boy, nor his private one to save Rosa, the doctor eventually loses both the woman and the office. But this failure, as he reveals at the very end, is in not securing an offspring, in not having reproduced this part of his being: “meine blühende Praxis ist verloren” (E 259).19 Like the officer in the penal colony, this man is not able to find a successor for his profession, but it is also too late to secure a private successor, a child with Rosa.

**Staging Bodies: a disappearance act from within Ein Hungerkünstler**

Thus far I have argued that *In der Strafkolonie* (1914) advances from Kafka’s earlier works (notably *Der Prozeß* and *Letters to Felice*) by restructuring desire as not merely a literary, but also a bodily experience. *Ein Landarzt* (1916/17) goes one step further in
testing the body’s suitability as a vehicle for human desire by shifting the focus of
transformative violence away from language to bodies. Through this body’s staging and its
demand for a reading, *Ein Hungerkünstler* (1922) continues this sequence of literary
experiments that test the body’s ability to perform as a narrative text. While the bodily
inscriptions in the back of the penal colony victims are brought about by external forces and
against the subject’s will, and the source of the wound in the country doctor’s patient
appears natural, this final body transformation—the body’s gradual shrinking—is controlled
by the subject himself. Desire in Kafka in nowhere more explicitly linked to the possibilities
and limitations of the body. The hunger artist effectively produces his symbolic self’s
narrative by pushing beyond the limits of the body, freeing it from all social contexts. Each
of these three stories is concerned with the body’s performative power, yet in this final case,
Kafka quite literally gives us a performing body that in its very performance negates its own
corporeality.

Like *Ein Landrzt, Ein Hungerkünstler* emerges after a long period of unproductiveness,
and as *In der Strafkolonie*, it is the product of a crisis within a larger project, in this case
the *Schloß*-novel. Kafka writes this story in 1922; the collection by the same name,
containing four stories, appears in print two months after his death in August 1924. The
motif of the artist, which three of the four stories share, has determined the direction of a
large body of early secondary literature focused on art’s opposition to life, and its place in the
modern world. Artistry prevails over hungering in early readings; since the 1980s, focus has
shifted towards its specific form which remained for a long time unexplored. This story’s
central figure, who, like the country doctor, makes it to the title, at first appears to possess an
extraordinary talent—to fast effortlessly—which is soon exposed as his inability to find the food that would satisfy him. If his art consist of hungering, and if this implies actually being in a state of hunger that can be satisfied with food, then the hunger artist is apparently neither hungering not an artist, begging the question, what exactly is the nature of his performance? Like the patient’s wound, the hunger artist’s body seems to require medical attention and yet appears as a curious artifact more suitable for aesthetic contemplation. Yet it remains unreadable from either vantage point: not the audience, not the narrator, and not the doctors, are able to discern the body-text that is staged for all to see. By controlling his body’s disappearance, the hunger artist breaks away from form, from corporeality. Yet in the absence of a legitimate reading, he dies not only as body, but as a text.

The story’s setup returns us to again to In der Strafkolonie: Both stories report of a once-cherished and now outdated (legal / artistic) practice of bodily transformations, each subjected to publicly staged rituals. Due to the declining popularity of executions and hungering performances, the officer and the hunger artist feel threatened. Having invested their entire beings as functionaries in these practices, they see no purpose beyond, and go to great lengths to revive them. Unable to do so, each man employs his own body to further this aim, albeit illegitimately, leaving behind the remnants of body-text. This illegitimacy in the penal colony arises from the fact that the officer has already seen the text that formulates the imperatives the others had to decode with their bodies, so that the machine cannot possibly offer him the same experience it did to its previous subjects. The hunger artist too goes against the rules of his profession, refusing to conclude his fast, thereby making his
success contingent on his failure, since his hungering at its most extraordinary peak would only prefigure the artist’s death.

Self-starvation is a performance act, and as such, the emaciated body it produces demands, on our part, an interpretive one—it commands us to read, to ask, how does this performing body function as a narrative text? What story does it tell? And how does this text account for the artist’s symbolic expression? Unlike the body of the penal colony victim, or the doctor’s patient, the hunger artist’s own body bears no markings to guide our reading. The embellished scripture painfully inscribed into the back of the prisoner, that was reduced to a deep and mysterious wound in the country doctor’s patient, has now altogether disappeared. The narrative that emerges is amplified through this hungering body’s full presence and its simultaneous, gradual, and yet undeniable, disappearance. The corporeal violence that occurs so outwardly in the two other stories is internalized here—performed from within, controlled by the hunger artist himself. This body consumes nothing; it produces nothing, and it is precisely this nothingness that is put on display in a ritual manner known to us from

*In der Strafkolonie* and *Ein Landarzt*. Its disappearance act becomes the

*Legitimationspapier* for the hunger artist’s being.

In many of Kafka’s works, food stands in distinctive and strange relationship to punishment. Before the hunger artist, who is repulsed by food, a number of Kafka’s characters experienced it as a disgraceful aspect of human existence: Gregor Samsa is beaten with an apple following his “Verwandlung”; the victims of the penal colony’s torture machine are first forced to chew on a ball that so many others gagged on, and are presented with rice
only when they are no longer able to eat it; Karl Rossmann is disowned a second time in *Der Verschollene* for attending a dinner against his uncle’s wishes; and eating is humanity’s punishment in *Forschungen eines Hundes*. It is thus fitting that Kafka turns to food, the fundamental means of human survival and of corporeal existence, for the most rigorous test of the body’s suitability to be enacted to speak a narrative of the symbolic self. Because food is such a necessity, self-inflicted hungering emerges as a complex phenomenon of socially contingent causes and meanings. Its earliest form in Europe can be traced to medieval times, when virgin women performed religious fasts in privacy in the belief that this spiritual exploration into the limits of corporeality would bring them closer to divine powers. Self-imposed starvation became a public practice, like the one described by Kafka, in the last two centuries, gaining greater importance as it gradually moved out of the sphere of religion into areas of politics, art, and medicine. Being employed in increasingly varying contexts, the motivations and consequences of self-imposed hungering become multitudinous and paradoxical.22

Self-starved bodies in general function as texts by mirroring the culture of their time, and can only be interpreted according to the contexts from within which they originate. Bodies become transformed into *narrative texts* when this transformation is deliberate. This is the case for the hunger artist, but the difficulty of reading his body lies in its apparent detachment from all recognizable contexts. The late-nineteenth century phenomenon of the hunger striker gives us a political context. The prisoner’s refusal to eat denotes a political act of resistance to unfair laws or practices. This form of hungering can empower its subject: The more emaciated a hunger striker’s body becomes, the more urgency his message elicits.
Flesh lost is voice gained, until the vision of his disappearing body screams loudly to compel its witnesses to action. In order for his fasting to achieve the status of a hunger strike, a prisoner must declare his intentions, and in doing so he makes the generally implied commitment to stop fasting once the desired political aims of the strike have been achieved. To prevent failure in signification, the hunger striker communicate the reasons for his disintegrating flesh *in words*. And it is this declaration of intention that achieves the onlooker’s correct interpretation of the emaciated body (which is often accompanied with a written sign). It is precisely in making his motives understood that a hunger striker turns his starving body into a text, a billboard that at once constitutes and communicates his act of resistance.

One must not dwell on Kafka’s story too long to conclude that the hunger artist is not a hunger striker. His only declaration is that he is, indeed, honestly fasting, and his reason is more fantastic than political—“weil ich nicht die Speise finden konnte, die mir schmeckt” (*E* 403). Moreover, this unusual motivation precludes the possibility that this strike would ever end. Like the officer and the country doctor, the hunger artist fights against the limitations of his own body, a body that cannot survive long enough to reach the promised enlightenment, travel at the speed of light and return home, nor eternally survive without food. Hungering necessitates the continued existence of a body, one which the hunger artist sacrifices by ultimately fasting “bis ins Unbegreifliche” (*E* 396). This aside, no conditions exist that could be met to end the hunger artist’s fast: neither a greater public interest in his performance, nor, as we see, the complete absence of any public attention. This man hungers not in protest of this practice becoming extinct, but in light of this being so; he does not use his
body to resist external forces; rather, he resists his own corporality as such. His emaciated body does not become a text of political resistance, so how, one might ask, does it perform instead?

Kafka’s depiction of the profession of hungering, including its declining popularity, is historically accurate. In the last two decades of the 1800s, “living skeletons” and “hunger-” or “fasting-” artists, like Kafka’s, performed at fairs, circuses, and amusement parks and earned their living making a spectacle of their extremely thin bodies and their ability to fast for prolonged periods, respectively. They employed impresarios to handle their booking affairs and manage their earnings.23 The forty-day fasting limit that so upsets Kafka’s hunger artist was indeed imposed in order to maximize profit and keep the increasingly secular viewers from losing sympathy for the performers, who, as everyone knew, did not live on thin air. More interesting than the hunger artists’ shocking appearance, became the question of the effects hungering had on a healthy body. Medical doctors engaged in experiments with fasting artists, using their bodies to gain data they hoped would be medically relevant. As previously artistic performances grew increasingly scientific, the deeply rooted disbelief in an honest performance was heightened, leading to severe precautionary measures being taken to ensure that these performers had no opportunity to eat during their fasts.24 Whereas in the 1880s, hunger artists were viewed as professionals with exceptional talent and ability, half a century later, they became widely regarded as people with psychological disorders and social defects, whose public exhibition became unethical.25
Despite Kafka’s accurate depiction of this performance art, his own hunger artist’s performance cannot be explained by any of these aesthetic/medical contexts. He is not motivated by profit, as we are told in the second sentence of the story: “Während es sich früher gut lohnte, große derartige Vorführungen in eigener Regie zu veranstalten, ist dies heute völlig unmöglich” (E 392). The narrator speculates “…um einen anderen Beruf zu ergreifen, war der Hungerkünstler nicht nur zu alt, sondern von allem dem Hungern allzu fanatisch ergeben,” or otherwise put, that this is the expression of his illness (E 399). The hunger artist’s attitude throughout the story does capture the paradox of the disease: insisting that hungering is easy (“er allein wusste, wie leicht das Hungern war”), and yet demanding attention and a special social status for this extraordinary achievement (“Immerfort wollte ich, dass ihr mein Hungern bewundert” [E 403]), and finally feeling a deep sense of disappointment because the sacrifice is always greater than any recognition of this “achievement.” Moreover, like anorexics, he welcomes the opportunities to suppress his hunger in victory: “Am glücklichsten aber war er, wenn dann der Morgen kam, und [den Wächtern] auf seine Rechnung ein überreiches Frühstück gebracht wurde, auf das sie sich warfen mit dem Appetit gesunder Männer” (E 394). We are always at a distance from the hunger artist, and cannot get past the façade, his “Knochenarme”, “die dünne Taille”; “diese kleine Knochenbüdel”; “[der] schwache Hals” and “überschwere Kopf”; and finally, “Sehr kleine Last des Körpers” (E 395, 396, 397, 396, 397). The narrator does not move beyond the hunger artist’s superficial appearance to his subjective Wahrnehmung. “Hungern” invariably denotes either the ability to reject food, or a performance act. The narrator not once contemplates the difference between the act of fasting, and the feeling of
hunger. We always remain too far, and can never get past the perspective of his audience.

A reading of the hunger artist as an ill man would be supported by Kafka’s suggestive narrator’s verbal report, presented in a detached and objective tone, but it does no justice to the hunger artist’s body-text, which escapes legal-political, aesthetic, as well as medical contexts. Whereas emaciated bodies of anorexics depend upon witnesses, to read them as embodying specific social norms, this hunger artist’s emaciated body seems to represent a radical negation of the external world and of corporeality altogether. This body returns us to the interpretive impasse which the country doctor faced earlier in trying to diagnose his patient’s wound. Whereas the wound told too many diverging narratives as to be objectively assessed and appropriately grasped, the hunger artist’s body as such, tells none. Through its disappearance act, the hunger artist’s expression breaks free of form, and it is his disappearance—one that cannot be read as representative of anything at all in the absence of witnesses—that stands in as a document of his existence. He releases his body, to borrow Maud Ellmann’s formulation, “from all contexts, even from the context of embodiment itself.”

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These three stories stem from different periods of Kafka’s literary productivity and address seemingly unrelated concerns. At the same time, a common fate connects Kafka’s three figures: Kafka gives us protagonists who go beyond their corporeal limits to realize their
desire: a hunger artist who wants nothing more but to fast “bis ins Unendliche”; a country doctor who finally realizes his desire for a woman and his physical inability to act on it; and a penal colony officer who has such an intense desire to manufacture justice that he is willing to subject his own body to the execution machine. It is a variation of the same desire for self-realization, and the anxious predicament of living under a threat of extinction. The bodies they write, read, and stage undergo transformations and are presented to judging audiences. In the process of this ritualistic staging, each man suffers the loss of a functionary identity, and fails to secure a “Nachfolger” to continue his work, and eventually loses his “Praxis”: the hunger artist is replaced with a more robust panther; the doctor with the sexually potent groom; and the execution officer and his machine by the new commandant who takes pleasure in sweets and gentler sexual encounters with women. More importantly however, their stories share the loneliest human experiences: physical pain and hunger. They are inexpressible truths “which cannot be denied, and cannot be affirmed”\(^3\); they resist language.\(^3\) There are, then, narratives that the body can more aptly convey than can words. And more than this, Kafka’s transformed bodies not only depict the existential states of his characters; they become text. The most profound case is Kafka’s final story, in which the hunger artist, through his disappearance writes a text that is not dependent on the other’s recognition. Perhaps, like the law that opens only once the countryman dies, this text too, becomes readable only from within the hunger artist himself.
K.’s Schloß-Geschichten and the Making of a Hypertext

Das Schloß, we are told, was Kafka’s final attempt to write a novel. In remaining short of completion, it seems to do the double duty of tracing both the protagonist’s and the author’s Kampf for the attainment of a self-contained unity—K.’s path towards the castle building and Kafka’s towards a finished novel. Yet this work, more than any other Kafka text, defies completeness throughout. Its three key figures—the castle, its representative Klamm, and the Land Surveyor K.—betray unity and purpose: The castle is neither a singular, stable construction, nor does it house a person of nobility or importance. Instead, it is an assemblage of wretched village houses, home to a bureaucratic machine. This bureaucracy’s most distinguished civil servant remains eternally removed from public sight. His authority hovers above the village, yet he emerges only as a figure of collective imagination. Moreover, Kafka gives us a strangely vacant K.-man, whose self-assumed identity as Land Surveyor would remain superfluous to the castle’s organization, even if his claim to it were not disputed. Yet it is precisely this superfluousness and foreignness that are conditions of K.’s becoming an instrumental figure in the emergence of the literary narrative form that characterizes Das Schloß.
The incongruities in being and identity of the castle, Klamm and K. are only matched by the fragmentary nature of Kafka’s text. Just as K. never reaches “das Schloß,” so Das Schloß never reaches its “Schluss,” provocatively breaking off in mid-sentence. K.’s repeated hikes to the castle inevitably detour to the village; his employment status remains unchanged throughout; and he never wavers from the persistent belief that the castle and the village constitute distinct spheres of life, despite repeated warnings to the contrary. The work’s structure is circular and repetitive, so that narrative progression or character development can hardly be ascertained. But the fragmentation does not stop with an empty middle and an abrupt termination where the reader might expect a conclusion. What we find as the novel’s first sentence in Max Brod’s and in Malcolm Pasley’s editions—“Es war spät abend als K. ankam.”—is not the work’s only beginning, since the manuscript contains a fragment which temporally precedes K.’s arrival in the village. Its status being unclear, Brod deletes the passage; Pasley moves it to the Apparatband.¹ What is more, the work’s title offers no greater unifying capacity than the double beginning and the incomplete ending, having remained a mere working title to which Kafka had not committed even after he stopped writing. In his final reference to it, in a letter to Max Brod, Kafka remarks—and merely parenthetically—“ich habe die Schloßgeschichte offenbar für immer liegen lassen müssen.”² Aware that he would never return to it again and that what he had written was not shaping into a novel, Kafka calls this loosely structured work his “Schloßgeschichte.”

In the pages that follow I propose the reason Das Schloß never became a novel extends beyond Kafka’s untimely death, and his oft-cited inability to bring a project to an end, and is
instead essential to the nature of the text at hand. These “Schloßgeschichten” in the plural, I suggest, constitute a hypertextual narrative, which is a more apt characterization of this form than either a story or a novel: Das Schloß is a collection of stories—about love, families, community, and loyalty. The text’s central figure, K., collects, re-imagines and assembles these stories, weaving them into a narrative web that in its incompleteness maintains precisely the degree of coherence that is characteristic of the Kafkaesque text. The Schloß conglomerate is a product of a desire that resides in this fictive agent K., but also in us as readers. And the structure of a hypertext narrative—especially in its digital form—accommodates both the symbolic and the corporeal dimension of subjectivity, placing fewer obstacles between us as readers as the point in the text at which we want to be at any given time. We can imagine a digital form of the Schloß enterprise where one of us can survey the landscape of this work as does K. Whereas K. follows his desire by moving from one spatiality to another, the reader of the digital medium can do so virtually, and move from one point in the text to another by activating hyperlinks, and creating new ones where he discovers a new connection. Comically perhaps the reader of the digital Schloß might come to the same conclusion vis-à-vis K.’s role in the text as the castle does with respect to its physical territory: “wir brauchen keinen Landvermesser” (Sch 75). We can move about on our own.

But let us return to the point at hand, namely that the fragmentary nature of this work is a its main structuring feature. While none of Kafka’s four novel attempts culminated in a distinct and conclusive ending, and some form of rupture is indeed both a literary concern and a stylistic feature of Kafka’s, Das Schloß remains different, from both the author’s other
fragmentary pieces and the traditional literary fragment, which *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur* defines as surviving extracts of larger works subsequently lost as wholes; works unintentionally abandoned or left unfinished by their authors; or those deliberately written as fragmentary texts.

What differentiates *Das Schloß* from the latter is that its ambiguous fragmentation extends beyond the textual level and concerns K.’s ontological status, which, as I argue, transcends the narrower function of being the work’s mere protagonist. Instead, K. emerges as a consciousness that holds together the conglomerate of narratives that make up this work and thus functions as a unifying cipher-figure on the margins of *Das Schloß*-hypertext. Rather than a failed attempt to complete a novel, I propose a reimagining of *Das Schloß* as a product of Kafka’s experimentation with alternative literary forms and with an intradiegetic narrative agency. Tracing K.’s interpretive maneuvers allows us to expose Kafka’s novel-fragment as a carefully crafted hypertext—without a clear beginning, without a possible ending, but with proliferating narratives that run in different directions and connect up with others within and beyond the web of stories that constitute this work.

However, unlike *Der Prozess*, which is left to us, Kafka’s readers, to decipher, *Das Schloß* contains a unifying cipher figure who takes on precisely this task. Rather than being a work in progress, it is a work in the process of being realized.

Kafka wrote *Das Schloß* some seventy years before the concept would enter literary studies and four decades before it would be first introduced in Information Technology. Max Brod was the first to encounter Kafka’s *Schloß*-hypertext, a sequentially indeterminate work with a vacant K.-figure whose ‘development’ Brod aided by carefully selecting and arranging Kafka’s chapters and fragments into a preferred fixed sequence to form a novel. Yet no
matter how mathematically one approaches *Das Schloß*—and there have been such attempts—in the absence of an editor’s ordering, one would not know what chapter or “Schloßgeschichte” to read first and which one to read next, or whether a privileged sequence necessarily exists. This is not to say that a certain ordering does not produce a more linear account than another, but rather that linearity is not the mode of reading / writing. Much like threads of a hypertext, the various episodes are at once self-contained and yet not entirely conclusive; they can be read individually, or as a collection. Some temporally precede others, but because they bear only a vague relevance to one another, the reader’s experience, one might venture to say, would not be cohesive, no matter the order or number of sequences one chooses to read. The non-linearity of Kafka’s *Schloß* truly challenges traditional rules of engagement with text, a predicament resolved, I argue, if one, first of all, conceives of it as a literary hypertext and of K. as an agent who actively steers and shapes its textual segments, and secondly, as I propose in the conclusion, ventures to create a digital version of the work and begins to shape it on his own.

While a reading of Kafka’s *Schloß* as a literary hypertext has not been explored, the work’s incohesive structure has remained a point of interest in Kafka scholarship for decades. Critics, early and contemporary, have noted the work’s fruitful and dynamic fragmentation and the multiplicity of readings to which it is consequently open. In light of this, they have called for new approaches to reading this text that are either consistent with, or can be taken to their hypertextual conclusions: Henry Sussman reads Olga’s narrative of her family in the village as an embedded “counter novel” to the main text, acknowledging a plurality of texts that make up the larger work. Marthe Robert goes further, viewing *Das Schloß* as a
reconstruction of a “universal library” with stories of “highly disparate” “origins, chronology, and style...which are sometimes superimposed, sometimes interwoven, and sometimes developed along parallel lines.” For Robert, Kafka evokes and combines an array of literary categories, whereby K. emerges as the protagonist of multiple novel genres, and *Das Schloß* as a layered novel. Charles Bernheimer discredits Robert’s reading on the grounds that it relies on K.’s deliberate experimentation with various literary roles, which would only be possible if K. possessed an encyclopedic literary knowledge. This, Bernheimer maintains, is not the case, as K. never visits a library or comes into contact with books and because he lacks a connection to his own past within which such a repository of library knowledge might be located. Instead, he suggests, it is precisely K.’s lack of access to any culture that compels the interpreter to “suppl[y] the symbolic subtexts that provide K. with a plurality of possible narrative destinies.” So while Bernheimer agrees with Robert that K. is in need of textual forefathers, he insists it is not K. but Kafka’s reader who supplies them. To a similar end, Elizabeth Boa observes that *Das Schloß* “invites actively gymnastic reading,” essentially agreeing with Bernheimer when she notes that the castle overlooking the village “offers... a brilliantly open model which does not so much deny meaning (leaving readers with nothing to do but weep) as generate many meanings according to what the observer brings to bear.” These examples from within two decades preceding the conceptual development of hypertext demonstrate not only a critical interest in the rupture of Kafka’s *Schloß*, but also a recognition that its fragmentation necessitates a new way of reading. They suggest that given its open structure, navigating *Das Schloß* ultimately relies on incorporating material from sources outside the text’s own parameters, be they supplied by K. or Kafka’s reader. Exactly this openness and anticipation of subsequent connections to
other sources reveals this work’s hypertextual character.

As hypertextuality achieved greater relevance in literary studies over the last two decades, so too the impetus to read Kafka in dynamic, non-linear ways gained momentum. For this we can credit Roland Reuß and Peter Staengle’s *Historisch-kritische Franz Kafka-Ausgabe* (FKA), which preserves the fragmentary character of Kafka’s corpus by reproducing the handwritten manuscript containing Kafka’s markups and deletions and refraining from intervening in the text through standardization or correction. Although a facsimile edition of the *Schloß*-manuscript has not yet been released, Reuß’s philosophy of keeping the text identical with the manuscript, that is, “Lesen, was gestrichen wurde,” has encouraged a rethinking of Kafka’s final major project, as a number of recent publications show. Martin Kölbel (2006) demonstrates that the work’s beginning, middle, and ending cannot be clearly determined, and in doing so identifies specific conditions that preclude the *Schloß*-text from taking on a unified form—features of Kafka’s work that were deliberately edited over in earlier book-bound editions and often overlooked in interpretations based on them. Matthias Schuster convincingly deduces that Kafka’s changes to the manuscript, which only Reuß’s version makes visible, serve to prevent the formation of definitive meaning and to deliberately instigate ambiguity. He criticizes Brod’s extensive deletions and Pasley’s splitting of the manuscript into a main text and an Apparatband for countering this effect by reducing this ambiguity and thereby encouraging more definitive readings. In line with this, Malte Kleinwort (2013) proposes that the distance between the *Schloß*-manuscript and its book-bound editions be understood in terms analogous to the relationship between the village and the castle. He shows that the distance between them differs between versions,
further elucidating the impact Brod’s and Pasley’s editing had on encouraging certain kinds of interpretations over others.\textsuperscript{12}

The paratextual nature of Kafka’s oeuvre has become the subject of more thorough exploration in the most recent Kafka criticism. Klaus Schenk argues that the incomplete endings of Kafka’s stories and novels have provoked others to complete, rewrite or reimagine them, citing Karl (Brand) Müller’s 1916 \textit{Die Rückverwandlung des Gregor Samsa} and Peter Handke’s 1969 \textit{Der Prozeß (für Franz K.).} Kafka reception history in the German-speaking world appears even more paratextual through the tendency of authors post 1945 to adapt Kafka’s themes, motifs and constellations, such as Anna Seghers in her 1972 \textit{Die Reisebegegnung}, in which Kafka, E.T.A. Hoffmann and Gogol meet at a Prague Café and paraphrase scenes from \textit{Das Schloß}.\textsuperscript{13} While Schenk describes how Kafka’s works elicit a hypertextual reception, Stanley Corngold reveals that Kafka’s oeuvre already consists of internal links, pointing to “the scattering of Kafka- ‘memes’…particles of Kafka’s earlier writings… re-membered in \textit{Das Schloß}.”\textsuperscript{14} These prevent the reader from advancing into \textit{Das Schloß}, instead drawing one backward into Kafka’s earlier fiction. Gerhard Neumann (2013) similarly situates \textit{Das Schloß} within another hypertext when he argues that it forms a part of Kafka’s larger Bildungsroman project together with \textit{Der Verschollene} and \textit{Der Prozeß}.\textsuperscript{15} In contrast to these approaches, which locate \textit{Das Schloß} in existing paratextual (Schenk) or intertextual (Corngold, Neumann) networks, I maintain that this work itself performs as a hypertext. Its various episodes refer the reader to others within the collection; they gesture back at Kafka’s earlier works and make playful allusions to literature beyond the author’s own. Most importantly, however, \textit{Das Schloß} documents the formation of a
hypertext through the cipher figure who moves the reader from one episode to another, a K.-figure who forms the links between them and who explicitly encourages associations to other texts. It is K.’s own performance—his creative function in the formal architecture of this text—that warrants a hypertextual reading. This hypertext is intratexual, and certain clear relations exist between its various threads, but it is nevertheless not a closed system, and remains open for new connections to be made—by an agent like any one of us who comes after K.

Robert’s pluralistic approach is one of the earliest to explicitly address K.’s function and, despite Bernheimer’s valid objection, it offers a solution to K.’s scattered self, one his own account does not. Reading *Das Schloß* as a plurality of texts, as Robert (and to some extent Sussman) does, explains why K. neither develops nor exudes an individualized character. Yet arguing for a different cause from Robert, I maintain that this multiplicity occurs neither through K.’s deliberate experimentation with various novels, nor his conscious imitation of many heroes, but is due to his exterior role: K. is no more a protagonist of many novels than he is of *this* one. Rather than being a fixed character within, K. stands as a unifying figure *outside* of the multiplicity of loosely connected self-standing “Schloßgeschichten,” collecting and arranging them in a web-like fashion into a larger hypertext. Bernheimer is right in objecting to Robert that K. does not have within himself a library of literary models which he could imitate; however, it is also evident that K. is in the process of establishing a library of iconic characters of his own. Most importantly, these are not men he could imitate (as in Robert’s account), but women with varying kinds of romantic linkages to the castle or their officials: the sickly woman who claims to stem from
the castle; the school teacher who entices a castle official to reside in the village; and barmaids who are Klamm’s purported lovers. Amalia and Olga are the alpha and omega of K.’s colourful alphabet of characters, the former a sinning virgin who ostracized her family by rejecting the advances of a castle official; the latter, a loyal daughter who prostitutes herself to support the family and reverse the devastating effects of Amalia’s decision. Thus, while Bernheimer might be right in claiming that K. is not the “surveyor of books” Robert holds him to be, he most certainly is the surveyor of stories—of gossip and rumors (200). K.’s semi-fictional reinterpretations of stories told to him by women, and imaginative inventions of his own, bear a loose relationship to one another and in a patchwork fashion comprise this hypertext. Despite a variety of narrative voices and a narrator who is distinct from K., this Surveyor’s own imprint on the assemblage of Das Schloß is conspicuous. It is by inventing and reinterpreting stories about others in the village—and not by imitating characters he read about before arriving there—that K. lives up to his Surveyor title, emerging as a cipher figure beyond the content of the many tales he collects into a hypertext.

The castle rejects K. as its measurer of lands, but it does recognize that he is consciously assuming an identity and entertains the story he has authored: “Sie sind, wie Sie wissen, in die herrschaftlichen Dienste aufgenommen”; “Sie sind als Landvermesser aufgenommen, wie Sie sagen, aber, leider, wir brauchen keinen Landvermesser” (Sch 33, 75, my emphasis). This places K. in the strangest of predicaments, having been granted recognition, but not admittance. Everyone recognizes him as the Land Surveyor, yet all, including K. himself, excessively designate him as fremd. Given that K. is devoid of any specific ethnicity, culture, religion, or custom, and is linguistically no different from the others, his
foreignness lies not in his point of origin but in his point of entry, his unique and exterior role in the text’s infrastructure. It is neither the castle nor the village that confines K. to aimlessly wander the snowy hills; rather, it is he who deliberately sabotages every opportunity to become a proper subject in its domain. K. stubbornly demands admittance, yet insists on his freedom: “Auch fürchte ich, daß mir das Leben oben im Schloß nicht zusagen würde. Ich will immer frei sein” (Sch 14). Ample opportunities are granted for integration in the village, but K. declines them all: He fires his assistants and terminates his own employment with the school; he jeopardizes his relationship with Frieda and in doing so rejects the prospects of marriage, lineage and a household. Social integration in the village would also constitute textual integration in Das Schloß, with K. becoming a proper character. This is a stable place, both sociologically and ontologically, yet it is seemingly not one Kafka intends his self-proclaimed foreigner to occupy.

K.’s incessant restlessness and avoidance of social ties is made comically apparent by the fact that he does not spend more than one night in the same bed, not to mention next to Frieda. His efforts to escape textual integration are likewise evident in his refusal to be subjected to a formal protocol by the village secretary Momus. Still, K. not only rebuffs integration, he also passes up the possibility of emigration, suggesting that remaining fremd is a condition for his self-realization, for becoming Surveyor. Only by not being consumed within any social, physical or textual order can K. emerge as a cipher on the fringes of the Schloß-text. By remaining detached from both the castle and the village, K. establishes a position from which to survey them and measure the distance between the two, and finds that it is governed by cross-territorial relationships.
A constant feature of this work and the golden thread of the many castle tales is K.’s unchanging supposition that the village and the castle are two completely different worlds, despite the villagers’ and castle officials’ repeated insinuations that this is not the case.\(^\text{19}\) The tension that arises between K.’s unchanged perspective and those of others keeps the exact relationship between the castle and the village always at the fore of the reader’s experience. It is indeed one of this work’s greatest mysteries. The castle appears in a position of superiority to the village, not only because it is situated on a hill that overlooks it, but because its bureaucracy, to which K. seeks to gain access, fittingly performs a surveying function, keeping semi-private, semi-factual records and protocols of events and people in the village. It already is in the business of interpreting and legitimizing village affairs, so that a Surveyor like K. who interprets the villagers’ motives and actions is even more redundant to its endeavors than one who measures its lands. But the uneven topography which divides the two is countered by a divisive power dynamic that is common to both spheres: In the absence of any female officials or women living there, power in the castle is concentrated in the hands of men, the most powerful of which is believed to be Klamm. Inversely, despite the presence of men in the village, it is women who exert influence. Landlady Gardena is not only physically superior to her scrawny husband; she also manages the inn, and is involved in village politics, as her conversation with Momus demonstrates. Similarly, the village mayor is less than able to look after the castle files, and it is his wife Mizzi who executes his duties, and whom Gardena proposes to involve in helping K.’s cause. Most puzzling perhaps, not even Klamm’s servants can stand up to the Herrenhof Inn barmaid Frieda, who chases them with a whip and locks them away in a shed, like misbehaving cattle.
Whatever the hierarchy, the castle and the village seem to belong to each other, not only as physical territories, but most of all as the subject matter of each other’s narratives. The key difference is the way in which they manage and keep records of them. While castle officials write reports and protocols about village affairs, the village women tell stories about themselves and other women, and their relationships to the castle and Klamm, making sense of their mysterious world through their tales. The village men participate neither in the castle’s sphere of text production, nor in the domesticity of the village’s oral traditions. Lacking personality, substance, and influence, they do not figure prominently in the narratives of women. Thus, mixed romantic unions between the castle’s men and the village’s women do not come as a surprise. The reported cross-territorial romances are numerous and of varying fates: Klamm’s affairs with Gardena and Frieda; Schwarzer’s love for Gisa; Sortini’s courtship of Amalia. A curious, yet seemingly traditional family union exists between the villager Brunswick and the sickly woman who claims to be from the castle, and for whom K. develops a special interest. The castle’s male officials do not appear to have conventional families, but the mutual attraction between the castle and the village suggests a sexually reproductive possibility between the two spheres. The unfortunate case for K. is that he cannot participate in such cross-territorial relationships, being both a man and, despite his best efforts, still caught in the village, so that the castle remains closed off for him. There is “kein Verkehr,” whether of an intimate or discursive nature, as he quickly learns through the white noise on the telephone, letters that arrive too late and whose message cannot be agreed upon, and streets that ought to lead to the castle, but do not (Sch 24). The village, on the other hand, proves open to both sexual and narrative exchange with
its numerous women, who are ready to take K. to bed or to share with him their many castle
tales: Frieda, Olga, Pepi. K., like his predecessor Josef K., attempts erotic conquests to
trigger the attention of higher powers. The first of these is Frieda, Klamm’s purported lover.
But like the roads that do not lead to the castle, so too sex with Frieda does not lead to
Klamm, proving to be a complete derailment:

Dort vergingen Stunden, Stunden gemeinsamen Atems, gemeinsamen Herzenschlags,
Stunden, in denen K. immerfort das Gefühl hatte, er verirre sich oder er sei soweit
in der Fremde, wie vor ihm noch kein Mensch, eine Fremde, in der selbst die Luft
keinen Bestandteil der Heimatluft habe, in der man vor Fremdheit ersticken müsse
und in deren unsinnigen Verlockungen man doch nichts tun könne als weiter gehn,
weiter sich verirren. (Sch 55)

Frieda replaces the physical presence K. seeks to establish with Klamm, both because the sex
takes place in front of Klamm’s door, and because K. comes to occupy an intimate place in
Frieda’s proximity he believes to be reserved for Klamm. Yet the fusion of their bodies does
not culminate in creative energy to further K.’s pursuits, but instead causes even this
foreigner feelings of estrangement and suffocation. This “Verirrung” redirects, in a
hypertextual fashion, to an earlier instance K. experienced while entering the village: “In
welches Dorf habe ich mich verirrt?” (Sch 10). Sex with Frieda signals the same wrong turn
that led K. into the depths of the village, and far away from the heights of Klamm and the
castle. The text and K. regress to earlier stages.

K.’s subsequent pursuit of conversations with Olga in favour of a night with Frieda reveals
that it is ultimately not sexual, but rather narrative Verkehr he seeks, or, to put it more
bluntly: he trades sex for gossip. Reinterpretations of castle tales are the offspring of such an
interpretive affair and, unlike the sexual one with Frieda, they open up a path for K.’s becoming. Not only Olga, but numerous other women K. encounters in the village enable this discursive production in place of a physical one, providing a subject matter to which K. gives a form through interpretation, stories that can be subsumed by K.’s interpretive enterprise, the *Schloß*-hypertext. What characterizes this array of episodic and incomplete sequences are K.’s perceived opposition between the castle and the village and his belief in the importance of bureaucratic connections and the elevated social rank village women enjoy in being loved by a castle official. In retelling or inventing *Schloßgeschichten*, K. fictionalizes the women in the village to suit his preferred narrative, and re-imagines men who pose a threat to him as allies. Since these stories are not about K., his own presence in these accounts will strike the reader as quite redundant. By framing these stories as ones about cross-territorial relationships, ultimately K. plays his own part in breaking down the exclusionary boundaries he had previously assumed, bridging the distance between the castle and the village. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to demonstrate every instance of this, but a handful of accounts shall suffice to show that K. emerges in the act of piecing together stories about others.

*“Ein Mädchen aus dem Schloß”*

One particularly self-contained episode in the *Schloß*-hypertext concerns the sickly Lady Brunswick, who once refers to herself as “ein Mädchen aus dem Schloß” (*Sch* 22). As the only woman who claims to have a tangible connection to the castle, she is uniquely alluring to K. The possibility of her return, one can imagine, implies for K. a reproductive potential
and Aufnahme—erotic and discursive Verkehr with the castle. One can almost hear K.’s
desire: Unlike Frieda, this woman could take K. to Klamm and beyond. By the virtue of
being the only woman to originate from above, a cross-territorial relationship with her could
elevate K.’s status to surpass even Klamm, who only has village lovers. This queen-like
figure, however, remains out of K.’s reach so that his courtship can exist only in an
imaginary realm of story-telling: This “Schloßgeschichte” involves K.’s re-imagining of Lady
Brunswick as a fictionalized and iconic character, as well as his own self-invention in what
can be loosely characterized as a modified Freudian family narrative in which K. attempts to
get closer to her by becoming a father-figure for her son, suitably named Hans. With a
strong attachment to his mother and fear of his father, this schoolboy recalls Freud’s ‘Little
Hans’ from his “Analyse der Phobie eines fünfzügigen Knaben which Freud published in
1909—well before Kafka began working on Das Schloß.20 And while Freud may not be
much of a role model for Kafka, one can see how for K. he would be: This interpreter of
dreams successfully consumes little Hans into a textual narrative—precisely what K.
attempts to do with an array of characters in Das Schloß.

The sequence consists of K. and the schoolboy playing a verbal game of chess, one in which
each tries to take possession of this queen/mother, whose presence is instrumental for the
becoming of both: K. the king of the castle, and Hans an adult. He who wins the linguistic
quest, so it seems, would win Lady Brunswick. The encounter takes place at school, when
Hans offers to help K. get out of trouble with the teacher and to even involve his mother,
should his own help not suffice. (The mother is powerful indeed, for even Hans’s father turns
to her for assistance.) K. turns the tables, proposing to help Hans’s sickly mother instead, a
favour for which Hans may repay him later. This is a clever move on K.’s part because this favour can be exchanged for a second contact with Lady Brunswick. The symbolic value of the queen/mother increases as each attempts to impress her: Hans reveals his motivation for approaching K. is his wish to fulfill her unarticulated desires, “Denn das habe die Mutter am liebsten, wenn man ohne ausdrücklichen Befehl ihre Wünsche erfüllt” (Sch 178). Having once inquired about K., the boy hopes that being able to report back to her would serve this function. K. on the other hand, seeks to impress the boy and the mother, reinventing himself to keep negotiations going, and with greater confidence about his diagnostic and curative powers than the Country Doctor himself, K. makes his best pitch:

Nun habe er, K., einige medicinische Kenntnisse und was noch mehr wert sei, Erfahrung in der Krankenbehandlung. Manches was Ärzten nicht gelungen sei, sei ihm geglückt. Zuhause habe man ihn wegen seiner Heilwirkung immer das bittere Kraut genannt. Jedenfalls würde er gern Hansens Mutter ansehn und mit ihr sprechen. Vielleicht könnte er einen guten Rat geben, schon um Hansens Willen tät er es gern. (Sch 178)

But little Hans guards his mother well, and so the imperative stands: “zur Mutter dürfte kein fremder Besuch kommen,” and Hans is armed with good reasons. First, K. appears to have the opposite, sickening, effect on the mother from what he preaches: “trotzdem doch K. damals kaum mit ihr gesprochen habe, sei sie nachher einige Tage im Bett gelegen”; moreover, his father, the mother’s guardian, already wanted to look for K. “um ihn wegen seines Benehmens zu strafen”; but most importantly, K.’s visit would not correspond with the mother’s desires, the fulfillment of which is Hans’s greatest concern, and which he wittily interprets for K.:
Kafka humours us with Hans, who fears losing his mother to K., for after all, this foreigner is already symbolically incestuously integrated in the family, sleeping with Frieda, who bears the same name as Hans’s sister, Lady Brunswick’s daughter. In an effort to outwit the Oedipal boy, K. tries to stir up his hatred for his father: “wen immer man gegenüber der Mutter aufstellte, er kam gleich ins Unrecht, jetzt war es K. gewesen, aber es konnte z.B. auch der Vater sein. K. wollte dieses Letzte versuchen” (Sch 179). And he does so by insinuating that the father is unjustly restraining the mother by keeping her in the village, away from the clean air that is instrumental to her recovery—and which she may conveniently find near the castle: “schon oben auf dem Schloßberg sei die Luft ganz anders.” It is the father, not K., who poses a threat to the mother, in failing to appreciate the sacrifices she is making for her romantic union in the village, according to K. “Warum lasse er sie nicht fort?” he demands, away from her marital restraints, back into the castle where she belongs, and where K. may find her to fulfill his own desires, able to engage in a cross-territorial affair (Sch 180).

The two contenders eventually come to a plan to liberate the mother from the father for the benefit of each of them. This involves K. talking to Brunswick, not about his wife, but about his own land-surveying problems. In keeping with Hans’s wishes, K. does not come into direct contact with the mother, and in keeping with K.’s own, he would at least be in
proximity of this special woman (and proximity is all K. ever gets), even if she remains far
away from the castle and out of his own reach. Yet K., like the Oedipal subject, in the end
succumbs to the threat of punishment by the deranged father, and rewrites Brunswick’s
aversion to himself into an ally’s loyalty:

When the two opponents come to an agreement and shake hands, with the game of words at
a draw, the narrator, who had abandoned K. for this entire episode, peculiarly returns to
mark the end of this Freudian tale out of which two psychoanalytic subjects emerge: a boy
who fears the loss of his mother, and K. who in his incompleteness already embodies the
condition of a castrated identity, something a union with Lady Brunswick could rectify. The
narrator’s opportune return reminds us of the fictitious nature of the “Schloßgeschichte”
that K. has put together for us: “- so spielte er mit den Träumen und sie mit ihm” (Sch 183).
And if the psychoanalytic allusions are not already excessive, the tale’s end offers us more.
Not having had a chance to court the mother with his medical abilities, K. attempts to lure
Hans with his fatherly aptitudes. This sequence ends with K. promising to Hans, on the condition that their plan is successfully executed, to make for him a walking stick [Knotenstock], even more beautiful than the one Hans admired in the classroom during their conversation. Needless to say, this object is symbolically charged, not only as a hiking stick used to climb hills, like the one leading to the castle, where K. would ultimately like to go, but is here also a phallic symbol, one which Hans can now hope to attain through K. as an alternative father figure he must not fear.

The point of this overtly psychological reading is not to subject Das Schloß to the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis, but rather to draw attention to this sequence’s playful interaction with texts outside the parameters of the Schloß-collection. On the one hand, this episode directs the reader to Freudian theory, that is, to scientific texts from beyond its fictional bounds, and on the other, K. makes an excursion into his own past. K.’s mention of his medical knowledge, be it invented, imagined, or real in the parameters of Kafka’s fiction, remains the most substantive reference to K.’s past. This sequence allows us to see how K.’s personal desires and fears shape his “Schloßgeschichten.” The reader observes not only K.’s own personal investment but his occupation as an inventor and interpreter of a story, and the intertextual character of its internal references. The basic pattern we see in this segment is, as I discuss below, a reoccurring one in K.’s “Schloßgeschichten,” demonstrating K.’s own imprint: K.’s insistence on the division between the village and castle spheres; his fictionalizing of the female character and of her story; the ally-making with the male threat; and his own forced or redundant involvement in village affairs.
Another thread in the hypertext K. assembles is a story concerning the romance between the village school teacher Gisa and the castle official Schwarzer to which K. devotes a disproportionately long account, considering Gisa’s limited contact with K. and her rather insignificant impact on his affairs. Several days after arriving in the village, K. witnesses Schwarzer paying a visit to her at the school. The story begins as hearsay—gossip—and quickly turns into K.’s own self-inventive retelling:

While a villager may be inclined to tell a foreigner such stories, it is difficult to see when this telling encounter could have taken place, given that the narrative perspective had not been distinct from K.’s at this point and the reader thus never ‘parted’ from K. at the Brückenhof Inn. Moreover, this supposed hearsay report is from the start infused with K.’s own emphases which determine the direction of the story, such as the qualifying “doch,” which implies a contradiction or at least a tension between Schwarzer’s employment with the castle and his residence in the village, and “lieber,” referring to Schwarzer’s inner desires, to which K. could not have access. K.’s remark that Schwarzer obtained his position through connections is rather imaginative, given that K. himself—a stranger whose status is
constantly questioned—has also managed to be appointed by the same local authority [*Gemeinde*] to serve at the same school, and all that without any such connections.

K.’s retelling, I suggest, reveals a strategy of identification. In the above account, Schwarzer, like K., is confronted by a person whose attention he seeks with a defenselessly passive tolerance. The two men appear equally redundant to the school’s operation, each exercising his occupation through mere physical presence and perhaps the occasional assistance in tasks which are readily performed by the official staff, thereby only underscoring their uselessness in the economy of education. But although this might be the case for K., the reader knows that Schwarzer does perform official duties of his own in the village, revealing the fictitious nature of K.’s statements. Concerning K.’s depiction of Schwarzer in a position inferior to Gisa, it suffices to say that he never sees the man in either infantile dependency on the Gisa-mother, fighting for her attention from among the many other children, or in the sexually submissive position to the Gisa-lover, beneath her feet. The two imagined scenarios, however, do combine into K.’s impression of Lady Brunswick, whom he first saw surrounded by children playing beneath her feet (*Sch* 21), and who exudes an erotic air of superiority to K., claiming to stem from the castle. The bleeding together of K.’s vision of Lady Brunswick and Schwarzer’s supposed view of Gisa serves to further strengthen K.’s identification with Schwarzer and links the two sequences as products of K.’s invention.

As the retelling continues, K. not only obscures the story he purports to be telling through the intrusion of his own biases, but muddies up his own account, so that in his present moment Schwarzer and Gisa had been correcting student work “solang es noch hell
“es war schon dunkel” before Schwarzer ever arrived (Sch 200, 199). K.’s overreaching conclusions and use of detail to which only an omnipresent narrator might be privy (and this is not Kafka’s narrator, not to mention K.) reveal that he is not merely giving a second-hand report, but rather crafting a preferred narrative of fictional nature. Inconsistencies in K.’s account reinforce the sense that his narration is unedited, invented in the moment of telling. The reader is left to decide whether to attribute these too obvious slips to Kafka as evidence of his work in progress, or to K. But given that the inconsistency occurs within a two-page passage, a mistake is less likely than Kafka’s deliberate use of ambiguity. K.’s interpretive maneuvers, after all, reveal his own unique perspective. Just as he reconfigures Brunswick’s known contempt for him into a friend’s expectation to be called upon for help, so here, K. re-imagines Schwarzer as an ally and in doing so he develops an increasing sympathy for the man who humiliated him a few nights earlier. In a process of identification, K. construes the relationship between Gisa and Schwarzer in the same terms of perpetrator/victim as he sees himself taking part vis-à-vis the castle: In his inability to reach out to the evasive other, Schwarzer’s pursuit for happiness mirrors K.’s own. Gisa, like Klamm, needs much solitude. “[W]eil sie die Bequemlichkeit und deshalb das Alleinsein über alles liebte,” she remains unwilling to incorporate Schwarzer into her domestic sphere. Consequently, and much like K., “trieb sich Schwarzer einen großen Teil des Tages beschäftigungslos herum” and often eavesdropped before Gisa’s “immer versperrten Tür” never hearing a sound, in the same way that K. peeks through the peephole on Klamm’s likewise locked door, never seeing a thing (Sch 201). Her attitude towards Schwarzer is as passive, speechless, and unreciprocated as Klamm’s to K:
On K.’s account, Gisa’s sensitivity to the presence of Schwarzer is similar to Klamm’s with respect to K., while Schwarzer is as content with Gisa’s mere uninvolved silent presence as K. would be with Klamm’s. But this castle official also suddenly appears in the uneasy position of the foreigner, trying to interpret Gisa, whose blank eyes reveal as little as Klamm’s letters. K. depicts her as entirely soulless to the point that Gisa’s “einfache stille Gegenwart” recalls E.T.A. Hoffmann’s animated doll Olimpia’s same passiveness towards Nathanael. This village teacher’s “runden grauen, förmlich niemals blinzelnden, eher in den Pupillen scheinbar sich drehenden Augen” are, like Olimpia’s, entirely unresponsive to the love being professed before them. Gisa, like the animated doll she resembles, lives in isolation and moves her body without any regard for the gaze of the man at her side (Sch 200).

While Schwarzer, much like Lady Brunswick, “brachte…das ständige Opfer” by giving up the proximity of the castle for his village lover, Gisa, like the villager Brunswick, remains ignorant of the honour and privilege of being loved by a person from the castle: “[N]ur daß sie Schwarzer ohne Widerspruch duldete sah man, aber die Ehrung von einem Kastellanssohn geliebt zu werden, verstand sie gewiß nicht zu würdigen” (Sch 201, 200).

Moved by this, K. sympathizes with Schwarzer to such an extent, as to be able to explain his earlier “lächerliche[] Ausbrüche” as “die Folgen dieser Lebensweise” for which Gisa is to
blame: “Der lächerliche Anlaß” to the uncomfortable confrontation was in all likelihood
“eine ungnädige Laune Gisas an jenem Tag, wegen der Schwarzer schlaflos in der Nacht
herumgestrichen war, um sich dann an K. für sein Leid zu entschädigen” (Sch 201, 203).

This imaginary retelling allows K. to reconfigure the power relations: He first strips the
opponent of his power by identifying with his victim status, and then elevates himself to a
higher position of power as to be able to benefit from this opponent:

[E]in Schuldiener ist für die Lehrerschaft und gar für einen Lehrer von Schwarzers
Art eine sehr wichtige Person, die man nicht ungestraft mißachten darf und der
man die Mißachtung, wenn man aus Standesinteressen auf sie nicht verzichten
cann, zumindest mit entsprechender Gegengabe erträglich machen muß. (Sch 202)

Schwarzer’s story allows yet another flight for K.—into the imaginary alternative. Like the
earlier daydream about Brunswick’s loyalty and support, this one is about Schwarzer’s
indebtedness as redress for his incorrect behaviour. K.’s template narrative remains the
same: What begins as a story about Gisa’s social inferiority to Schwarzer as a man from the
castle ends, like the Brunswick sequence, with K.’s own fantasy of superiority over the same,
here in his other capacity as the assistant teacher.
In his mental excursion into the Gisa/Schwarzer affair, as well as in his verbal quest for Lady Brunswick, K. gains a fictional ally. Following the same pattern, he jumps to the next interpretive journey, rushing to Barnabas in anticipation of a message from the castle, only to discover Amalia, an alternative messenger, armed not with a letter from the castle but an oral confession on village affairs. Through her “überlegenes Verlangen nach Einsamkeit,” Amalia recalls Gisa, the seductress of a castle official, as well as Lady Brunswick, prompting K. to question her origin: “Stammst Du hier aus dem Dorf?” (Sch 205). She disregards K.’s question and meets him instead with a reading: His anticipation of a message from the castle, she maintains, is a mere pretense for his frequent visits, covering up his and Olga’s mutual affection. While K. rejects Amalia’s insinuations, repeatedly reminding her of his bride Frieda, her invention of a story about a cross-territorial relationship (this time between a villager and a foreigner) gives rise to an intimate moment: Amalia “machte die Stummheit sprechend, machte die Fremdheit vertraut, war die Preisgabe eines Geheimnisses, die Preisgabe eines bisher gehüteten Besitzes, der zwar wieder zurückgenommen werden konnte, aber niemals mehr ganz” (Sch 206). It is not Olga’s love that moves K. and arouses intimacy, but Amalia’s telling, perhaps even her inventing of it. Olga too soon arrives, with her own stories about the inconclusive relationships between the village and the castle: Barnabas’s semi-official employment with the castle; Klamm’s lack of oneness with himself; Amalia’s secret love for Sortini. This story-telling quickly causes K. to forget Frieda altogether: “an die Heimkehr dachte er jetzt nicht” (Sch 211). He loses himself, not in Olga’s
body, as he did in Frieda’s, but in her imaginative story-telling, and this experience is both pleasant and familiar, contrary to the strangeness he felt with Frieda:

Durch alle die ungünstigen Neuigkeiten Olgas war K. zwar betroffen, doch sah er einen Ausgleich zum großen Teile darin, daß er hier Menschen fand, denen es, wenigstens äußerlich, sehr ähnlich ging wie ihm selbst, denen er sich also anschließen konnte, mit denen er sich in vielem verständigen konnte, nicht nur in manchem wie mit Frieda. (Sch 216)

This common ground between K. and Olga is their capacity as both story keepers and story sharers, or, to put it bluntly, gossipers. She too re-imagines common castle tales, presenting K. with an array of narratives. K. stays the night, indulging in a purely interpretive Verkehr and betrays his bride in this narrative affair with Olga, and in realizing just how well he can relate to her, a brief moment of physical intimacy follows: “sie rückten noch näher zusammen auf der Ofenbank” (Sch 216). The dubiousness of the castle-world, which Olga’s stories make explicit, only reveals further possibilities for interpretation, leaving it open to K.’s and the reader’s imagination to select a preferred narrative path. For instance, Olga explains, the castle’s delay in issuing Barnabas a messenger’s uniform can mean any number of things:

“[Die Langsamkeit] kann bedeuten, daß die Sache im Amtsgang ist, sie kann aber auch bedeuten, daß der Amtsgang noch gar nicht begonnen hat, daß man also z.B. Barnabas immer noch erst erproben will, sie kann aber schließlich auch bedeuten, daß der Amtsgang schon beendet ist, man aus irgendwelchen Gründen die Zusicherung zurückgezogen hat und Barnabas den Anzug niemals bekommt.” (Sch 212)
Olga for one takes the absence of a uniform as an indication that her brother’s service to the castle is not entirely official, legitimate, or authorized. But in doing so, she disqualifies the value of every link in the bureaucratic chain, undermining not only the legitimacy of the messenger, but also the authenticity of the message, the unity of its originating source and its relation to the recipient:

“ Ist es überhaupt Schloßdienst, was Barnabas tut, fragen wir dann; gewiß er geht in die Kanzleien, aber sind die Kanzleien das eigentliche Schloß? (Sch 213)...Barnabas spricht mit Beamten, Barnabas bekommt Botschaften. Aber was für Beamte, was für Botschaften sind es. Jetzt ist er, wie er sagt, Klamm zugeteilt und bekommt von ihm persönlich die Aufträge...Aber es ist doch so? Nun ja, es ist so, aber warum zweifelt denn Barnabas daran daß der Beamte, der dort als Klamm bezeichnet wird, wirklich Klamm ist? (214)...Diese Briefe bekommt er nicht unmittelbar von Klamm, sondern vom Schreiber... Inzwischen sucht der Schreiber aus den vielen Akten und Briefschaften, die er unter dem Tisch hat, einen Brief für dich heraus, es ist also kein Brief den er gerade geschrieben hat, vielmehr ist es dem Aussehen des Umschlages nach ein sehr alter Brief, der schon lange dort liegt. Wenn es aber ein alter Brief ist, warum hat man Barnabas so lange warten lassen? Und wohl auch Dich? Und schließlich auch den Brief, denn er ist ja jetzt wohl schon veraltet.” (219-20)

And since nothing is evident, Olga’s story is open to reinterpretation, one which K. readily offers, depicting Barnabas as an erring messenger, who is “zu jung für diese Aufgabe” (Sch 223). The letter, however, remains of utmost importance to K.:

“Mögen es auch alte wertlose Briefe sein, die wahllos aus einem Haufen genau so wertloser Briefe hervorgezogen wurden...so haben diese Briefe doch wenigstens irgendeinen Bezug auf meine Arbeit, sichtlich sind sie für mich, wenn auch vielleicht nicht für meinen Nutzen bestimmt, sind wie der Gemeindenvorsteher und seine Frau bezeugt haben, von Klamm eigenhändig gefertigt und haben, wiederum nach dem Gemeindenvorsteher, zwar nur eine private und wenig durchsichtige, aber doch eine große Bedeutung.” (Sch 225)
K.’s dismissal of Barnabas and yet the defense of the letters is opportune. Having established a meaningful connection with Olga, Barnabas becomes a threat. Given Olga’s habitual prostitution with Klamm’s staff, the threat becomes the only man with whom she is not sleeping, but one to whom she remains intimately connected through their castle tales. Thus, rather than identifying with Barnabas as an ally who shares a common fate, unable to access the castle in any meaningful way, K. downgrades him to a child, portraying him to Olga as incapable of suitably responding to castle affairs. It is K., and not the brother, who is the most suitable partner in interpretation. Olga has, after all, become K.’s collaborator on this hypertext. This becomes evident with her story of Klamm. And it is precisely here that Olga replaces Frieda. Where Frieda failed to provide the satisfaction of physical closeness to Klamm through sexual intercourse, Olga provides K. a path to Klamm that is the repository of the village’s collective knowledge of the man, a multiplicity of stories out of which his being is layered. Frieda shows K. Klamm’s body through a peephole; Olga gives him a vision of how this figure emerged. Klamm is, first and foremost, a figure of collective imagination, a narrative creation that exists in the village’s oral traditions.

“[N]atürlich ist sein Aussehn im Dorf gut bekannt, einzelne haben ihn gesehen, alle von ihm gehört und es hat sich aus dem Augenschein, aus Gerüchten und auch manchen fälschenden Nebenabsichten ein Bild Klamms ausgebildet, das wohl in den Grundzügen stimmt.” *(Sch 215-16)*

However, being a matter of collective creation, the physical figure of Klamm is not a unified one:

“Er soll ganz anders aussehn, wenn er ins Dorf kommt und anders wenn er es verläßt, anders ehe er Bier getrunken hat, anders nachher, anders im Wachen, anders im Schlafen, anders allein, anders im Gespräch und, was hienach
These differences, Olga maintains, are neither objectively true of Klamm, nor are they lies on the part of the viewers. Instead, they are in the eyes of the beholder: “[D]iese Unterschiede…entstehen durch die augenblickliche Stimmung, den Grad der Aufregung, die unzähligen Abstufungen der Hoffnung oder Verzweiflung, in welcher sich der Zuschauer, der überdies meist nur augenblicksweise Klamm sehen darf, befindet” (Sch 216).

But in trying to find something real, people err. So too Barnabas does “mehr zu erfinden als zu berichten” about the difference he perceives between Klamm and other officials (Sch 217). Klamm exists in complete passiveness, only through the layers of others’ collective creation—and this layering and the collective reading and collaborative interpreting characterizes hypertext. Everyone has a story to feed into the collective conception of Klamm: be it about his character, appearance, or influence. Only there is little consensus. Olga’s efforts to deconstruct Klamm’s appearance and her appreciation for a reality in which identities of power figures emerge through the acts of imagining, collecting and interpreting appeal to K. He can join her to expand, contract, dilute and populate anew the figure of Klamm.

Das Schloß is then perhaps after all best not viewed as Kafka’s last attempt to write a novel.

Rather, abrupt termination suggests another possibility:

Die Stube in Gerstäckers Hütte war nur vom Herdfeuer matt beleuchtet und von einem Kerzenstumpf, bei dessen Licht jemand in einer Nische gebeugt unter den dort vortretenden schiefen Dachbalken in einem Buche las. Es war Gerstäckers Mutter. Sie reichte K. die zitternde Hand und ließ ihn neben sich nieder setzen, mühselig sprach sie, man hatte Mühe sie zu verstehn, aber was sie sagte (Sch 380)
A bound book is a foreign artifact in the textual practices of the castle: Its letters have no connection to their originating source, nor to the addressee, as Klamm’s letter to K. shows; they cannot be located as the mayor’s search for the Land Surveyor file demonstrates; and they are often written on loose scraps of paper which, like the one pertaining to K.’s own matter, easily get lost in the corridors of the Herrenhof Inn. Thus, it is telling that K.’s first and only encounter with a bound book—the symbol of textual unity—is followed by the harshest confirmation that such unity and completeness is not possible: a mid-sentence break, between an instance of speech production and the possibility of reflection [“...aber was sie sagte”]. This ‘ending’ withholds judgment (on the part of K. and on the part of the woman who is about to speak to him) and precludes interpretation (K.’s and the reader’s). Kafka’s “novel” breaks off in mid-sentence, never reaching a status of completion, precisely at a moment when the only unified text—which Das Schloß itself never becomes—makes its appearance. And instead of unity, we get a unifying figure, for K. too ultimately lives up to the self-proclaimed title by surveying not the castle’s physical lands, but its narrative landscapes, collecting and interpreting castle stories told to him by and about women and weaving them into the Schloß-hypertext that is this work. I have advocated this hypertextual approach because it recognizes the productive potential of this work’s fragmentation, embraces the impossibility of its completeness, and gives purpose to the strangely vacant protagonist, as a figure in the text’s margins.
From Bildungsroman to Hypertext: Kafka’s K.-men and their journeys

Das Schloß, I have argued, operates as a fictional hypertext, rather than a novel fragment; its central figure, K., is its reader and creator, the consciousness linking the texts together, rather than merely being a novel’s protagonist. So too, Kafka’s three novel-fragments, one might argue, do not stand alone in their incompleteness, but collectively form another hypertext, each with an increased degree of hypertextuallity. On a formal level, Der Verschollene is missing only an ending to make it “whole”; Der Prozess is farther from such a unified next, requiring a clear ordering, and Das Schloß contains an agency who takes on the task of this collecting and arranging the stories the various parts of text. The structural similarities between Das Schloß and Kafka’s earlier Prozeß, and the seeming absence of character and narrative development across these, suggest a continuum. Indeed the two K.-men share a strong bond. K.’s attempt to get inside the castle resembles Josef K.’s efforts to slide behind the veil of the law. Both of these alienated subjects assert a need to engage in a battle with an unreachable authority which each perceives as undermining his claim to an identity: Josef’s as an innocent citizen; K.’s as a legitimate employee. For both men that battle plays out in the domain of erotic conquests on the one hand, and spoken language on the other (argumentative persuasion for Josef; narrative invention for K.). The hypothesis of continuity of the K. character across the novels gains force when we take into account the first of them as well: ‘der Verschollene’ Karl Roßmann.

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of Kafka’s three K.-men is their resistance to change. In fact, when one looks at the three K.-figures as a constellation, a kind of collective
regression appears to occur, as evidenced by the gradual disappearance of an individualized character, and the increasing temporal and spatial unspecificity of his surroundings. The irretrievably lost Karl Roßmann remains the most tangible of the three K.s: He bears a full name, is guilty of an earthly sin, and arrives in New York, at a place most easily locatable on a modern world map. Yet this underdeveloped, naïve character is the most nuanced of the three as an individual. His successor in Der Prozeß, the modern metropolitan banker Josef K., moves between rural and central parts of town, disoriented in space and time. He bears half a name and displays a solely functional identity, identifying only in relation to his profession, avoiding all familial ties, and pursuing women as mere linkages in a network of power. And his sin, whatever we take it as, is certainly not of cardinal nature. Otherwise put, the specificity of the protagonist’s being in space and time and his status as an individual begin to waver.

Such reduction is even more profound in the final K.-figure. Without occupational and familial ties, a clear place of origin or a locatable place of arrival, K. is neither an underdeveloped individual like Karl Roßmann, nor a functionary figure like Josef K., but rather a hollow marker, whose main feature is his utter emptiness. Kafka gives us a mysteriously foreign figure, whose fragmentary identity is not denoted by a proper name but a floating cipher, and an occupation that is not only disputed but also redundant to the castle’s organization. The reader cannot locate K. on a map any more than K. can locate himself within the land he seeks to survey, having gone astray even before arriving: “In welches Dorf habe ich mich verirrt?” (Sch 10). The answer to this question provides no orientation. The village belongs to the castle of Count Westwest. West relative to the west of
what, we never find out. And the fact that the question never comes up again only underscores the depths of this disorientation. This rural world is temporally and spatially far removed from Josef’s metropolis, yet it seems that K. has arrived at a place that prefigures the organizational logic known to us from Der Prozeß, a place within which no progression appears to be possible, a place in which meaning is located only in relation to oneself.21

Whereas Der Verschollene resembles an attempt at a Bildungsroman, one that is made impossible by virtue of Roßmann’s circumstances not being conducive to ‘Bildung’, Das Schloß moves away from this project altogether. The peculiar incompleteness of name, place and purpose is not without effect: It challenges the reader to ‘locate’ the rest of K -- and thereby reveal a hidden metaphysical truth and the inner logic lurking underneath the surface narrative. And this temptation to interpret K., and to correct his alarming interpretations, distracts from the real question of the text, namely: Why would Kafka give us such a featureless main character? And behind the question of K.’s employment status with the castle lurks another: What is K.’s status in The Castle’s infrastructure? If we accept the continuity of the protagonist across the novels as a legitimate premise, it becomes clear that Das Schloß not only functions as a narrative web, but also participates in a broader hypertext, where it interacts with Kafka’s earlier novel-like works. Each subsequent novel is characterized by an increased ethereality. As the protagonists lose definition, the managerial presence of this narrative voice gains in prominence, and it is this voice, of the cipher figure, that gives the text its coherence and mission.
And although *Das Schloß* is not a Bildungsroman, it is nevertheless a work about becoming—K.’s self-realization as Land Surveyor. So what, if anything, has the K.-man learned by trial and error between succumbing to one bureaucratic machine and returning to wage a battle against another? A decade after Kafka’s correspondence with Felice stresses the opposition between a literary career and a family life, a K.-figure emerges who successfully collapses this distinction between the physical and the linguistic domains of becoming: Unlike the eternal bachelor Kafka, who succeeds as a literary figure at the cost of not becoming a father figure, or his Karl Roßmann, who must be irretrievably lost precisely for having fathered a child, this final K.-man secures his own identity, elicits desire in women and produces an offspring with them—all through language alone. K. becomes, in the act of weaving together disparate stories into a literary hypertext, the subject Kafka desired to be: literature in the making.


CONCLUSION

Towards a New Literacy:

Doing Kafka in the Digital Age

Kafka’s literary imagination finds a universal appeal. And although his corpus was not awaiting the dawn of the digital age to illuminate its complexity, it does find resonance with the reader of the digital era. There are various reasons for this, some with greater implications than others. The recent trial on Kafka’s unpublished writings raises a more serious point. This decade-long legal dispute ended in a 2012 ruling by a Tel Aviv court awarding ownership of the manuscripts to the National Library of Israel in support of its claim that Kafka’s writings are a cultural asset which belongs to the Jewish people, and as such to the Jewish state. The daughters of Max Brod’s beneficiary, Esther Hoffe, who had inherited the documents, appealed the decision but the verdict was upheld and on August 6th, 2016 the court ordered that the manuscripts in question finally be placed in the possession of the National Library of Israel. The outcome of this trial rests on the premise that Kafka’s literature is Israel’s national heritage, or at least to a greater extent than it is European. At the same time, projects funded by the European Commission to define and promote core “European literature” continue to claim Kafka as one of its key representatives and so support a different position. Thus, while the legal dispute is finally settled, the intellectual one remains, and competing claims to Kafka’s cultural identity persist. But the trial has also raised more pragmatic questions, namely how limited public access to these
manuscripts might be, given the current political climate in Israel.¹ The glaringly obvious solution to this perceived problem—and one to which the National Library eagerly agreed—is to make this new Kafka collection available online. If this is indeed an acceptable solution, the question becomes: what exactly is the value of such physical documents in the digital age? Anyone familiar with Kafka’s literature immediately recognizes that the unification of these manuscripts under one roof would do nothing to change the inherent incompleteness of his works. And if online access allows for the same kind of study and research in which we would engage at the archives in Israel, why do so many Kafka readers nonetheless desire to collect and assemble this corpus that is dispersed across the globe? For the parties involved it is not only a question of cultural heritage but of the manuscripts’ monetary value, but why does the online availability of these yet unread manuscripts not satisfy our demand for access? Is it the desire to hold in our hands the very material artifact Kafka once held in his? If so, is it because locating the physical corpus promises a more fulfilling encounter with his literature? And is this not precisely the kind of desire—singular, unified, and corporeally localizable—that Kafka’s corpus rejects?

This, of course, is all a matter of circumstance, but there is also something intuitively digital that makes Kafka’s literature today more current than ever. The virtual nature of Kafka’s correspondence with Bauer, for example, seems to prefigure the present-day dating culture in which a typical romantic rendezvous is preceded by an epistolary encounter from a distance. Or as Rafia Zakaria puts it, “What Kafka did in lyrical prose, the rest of us bumble through on social media and dating apps today—enjoying a similar disconnect from reality.”² But the affinity with digital structures is not limited to the letters. In his recent
monogram, *Playful Intelligence: Digitizing Tradition*, Henry Sussman sets out to demonstrate that digital thinking is a constitutive trait of Kafka’s fiction:³

Kafka strips bare the proliferation of ‘analog’ detail in Dostoyevsky to reveal a digital substratum discernible under the comprehensive cybernetic regime in which we strive, communicate, and address the telling questions of the moment. Pulled out from the baroque regulation and convention of the Victorian age, Kafka’s universe of digital attitudes and conditions is nauseatingly uncertain, unpredictable, and impersonal (8).

The various recent works I discuss throughout my dissertation attest to a growing recognition of the highly self-referential and hypertextual nature of Kafka’s corpus. This dissertation explores one aspect of this, namely how Kafka’s increasingly hypertextual narrative form evolves along the same lines as his conception of desire. But the question that emerges at the end of my project is: how can insights like these guide our research, or more broadly, what does the digital era hold for the future of Kafka scholarship?

To answer this question, it is worth reflecting on the profound influence which advances in computational technology over the last quarter century have had on the forms and practices of the humanities, and the kind of research they have made possible. Mass-scale book scanning projects such as Google Books, Open Content Alliance, and Project Gutenberg have made an unprecedented amount of literature available online. At the same time, online archives and digital libraries have improved our access to previously difficult to access research materials and sped up the process by which we retrieve them.⁴ And specialized hypertext software programs such as Eastgate Systems’ Storyspace and Apple’s Hypercard
have enabled the writing and reading of fictional and non-fictional hypertext narratives, electronic literature told through links. At the intersection of computing and humanistic disciplines, known as Digital Humanities, new modes of scholarship have become possible. Not only do we, literary scholars, have new tools, techniques and media to conduct our research with greater ease or in new ways, but we are also able to ask new research questions and generate previously unknowable information that helps us understand literary and cultural facts and their history.

Consequently, research and teaching practices in the humanities have undergone a paradigm shift in recent decades, as prominent Digital Humanities scholar Alan Liu explains. The solitary writerly activity has evolved into a collaborative “authoring,” which now often additionally involves designing, image editing, and programming. Reading has transformed into “Social Computing”: Not only do we increasingly read on screen rather than on paper, but so too focus has shifted from the main document to the “un- or under documented margins”—the sidebars of blogs, or the walls of Facebook pages. And the presence of comments, blog rolls, and trackbacks makes visible a collective and annotative reading experience. In addition to the traditional print literature that has become available in computer-readable form, for the first time in human history, a massive amount of opinionated data stemming from social media has been and continues to be recorded in digital forms, thus making new quantitative research possible on both fronts.

Since early 2000, sentiment analysis—the study of sentiments, evaluations, attitudes, and emotions—is both at the center of social media research and natural language processing.
This is to say that in the digital age, critical judgment requires assessing the credibility and authority of new forms of online authorship (blogs, wikis, and the like). In academia, the peer review process is increasingly being replaced by the same collective commenting and annotating we see in social media. As book sales are declining and access to online forums is growing, more and more disciplines publish in online unrefereed forums before the same work appears in peer-reviewed journals. This trend gives even the literary scholar an incentive to first publish online. We begin to rethink the viability of the monographic print book, which, with its multi-year writing, editing, review and press production process does not meet the demand for the gratification of instant access and feedback to which the present-day reader is growing increasingly accustomed. We begin to admit to ourselves that the digital age necessitates a new form of writing.

The very act of interpreting through close reading, which has been the status quo methodological approach of most of literary scholarship in the 20th century, is now complemented by “distant reading,” the computational analysis of large amounts of text intended to extract new data and to generate new meaning. The statistical, quantitative method of this form of “non-reading” is based on the premise that certain synchronic or diachronic patterns in literature are not detectible through a close reading of a few texts, but can only be uncovered by escaping the restrictions of preconceived canons and scrutinizing hundreds or thousands of texts at once. As Franco Moretti, the Italian literary scholar behind this innovative idea, explains,

the trouble with close reading (in all of its incarnations, from the new criticism to deconstruction) is that it necessarily depends on an extremely
small canon. This may have become an unconscious and invisible premise by now, but it is an iron one nonetheless: you invest so much in individual texts only if you think that very few of them really matter. [...] At bottom, it’s a theological exercise—very solemn treatment of very few texts taken very seriously—whereas what we really need is a little pact with the devil: we know how to read texts, now let’s learn how not to read them. Distant reading: where distance, let me repeat it, is a condition of knowledge: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems. And if, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases when one can justifiably say, less is more.8

Moretti’s quantitative formalist approach to studying literature can be employed to explain literary and cultural macro-phenomena such as the evolution of genres, sociological aspects of literature, style and its reception, the presence of recurrent content or themes in a certain literary period, as well as intertextuality. But the Digital Humanities also provide useful tools for exploring intertextuality and hypertextuality on a micro-level. Indeed, many DH projects are concerned with the traditional task of uncovering patterns and relationships between and within specific canonical texts. *The Documentation for Bouvard et Pécuchet* 9 is one such project that seeks to contextualize and make digitally available previously difficult to access source documents and materials that Flaubert gathered to write his last novel. Moreover, the project involves a computing device that can produce configurable arrangements of quotations that Flaubert extracted from these sources. Most importantly, however, users are able to produce a hypothetical reconstruction of *Bouvard et Pécuchet’s* second volume, which Flaubert did not write in his lifetime, but for which he had gathered materials. In this way, *The Documentation for Bouvard et Pécuchet* is one example of the new model of reading as co-authoring that Alan Liu describes.
**DanteSources,** to name another notable example, is a digital library through which users can retrieve the primary sources Dante cited in his texts. It is designed to visualize their distribution in Dante’s work through tables and charts that indicate thematic areas and other commonalties. A feature of the library called **Intertextual Dante** allows users to read the corresponding passages in Dante’s and Ovid’s texts on the same screen and in their respective contexts, to search intertextual passages in specific poems or books, and even to quantitatively assess Dante’s allusions to Ovid through similarities in word choice and structuring features such as characters, places, events, and the like. This machine has the advantage of improving literary scholarship by increasing the precision of the associative trails one might locate in a work.

Current DH projects like these conceive a work of literature as a conglomerate of parts whose arrangement is not static, and whose reconfiguration allows new forms of meaning to emerge. And this underlying idea is not new to Kafka studies. Already in the 1990s, with the publication of the first parts of the *Kritische Kafka Ausgabe,* Roland Reuß and Peter Staengle asserted both the need for a new way of reading Kafka and offered a partial solution: moving away from book-bound texts, abandoning the confined form, and embracing the incompleteness of Kafka’s corpus. This edition, although it features a CD rom that supplements the facsimile transcriptions and images of Kafka’s handwritten texts, still remains largely textual but Reuß and Staengle’s work might be credited for motivating several small-scale DH projects on Kafka that are currently underway in Germany.

Researchers at the University of Stuttgart’s Institute for Natural Language Processing have
undertaken a pilot experiment to test, on the example of Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung*, the usefulness of manually annotated word alignment in determining the extent to which foreign language translations of literary texts can help resolve ambiguities in co-reference resolution (the task of finding all expressions that refer to the same entity in a discourse). On a technical level, the study tests computational linguistic tools to improve the identification of character or persona references in literary texts. But pertaining specifically to the text at hand, the collaborators are able to comment on the quality of existing English translations of Kafka’s story based on their usefulness in resolving coreferential ambiguities in the original German.

The Kafka scholar of today must still resort to printed editions, but this too will soon change. Collaborators at the University of Göttingen are working on developing a resource to address the needs of quantitative Kafka-research. They propose building and annotating a digital Kafka library, bringing together all of his available writings in a format that allows for high-quality linguistic annotation, text-mark-up, and metadata. “KARREK” or “Kafka/Referenzkorpus” is part of a larger Quantitative Analysis of Literary Modernity project. If completed, it promises to enable not only comparative quantitative-stylistic analyses of Kafka’s corpus, but also its relation to a reference corpus, such as Newer German Literature, Prague Literature, or Modern Literature.

Throughout this dissertation I have argued that Kafka’s narrative form—from an aesthetic perspective—can be conceptualized as hypertext and that inherent hypertextuality has a great explanatory power in Kafka’s late conceptualization of desire as a free, multi-
directional force of self-realization. Now I would like to turn to the question of how this narrative form might be, technically, translated into a hypertext and what implications this might have for our desire as participants. How might such a project be realized? And what aims would it fulfill? In the parable Vor dem Gesetz we are told, “Die Schrift ist unveränderlich, und die Meinungen sind oft nur ein Ausdruck der Verzweiflung darüber,” an unforgiving state of affairs that Josef immediately protests (P. 230). This statement is supported by the very nature of the print medium. But what if this were not so? Or at least, what if this depended on the nature of the Schrift in front of us? Whereas the author of print culture produces a bound text, rendered even more stable through the physical form in which we encounter it, the hypertext author controls what she deems to be necessary but also hands some control over to the reader. A hypertext is not only changeable, but it is only realized in the reader’s act of moving through it, a process also known as “wreading.”

Kafka’s Prozess might be conceived of as a hypertext project. However unintentionally, Kafka has left his reader a great deal of freedom (and necessity) to figure out her reading path. Das Schloß truly embodies both the dynamic structure and the reader response of hypertext. It advances from Der Prozess through its embedded active “wreader,” the K.-figure who moves us from one segment to another when the reader can well imagine (and desire) to follow the story by a different path. We are sitting, as it were, on K.’s shoulders as he chooses his paths and follows his desire. But what if we could choose our own path through this textual landscape more freely? Reuß and Staengle’s Stromfeld slip box edition in which each chapter or fragment is individually bound and randomly arranged only elucidates the joy of a reading experience that allows for a multitude of reading paths. But
even this modern edition cannot escape the restraints of the paper form. Our reading remains directed by preconceived authentic units (albeit smaller ones). The reader will presumably still start reading at the beginning of one booklet where she previously began with the single bound book. The effect of navigating the digital Schloß on the other hand, is to determine not only one’s own reading path which might begin at any given point of intersecting themes, motifs, characters or character constallations and the like, but to uncover connections and embed these discoveries directly into the text, which would in turn produce more possible reading paths. The more readers access the digital Schloß and the more connections they make, the greater becomes the range of reading paths. The text is enriched and yet remains open as to allow future generations to annex it to so far undiscovered interpretive possibilities.

Designing such a project could provide the platform for both text-immanent interpretations as well as a creative venue to experiment with Kafka’s text, which could also be a useful pedagogical tool. It could be realized through the collaborative effort of a Kafka scholar and a DH research designer, using a software such as Storyspace. One would begin by exposing the structure of the work by creating links to visualize patterns within Das Schloß, its relation to Kafka’s other works or those beyond his corpus. Associations between various parts of the text could be established and visualized by linking passages, characters or character constellations, parts of speech, etc. For example, one might create a link between the scene in Das Schloß in which the old shoemaker Barnabas waits for redemption in the view of the castle officials and the parable Vor dem Gesetz, as to explore this villager in Das Schloß as a reconfigured version of the man from the country in Der Prozess. This
would constitute a text-immanent connection, which could then be recognized through a hyperlink that takes the reader to Kafka’s other text to explore this association. The visual displays of associative trails would convey the blueprint of the work’s structure. By following these links, end users or wreaders (Kafka students for instance) would move within Das Schloß, between it and Kafka’s other words and (depending on technical possibilities) to works beyond its scope. The user could explore where the various Schloßgeschichten lead, reorganize them and test alternative reading paths. If in the process she discovers a new connection, she could enrich the project by introducing a new link to indicate it. A potential challenge is limiting, or eliminating links that lead to unimportant or irrelevant information. This can be addressed through a built-in user-testing feature by which subsequent users can confirm the quality of the associative trail or report an erroneous or weak association, which can then be removed. In a small-scale project this might occur through the review and approval of the project owner; where the number of users is sufficient, a link can be automatically removed after a pre-defined proportion of the readership has indicated the error.

Printed texts solicit reader desire with a promise of an ending. Digital hypertexts obviate the need for closure and instead foreground the reader’s participation in the construction of a narrative. The very possibility of this agency addresses the pluralistic nature of desire to which Kafka’s works attest. The young Kafka once wrote, “Manches Buch wirkt wie ein Schlüssel zu fremden Sälen des eigenen Schlosses.” When we encounter such a work, he seems to suggest, we shall follow our readerly desire and unlock as much of ourselves as we
do of the literary work. The construction of a digital *Schloß*-hypertext would be to accept this invitation.
Notes

Introduction

1 For the last of these, see Mladen Dolar, “Kafka’s Immanence, Kafka’s Transcendence” in Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond, ed. Regina Schwartz (New York / London: Routledge, 2004), 171-190. I discuss the other approaches below.

2 Cf. Friedrich Kittler, Grammophon Film Typewriter (Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose, 1986), 323.


5 Kafka, Das Urteil, in E 47-60, here 60.


8 Verkehr is a term Kafka frequently used and one which plays a prominent role in his theorizing of desire. Throughout this dissertation I refer to the German word because it captures both the communicative and erotic connotations, particularly pertaining to the law’s dealings with its subjects. For a discussion on the relevance of the double meaning of “Verkehr” in Kafka, see Bernheimer, Flaubert and Kafka; Mark Anderson, Kafka’s Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg fin de siècle (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and John Zilcosky, Kafka’s Travels: Exoticism, Colonialism, and the Traffic of Writing (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), esp. “The Traffic of Writing: Technologies of Intercourse in the Letters to Milena,” 123-152.


11 The pattern I describe here for the two stories likewise applies to the novels: In Der Prozess, Josef experiences sudden outbursts of desire for women as passageways to the law: Bürstner, the laundress and Leni. And in Das Schloß, K. emanates sexual attraction to men and women at the precise moments when he realizes they might become useful in his endeavor: Barnabas, Frieda, Olga and Amalia, and the mysterious sickly woman from the castle. But he feels no similar attraction to Pepi or Gisa who do not appear useful to him.


14 Nelson’s initial 1965 definition of hypertext, as “a body of written or pictorial material interconnected in such a complex way that it could not conveniently be presented or represented on paper” stresses the former quality, while his later 1974 revision includes the element of interactivity: “hypertext means forms of writing which branch or perform on request; they are best presented on computer display screens.” (Nelson, “Complex Information Processing,” 85; Computer Lib / Dream Machines [Tempus Books of Microsoft Press, 1987 (1974)], 134).

15 Ted Nelson readily admitted in 1965 that “Hypertext is fundamentally traditional and in the mainstream of literature,” and so viewed it as a natural extension of traditional textuality (Literary Machines 90.1 [Sausalito: Mindful Press, 1990], 1/17). Theoretician Jakob Nielsen, writing thirty years later, similarly explains that “[t]he simplest way to define hypertext is to contrast it with a traditional text like this book. All traditional text, whether in printed form or in computer files, is sequential, meaning that there is a single linear sequence defining the order in which the text is to be read. First you read page one. Then you read page two. Then you read page three. You don’t have to be much of a mathematician to generalize the formula which determines what page you read next” (Multimedia and Hypertext: The Internet and Beyond [Boston: AP Professional, 1995], 1).

16 Proponents of hyper-fiction maintain that one major advantage of writing fiction with hypertext technology is the ability to convey the experience of spatiality and temporality in a new way, thus perhaps extending the modernist project in a new medium. Cf. Dirk Van Hulle, “Hypertext and Avenue-text in Twentieth-Century and Contemporary Literature,” in A Companion to Digital Literary Studies, ed. Ray Siemens and Susan Scheibman (Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell, 2007), 139-159, here 139-140, who argues that “experiments of modernists prefigure literary aesthetics in the digital age.”

17 Vannevar Bush, “As We May Think,” The Atlantic Monthly 176 (1) (July 1945): 101–8, here 108. Bush’s vision of a memory extender machine (Memex) that would store information and retrieve it through such associative trails remains a source of inspiration for hypertext scholars to this day, despite the fact that it was never built.


19 Borges’s story has inspired media and hypertext fiction scholars. In 1987 Stuart Moulthrop designed a hypertextual remake of the story, calling it “Victory Garden.” It was published five years later and remains one of the most important works of electronic literature to date.

20 Cf. Chapter 3n3.

21 Richard T. Gray correctly points out that “like ‘Brief an den Vater’, the letters [to Felice] are also an imaginary creation and may be read as a kind of epistolary novel, a fiction, with Felice and Kafka as the main characters and Grete Bloch an important third figure” (A Franz Kafka Encyclopaedia, [Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2005], 51).

22 Parts of Der Verschollene and Der Prozess were published separately: Der Heizer and the parable Vor dem Gesetz, respectively.


27 For Kafka’s engagement with psychoanalysis, see Hartmut Binder, who was the first to discuss Kafka’s knowledge of Freud, in *Motiv und Gestaltung bei Franz Kafka* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1966), 92-114. For an overview of psychoanalytic interpretations of Kafka, see “Psychoanalyse,” *Kafka Handbuch: Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, eds. Manfred Engel and Bernd Auerochs (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2010), 65-72, esp. 70ff.


29 Hellmuth Kaiser, *Franz Kafka’s Inferno: Eine psychologische Deutung seiner Strafphantasie* (Vienna: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1931). Gregor takes the position of the breadwinner, while the father suffers a blow to his ego (and by inference to his health), and reveals the incestuous nature of his desire when he seeks to win over for himself the mother and sister. The actual transformation that gives the story its title, Kaiser claims, constitutes the reverse development, in which the son once again sinks into infantile dependency, marked by his animalistic metamorphosis, and the father regains the position as the head of the family. By the same logic, the ape’s Rotpeter’s transformation into a human represents the coming of age and entering society as man—reaching, so to say, the civilized existence Gregor lived before he metamorphosed into a beetle. Rotpeter’s transition is symbolically marked with the oral enjoyment of consuming alcohol, something with which he initially struggles as teenage boys do; his compromised sexual development is further suggested by the bullet wound below the hip (or in the genital area). *In der Strafkolonie* captures a similar constellation of the father-son conflict: The prisoner is punished for opposing his “Hauptmann”—a father figure—and by challenging this father to drop his whip, this son-figure opposes the inevitable act of castration. The resulting punishment constitutes in Kaiser’s view the father’s rape of the son, and, unsurprisingly, his return to power as in *Die Verwandlung*.


36 As if this were not explicit enough, Mendoza adds, “Here already the pattern of Kafka’s plots can be recognized—the son plays the role of the seeker whose goal is the father’s love, whereas the role of the adversary is played by the father who provides the negative press through his rejection” (25).


38 Koelb, “The Text as Erotic /Auto-Erotic Device,” 220.


44 Bernheimer, *Flaubert and Kafka*.


48 Horn is perhaps the harshest critics of Mecke’s. He insists that the fallacious “Kafka” = “homosexual” equation problematically necessitates a conception of identity as fixed and unchanging, so that it is possible to conclude that Kafka was a homosexual even in the absence of evidence of homosexual sex and by ignoring of his heterosexual activities. Most problematically,
however, this approach requires us to concede that homosexuality and heterosexuality exist only as binary opposites and that a person is always one or the other.


53 The exact relationship in which *Anti-Oedipus* stands to Lacanian psychoanalysis is somewhat ambiguous and remains an open field of inquiry. While Deleuze and Guattari unequivocally reject Freud and dismiss psychoanalysis entirely, they praise Lacan with “schizophrenizing the analytic field, instead of oedipalizing the psychotic field” and credit him with searching for a more direct approach to desire, one that abandons the Oedipal limits (*AO* 309). In doing so, the authors position *Anti-Oedipus* as an extension of the groundwork laid by Lacan, but their insistence on *Anti-Oedipus*’s compatibility with Lacan’s thought has been the basis of contention and a source of great irritation for neo-Lacanians such as Slavoj Žižek, for whom this work represents a “ruthless[] appropriati[on]” of Lacan that “misses the point of Lacan’s Real” (Žižek, “Notes on a Debate ‘From Within the People’,” *Criticism* 46, no. 4 (2004): 661-666, here 662, 661). Luke Caldwell reads Deleuze’s revisions of Lacan as “more of an internal reversal than a rejection,” a move “beyond psychoanalysis to what they call ‘schizoanalysis’” (Caldwell, “Schizophrenizing Lacan: Deleuze, [Guattari], and *Anti-Oedipus,*” *intersections* 10, no. 3 (2009): 18-27, here 21.) Peter Hallward weighs in, pointing out that although Deleuze and Lacan share a number of common concerns (both work to take apart the traditional, ego-centered subject, each stressing the importance of differentiation and displacement), Deleuze also discards a great number of concepts that are central to Lacan’s philosophy of desire (the process of representation, signification and the symbolic, the unconscious as structured through language, as well as the subject, the inter-subject, and the other), concluding that *Anti-Oedipus* as an extension of Lacanian thought is exaggerated (Hallward, “You can’t Have it Both Ways: Deleuze or Lacan,” *Deleuze and Psychoanalysis: Philosophical Essays on Deleuze’s Debate with Psychoanalysis*, ed. Leen De Bolle [Leuven: Leuven UP, 2010], 33-50, here 34).

54 Cf. Catarina Pombo Nabais, “Deleuze’s Two Approaches to Kafka” in Petr Kouba and Tomáš Pivoda eds., *Franz Kafka: Minority Report* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia Books, 2011), 32-41, here 36. Pombo Nabais points out that Deleuze’s own earlier interpretations of Kafka, contained in *Proust and Signs*, employ the Lacanian conception of the law, grounded in the tripartition symbolic/imaginary/real within desire. She criticizes Deleuze for failing to acknowledge explicitly this radical turn, which she links to the publication of *Anti-Oedipus*, and Guattari’s influence of his philosophy.

55 This reversal recalls Kaiser’s first psychoanalytic reading according to which *Die Verwandlung* consists of such two stages.
Chapter 1

1 Josef is a young professional, without a private life: he had not visited his mother in at least three years; he avoids any “Verkehr” with his young cousin Erna, and is frightened even at the thought of his uncle visiting (P 272, 96, 95). After his work at the office, he typically goes for a walk “mit Bekannten,” or spends his evenings “an einem Stammtisch mit meist älteren Herren,” or dining with the bank director. His only intimate relationship is with a waitress named Elsa, who receives guests throughout the day “nur vom Bett aus” and whom Josef visits once a week (P 26). Upon a closer look, the suggested romantic relationship seems more business-like: after his arrest, Josef never again contacts Elsa, nor does she reach out to him, so that she appears less of a private man’s lover than a business man’s prostitute. The impersonal nature of their relationship is further supported by Josef’s later fantasy to take the court’s law student, whom he hates, to visit Elsa in bed (P 70).


3 Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande dates back to 1906; it is one of the first pieces Kafka wrote after being awarded his doctorate of law in June of the same year. There are three versions of the fragment; I cite from the earliest 1906 version. That Kafka had intended to create a longer piece of writing than this is evident not only in the fragment’s title—wedding preparations to which the

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57 Slavoj Žižek, “A Letter Which Did Arrive at its Destination,” *lacanian ink* 28 (Fall 2003) 82-99, here 82.


story never gets—but can also be inferred from his 1910 letter to Max Brod, in which he remarks “Das Stückchen der Novelle...ist schon alt und sicher nicht fehlerlos, aber es erfüllt die nächste Absicht der Geschichte.” Franz Kafka, *Brieve 1900-1912*, ed. Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1999), 131 (17.12.1910.).

4 Cf. Wolf Kittler, who similarly suggests that Raban essentially desires a “postal eutopia”—that is the mailing of his physical body while the subject remains at home (“Schreibmaschinen, Sprechmaschinen: Effekte technischer Medien im Werk Franz Kafkas,” in Kittler/ Neumann, *Schriftverkehr*, 75-163, here 83).

5 Kafka, *Brieve 1900-1912*, 159-60 (13.7.1912).


7 Cf. Bernheimer’s interpretation of Kafka’s dream as the expression of his fantasy to “have Felice transformed into a source of endless written feedback,” which also functions as a “mothering shelter.” Bernheimer attributes to Kafka here yet another female role, not that of the birthing mother but of the midwife when he reaches into the envelope to release the letters (*Flaubert and Kafka*, 155).

8 In a diary entry from March 9th, 1914 Kafka reflects on his earlier hesitation to marry: “Ich konnte damals nicht heiraten, alles in mir hat dagegen revolviert, so sehr ich F. immer liebte. Es war hauptsächlich die Rücksicht auf meine schriftstellerische Arbeit, die mich abhielt, denn ich glaubte diese Arbeit durch die Ehe gefährdet” (*T2* 135).

9 Josef first appears in Kafka’s diary entry from July 29th, 1914 (*T3* 30). But despite what I call the strategy of transferring the task of linguistic self-production onto one of his characters, Kafka’s fear of literary unproductiveness grows. In the months that follow, he struggles to write, and sees a remedy to this nothing short of winning Felice back: “Ich kann nicht mehr weiterschreiben. Ich bin an der endgültigen Grenze, vor der ich vielleicht wieder Jahre lang sitzen soll, um dann vielleicht wieder eine neue, wieder unfertig gebliebene Geschichte anzufangen. Diese Bestimmung verfolgt mich. Ich bin auch wieder kalt und sinnlos, nur die greisenhafte Liebe für die vollständige Ruhe ist geblieben. Und wie irgendein gänzlich vom Menschen losgetrenntes Tier schaukelt ich schon wieder den Hals und
mochte versuchen, für die Zwischenzeit wieder F. zu bekommen. Ich werde es auch wirklich versuchen, falls mich die Übelkeit vor mir selbst nicht daran hindert” (T3, 59 [30.11.1914.]).


12 Deleuze and Guattari, Minor Literature.

13 Peter Beicken, Franz Kafka: Der Prozess (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995), 106.

The thesis remains current in the late 1990s, with Detlef Kremer, who regurgitates without attribution the main points of Canetti’s essay is Die Erotik des Schreibens (Bodenheim b. Mainz: Philo, 1998). Instead of explaining what constitutes the erotic in writing, Kremer ends with the oft-cited observation that Kafka’s sexuality is sublimated in literature and that Kafka enjoys writing about ‘things erotic’: “Die angemessene Form der Erotik besteht für Kafka nirgends sonst als im Schreiben. Und er schreibt von nichts so gern wie von den Lüsten und Begierden” (16). Echoing Canetti, Kremer maintains that Kafka’s epistolary affairs with Bauer and later Jesenská, both of which necessarily must remain distant, function as the “Inszenierung eines Scheinvorganges, der die Leidenschaft kultiviert, indem er die sirenische Gefahr der Frau auf körperlicher Distanz hält und die Stuktur der Verführung unter der Hand verkehrt (13). Like Odysseus in Das Schweigen der Sirenen, so too Kafka desires to be the object of the other’s desire, but stay safe from her interpretation (13-14).


17 Bernheimer, Fraubert and Kafka, 154.


23 Slavoj Žižek, Interrogating the Real, 25.


25 This truth is conferred several times later on: Huld explains that there is a significant lag between the genesis and the reception of his written defense: “Die ersten Eingaben werden nicht gelesen” (P 119), and in any case they miss the point: “Die schriftliche Eingabe ist selten von Bedeutung, da man
nicht weiß, worum es eigentlich geht” (P 120). Even when the subject matter is known, an attempt at representation never reproduces a truth about the subject but only an agreed upon fiction, as Totorelli confirms with his paintnings of judges, which he describes as mere “Erfindung” by the courts themselves (P 153).

26 As has been commonly observed, Fräulein Bürstner explicitly recalls Felice Bauer through her initials, her profession as “Schreibmaschinistin” (P 18), and her frequent theatre visits.


28 While the courts fabricate and circulate “Schriften,” these documents are either absent, or inaccessible and the texts that are available sway between impenetrability and vacancy: Josef’s arresting guards hold a book in their hands, but cannot produce an arrest warrant or read Josef’s identification papers; during his hearing the judge refers to a book, but it turns out to contain merely poorly illustrated porn, and Huld’s papers remain indecipherable to Block, who vainly tracing with his finger over the same lines all day long.

Chapter 2

1 In der Strafkolonie, in E 164-198.

2 There is some disagreement about exactly when Kafka wrote this story. Hartmut Binder placed its conception prior to Kafka’s work on Das Schloß: “Februar [1922]: Der Hungerkünstler entsteht. Ende Februar: Beginn der Arbeit am Schloß” (Kafka Kommentar zu sämtlichen Erzählungen [Munich: Winkler, 1975], 41), while Peter-André Alt argued that the story emerged in the context of Kafka’s struggle to continue working on Das Schloß [Franz Kafka: Der ewige Sohn. Eine Biographie [Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005], 647]. Kafka’s diary entry from May 25th, 1922 would suggest that the story was written in May: “Vorgestern ‘H.K.’” (T3 233), making it an anomaly in my otherwise chronological rendering of his evolution of a theory of desire. Yet this has no bearing on my broader argument. Kafka’s explorations into desire, and the non-linear narrative form in which they culminate in Das Schloß are a patchwork project. I do not claim a direct and linear of a concept that is deeply in non-linearity. Admittedly, Das Schloß in part due to its length and subject matter lends itself to a higher degree of intertextuality than does a shorter piece such as Der Hungerkünstler.


4 Kafka’s literalization of the metaphor has been discussed primarily with reference to Die Verwandlung. See Günther Anders, Kafka—Pro und Kontra: Die Prozess-Unterlagen (Munich: Beck, 1951), 41; Walter Sokel, Franz Kafka (New York: Columbia UP, 1966), 5; and chapter 3 of Stanley Corngold’s, Franz Kafka: The Necessity of Form (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1988). The difference is that Samsa’s beetle body is not the literalisation of any linguistic violence he endures but rather of his desire to escape the certain social pressures, some of which are made manifest through language, such as his fear of his superior’s “Vorwürfe” (Die Verwandlung in E 96-161, here 107).


6 Wilhelm Emrich, Franz Kafka (Königstein: Athenäum Verlag, 1981), 228.


8 There is something to suggest that the penal colony’s execution system might offer a more humane alternative in meeting the desire for contact with the law than its indifferent modern counterpart of
Der Prozess. And in weighing the physical torture inflicted by the writing machine against the life-long psychological and emotional torment of being a subject before the law and not knowing what it is, a predicament with which Josef and the man from the country are faced, the scale may very well tip in favour of the latter.

9 The state in which this machine’s subject finds himself is irreconcilable with the Christian notion of martyrdom. There is no cause to which the man willingly sacrifices his life. He is unaware of the cause of his being there, and by the time he discovers what his sin is, it is already too late to decide on making such a sacrifice. Only in refusing to read, to acknowledge, and to internalize the ruling law could he become a martyr, but surely not in the sense in which the officer has in mind. Instead, he is a martyr in the original Greek meaning of the word before its inauguration in Christian terminology, namely the witness.


11 Perhaps bodily contact with the law is reserved for those who have not encountered it otherwise, and not for the officer who possesses the words of the law, and who may not be enlightened by reading it with his body. Or perhaps the officer cannot find redemption because he does not subject himself to a punishment; rather, he gives into a desire to become an integral part of the justice-producing machine so that the machine could not bring about justice by producing this text.

12 Cf. Doreen Densky, “Proxies in Kafka: Koncipist FK and Procurist Josef K.,” in Kafka for the Twenty-First Century, eds. Stanley Corngold and Ruth V. Gross (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), 120-135, who argues that “modern narrating and institutional setting are linked to concerns of vocal agency and the inherent need to assign and fill positions in order to function” (132).


14 Kafka, T2. The quoted passages are from the following 1915 diary entries: January 20, January 30, February 2, February 22, March 23, May 14, September 28, and November 21.

15 There are three instances of verbal threats, none of which is ever carried out: the doctor threatens to whip the groom, but is carried away before he has a chance to; the choir calls for the doctor’s murder if he fails to cure the patient, but he manages to escape; and the patient threatens to scratch the doctor’s eyes out.


17 Cf. Walter Benjamin, Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963), 36, where he discusses the polar opposite representation magician and the surgeon in healing. The doctor “greatly diminishes the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating into the patient’s body, and increases it but little by the caution with which his hand moves among the organs. In short, in contrast to the magician – who is still hidden in the medical practitioner – the surgeon at the decisive moment abstains from facing the patient man to man; rather, it is through the operation that he penetrates into him.”

18 To my knowledge, the equation of patient/Rosa has not yet been explored in Kafka scholarship.
Aaron Manson has interpreted the doctor’s conflict as the opposition between duty and faith. See Aaron Manson, “Theology of Illness: Franz Kafka’s ‘A Country Doctor,’” Literature and Medicine 24, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 297-314.

Parenthetical citations to Ein Hungerkünstler follow E 392-404.


And a lucrative business indeed it was. In 1926, Siegfried Herz (alias Jolly) earned 130,000 DM after 350,000 visitors saw him locked up in the Berlin pub Das Krokodil, in a sealed glass box for forty-four days (Walter Vandereycken, From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa [New York: Random House, 1988], 89). Cf. Mitchell, “Kafka and the Hunger Artists.”

At an exhibition in Berlin in 1887, the Norwegian hunger artist, Francisco Cetti, was watched for eleven days following a thirty-day fasting experiment in London’s Royal Aquarium. After ten days, doctors were surprised to discover that Cetti actually gained weight during his fast-period! Apparently, he had foodstuffs. Likewise, Jolly was arrested three months after his performance at Das Krokodil. His manager filed a complaint disclosing that Jolly had received ten pounds of chocolate during his fasting performance through the wires of a radio. This infraction resulted in a 1000 DM fine, and Jolly was acquitted on appeal. Also in 1926, Reinhold Ilmer (alias Harry Nelson) was removed from his glass cage by police during his forty-four-day fast in Leipzig because he had secretly received food. He was sentenced to two and a half months imprisonment. (Vandereycken, From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls, 86, 89, 90).

Despite attracting a different audience, new cultural, economic, and political factors led to the decline of hungering performances following a final brief revival in the 1920s. New entertainment forms, such as television and the cinema replaced trips to the circus; economic improvements and changes to the social security system meant that fewer men had to resort to hungering to earn a living; and attitudes towards hunger artists began to change within the medical community.

The display of extreme thinness has in recent decades once again returned to entertain, and has become “the most fashionable disorder of our day,” (Vandereycken, 1). Media focus on thin celebrities and on growing problems caused by food abstinence led to a retrospective diagnosis of a series of famous persons as anorexic. Exactly a century after hungering as a performance art was at its peak, diagnosing anorexia nervosa—historically—began to take place. (For more on the posthumous diagnoses of famous people, including Kafka, see Nina Diezemann, Die Kunst des Hungerns: Essstörungen in Literatur und Medizin um 1900 [Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2006].) As if it were not enough to diagnose Kafka’s hunger artist with an eating disorder, such a diagnosis was made post-factum of Kafka himself, first in 1987 by Dr. Manfred Fichter, and then again in the 1990s by Walter Vandereycken and Ron van Deth who confirm Fichter’s findings that Kafka suffered of anorexia nervosa in their historical study of self-imposed starvation. Around the same time, literary scholars began contextualizing this modern disease in the broader social
discourse of fin de siècle. For example, in 1989, Mark Anderson stressed that the language crisis could not be discussed without at once thematizing the abstinence from food and the destruction of the corporeal self. In 1980, Gerd Schütze characterizes Kafka’s Hungerkünstler as “besonders treffend” in a list of literary texts that depict “das Wesen, die Tragik und die Sehnsucht der Magersüchtigen,” even though Peter Beicken had explicitly warned against such a reading in 1974, insisting “den Hungerkünstler als Kranken oder Hochstapler entlarven zu wollen, führt ihm nur ein neues Missverständnitzu.”(Anderson, “Anorexia and Modernism, or How I Learned to Diet in All Directions,” in Discourse 11, no. 1 [Fall 1988 / Winter 1989]: 28-41; Schütze, Anorexia nervosa [Bern/Stuttgart/Wien: Hans Huber, 1980], 9; Beicken, Franz Kafka: eine kritische Einführung in die Forschung [Frankfurt a.M.: Athenion, 1974], 322).

26 With this statement, Kafka puts us historically in the period of 1915-1920, prior to the revival in of the art in 1920s which occurred for the most part after this story was written. Cf. Vandereycken, From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls.


28 For a discussion on the narrative perspective, which limits the reader’s access to the hunger artist, see, for example, Ingeborg Henel, “Ein Hungerkünstler,” DVLG 38 (1964): 230-47. Our inclination to place the narrator’s eye in the audience rather than in the cage has led some scholars to conclude that this story constitutes a new turn for Kafka, leading to a more objective and reliable narrative style. This line of argument was soon discounted, most notably by Richard Sheppard on the grounds that the narrator of the story shows bias and a sense of superiority over the hunger artist. Sheppard argues that the narrator is a not objective in his report, providing unnecessary detail in unimportant matters, and insufficient detail where it is called for. He further criticizes the narrator for inappropriate emotional responses, and distorted vision of false priorities, misplaced emphases, and a biased perspective (Richard Sheppard, “Ein Hungerkünstler: A Reconsideration,” The German Quarterly 46, no. 2 [March 1973]: 219-233).

29 Ellmann, Hunger Artist, 14.

30 Ellmann, Hunger Artists, 40.


Chapter 3


2 Briefe 1902-1914, 413.

3 Kafka’s very first novel attempt, Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande, breaks off without even a trace of the announced wedding preparations; Das Schloß ends in mid-sentence; and the reader loses sight of America’s protagonist Karl Roßmann, when he joins a travelling theatre in Oklahoma, but since the work never advances and the protagonist merely moves from one unfortunate situation to another, there is no sense of finality or conclusiveness. The ending of Der Prozess might strike the reader as an exception to this generalization, but as conclusive a novel ending as the execution of the protagonist would seem, it is less so when we consider how disconnected this final chapter is from the others. Perhaps Kafka wanted to secure an ending and thus wrote the final words of his work at the beginning of the writing process. The trouble is, this
ending does not bring the story to an end, one that by its own logic promises to go on indefinitely. The accordion-like structure of this third novel attempt could accommodate endless chapters about the mysterious manifestations of this bureaucracy, so that such an abrupt termination as the execution does not conclude, but merely breaks off these processes. Then there is the mysterious short story entitled “Der Traum,” in which Josef K. dreams of walking at a cemetery, and watching characters that resemble his executioners in Der Prozess carve his name into a tombstone. This dream sequence, in all likelihood a fragment of the larger Prozess-venture, could precede the chapter in which Josef is executed, or be part of it, but in either case demonstrates that the ending lacks full connection to the remaining text.

7 Bernheimer, Flaubert and Kafka, 201.
10 Martin Köbel, Die Erzählrede in Franz Kafkas ‘Das Schloß’
14 Stanley Corngold, “Ritardando in Das Schloß” From Kafka to Sebald: Modernism and Narrative Form, ed. Sabine Wilke (New York: Continuum, 2012), 11-26, here 11-12.
16 Bernheimer has been criticized for not accounting for the text’s strategies of signification (Krauss, Kafka’s K. versus the Castle, 3).
17 From a window of a village house, a man exclaims, “Es ist der Landvermesser,” “Ihr seid doch der Landvermesser...und gehört zum Schloß”; at the Herrenhof we learn, “Der Herr Landvermesser darf nur bis in den Ausschank gehen”; Frieda rejoices in an intimate moment, shouting to Klamm, “Ich bin beim Landvermesser! Ich bin beim Landvermesser!”; even her replacement readily identifies K.: “Ah, der Herr Landvermesser” (Sch 24, 45, 56, 124). At the same time, the villagers insist on K.’s foreignness. The teacher warns K., “kein[...] Fremde[r]” likes the castle; the mayor debunks K.’s reading of Klamm’s letter as that of a “Fremder”; the Herrenhof Inn landlord sets K.
straight on the house rules of which K. speaks “nach Art eines Fremden” and the schoolboy Hans Brunswick refuses to help K. visit the sickly Lady Brunswick, insisting “zur Mutter dürfe kein fremder Besuch” (Sch 18, 89, 43, 179). K. himself repeatedly identifies himself as such: “ich bin hier fremd”; “ich bin hier ein Fremder” (Sch 18, 29). Gardena puts it most aptly when she remarks, “Sie sind ja, Herr Landvermesser, der Fremde” (Sch 111).

18 K. spends the first night in the village on a haystack at the Brückenhof Inn; the second at the Herrenhof with Frieda; the third with Frieda in the Wirtshaus (not sleeping in the same bed); the fourth at school; the fifth at the Barnabas house talking to Olga; the sixth in bed with the castle official Bürgel, and lands on the seventh day at Gerstäcker’s house.

19 “Dieses Dorf ist Besitz des Schlosses, wer hier wohnt oder übernachtet, wohnt oder übernachtet gewissermaßen im Schloß,” Schwarzr informs K. upon arriving in the village (Sch 9); “Zwischen den Bauern und dem Schloß ist kein großer Unterschied,” the village teacher corrects K. the next day (Sch 19); and in response to being asked whether she has ever been in the castle, Frieda too fails to see the point of distinction: “Nein, aber ist es nicht genug, daß ich hier im Ausschank bin?” (Sch 50).


Conclusion


5 More than this, readers are impatient and desire to mold the text while reading and to consciously shape their own reading experience. Cf. Michel Chaouli, “Remix: Literatur,” in Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken 63.6 (June 2009): 463-476, here 463, in which he contemplates a machine that allows the reader “eine Texteigenschaften zu unterdrücken und andere…zu verstärken … Können wir uns das vorstellen? Wichtiger noch: Wollen wir uns das überhaupt vorstellen?” he asks, quickly admitting, “Obwohl ich von Amts wegen strikt gegen Textfälschung bin, muss ich gestehen, dass ich wohl kaum der Versuchung widerstehen könnte, mit solch einem Gerät zu spielen.”


8 Franco Moretti, Distant Reading (London: Verso, 2013).
9 http://www.dossiers-flaubert.fr
10 http://digitaldante.columbia.edu
14 November 9, 1913 letter to Oscar Pollak.


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