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Contents

SPECIAL ISSUE: KAFKAS SPÄTSTIL / KAFKA'S LATE STYLE

ARTICLES

Abbreviations for Kafka Citations viii

Pavel Schmidt xi
f.k.

Stanley Corngold 339
Introduction

John Zilcosky 344
Trauma, Hysteria, and Simulation in the Late Kafka
Although readers have related many biographical factors to Kafka's writing, none has noticed the importance of his long-standing interest in the deleterious effect of modernization on people. Beginning with the train-transported characters of his early writing and moving to the nervously symptomatic bodies of his later work, I argue that we must understand Kafka's well-known poetics of indeterminacy within this framework. I analyze Kafka's writings as an accident-insurance clerk, where he sometimes handled cases of "traumatic neurosis" and "hysteria," together with his short fiction in order to understand how his aesthetics developed in concert with contemporary medical-legal theories. Kafka's "literary" suspicion of these theories emerged especially in his later years, when his characters showed hysterical symptoms fully decapitated from apparent causes at the same time that he "despaired" of language's inability to refer to anything beyond itself. The relation of these "simulating" characters to Kafka's famous anti-mimetic poetic skepticism gives his writing a surprising social-political

significance. In both form and content, it outlines the inability to represent in a medical-legal context that demands nothing less. (JZ)

Thomas Wegmann 360
The Human as Resident Animal: Kafka's *Der Bau* in the Context of His Later Notebooks and Letters
Kafka first read Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety* in 1922. One can read Kierkegaard's text as a central element in the poetology of "Der Bau," which reenacts the relationship between construction, habitation, and thinking against a background of anxiety. "Der Bau" in fact reveals the practice of habitation as a reflection of a state of anxiety. This is the paradox of Kafka's story: habitation is something that cannot be thought; the more one attempts to ponder the subject, the less one can actually reside. Kafka, as author, is shown to be no more master of his writing than the animal builder is master of his burrow. Creation in this sense is not ruled by the classic opposition of subject and object: the author does not govern his writing but is transformed into what he writes. And this is precisely what *Der Bau* demonstrates *in extenso.* Telling about the burrow means postponing the finality of the burrow as well as that of its safety-anxiety-complex. What Kafka cultivated in his late writings is the dystopia of an eternal writing as an equivalent of living and as an alternative to the artistic finality, the rational concept, and the apparent wholeness of works and buildings. (TW)

Christiane Frey 372
Kafka's Test
This essay offers a reading of Kafka's long-ignored short narrative piece "Die Prüfung" (1920), uncovering the paradoxes of testing that the curious ending of the text exposes. Confronting the parable first with Brod's *Heidentum, Christentum, Judentum* and second with one of the most widely discussed of Kafka's parables, namely "Vor dem Gesetz," the essay explores Kafka's reconfigurations of the intricate relationship between grace and sin, calling and serving, the law and the examination. The essay concludes by showing how the pedagogical and psychological discourse of "testing" circa 1920 was concerned with an epistemic problematic that is very much in evidence in Kafka's parable. (CF)

Ritchie Robertson 385
Myth vs. Enlightenment in Kafka's *Das Schloß*
Das Schloß shows many of the features commonly considered characteristic of "late style," such as a distance from conventional narrative methods, a reliance on enigmatic forms of expression, and a prominence given to symbolic objects such as the castle of the title. However, the kind of myth-criticism that flourished in North America from roughly the 1940s to the 1960s has not produced very convincing results when applied to this text. Myth is present in *Das Schloß* rather as the mythic consciousness possessed by the villagers but questioned by the aggressively rational K. The novel as a whole, however, is not a rationalistic attack on religion: rather, it shows the villagers engaging in a range of religious practices and acknowledges a lingering desire for transcendence which, however, has now to be satisfied within, not beyond, everyday life. (RR)

Christian Jany 396
Schriftkerben // Kerfs of Writing. A Phenomenology of Kafka's Stylus
This essay investigates a specific notion and practice of writing that may explain and make sense of: a) certain graphic features of Kafka's handwriting (Part 1); b) several „conceptual" remarks about his "intransitive" way of writing (Part 2); c) some narrative texts, most notably "Ein Traum" and the Hunter Gracchus fragments (Part 3). Considering the connection of these three elements, which intertwine in an exemplary way in Kafka, the essay proposes a new perspective on the aesthetics of Kafka's "style"—namely, the practice of what will be described as "fetishistic inscription" and subsequently explored in its poetological relevance. The attempt to excavate a moment of identity, that is to say, an essential belonging-together of the threefold nexus, marks the phenomenological method of the investigation. Finally, the exemplary relationship between graphics and notions of selfhood in Kafka may enable us to glimpse a fundamental modality in which subjects relate to their script (Part 4). (CJ)

Malte Kleinwort 416
Incidental and Preliminary – Features of the Late Kafka
This article points towards a connection between two research areas conventionally separated from each other: on the one hand, an interest in the social problems and ideas with which Kafka was familiar in his job at the Prague Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute and, on the other hand, an interest in Kafka's writing process. The world of Kafka's late texts looks like one seen through the eyes of an insurance expert, shaped by flexible, only preliminary norms and calculations in which the behavior of a single individual is incidental and insignificant. A closer look at late manuscripts by Kafka demonstrates that he struggled hard against the merely preliminary character of his writing and experienced difficulties deciding what was merely incidental and what was significant in his own texts. The difficulties of the writing process are also difficulties that the figures in his texts have to deal with: hence, the incidental and the preliminary are seen here as features of Kafka's late writing and writings. (MK)

REVIEW ARTICLE

Sabine Wilke 425
Zwanzig Jahre Germanistik postkolonial
(Lubrich, Oliver, *Das Schwinden der Differenz. Postkoloniale Poetiken. Alexander von Humboldt – Bram Stoker – Ernst Jünger – Jean Genet.*—Hermes, Stefan, *"Fahrten nach Südwest." Die Kolonialkriege gegen die Herero und Nama in der deutschen Literatur (1904–2004).*—Albrecht, Monika, *"Europa ist nicht*

die Welt." (Post)Kolonialismus in Literatur und Geschichte der westdeutschen Nachkriegszeit.—Lillge, Claudia und Anne-Rose Meyer, Hrsg., *Interkulturelle Mahlzeiten. Kulinarische Begegnungen und Kommunikation in der Literatur.*—Schmitz, Helmut, Hrsg., *Von der nationalen zur internationalen Literatur. Transkulturelle deutschsprachige Literatur und Kultur im Zeitalter globaler Migration.*—Struck, Wolfgang, *Die Eroberung der Phantasie. Kolonialismus, Literatur und Film zwischen deutschem Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik.*)

BOOK REVIEWS 440

BERENDES, JOCHEN, *Ironie – Komik – Skepsis. Studien zum Werk Adalbert Stifters* (Elisabeth Strowick) 458
BORSCHE, TILMAN AND INIGO BOCKEN, Hrsg., *Kann das Denken malen? Philosophie und Malerei in der Renaissance* (Thyra E. Knapp) 444
BROCKMANN, STEPHEN, *A Critical History of German Film* (Brad Prager) 472
COUSINEAU, THOMAS J., *Three-Part Inventions: The Novels of Thomas Bernhard* (Jack Davis) 478
DAVIDSON, JOHN E. AND SABINE HAKE, eds., *Framing the Fifties: Cinema in a Divided Germany* (Rachel Palfreyman) 474
GOMES, MARIO, *Gedankenlesemaschinen. Modelle für eine Poetologie des Inneren Monologs* (Monika Fludernik) 462
HEINZ, MARION UND VIOLETTA STOLZ, *"Weitstrahlsinniges" Denken. Studien zu Johann Gottfried Herder* (Wolfgang Düsing) 450
KEMPER, HANS-GEORG, *Komische Lyrik – Lyrische Komik. Über Verformungen einer formstrengen Gattung* (Rüdiger Singer) 441
KOHLROSS, CHRISTIAN, *Die poetische Erkundung der wirklichen Welt. Literarische Epistemologie (1800–2000)* (Rainer Godel) 454
KRAMSCH, CLAIRE, *The Multilingual Subject: What Foreign Language Learners Say About Their Experience and Why It Matters* (Jeanne Schueller) . 440
MÜLLER, HARRO, *Gegengifte. Essays zur Theorie und Literatur der Moderne* (Willi Goetschel) 465
ONANA, MARIE BILOA, *Der Sklavenaufstand von Haiti. Ethnische Differenz und Humanitätsideale in der Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Dirk Göttsche) . . 456
PAILER, GABY, ANDREAS BÖHN, AND STEFAN HORLACHER, eds., *Gender and Laughter: Comic Affirmation and Subversion in Traditional and Modern Media* (Jill Twark) 452
ROBINSON, DOUGLAS, *Estrangement and the Somatics of Literature. Tolstoy, Shklovsky, Brecht* (Max Statkiewicz) 467
ROGOWSKI, CHRISTIAN, ed., *The Many Faces of Weimar Cinema: Rediscovering Germany's Filmic Legacy* (Marc Silberman) 471
SCHOLZ, SUSANNE UND JULIKA GRIEM, Hrsg., *Medialisierungen des Unsichtbaren um 1900* (Ralf Simon) 460
SCHÖNBORN, SIBYLLE UND VERA VIEHÖVER, Hrsg., *Gellert und die empfindsame Aufklärung. Vermittlungs-, Austausch- und Rezeptionsprozesse in Wissenschaft, Kunst und Kultur* (Gerhard Sauder) 446

STROHMAIER, ALEXANDRA, Hrsg., *Buchstabendelirien. Zur Literatur Friederike Mayröckers* (Edith Anna Kunz) 480
VÖLKER, KLAUS, *Kabarett der Komiker. Berlin 1924–1950* (Alan Lareau) 469
ZELLER, CHRISTOPH, *Ästhetik des Authentischen. Literatur und Kunst um 1970* (Monika Schmitz-Emans) 476

The Human as Resident Animal: Kafka's *Der Bau* in the Context of His Later Notebooks and Letters

THOMAS WEGMANN
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Having been given an early and permanent pension by his insurance institution as a result of his tuberculosis, Franz Kafka spent the summer of 1922 in Planá in the Bohemian Forest. He lived with his sister Ottla, who had rented a two-room apartment in a country home together with her husband and young daughter. Apart from his walks, Kafka spent most of his time in Planá in bed.[1] This change in lifestyle continued into September of that year when he returned to his parents' Prague home, where he again preferred to remain in bed and where he read Kierkegaard, in particular his central work *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844), which argues that with greater awareness of one's anxiety comes an increasing concretization and solidification of the very object of that anxiety.

One can read Kierkegaard's text as a building block for the poetology of Kafka's *Der Bau*, which enacts the relationship between construction, habitation and thinking—all against a background of anxiety. In this respect it is no accident that the burrow figures not only an animal's work but is also referred to by such terms as "Haus," "Burg," and "Wohnung;" moreover, the first-person narrator calls himself, among other things, the "Hausbesitzer" or "Baumeister." As is frequently the case with Kafka, above all in his late work, an animal narrates what humans would like to be able to ponder but are evidently unable to—here, certain thoughts regarding habitation. Or anxiety.[2] Which is sufficiently paradoxical, as Kafka could have read in Kierkegaard that animals are incapable of anxiety.

The inhabitant of Kafka's burrow, however, is expressly capable of this emotion. I will return to this point because it forms my central thesis regarding *Der Bau*, which treats the story as an attempt to show the practice of habitation as a reflection of the state of anxiety. Here, Kafka gives a narrative account of this reflection.

In dealing with the relationship between residing and reflecting, *Der Bau* also anticipates a later lecture by Martin Heidegger titled *Bauen Wohnen Denken* (1952).

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In this lecture, Heidegger articulates the connection between construction, habitation and thinking and turns it against the conventional causality that situates housing as the purpose of building. According to Heidegger's argument, this relation is a fundamental mistake: "Vielleicht ist es vor allem anderen die vom Menschen betriebene Verkehrung dieses Herrschaftverhältnisses [von Wohnen und Bauen, T. W.], was sein Wesen in das Unheimische treibt."[3] Against this mistake, Heidegger sees residing not as the purpose but as the cause of building and the act of building itself as a practice of habitation: "Bauen [. . .] ist nicht nur Mittel und Weg zum Wohnen, das Bauen ist in sich selber bereits Wohnen. [. . .] Wir wohnen nicht, weil wir gebaut haben, sondern wir bauen und haben gebaut, insofern wir wohnen, d. h. *als die Wohnenden* sind."[4] Due to this point, the relationship between man and space is nothing other than "wesentlich gedachte[s] Wohnen."[5] Heidegger's lecture represents the attempt to think in philosophical language and with regard to the etymological tradition a matter that in the last resort is unthinkable: though it represents an anthropological constant, "Wohnen" has no adequate definition.

This is exactly the point of Kafka's story, in which habitation is not something that can be thought; the more one attempts to ponder the subject, the less one can actually reside. Throughout this essay I will elaborate this paradox by looking at Kafka's later notebooks and letters. This project may portend a simple-minded autobiographical reading of *Der Bau*,[6] but in fact I will attempt to show in a further step how Kafka's text throws profoundly into question precisely that relationship on which the autobiographical model is based, namely the relationship between the author's life and work. In Kafka's narrative, the burrow functions as an artificial lifework promising safety, wholeness and finality but instead produces anxiety and doubt about this very construction precisely because it seems to have been established once and for all. In other words: Within classical aesthetics the finality of the work suggests timeless eternity; in Kafka's late writing, however, the finality of the work connotes the finality of death—the death of the act of writing the work and hence the death of the author-builder himself. The only way out is building without an end or writing without a finished work. One is inclined to call this state of affairs a paradox, but for Kafka it was simply good poetology.

Der Bau is narrated predominantly in the present tense by an animal whose specific features are unclear; however, we have become aware that in describing this creature, Kafka made use of chapters on the badger and the mole from *Brehms Tierleben*.[7] The story begins with the first-person narrator—better, perhaps, first-creature narrator—telling of his daily habits and his subterranean den, which he has burrowed out of the earth with great effort, producing a labyrinthine network of passageways and alcoves and a large main chamber, the so-called "Burgplatz," where a large part of his provisions are stockpiled. Apart from functioning as a supply depot, the burrow serves as

protection against outside enemies. Safety is not only a central theme of the story as a whole but is coupled with a double antagonism, as it were—that between a life within and without the burrow and, closely related, the antagonism between freedom and security. Whereas life on the outside consists of senseless freedom bereft of any and all security, the burrow connotes at least a certain measure of protection (NS2 576–632; here, 594f). But increasingly in the course of the story, the burrow's security will prove to be highly deceptive and at the same time the story's central motif. The illusory security of the protective burrow is latent in the very first sentence—"Ich habe den Bau eingerichtet und er scheint wohlgelungen"; doubts about the lair's safety become manifest in the second part of the tale when the animal wakes up to hear a hissing noise that will completely obsess him for the rest of the story. This noise, which comes from a great distance from somewhere within the burrow, cannot be pinpointed but is perceived as an existential threat, since it implies an invisible enemy, a powerful foe.

The story concludes by breaking off in mid-sentence with the words, "alles blieb unverändert, das . . . ." *Der Bau* was first published after Kafka's death in 1931 by Max Brod, who also gave the story its title. Kafka wrote this tale in the winter of 1923–24, probably between the end of November and Christmas 1923 (NS2A 146). At this time he was cohabitating with Dora Diamant, whom he had first met in July of that year, 1923, in the Baltic Sea town of Müritz, where she was working at the holiday colony of the Berliner Jüdisches Volksheim and where Kafka was lodging in the same pension as his sister Elli and her children. Dora Diamant would be Kafka's constant companion in the last months of his life, functioning as confidante, surrogate sister, and lover. In September he had already traveled to see her in Berlin. This visit was originally planned for just a few days, a stopover on the way to Palestine, a trip that the two had scheduled for October. Kafka wrote to Milena Jesenská of this trip in November, but it was ultimately to be the fantasy of a man who was himself persuaded that he would never again leave his bed.

Indeed, Kafka would not budge from Berlin for the next few months. Together with Dora he moved into a room with a bay window in a semi-modernized villa with badly functioning heating. The room was in the southern Berlin suburb of Steglitz, which lay on the threshold between city and countryside. Kafka largely avoided trips to downtown Berlin, which was beset with mass demonstrations and street riots in the fall and winter of 1923 when the hyperinflation was at its height.[8] Instead he contented himself with walks in the comparatively tranquil neighborhood of his domicile. He wrote to Max Brod, "Meine Strasse ist die letzte annähernd städtische, dann löst sich alles in den Frieden von Gärten und Villen auf, jede Strasse ist ein friedlicher Gartenspazierweg oder kann es sein" (BF 453). This biographical threshold-situation, as it were, accords with the high value that Kafka places in his texts on such transits and architectural junctions as doors, stairs, corridors, bridges,

and diverse entrances and exits. These constitute the difference between here and there, in and out—and they simultaneously attempt to bridge these differences. It is in just such a transitional space that the terminally ill Kafka sets himself up behind a protective shield on the city's edge, distancing himself topographically from the unrest in the city center while at the same time remaining connected with it mentally, partly through the local media—the newspapers on display at Steglitz's Rathausplatz, signs of the time in the form of headlines before which he trembles, as he wrote to his sister Ottla, and whose barely less than lethal poison he drinks in, as he wrote to Max Brod (BF 453). In the middle of November, after continually quarreling with his landlady—who was the model for the eponymous character in his story *Eine kleine Frau*—Kafka moved out of the bay-window apartment and into a two-room affair in the nearby Grunewaldstrasse, the two rooms being awkwardly separated by the bedroom of the landlords. And here, in Steglitz, Kafka and Dora stayed until they were given notice and in early February 1924 moved once again, this time to Zehlendorf, also on the outskirts of Berlin.

The letters and notebooks from Kafka's last years are full of all kinds of talk about living quarters—about the various rooms he inhabited, their characteristics, and their immediate surroundings. These accounts can come across as prosaic and pragmatic when, for example, he writes his parents that someone could claim familiarity with his apartment only after having lived there for at least a year; or that one of the two rooms was very sunny while the other had sun only in the morning but that both rooms had central heating and electric light (BE 35f.). Or, likewise, in writing his parents, when he declares that "Die Wohnung ist so schön, dass ich fürchte, sie bald wieder zu verlieren" (BE 42). It is in this context that we have a prose-sketch by Kafka from one of his notebooks, a blue school notebook,[9] which was written during his stay in Berlin. In this text, situated somewhere between sketch and story, a bureaucratic entity—the housing office—becomes involved in the private life of the first-person narrator, compelling him (or rather, an unspecified "we") to sub-let a room of their apartment. Through failure to meet the deadline, this subtenant cannot be chosen by the apartment dwellers themselves but will be determined by the housing office. Thus, we have a case here of the outside world intruding on the internal world, a case of a strange and alien entity infringing on the narrator's domestic refugium—and all of this is complicated by the involvement of a German bureaucratic institution. As an alternative, the narrator brings a relative into the picture, an indigent nephew who is studying law in Berlin—"ein schwacher, ängstlicher, kurzsichtiger Junge mit [. . .] unangenehm verlegenen Bewegungen und Redensarten" (NS2 571). The significance of this development is that it is only the anonymous outside power that jogs the narrator's memory and impels him to give this certain relative a thought—that is to say, it is only in contrast with the dictates of the bureaucracy that this unappetizing nephew is called to mind and viewed as the lesser

of two evils. This unloved creature, this law-student nephew, is at least not an unknown entity and could therefore preserve the apartment's occupants "vor dem Eindringen irgendeines beliebigen . . . wildfremden Mieters" (NS2 571). At this point we can see all kinds of parallels to other texts by Kafka, all of which testify to how fluid the boundaries can be between letters, notes, drafts and prose with literary ambitions—between real and fictional scenarios—and how closely linked are the various genres of text produced by Kafka, particularly in his later years—texts often treating the thematic complex of habitation and its affiliated concerns: home and alien surroundings, residing and moving on.[10]

Kafka wrote both his parents and his sister Elli that he would soon be subletting one of his two rooms in the Grunewaldstrasse. Owing to the period in which it was put to paper, our prose fragment on the threatening sub-tenant is closely related to *Der Bau*, above all by virtue of its central theme. As different as these two texts are, the differences they portray between here and there, between inside and outside, and between the self and its possessions and the alien other are all of a porous nature—or at least threaten to become so. Accordingly, one can conclude that for Kafka, precisely in his last years, habitation became an ontological equivalent for being, an idea that once again anticipates Heidegger's lecture: "Das Wohnen ist die Weise, wie die Sterblichen auf der Erde sind."[11] I mean to stress the simple but valid point that being somewhere, in particular, under worldly circumstances, which anyone and everyone has to recognize as an inescapable condition, became a pressing issue for Kafka.

All this material belongs to any attempt at a complete understanding of Kafka's attitude toward habitation and work. Already in 1913, he wrote to Felice Bauer that the best living arrangement for him was to sit at a desk, with his writing materials and a lamp, in the farthest reaches of an extensive cellar; his meals would be brought down to him but set down far from his writing desk; it would be quite a walk for Kafka to finally arrive at his meal—his sole opportunity to take a stroll—passing underneath a long expanse of basement vaults (BF 250). This vision perfectly expresses an inescapable dichotomy—that to be secure one must also be a kind of prisoner—a dichotomy again perfectly expressed a few years later in Kafka's story of the animal held captive in his own labyrinthine construct. The burrow is the central labor of this creature—and had Kafka not always compared the writer's existence to the life of animals, particularly those that dig and excavate, burrowing subterranean caverns and passageways?[12] Just as burrowing belongs to the life of certain animals, writing is an existential necessity for authors. And hadn't Kafka started to learn Hebrew shortly before writing *Der Bau*, a language, in which the seven different verb conjugations are called "binjanim" or "binyanim," going back to the singular form "binyan," which also means "building" or "burrow"?[13] And moreover, is not "der Bau," meaning in German not only "burrow" but also

"structure," a metaphor going back to antiquity, the metaphor for an artistic creation that is constructed. It was Pindar who seized on the notion of the writer as builder, conceiving him as what was later to be called *poeta faber*. But we'll see with Kafka's narrative that a burrow, like all artistic creations, includes a destructive and troubling component, which reveals a fundamental difference between the burrow and the act of burrowing, the written work and writing.

The motif of habitation also expresses the hiatus between staying and leaving, which from an evolutionary standpoint also touches on the question of settledness and nomadism, a question to which Kafka's human-animal hybrids constantly allude (most clearly in *Bericht für eine Akademie*) and a question that every journey engenders, however distantly remembered. In the summer of 1922, Kafka wrote to Oskar Baum about visiting him in Georgental:

> Ich habe, aufrichtig gesagt, eine fürchterliche Angst vor der Reise, natürlich nicht gerade vor dieser Reise und überhaupt nicht nur vor der Reise, sondern vor jeder Veränderung [. . .]. Im letzten oder vorletzten Grunde ist es ja nur Todesangst. Zum Teil auch die Angst, die Götter auf mich aufmerksam zu machen; lebe ich hier in meinem Zimmer weiter, vergeht ein Tag regelmässig wie der andere, [. . .] die Hand der Götter führt nur mechanisch die Zügel, so schön, so schön ist es, unbeachtet zu sein [. . .]. (Br 382)

And in a conspicuous analogy, he wrote in *Der Bau*: "Ich bin von einer Reise zurückgekehrt, besinnungslos müde von den Strapazen, aber das Wiedersehen der alten Wohnung . . . verwandelt meine Müdigkeit in Unruhe und Eifer" (NS2 603). Here, too, the seemingly fixed structure of the burrow stands in opposition to the rigors of being underway, but the kind of safety that is promised by burrows and flats in the end turns out to be an illusion incapable of overcoming anxiety, read: "Todesangst".

In the last years of his life, Kafka's fear of traveling became notoriously problematic. Fear of traveling and the resulting need to remain sedentary and go unheeded by the gods— the impossibility of leaving not only his apartment but his bed; that is, his *having* to stay home as a result of fear and worsening health—stood in implacable and irreconcilable opposition to Kafka's *desire* to travel—for instance to Palestine with Dora Diamant. This is exactly the point where fear turns into anxiety in a way that makes it difficult to distinguish between them. Whereas "fear" usually connotes an object at which that fear is specifically aimed, "anxiety" normally knows no object about which it is anxious: Anxiety is fear of no-thing. In the case of Kafka, both fear and anxiety are matters of concern: On the one hand, there is a concrete object that threatens the subject, e.g. traveling. On the other hand, this fear provokes a reaction like the need to remain sedentary, which in turn slowly gives way to ontological anxiety. Kafka's own apartment thus functioned at one and the same time as hideaway and prison, antidote to fear and generator of anxiety—

whereby his desires and his self-imposed constraints were so intertwined as to be ultimately indistinguishable.

In his penultimate letter to Milena, Kafka wrote that the sinister source of all anxiety was the fact of being unable to decipher one's own condition, since it was hidden behind all kinds of outward tokens (BM 321). And the truly insidious aspect of anxiety is that the attempt to intellectually penetrate and plumb its depths only increases, indeed exponentially, its influence and power . This is precisely what Søren Kierkegaard postulated, and this is what Kafka's *Der Bau* treats of. According to Kierkegaard, " [wird] jenes Nichts, das der Gegenstand der Angst ist, mehr und mehr ein Etwas . . . . Das Nichts der Angst ist [somit] ein Komplex von Ahnungen, die sich in sich selbst reflektieren, dem Individuum näher und näher rücken, obgleich sie [. . .] in der Angst wiederum Nichts bedeuten [. . .]."[14] In *Der Bau* the animal's anxiety is initially a diffuse feeling that goes hand in hand with doubts as to the protective and safeguarding function of the burrow and increasingly issues in abominable imaginings with regard to the eventual infiltration of the foe. Anxiety as the opposite of knowledge produces feelings of ontological insecurity; and the more the narrator reflects on the insecurity of his burrow, the greater this feeling of trepidation becomes. This dynamic is what creates the ambiguous nature of the burrow, which is endowed with both a sense of safety and impending danger.

As is well known, certain scholars have seen this specific ambiguity as being prompted by the paradigm of the trenches,[15] which in 1915 Kafka witnessed in the form of a model designed for public viewing near Prague. I will not be pursuing this connection but instead wish to continue to reference the complex relationship between inside and outside spaces, for the burrow in Kafka's story is primarily there to protect against outside threats. According to its animal builder, he is willing to exempt it from any other tasks:

> Nun verhält es sich aber so, dass er in Wirklichkeit—und für die hat man in der grossen Not keinen Blick und selbst in ungefährdeten Zeiten muß man sich diesen Blick erst erwerben—zwar viel Sicherheit gibt, aber durchaus nicht genug, hören denn jemals die Sorgen völlig in ihm auf, es sind andere [. . .] Sorgen, aber ihre verzehrende Wirkung ist vielleicht die gleiche wie jene der Sorgen, die das Leben draussen bereitet. (NS2 600)

In other words, anxiety originates precisely *within the burrow*, which is of course supposed to keep the outside world and its accompanying anxiety at bay—or, at the very least, anxiety is significantly increased from within through the animal's reflective nurturing of it.[16] As a result, the narrator must protect himself in twofold fashion—on the one hand, against his external enemies and, on the other, against his internal anxiety. In order to protect himself from the latter anxiety, the creature goes out into that hostile outside world against which the burrow is supposed to protect it.

> Der Bau schützt vielleicht mehr, als ich [. . .] im Innern des Baus zu denken wage. Es ging so weit dass ich manchmal den kindischen Wunsch bekam überhaupt nicht mehr in den Bau zurückzukehren sondern hier in der Nähe des Eingangs mich einzurichten, mein Leben in der Beobachtung des Eingangs zu verbringen und immerfort mir vor Augen zu halten und darin mein Glück zu finden, wie fest mich der Bau, wäre ich darin, zu sichern imstande wäre. (NS2 592)

The deictic "hier" in the phrase "sondern *hier* in der Nähe des Eingangs" refers to the narrative standpoint that, at least in this scene, finds itself outside the burrow; and the subjunctive mood at the end of the passage refers to the burrow's illusory protective function—"und immerfort mir vor Augen zu halten und darin mein Glück zu finden, wie fest mich der Bau, *wäre ich drin*, zu sichern imstande *wäre*." This function is merely a promise—as indicated by the subjunctive mood—that results from observation of the burrow from the outside; only from the outside is there the promise of a secure dwelling, which is why the burrow's inhabitant, from deep within its bowels, is being constantly driven outside it. And so we are able to assert that the outside view of the burrow protects the creature from its own anxiety while at the same time making the threat of external enemies manifest; the inside of the burrow protects the creature, to a certain degree, from external enemies, but it cannot protect him from a spreading anxiety that is the product of fretting and reflection. Consequently, the narrator can programmatically assert: "Zuviel beschäftigt mich der Bau" (NS2 590). His complaint is nothing more than a reflection on too much reflection.

This hiatus becomes a full-blown paradox through the hissing noise, which functions as a peripety in the middle of the text. The narrator hears this noise one day after awakening from sleep, and ever since then it seems omnipresent, audible everywhere throughout the burrow. The animal presumes that the noise is issuing from a powerful external enemy who is observing him on a round-the-clock basis. What then emerges as a token of his anxiety is the animal's own round-the-clock *listening* so as to locate the source of this noise and hence the foe with which the narrator associates it. The climax of the narrator's anxious vision is the notion that he could have accidentally burrowed into some strange creature's lair, which now has become absorbed into his own labyrinthine den. The pseudo-contrast between the protective inside and the threatening outside is thereby completely overturned; the external danger has now penetrated into the burrow itself—although it remains unclear to the very end as to whether the enemy and its hissing noise actually exist or whether they have been generated by the narrator's neuro-psychological apparatus. But the answer to this question remains of secondary importance insofar as anxiety is always a product of both reality and the imagination and can also take on the status of reality for the imagining subject.

Implicitly broached in this respect is the epistemological problem formulated by the physicist, philosopher, and theoretician of science Ernst Mach,

who periodically taught at Prague's Karl Ferdinand University, where Kafka was later a student. In his writings, Mach moved about in the gray areas between physics, mathematics, physiology, and psychology. In his 1886 disquisition *Die Analyse der Empfindungen*,[17] he sought to overcome the classic dualism of the ego and the world it inhabited—the so-called subject-object split—through an epistemological theory that was informed by the natural sciences. According to Mach, the ego was an "Empfindungskomplex"—or a "complex of sensations"—that consisted of perceptions of the world from both "outside" (object) and "inside" itself (subject). Thus, the ego was awash with sensations from within and without—"Drinnen" and "Draussen"—and had no firm identity in the flux of these perceptual stimuli.

This dissolution of the boundaries between *Drinnen* and *Draussen*, between subject and object, is supercharged in Kafka's story so that it becomes a slippery and indeterminate paradox.[18] This latter concept comes from Gerhard Neumann and designates any paradox that arises from a circular movement of opinions and statements. The one statement modifies the one previous so that a new meaning emerges but with the result that the statement as a whole no longer makes much sense. *Der Bau* has numerous instances of this, for which I offer one telling example, the statement: "Nein, ich beobachte doch nicht wie ich glaubte meinen Schlaf, vielmehr bin ich es der schläft, während der Verderber wacht" (NS2 593). In *Der Bau*, Kafka generates the image of the labyrinth so as to describe this blurring of boundaries between the ego and the outside world, having the burrow-dweller speak of the anxious confusion and dismay felt in this putatively familiar environment.[19] The labyrinth, which does not distinguish between beginning and end, has no causal logic; instead, it is an amalgam of the burrow's myriad passageways and the maze-like inner world of the burrow's inhabitant, who is prey to an endless series of observations and reflections on them. The narrator could well assert that "I am the burrow"—and he does indeed declare it, albeit employing other language: "[I]ch und der Bau gehören so zusammen, dass ich ruhig, ruhig bei aller meiner Angst mich hier niederlassen könnte . . . denn nichts kann uns auf die Dauer trennen [. . .]" (NS2 602). In the labyrinth of his burrow the animal experiences the labyrinth of his own thoughts and with it the powerlessness of human acts of cognition, which lead nowhere because they only circle about themselves. Plumbing the depths of anxiety in a state of anxiety does not banish this evil but only deepens it.

Der Bau is characterized by various levels at which the dissolution of boundaries takes place—dissolutions that also affect habitation and dwelling-place, these serving to distinguish protected from unprotected space, *Drinnen* from *Draussen*. On the other hand, it is precisely this spatial differentiation, which is just an effect of buildings and burrows, that causes the narrator so much trouble and doubt. The mainspring objective of any habitation is protection—if only from the wind and weather. At the same time, all forms of habitation imply that a person leaves his dwelling-place from time to time. Without access to the outside world, no person, no animal, no organism can exist for long—to the contrary, those who do not leave their lodgings or their "burrow" now and then have in fact taken up residence in their very own grave, as the narrator seems to know: "[D]ie Notwendigkeit zeitweiliger Ausflüge sehe ich ein" (NS2 586). And it is in this respect that *Der Bau* tells of a double dissolution of boundaries. On the one hand, the outside melds with the inside, the protection provided by the burrow proving to be deceptive and the burrow itself a ruinous construction; on the other hand, the burrow oscillates between being a secure refuge and a grave that the animal has dug for himself.[20] Both of these aspects are closely related to one another, for the view of the burrow as a place of security or a self-dug grave depends on the animal's literal standpoint. Viewed from the outside, the burrow promises protection, whereas inside the burrow a claustrophobic terror of death reigns—not least evoked by this fatal danger that the burrow is unable to keep at bay any longer but that penetrates, at least according to the animal's perceptions, farther and farther into his refuge.[21]

Der Bau articulates, in narrative fashion, the blurring of the boundaries between the burrow and its engineer, for whom it is no accident that he resides and lives in his own creation, which is the burrow.[22] One may also read this amalgamation of life and work as paradigmatic for the aesthetic of Kafka's later texts. Here, the paradoxical intensifications that will come to be definitive of his prose no later than 1916 are carried over into his own life and writing to the degree that these become indistinguishable from one another, thereby evoking an authorial life in which one's own existence is not retroactively composed but is first *achieved* through writing.[23] The supposedly seamless autobiographical component as manifested in Kafka's journals and letters does not refer to a life apart from his writing but is rather part of an all-encompassing and self-reflexive game that succeeds in constituting his self through the very act of writing. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari long ago noted that one cannot read Kafka's letters isolated from his so called work. Kafka's writing is not to be understood as driven by an urge to publish; rather, he was intent on having everything he'd ever written destroyed—just as if his literary works had been mere letters.[24] Consequently, we may say that Kafka lived for the sake of writing and less for the sake of having written something. Thus it also makes only limited sense to distinguish between finished and unfinished texts, drafts, sketches and published works; rather Kafka was incapable of composing provisional drafts or sketches; what he wrote had validity, because he wasn't allured by the finality and wholeness of a traditional concept of work, which distinguishes between finished and unfinished artifacts, artistic and non-artistic texts—or at least pretends to be able to do so. "Writing is above all more important as a process of its own" and less the condition of a work; especially in Kafka's later texts, the process of writing is a synonym for the process of living.

In the case of Kafka, the author is no more master of his writing than the animal builder in *Der Bau* is master of his burrow.[25] Creation in this sense is not ruled by the classic opposition of subject and object; the author does not govern his writing but is transformed into what he writes: the writing possesses a logic of its own. And this is precisely what *Der Bau* demonstrates *in extenso*, even if the narrator, throughout the story, does nothing more than tell it—telling against the danger, against that infernal hissing noise. In telling his story he reassures himself and thereby obtains what the burrow can provide only in the sense of its being a promise—of security in an insecure environment, if only temporarily. What the burrow can only promise is enunciated by the narrator, who fulfills that promise at least in the moment of its telling; and the telling, in turn, constitutes the home of the narrator—a home that is of course inspired and irremediably dominated by mortal terror. However, like the act of writing (for Kafka), the act of narration (in *Der Bau*) does not constitute the work itself but is rather an alternative to the deceptive whole of the so called work. Narrating is thus focused as an act, and writing as a process; neither of them can be transformed into a building or a work, because buildings and works usually mark the end of creative processes. If there is one extraordinary aspect to Kafka's art of narration, it is the interplay between subversion of story movement and narrative time as a technical device to represent anxiety in its many variants. To this extent, telling about the burrow means postponing to a later date the finality of the burrow as well as its safety-anxiety-complex. What Kafka cultivated in his late writings is the dystopia of an eternal writing as an equivalent of living and as an alternative to the artistic finality, the rational concept, and the apparent wholeness of works and buildings.

[1] Peter-André Alt, *Franz Kafka: Der ewige Sohn* (München: Beck, 2005) 623ff.

[2] In his essay on Kafka, Benjamin was not only the first to establish a relationship between the writer's tuberculosis and his second to last story, but he also emphasized the role of animals in a special way: "Soviel ist sicher: unter allen Geschöpfen Kafkas kommen am meisten die Tiere zum Nachdenken. Was die Korruption im Recht ist, das ist in ihrem Denken die Angst. Sie verpfuscht den Vorgang und ist doch das einzig Hoffnungsvolle in ihm. Weil aber die vergessenste Fremde unser Körper – der eigene Körper – ist, versteht man, wie Kafka den Husten, der aus seinem Innern brach, 'das Tier' genannt hat. Er war der vorgeschobenste Posten der großen Herde." Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka. Zur zehnten Wiederkehr seines Todestages," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt a. M: Suhrkamp, 1991) II.2: 409–432; here 430f.

[3] Martin Heidegger, "Bauen Wohnen Denken," in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1954) 145–162; here, 146.

[4] Ibid., 146, 151.

[5] Ibid., 158.

[6] In his reading of Kafka's *Der Bau*, Johannes Türk shows how thematic material that, on the surface, seems to deal with an animal's attempt to secure his burrow, is used to constitute anxiety as an attempt to anticipate the author's imminent death. "Anxiety quite literally spoils the paranoid plans and architectural ventures of the animal, whereas the only hope for the future lies precisely in what spoils it." (Johannes Türk, "Rituals of Dying, Burrows of Anxiety in Freud, Proust, and Kafka: Prolegomena to a Critical Immunology," *The Germanic Review* 82 (2007) 141–156; here, 153. In his interpretation the burrow functions as a kind of immune system – or should at least do so.

[7] *Brehms Thierleben. Allgemeine Kunde des Thierreichs. Große Ausgabe*, 2., umgearbeitete und vermehrte Auflage (Leipzig: Bibliogaphisches Institut, 1876–79); online: http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001998119).

[8] In this regard, Dora Diamant wrote that going into the city was for Kafka a kind of Golgatha that almost brought him to the point of physical collapse. See Dora Diamant, "Mein Leben mit Franz Kafka," in *"Als Kafka mir entgegenkam . . .": Erinnerungen an Franz Kafka*, ed. Hans-Gerd Koch (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1995) 174–85; here, 176.

[9] KBod AII, 3. This scriptive abbreviation refers to the collection of Kafka manuscripts preserved in the Bibliotheca Bodleiana in Oxford since 1961.

[10] "Ein Blick in das Manuskript [vom *Bau*, T. W.] zeigt, dass Kafka sogar zuerst von 'Heimat' spricht und diesen Begriff erst nachträglich durch 'Burg' ersetzt." Reiner Stach, *Kafka: Die Jahre der Erkenntnis* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2008) 591.

[11] Martin Heidegger, "Bauen Wohnen Denken," 148.

[12] For numerous examples, see Gerhard Kurz, "Das Rauschen der Stille: Annäherungen an Kafkas *Der Bau*," *Franz Kafka: Zur ethischen und ästhetischen Rechtfertigung*, ed. Beatrice Sandberg and Jakob Lothe (Freiburg i. Br.: Rombach, 2002) 151–71, esp. 156f. For an English version, see Stanley Corngold (ed.), *Kafka's Selected Stories* (New York and London: Norton, 2007) 333–55.

[13] Thanks to Jeffrey Grossman for this hint.

[14] Søren Kierkegaard, *Der Begriff Angst*, trans. Gisela Perlet, ed. Uta Eichler (Stuttgart: Reclam 1992) 73.

[15] Cf. Wolf Kittler, "Grabenkrieg – Nervenkrieg – Medienkrieg. Franz Kafka und der Erste Weltkrieg," *Armaturen der Sinne. Literarische und technische Medien 1870 bis 1920*. Hrsg. von Jochen Hörisch, Michael Wetzel (München: Fink,1990) 289–309. Julia Encke, *Augenblicke der Gefahr. Der Krieg und die Sinne, 1914–1934* (München: Fink, 2006) 111ff.

[16] Jochen Schmidt refers to this ambiguity, too, "Bau und Haus sind in zahlreichen Texten Kafkas Metaphern für Ordnungssysteme, in denen sich die rationale Organisation als eine aus Sicherungsbedürfnissen hervorgehende, aber eben darum von untergründiger Unsicherheit, Angst und 'Sorge' zeugende Sekundärstruktur ausprägt." Jochen Schmidt, "Am Grenzwert des Denkens: moderne Rationalitätskritik in Kafkas später Erzählung *Der Bau*," in *Figurationen der literarischen Moderne*, ed. Carsten Dutt and Roman Luckscheiter, Heidelberg: Winter, 2007) 331–346; here, 343.

[17] Ernst Mach, *Die Analyse der Empfindungen und das Verhältnis des Physischen zum Psychischen*, 2., verm. Aufl. (Jena: Fischer, 1900).

[18] For this and what follows, also see Ivana Perica, "Franz Kafka – *Der Bau*: Die Architektur einer Erzählung," *Zagreber Germanistische Beiträge* 15 (2006) 115–35; here, 127f.

[19] Cf. with regard to the labyrinth aspect Alt, *Franz Kafka*, 661f.

[20] Gerhard Kurz writes: "Schon der Bau als Ort in der Unterwelt ist ein 'Grab', das sich das Tier gräbt." See Kurz, "Das Rauschen der Stille," 168.

[21] Accordingly, the narrator confirms that the burrow "so sehr mein ist, dass ich hier letzten Endes ruhig von meinem Feind auch die tödliche Verwundung annehmen kann, denn mein Blut versickert hier in meinem Boden und geht nicht verloren" (NS2 601).

[22] In Stanley Corngold's reading, the burrow is an elaborate metaphor for the "house of art," where the poet who has devoted his life to writing comes to lodge. Corngold equates the creature's digging with writing, a link substantiated by the etymological similarity of the terms "scharren" (digging) and "schreiben" (writing). Cf. Stanley Corngold, *Franz Kafka: The Necessity of Form* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) 282.

[23] Cf. Bernd Neumann, *Franz Kafka – Gesellschaftskrieger: Eine Biographie*, (München: Fink, 2008) 14.

[24] Cf. Gilles Deleuze / Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Für eine kleine Literatur* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1976) 40f.

[25] Cf. Gerhard Kurz, "Das Rauschen der Stille," 160.